POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY IN SYRIA

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Editor

J A Allan

CENTRE OF NEAR & MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
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POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY IN SYRIA

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PROCEEDINGS OF A CONFERENCE HELD AT
THE SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES
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on 20 May 1987

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School of Oriental & African Studies

in association with staff of the SOAS Middle East Centre

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume contains papers of the conference held at the School of Oriental and African Studies on 20 May 1987 on the subject of the contemporary politics and economics of Jordan. The purpose of the meeting was first to examine briefly the environmental endowment of the country and then to look at Syria's economy and development prospects and secondly to analyse the country's current political options and its regional and international relations.

The convenors were very pleased to be able to draw very fully on the expertise of specialists from many parts of the world and the they are very grateful to those contributors who spared time to prepare papers in camera-ready form (sometimes at very short notice) so that their views could be available in this publication at the conference.

Tony Allan, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London

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Note

The papers and abstracts included here have been prepared from camera-ready copy provided by the authors and the contents reflect their opinions. Convenors of the meeting from School of Oriental Studies and elsewhere, and officials of the University of London in which the sessions were held, do not necessarily share the views expressed herein.

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SYRIA : LAND AND PEOPLE

Norman N. Lewis

Abstract: The objective is to present an introduction to the countryside and the people of Syria. The emphasis is on developments between 1946, when the country attained its independence, and the present time. The following are some of the topics which are briefly discussed: landscapes and agricultural regions, ethnic and sectarian groups, demography, changes in the way of life of the tribes, deterioration of the rangeland, the agricultural boom of 1943-58, the land reform of 1958-68, farming today.

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Introduction

I will try in this first lecture today to present a down to earth introduction, descriptive rather than analytical, to the country and people of Syria. I will concern myself more with the countryside than with the cities and will only mention very briefly some important matters which will be dealt with more fully by later speakers.

Syria is a country of moderate size - larger than England and Wales together, smaller than the United Kingdom. But nearly half the country is poor steppe or semi-desert, only 30% of the total area is agricultural land, and only 9% of the agricultural land is irrigated, so that the really productive part of the country is quite small. The uncultivated land does, however, provide some of the food required by Syria's several million sheep, and farming of all kinds, including sheep rearing, contributes a larger proportion of Gross National Product and supports more people than any other activity. Cotton is a particularly important crop, as it provides one of the country's most valuable exports. Syria has few non-agricultural resources - crude oil and phosphates are the most important - and has great difficulty in paying for its imports. However, although it is not a rich country, it is not very poor, as the following figures of G.N.P. show. I have grouped with

Paper presented at the Conference on Politics and the economy in Syria convened in the University of London (SOAS) on 20 May, 1987.

SOME ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL INDICATORS

Country	Gross National Product Per Capita (U.S.$) 1984	GNP Per Capita Av. Ann. Growth Rate (%) 1965-84	Population Ann. Growth Rate (%) 1973-84	Mortality Rate of Under Fives (Per Thousand) 1960	1985	Adult Literacy Rate 1985 Male	Female
U.S.A.	15,400	1.7	1.0	30	13	99	99 (1970)
U.K.	8,570	1.6	-	27	12	NA	NA
ISRAEL	5,060	2.7	2.2	40	16	97	93
USSR	4,550	NA	0.9	53	29	98	97 (1970)
SYRIA	1,620	4.5	3.4	218	71	76	43
JORDAN	1,570	4.8	2.8	218	65	87	63
TURKEY	1,160	2.9	2.2	258	104	86	62
NICARAGUA	860	-1.5	3.0	210	104	58	57 (1970)
EGYPT	720	4.3	2.6	300	136	59	30
CHINA	310	4.5	1.4	202	50	82	56
ETHIOPIA	110	0.4	2.8	294	257	8	1 (1970)
CHAD	80	NA	2.1	326	232	40	11

Source: UNICEF, "The State of the World's Children 1987"

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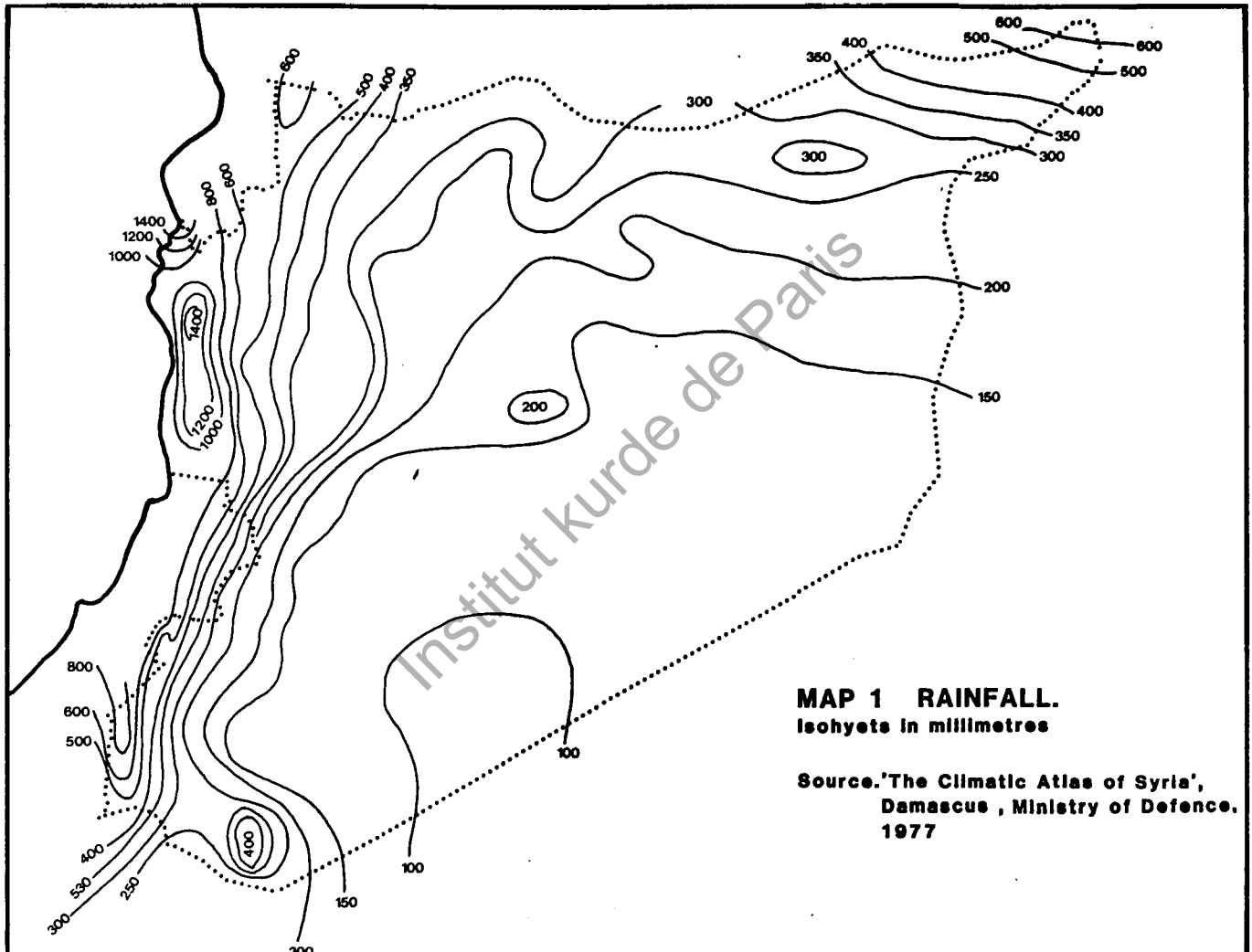
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MAP 1 RAINFALL.
Isohyets in millimetres
Source.'The Climatic Atlas of Syria',
Damascus , Ministry of Defence.
1977
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MAP 2 SYRIA

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these figures others which are useful social indicators and which confirm the impression of a country which is much more advanced than the poorer countries of the third world. (I should add at this point that many of the figures I shall cite in the course of this lecture are not entirely reliable; most are estimates or approximations.)

Rainfall and the landscape

An appreciation of the importance of rainfall is essential to an understanding of Syria's economy, and of much else besides (see Map 1). As the next lecture is on environmental constraints on agricultural production I won't labour the point now but will merely state that the eastern half of the country is too dry to grow crops, that much of the centre can only grow mediocre crops of wheat and barley, and that only the west can rely on getting enough rain, in most years, to be assured of producing a wide range of good quality crops. Almost every part of the country is subject to periodic, very damaging droughts and only the irrigated areas can be sure of good crops every year.

To take a transect across the country from west to east at about the latitude of the city of Hama (see Map 2):- The western littoral is reminiscent of coastlands in other Mediterranean countries: behind a narrow coastal plain hills or mountains - the 'Alawite mountains - rise to a maximum elevation of 5000 feet. Natural vegetation and crops are typical of the Mediterranean - olives, grapes and other fruit, wheat and tobacco are grown, mulberry trees formerly nourished a cottage silk industry, pine trees grow on the uncultivated hillsides, but much of the land is steep, rocky and eroded.

Behind the crest of the mountains the ground falls steeply to the valley of the Orontes ('Asi) river, the water of which irrigates some of the finest farmland in Syria, between Homs and Hama and in the broad, flat-bottomed valley called the Ghab, which was formerly swampy but which was drained in the 1960s. Around Homs and Hama, and further north, rainfall is adequate to grow winter and summer crops - wheat, barley, maize, millet, chickpeas, cotton, melons, olives, fruit, nuts... - but as one travels east the rainfall decreases and becomes less reliable and the range of crops narrows. East of the 250 mm. line barley is almost the only crop which can be grown without irrigation, and finally barley gives way to uncultivated steppe, the grazing ground of sheep and formerly of camels. South and east of Palmyra the country is desert, and if the western littoral of Syria resembles parts of Greece the south-east is reminiscent of Arabia.

Between Homs and Damascus the belt of good land narrows almost to nothing, for this area is in the rainshadow of the mountains of Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon. Damascus itself is situated on a partly natural and partly man-made oasis, a miracle of fertility and meticulous farming, but now, alas,

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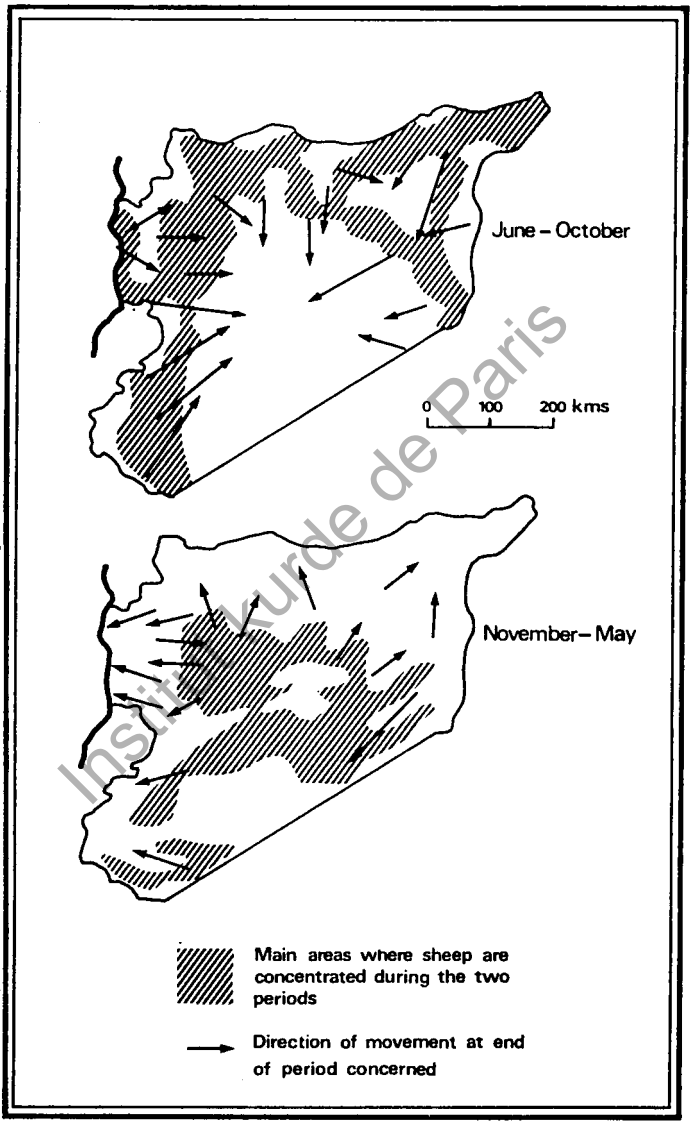
MAIN LOCATIONS AND SEASONAL MOVEMENT OF SHEEP.



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Source: After Joubert 1983 p. 21

encroached on and polluted by the city and by industry. South of Damascus the belt of farming land broadens again to take in the Hawran plain and a hilly area usually, though no longer offically, called Jabal ad Duruz because most of the people who live there are of the Druze sect.

The belt of good farmland broadens again north of Homs and Hama, and the great northern city of Aleppo is the agricultural capital of Syria. The Euphrates (Furāt) is Syria's biggest river, bordered like its tributaries with irrigated land, and it is the site of the country's biggest dam and hydroelectric plant. It is hoped that eventually enormous areas of country will be irrigated by water from the reservoir created by the dam and by the water of the river's principal Syrian tributary, the Khabur.

North of the Euphrates is the region known as the Jazirah, the north-eastern part of which is a fertile and well-watered grain-growing plain. As one travels from north to south in the Jazirah the rainfall decreases just as it does going from west to east in the centre of the country, and once again crops become sparser and eventually give way to dry, uncultivated steppe and eventually to desert (see illustration).

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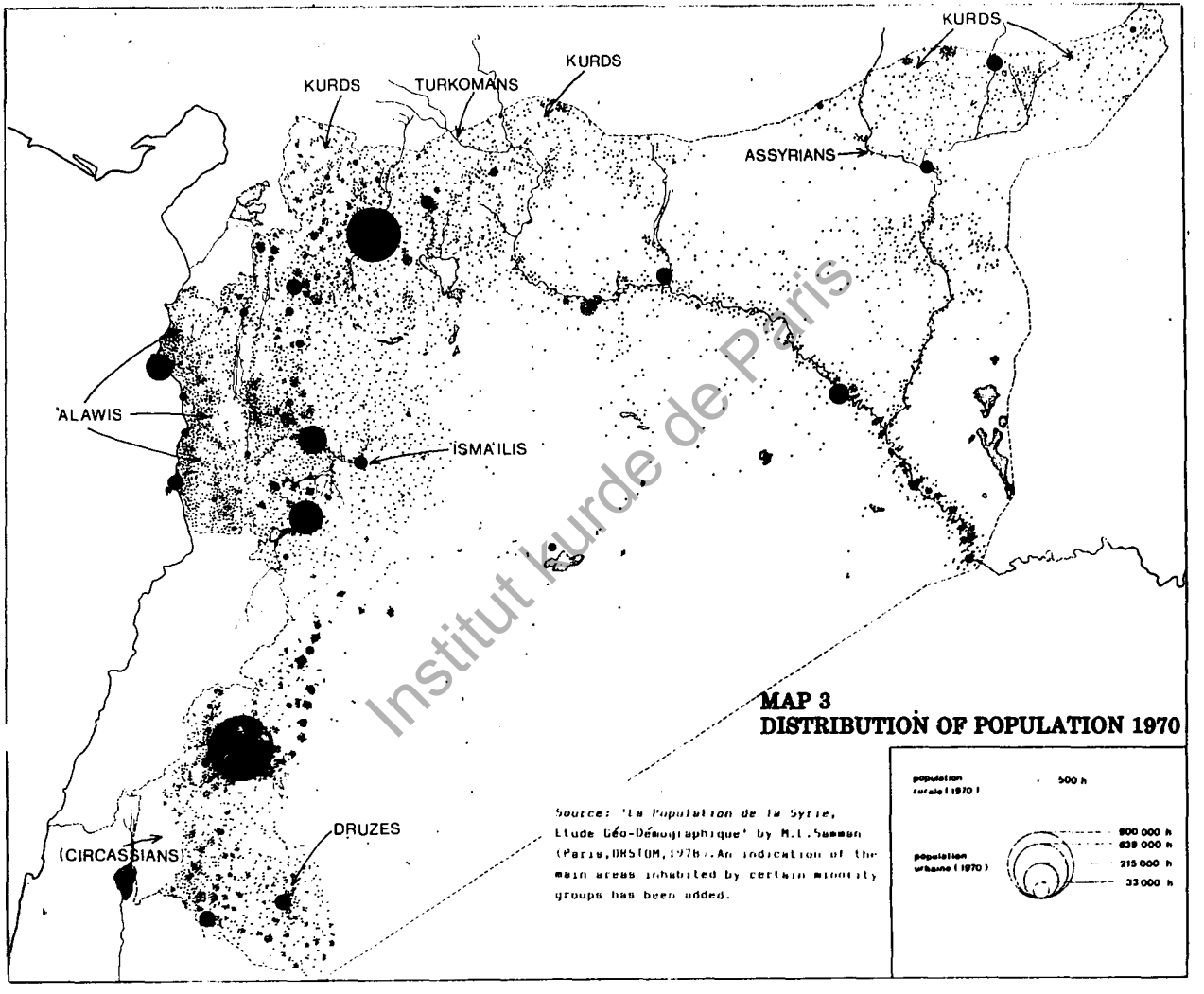
Syria before independence; ethnic and religious communities

Until 1918 the area within the present frontiers of Syria was part of the Ottoman (Turkish) empire, governed from Istanbul, as were the areas we know as Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, and Lebanon. The Turks lost all this by their defeat in the First World War and it was parcelled out between the French and the British. For a year and a half in 1918-20 Amir Faisal, who had led the Arab revolt, ruled inland Syria from Damascus, but in July 1920 the French moved in and from then until 1946 they ruled Syria as a mandatory power responsible, at least nominally, to the League of Nations. The Syrians agitated for their independence throughout the mandatory period, and finally, at the end of the Second World War, the French withdrew.

Economic and social development was not rapid in the period between the wars, but it was far from negligible: internal security was imposed, roads were built and education and health services improved. A few modern industrial plants were built, a start was made on irrigation projects and a gradually increasing area of land was cultivated. Although the infantile mortality rate remained very high and life expectancy was generally short, some of the old Malthusian checks - famine, cholera, plague - were no longer a threat and the population gradually increased. By 1945 it was about 3.25 millions, if the nomads were included.

Despite the beginings of modernisation the old traditional ways persisted and the social system changed only slowly. In the steppe and desert the beduin tribes



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MAP 3
DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION 1970

Source: 'La Population de la Syrie, Etude Géo-Démographique' by M.I.Sawaan (Paris, ORSTOM, 1976). An indication of the main areas inhabited by certain minority groups has been added.

SYRIA : ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS ABOUT 1945

		%	
MUSLIMS			
Sunnis	2,371,053	7.27	Most of the Sunnis were
'Alawis	325,311	10	Arabic-speaking townsmen
Druzes	87,184		or villagers, but the
Isma'ilis	28,527		number also included
Shi'is	12,742		(1)c. 400,000 beduin or
TOTAL MUSLIMS	2,824,817	86.6	other Arabic-speaking tribesmen, (2) 20-30,000 Circassians and Chechens,* (3) 30,000 Turcomans and (4) 150,000 Kurds. Most of the last three groups were bi-lingual, but some of the Kurds did not speak Arabic.
CHRISTIANS			
Arabic Speaking			
Greek Orthodox	136,957		
Greek Catholic	46,733		
Syrian Orthodox	40,135		Also known as Jacobites
Syrian Catholic	16,247		
Masonites	13,349		
Latins	5,996		Roman Catholics
Protestant	11,187		
	270,604		
Non-Arabic speaking			
Armenian Orthodox	101,747		
Armenian Catholic	16,790		
Nestorians	9,176		Also known as Assyrians
Chaldeans	4,719		Assyrian Catholics
	132,432		
TOTAL CHRISTIANS	413,036	12.6	
JEWS	29,770		
YAZIDIS	2,788		
TOTAL	3,260,411		

*Immigrants who fled from the Caucasus when the Russians occupied the area in the 19th. century.

Main source: A.H. Hourani, "Minorities in the Arab World", OUP, 1947, q.v. for details.

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still moved with their great herds of camels, and in most of the farming areas the majority of the people owned no land, or very little, and worked as share-cropping tenants for land owners. A great deal of the land was the property of big absentee landlords, members of powerful city families, nearly all of them Sunni Muslims, who constituted the economic, social and political elite of the country. The gap between the relatively few rich and the poverty stricken many was very great; the middle classes were not yet numerous.

Loyalties to family, tribe, ethnic or sectarian group were strong, and more real in people's minds than any conception of Syrian identity or patriotism. I will say something about each of the main groups as they were in the mid-40s, just before independence. At the same time let us look at Map 3, showing the distribution of population, although it shows the situation as it was in 1970.

Muslims of one sort or another made up nearly 90% of the total population, but they were not a homogeneous group. By far the greatest number - nearly three quarters of the total population - were Sunnis, members of the mainstream, orthodox sect of Islam. They preponderated in the cities, and most of the big landowners and leading politicians were Sunnis. The majority of the peasants of the central farming belt were also Sunnis.

The beduin, the few tens of thousands of Circassians who lived in the Jawlan and elsewhere in the country, and the numerous Kurdish and Turkoman tribespeople along the Turkish frontier were all Sunnis.

The next largest group was the 'Alawi community, which probably accounted for some 10% of the total population. Their religion is 'secret' and combines Shi'ite Muslim, Christian and pagan elements. During the Ottoman period they were a poor, despised minority, reckoned to be hardly Muslims at all, but rather infidels or idolaters. They were then practically confined to the mountain region along the coast which bears their name. They began to spread a little towards the end of the nineteenth century, to the farmlands round Hama and Homs where they provided cheap labour for landowners, and during the period of the mandate they spread further to Latakia and to other cities. When Syria became independent in 1946, however, they were still generally thought of as a backward and unimportant minority, just as the Shi'is were in Lebanon.

Another heterodox Muslim group was better known and better regarded, for they had already played a notable part in the history of Syria. Nearly all the Syrian Druzes then lived in Jabal ad Duruz, the 'mountain of the Druzes'. They were more or less distantly related to the Druzes of Lebanon, Palestine and northern Syria, for their forefathers had come from those areas to settle in 'the Jabal' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Their religion is an

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offshoot of Isma'ilism. They were clannish, hardy, independent-minded people who had several times defied Ottoman armies and who had rebelled against the French in 1925. They numbered about 90,000 in the mid-forties.

The Druzes' 'cousins in religion' the Isma'lis, were far less numerous - there may have been 30,000 of them.

Christians,of eleven different rites, totalled 400,000 or so in the mid-forties - 12% or 13% of the total population. Two thirds of these were Arabic-speakers and some of them were proud to claim that they and their forefathers had lived in Syria as Christians since the earliest days of Christianity; indeed there were two or three villages north of Damascus whose people still spoke Aramaic, which had been the common language of Palestine-Syria in the time of Christ. Other Christians, however, had come to Syria as refugees : more than a hundred thousand Armenians fled Turkey during the First World War or during the nineteen twenties, and about 10,000 'Assyrians' came from Iraq in 1933.

Most, but by no means all, of the Christians were city-dwellers. They tended to be more open to western influences than many of the Muslims, and took readily to modern education. Many of them were in commerce and were reasonably well-off. The Armenians, nearly all of whom were indigent when they arrived, were given some assistance and then pulled themselves up by hard work and skill. 60,000 of them lived in Aleppo.

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Population groups since independence.

To speak first in terms of numbers, the census of 1960 showed Muslims to be more numerous and Christians less numerous than in 1945, for reasons which I will mention in a few minutes. Since then censuses have not recorded people by ethnic or religious affiliation but there is no doubt that Christian numbers have continued to fall proportionately, though perhaps not absolutely.

Considering each of the the communities in terms of influence, the development which has attracted most attention is the rise to prominence of the 'Alawis, who have come near to monopolising power in the army, the Ba'th Party and the government. To trace this development it is necessary first to look at the armed forces in the 1940s, when the Syrians were taking over from the French. At that period, and since then, many young men from rural areas, and

particularly from the 'Alawi and other Muslim minority communities, thought, rightly, that the army might provide them with a means of economic and social advancement. Few of them had the necessary connections in the cities to enable them to enter commerce, industry or administration, and they could not afford to buy out of compulsory military service, even if they had wanted to, or to pay for conventional advanced education. But there were excellent career prospects in the rapidly developing armed forces, and the Military Academy in Homs and other military training establishments provided education and training of a different order from that of civilian schools. Some of the Druze, Isma'ili, and particularly 'Alawi officers were very successful, and by the early 60s they held a number of key command and staff posts. One of them was Hafez al Asad, a former fighter pilot, who was then Commander of the Air Force (and who subsequently became Commander in Chief and, in 1971, President).

The political developments of the 50s and 60s will, no doubt, be discussed this afternoon, and therefore I will only say that at that period the left wing of the Ba'th party, or the neo-Ba'th, rose to prominence. The party drew much of its support from the same provincial and minority groups and the same classes which had provided many of the young officers in the army, and a number of these were either members of the party, or willing to lend it their support.

After internecine struggles for power within the army a group of 'Alawi and other officers, including Asad, carried out two coups d'état in 1963 and 1966, and established their pre-eminence in the army and in the party. They systematically eliminated their rivals in the army, including most of the remaining old guard Sunni officers, and, in 1966, Druze officers. They recruited and promoted their own supporters and 'colonised' the lower echelons with 'Alawis. After the 1966 coup they helped to bring a neo-Ba'th government to power, and after further strife in the next four years Asad triumphed over his opponents and achieved virtually supreme power. He was endorsed as President by referendum in 1971, and he and the Ba'th have ruled ever since.

As a result of all this the 'Alawis are now both powerful and prosperous. Besides the large number in the officer corps, which is privileged, not to say pampered, many have found well paid posts in one of the ministries or other establishments in the vast government machine, and they are particularly well represented in Damascus. They have come a long way since they were considered an obscure and unimportant minority.

Relatively little is heard about the Druzes at present. The Druze officers who had been prominent in the army until 1966 were got rid of after one of them attempted a coup which failed. But though the Druzes of Syria may not

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now make headlines the community has made considerable economic and social progress. This is not to say that there has been any great development in Jabal ad Duruz itself, but in the last 25 years or so many Druzes - and 'Alawis - have left their mountain villages for Damascus, have attended high school and university and have then entered the professions, or business, or administration.

When the Ba'thists took over in the 60s they almost ruined the old urban Sunni ruling class by expropriating land, nationalizing industries and taking over banking and large scale commerce, and they destroyed their political power. Since then this section of the Sunni community has recovered somewhat economically but has regained little of its old political standing.

I shall be saying something about the Sunni and other country people in a few minutes. As to the 'racial' Sunni minorities, the Turkomans are now almost entirely assimilated and arabic speaking. The same is true of some of the Kurds, but many of them have retained their particularism, and those of the Jazirah have had a bad time. Some have been dispossessed of their land to make way for Arab farmers moved from the Euphrates valley when the reservoir built up behind the great new dam at the beginning of the 70s, and they have been discriminated against in other ways.

At the other corner of the country, the Circassians have also suffered. The town of Qunaitrah and a dozen villages nearby constituted the largest concentration of Circassians in Syria until 1967, when their inhabitants, along with nearly all the Arab inhabitants of the Jawlan, fled or were driven out when the Israelis invaded and occupied the area. They are now in or near Damascus, or have emigrated to U.S.A.

When the French left Syria some of the Christians worried about their future as members of minority groups in a predominantly Muslim country. They did well in the boom years of the 50s, but became nervous of what Arab nationalism, Nasserism and a possible Muslim resurgence might mean for them. When Syria and Egypt joined together as the United Arab Republic from 1958 to 1961 some of the Christians left the country, and afterwards, when the Ba'th took over in Syria and embarked on their campaign of nationalisation large numbers of people emigrated. Most of those who left were from the wealthier classes, Muslim as well as Christian, and those who had not already exported their capital took as much of it as they could with them. The capital drain was believed to be of the order of £100 million Sterling. They were followed by others, less well off, who were infected by nervousness and thought their prospects would be better elsewhere than in Syria. About half a million people, half of them Christian and half Muslim, left at that time. The proportion of the population

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which was Christian came down from its former 12% or 13% to less than 8%. Aleppo was particularly hard hit.

The great majority of the former 30,000 or so Jews has also left Syria, either for western countries or for Israel, but I believe I am right in saying that none were coerced into going or staying, and that those who remain are not discriminated against.

Other demographic developments.

Emigration did not cease even after President Asad moderated the economic policies of the government. Economic opportunities for educated people abounded in the 70s in the oil-rich Arab countries and elsewhere, and Syria has suffered something of a brain drain. All told, probably over a million Syrians left the country in recent decades and are living and working abroad. In addition perhaps as many as 100,000 semi-skilled or unskilled workers leave the country temporarily each year to work in neighbouring countries for a spell and then return.

But though the country has lost some of its people it is now more than making up the numbers. If you would like a graphic demonstration of the effects of the most important demographic factor affecting the country, visit any Syrian school at going home time. I think you will be amazed by the enormous number of kids who come out of the gates - indeed you may be literally bowled over by them. Stay around and watch and you may see that another great batch of children goes in a little later - some schools work a shift system. All this will remind you that the population of Syria is increasing at a rate which is among the highest in the world - the annual rate of growth is at present 3.4% - and that it is a very young population - almost half the population of the country is less than 15 years old.

Why is this? Firstly, the birth rate is very high, because women marry young (44% of them before they are 20 years old), and the objective of almost every married couple is to have as many sons as possible. Secondly, infant mortality rates have plummeted: in 1960 218 out of every thousand children died before they were five years old, and now the figure is only 71 per thousand. Mortality rates of other age groups have also declined and the average expectation of life is now 64 years. All this is the result of improved hygiene, health services and living standards. The upshot is a veritable population explosion. The total population of the country, in millions, was about 3.4 in 1950, 4.6 in 1960, 6.3 in 1970, 9 in 1980 and 10.6 in 1986. I do not need to enlarge on the problems this causes or exacerbates - poverty, unemployment, social unrest. A slight slackening of the rate of growth may now be perceptible but even so the population of the country might double by the end of the century.

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The second very noticeable demographic trend is the rapidly accelerating growth of the cities. Half the population of the country now lives in urban areas. The population of Damascus trebled between 1950 and 1975 and since then has increased by another 50%. The growth is fuelled by a continuing influx of people from the countryside, which cannot possibly support its own rapidly growing population. The incomers hope for jobs and a better life than their villages can provide, but they often do not find them, and in a country which does not, so far as I know, provide unemployment benefit or similar forms of state assistance it is hard to know how the poorest people survive in either the villages or the cities.

Another development of recent decades which is partly demographic is the change which has taken place in the way of life of the formerly nomadic and tent-dwelling tribespeople. I have recently dealt in some detail with this subject elsewhere and will therefore be brief here. It was reckoned in the 1940s that about 400,000 people belonged to tribes which were nomadic or partly nomadic. Some of these were primarily dependent on camels, others on sheep. Since the late 50s some of them have moved, permanently or temporarily, to Saudi Arabia, where the economic, social and political climate suits them well, or to other neighbouring Arab countries. The majority, however, have stayed in Syria. Very few of them now keep camels, whose numbers have fallen from about 100,000 in the 30s to about 5,000 today. The reasons are not altogether obvious, but it might not be too great a simplification to say that the camel had two main functions, one of which was to provide transportation and the other to provide food, almost entirely in the form of milk. Motor vehicles are now the universal carrier, and milk, as well as meat and wool, is provided by sheep, whose numbers have risen from about two million in the 30s to a possible twelve million today. Sheep can live in every part of the country and may be owned by townsmen, peasants or tribesmen. Many of them are taken by tribal shepherds to the steppe or desert to graze in spring, and some stay there for most of the year, but whereas a generation or two ago the animals always migrated on the hoof and lived on natural vegetation and on water raised by hand from wells or rivers, today they are often moved in trucks, fed with concentrates and other foodstuffs brought to them by truck and provided with water raised by motor pump and transported by tanker.

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Some shepherd families still live in tents for all or much of the year, but the more usual pattern is for only a few family members to go with the flocks on their annual migrations, while others stay behind in a village house which they have probably built in the last twenty or thirty years. The process of sedentarisation or settlement of former nomads along the eastern border of the cultivated zone is no new thing, but it has taken place on an unprecedented scale in recent decades. Large flock owners or professional shepherds may not be interested in acquiring

a patch of land, but poorer people, with only a few sheep, value the addition to the family budget represented by ten or twenty acres, even of poor land. Much of the land was bought from or is rented from the State, or was given by the State to the farmers.

Nearly all the land in this border region is poor and dry, and grows little but barley which is fed to the sheep. In many parts barley is grown year after year without any fallowing, crop rotation or fertiliser. No wonder that even in good years, which are rare enough in this semi-arid region, the crops are poor and are worse than when the land was first cultivated a few decades ago. Rural poverty and the effects of over-population are particularly evident in this area; villages are often half deserted with most of the able-bodied men away looking for work in the better endowed parts of the country, in the cities or in one of the neighbouring countries.

I should, perhaps, mention another type of over-population: of sheep as well as human beings. In the last fifty years the number of sheep in the country has increased five- or sixfold and in the same period much of the land on which they used to graze has been ploughed up. The natural vegetation in the remaining rangeland has, as a result, been seriously overgrazed, to the point that some of the most important palatable sub-species have almost disappeared. At the same time shepherds and others have uprooted bushes and burnt them on their camp fires, and wide areas of steppe which carried quite abundant vegetation less than fifty years ago now resemble true desert. A third practice, ploughing in the steppe in hopes of a catch crop of barley, is if anything even more destructive. The Syrian steppe is therefore something of an ecological disaster area. I hope you are going to hear, a little later, about government efforts to improve matters.

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Recent developments in the countryside

I will turn now from the steppe to discuss developments in the main farming areas of the country. The modern age for the Syrian countryside may be said to have begun in the late 40s and early 50s when the Second World War and the Korean War, amongst other factors, provided a great stimulus to agriculture. In the Jazirah, especially, huge tracts of land which had hitherto remained uncultivated were ploughed and sown to wheat or barley. The area devoted to these two crops doubled between 1946 and 1963, and most of the increase was of land newly cultivated by tractor-hauled steel ploughs and harrows. The outbreak of the Korean war was followed by a steep rise in the price of cotton, to which Syrian farmers and entrepreneurs responded by increasing the acreage under cotton by a factor of ten. All along the Euphrates and everywhere else where water could be got onto the land motor pumps were installed to irrigate more and more cotton.

Entrepreneurial businessmen and, to a lesser extent, established land owners, were primarily responsible for these developments, from which they profited hugely, and the spinoff benefited many others in the country and the cities, especially in Aleppo. But as mechanisation spread many of the poorer peasants and landless labourers were left even worse off than they were before, and the new developments highlighted the contrast between the miserable conditions in which they lived and the wealth of the landlords. Agitation and clamour for reforms grew throughout the 50s, as the left wing parties - Nasserists, Socialists and Ba'thists - supported the disaffected peasants and drew support from them. The necessity of agrarian reform was one thing on which all the politicians of the left agreed, and most of them wanted not mere reform but a social revolution. Their ambition was to confiscate land from big landowners, whether of the traditional landlord class, or of the new entrepreneurial type, or tribal shaikhs, and to redistribute it to landless people and poor peasants. They would thus break the power of the 'the feudalists and exploiters' and, they hoped, bring about a social transformation in the countryside.

The first steps in this direction were taken during the period of union with Egypt, and more radical measures followed when the neo Ba'th took over in the 60s. It was decreed that no one might own more than a stated area of land (an area which varied from one part of the country to another and was greater for unirrigated than for irrigated land; these limits and other features of the 'reform' were changed and elaborated several times by changes to the law). By the end of the 60s the confiscation phase was over; 3.7 million acres had been taken from their owners. This was a tremendous area by Syrian standards - about a quarter of the then cultivated land. One of the main objectives of the radicals certainly seemed to have been achieved, for the biggest landlords had lost their main resource and their political power. The old landowing families had not, however, lost everything. Each individual was allowed to retain a certain amount of land, and by splitting up the family estates between all the individuals of their extended families before expropriation took place, and by allowing the poorer land to be confiscated while keeping the best, some of the landlords considerably softened the blow. (Not all were able to do this; some lost everything and left the country.) As the revolutionary fervour of the 60s cooled, and President Asad introduced conciliatory policies, the position of some of the old families improved. In the last dozen years or so they have been able to lease or buy new land, or even, in some cases, to recover their old properties. In the same period younger members of those families have branched out into profitable business or other activitis.

If all the 3.7 million acres which had been expropriated had been redistributed quickly the 'reform' would have had a tremendous impact, but progress was slow and fitful, and in

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the end less than a third of the expropriated area was redistributed to individuals. The rest was held in suspense, or earmarked for forestry, grazing or other non-agricultural use, or turned over to state farms, ministries or cooperatives. Only 52,500 families benefited directly from the redistribution, but about the same number were enabled to buy or rent state owned land cheaply, or were settled on excellent land made available by the drainage and irrigation project in the Ghab and adjoining areas. Even so, many more rural families remained landless than benefited by all these measures.

The transformation of the economic and social scene was not as great as the reformers had hoped would be the case, and left wing critics have fiercely attacked the concepts and results of the agrarian reform and associated programmes. Too much, they say, was left in the hands of 'the Kulaks', the fairly well off peasant landowners who retained a hundred, two hundred or more acres and may have bought or rented state or other land besides. Certainly great inequalities remained and have, I think, been exacerbated since. The results of the reform were, however, impressive; before the expropriations holdings of over 250 acres covered more than half the privately owned farmland; afterwards less than one percent was so held. After the redistributions small holdings, i.e. those under 17 acres, covered more than half the total, and medium holdings, of between 17 and 250 acres, covered nearly half. Thus was established the present pattern of landowning in Syria, which in most areas is predominantly one of family-owned small or medium sized holdings.

The long drawn out process of expropriation and partial redistribution had caused disruption, and even when it was all over formidable problems remained. 52,500 families had been given an average of 20 acres each, and a much larger number of peasants already owned only about the same amount. Could they make a living from this? Those who had productive land, especially if they had access to irrigation water, could do so, but many could not. Much of the redistributed land was poor and unproductive, some of the new owners lacked knowledge and experience, and nearly all lacked the money or the credit necessary to buy seed, fertiliser or machines. Even the government-owned Agricultural Bank would not lend to such poor risks as these.

The problem had been anticipated by the reformers, and the partial answer was to oblige beneficiaries of the reform and other small owners to belong to cooperatives. Cooperatives can borrow from the Agricultural Bank on behalf of their members, and can act as intermediaries between them and government organisations which are concerned with agriculture. Some of the cooperatives serve their members well, especially those which started as voluntary, private organisations before the reform, and all of them have now become a cog of some importance in the complex machinery which controls so much of the rural economy. But the

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government cooperatives arouse little enthusiasm amongst the people, who prefer to cooperate informally and in traditional ways with relatives or friends rather than with a bureaucratic organisation imposed from without. The owners of only about a quarter of the agricultural land belong to cooperatives.

With the reform completed the government set about modernising agriculture. Much progress was made in areas which were already irrigated or received adequate rainfall. The land there is now farmed more intensively than in the past, more varied crops are being grown, new and improved varieties of seed are being planted, fertilisers, insecticides and pesticides are in use, and yields have improved. More ambitious projects were also initiated; it was optimistically proclaimed that now the country was rid of 'the tyranny of the feudalists' the next step was to rid it of 'the tyranny of the weather', in other words to increase the irrigated area by massive capital investment programmes; you will be hearing more about that later.

Farming is now controlled to a great extent by the government, for Syria's is a centrally planned socialist or state-capitalist economy. Successive Agricultural Plans specify how much land is to be devoted to each of the main crops - wheat, barley, cotton, sugar beet and lentils. The Plan also lays down how and where seed and other necessities are to be distributed and at what price, and what credits are to be made available to farmers. The large proportion of the crops used by farming families for their own subsistence is relatively free from government controls, but a large proportion of the main crops is bought at fixed prices by government Boards. Other crops, like fruit and vegetables, may be sold on the open market, but prices are regulated. The important sheep industry is also relatively free of government control, which is one reason for its popularity.

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It goes without saying that the farmers complain that they are always underpaid, and that the margins between what they are paid for their crops and the prices these eventually fetch on the internal or export market are excessive. They feel that they are supporting an enormous, elaborate and unnecessary bureacracy, and they resent what they see and hear of excessive wealth and corruption amongst the managers of the official organisations concerned with the affairs of the countryside. Despite all this, however, most of them concede that things are better than they used to be, and that they are more prosperous than their fathers were. As to the future, well, they say, only God knows.

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SYRIA'S AGRICULTURAL OPTIONS

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Abstract

Syria is environmentally well favoured in agricultural terms compared with other countries in the region and has had some encouraging and some disappointing experiences in the past three decades of agricultural development. The imperative to incresae agricultural production and productivity is driven by a 3.5 per cent per year population increase. Most of Syria's renewable land and water resources were hard pressed by the 1970's except that of the Euphrates water which had not been utilised to the level envisaged in the county's five year plans for the irrigated sector. Euphrates water, however, will be an increasingly serious problem over the next decade as Turkey has already developed substantial water management schemes on the river and is committed to even more comprehensive intervention throughout the 1990s. The major increase in irrigated land has not come from the developemnt of river water resorces; rather it has been enabled by a very steady and probably unsustainable increase in the use of groundwater, the implications of which will be discussed. The dryland sector has played an increasingly important role in Syria's agricultural production since the early 1950s but it remains vulnerable to annual variations in climate. The progressive intensification of dryland farming has led to environmental degradation which in many cases is not reversible. In concert with the changes and improvements in farming have come major reforms and reorganisations of rural institutions stemming from the socialist persuasion of the Baath leadership.

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Paper presented at the Conference Politics and the economy in Syria held in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, on 20 May 1987

SYRIA'S AGRICULTURAL OPTIONS

J A Allan

Introduction

Compared with most countries of the region Syria is environmentally well favoured. Over one third of the country receives more than 250 mm on average per year, and summer temperatures are not as extreme as elsewhere in the Middle East. The extensive rainfed tracts have been a traditional source of agricultural security and as long as they were not over-pressed it was possible for a rich variety of complementary agricultural and grazing activities to proceed without significant impact on the resource base. With population rising at a rate of well over three per cent per year for some decades associated at the same time with changes and improvements in domestic food consumption, the need to increase food output has been inescapable and policies to improve land as well as the rural infrastructure and rural institutions associated with agricultural production have been a basic element in national policy and planning for almost three decades. Such national planning came after a period of successful entrepreneurship on the Gezira rainfed tracts in the late 1940s and 1950s which were managed according to the conventions of capitalism and directed by powerful interests in Aleppo. In this phase of the extension of the cultivated area full advantage was taken of the land and the new technology of the time of mechanised cultivation and harvesting, and marketing arrangements were swiftly organised to accommodate the welcome increase in grain production.

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Semi-arid regions require particularly skilled management, however, and this is especially so in the Middle East where a marginal tract may serve many functions. It can be used as a source of opportunist crop production by a number of communities, both settled and mobile. At the same time it may be the reserve resource for nomadic communities in years of low rainfall when they cannot sustain their herds and flocks and on tracts further down the rainfall gradient. The story of Syria over the past thirty years, like that of so many coutries in the region, is one of progressively greater ingenuity being demanded in managing

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marginal tracts in attempting to accommodate the competing demands for crop and vegetation production. It is an uncomfortable political reality that the leaderships in countries such as Syria very responsibly perceive the need to increase food production but they have a limited grasp of the extraordinary and unprecedented pressures being exerted on marginal lands in their countries. The increased production is required straightforwardly to meet the national demand for grain which results from the rapid rise in population. An especially onerous additional pressure is the steady increase in the demand for livestock products. The two pressures together bring economic and political consequences as livstock compete with people for cereals the cheapest form of energy and protein. The

demand for livestock products by middle income groups reduces the amount of cheap staples to poor communities. There is a case for reducing the demand for livestock products in many countries of the region and it has been suggested that livestock products should be taxed to reduce the demand. (Yotopoulus 1984) Some, including the author, argue that the demand for livestock products drives the agricultural sector of the whole region with irrevocable consequences. In some countries for example, including Syria, irreversible changes are being imposed on rangeland resources by over-stocking, and in others over-pumping of groundwater to raise fodder for livestock is having irreversible consequences on groundwater resources. Unfortunately livestock products are in demand not only in Syria but throughout the region and the oil rich customers have been able to drive prices to unheard of levels so that farmers are very highly motivated indeed to raise the local mutton favoured everywhere in the Middle East. Such are the international market pressures that even where there are government set internal prices designed to inhibit production a black market quickly emerges which brings livestock products unofficially to the local as well as to external markets.

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These environmentally threatening activities apart the success of Syrian farming in the past three decades has been in the utilisation of its rainfed land resources and of its groundwater. The changes have largely taken place in the past 25 years and reflect the adoption of a wide range of modern farming techniques and especially mechanised methods in pumping, irrigation, cultivation and harvesting. (Jaubert 1983 p 1) Unfortunately both of the resources upon which the succes to date has been based are patently very hard pressed and the chapter is intended to draw attention to Syria's limited agricultural options. The considerable successes in groundwater development, in rainfed farming and livestock rearing have not been repeated in the major government sponsored projects to develop the land and water resources of the Euphrates Valley. But land improvement in hot countries happens to one of the most difficult challenges undertaken by individual farmers or government agencies, and Syria's experience is average for the region.

A well favoured but very hard pressed resource base

It has been suggested that Syria's agricultural resources are being pressed at an unprecedented level. Jaubert (1983 p 33) suggests that one of the features which has emerged since the 1960s in the rainfed areas consequent upon the intensification referred to above is that agriculture has become a 'mining activity'. Previously the prevailing rotation was barley-fallow, but with mechanisation farmers dropped the fallow and began to raise continuous barley. The consequences for yields have been significant and Jaubert quotes the ffigures in Table 1 along with evidence from a review of yields in zones 2, 3 and 4 which confirms the trend for most of the low rainfall areas.

The decline in barley yields is imporatant because barley is the indicator crop for what is happening at the margins where farmers are attempting to produce as much as possible from each of the progressively more marginal zones. The argument that yields have fallen most steeply since the 1960s for the farmers engaged in this struggle is demonstrated in Table 1. It was in the 1960s that crop production became both more extensive and more intensive with the change in rotation. Figure 1 also indicates that barley yields have fallen since the late 1960s and it also shows very clearly how fluctuating are Syria's barley yields because of

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Table 1 Evolution of barley yields in Aleppo Province. Yields in 100 kg/ha

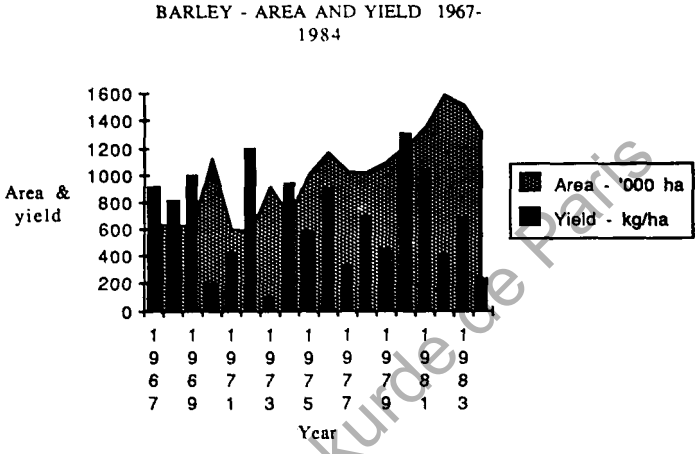
Zone	Villages	c1930	c1940	c1950	c1960	c1970	c1980
2B	Deir Qaaq	-	10-20	-	-	-	5
3	Aqraba	12-15	8-10	-	-	5-7	3-7
4	Hawaz	-	-	20-25	15	10	3-7
4	Khanasser	-	-	-	20	-	2-9
4 or 5	Hazmalsur	-	-	-	8-20	-	2-10
5	Bir Amaleh	-	-	-	10-30	-	2-14

Source: Jaubert (1983) p 16
Note: The average rainfall for the agricultural zones of Syria are **1A** - 600 mm, **1B** - 350-600 mm, **2** - 250-350 mm and not less than (anlt) 250mm in 2 years out of 3, **3** - over 200mm anlt 200 mm in 1 year out 2, **4** - 200-250 mm anlt 200 mm in 1 year out of 2, **5** - below 200 mm.

their dependence on the rainfall in the winter growing season. The 1983 and 1984 seasons were particularly severe. Figure 2 shows that non-irrigated wheat yields were closely correlated with rainfall but because wheat is grown in less marginal tracts the amplitude of the annual yield data is not so extreme. The most interesting feature of figures 1, 2 and 3, however, are the area figures.

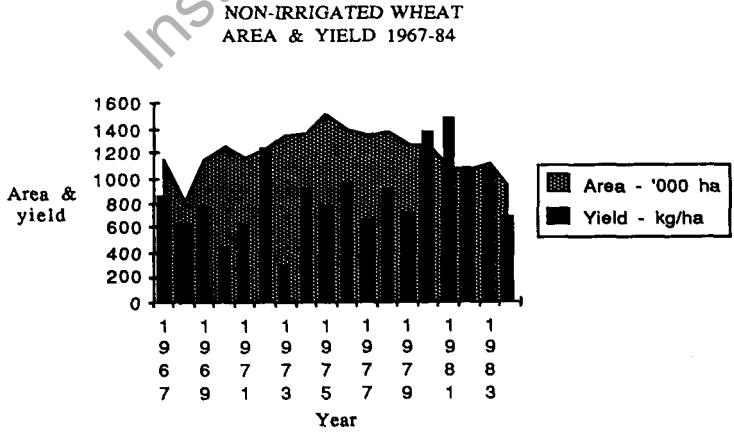
These reveal that during the 1970s there was a steady increase in the extent of the barley area at the expense of the wheat hectarage. The reason is partly a preference for barley by farmers especially for its resilience and multiple uses in the most marginal zones, but the main reason is that barley is a less regulated crop than wheat and farmers have greater discretion in disposing of it. There is a at the same time an effective black market in wheat, and this may be a reason for an under-declaration of the wheat hectarage.

Figure 1



Source: Syrian Annual Agricultural Statistical Abstract, 1976 and 1984

Figure 2



Source: Syrian Annual Agricultural Statistical Abstract, 1976 and 1984

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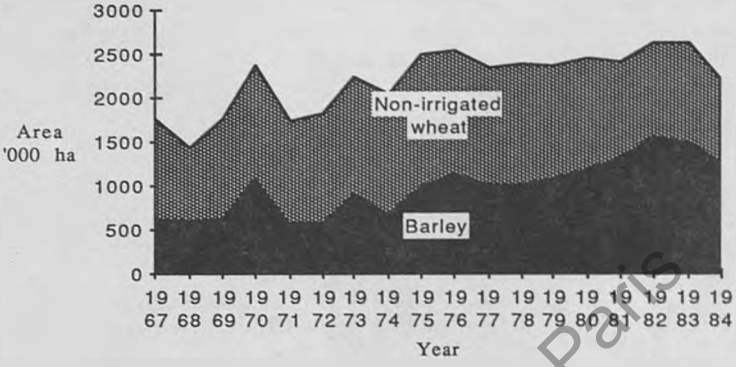
Figure 3 RAINFED CEREALS
1976-84



Source: Syrian Annual Agricultural Statistical Abstract, 1976 and 1984

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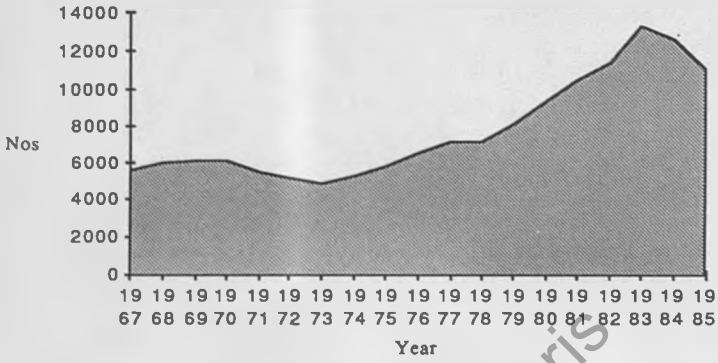
The options in the rainfed regions of Syria are therefore limited. The extension of cultivated area has already gone further than is consistent with sustainable yields in view of the ever increasing livestock population. It is unlikely that there will be any dramatic improvements in agricultural production but there is some optimism that the output of wheat and barley will improve with the implemenattion of practices being encouraged by the Ministry of Agriculture and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA). These involve making better use of the fallows of which it is estimated there are over 15 mn ha in Syria as a whole (Ministry of Agriculture 1984) of which 2.5 mn ha are in the dry zones and are potentially susceptible to new methods of management. The main aim of the experiments being conducted by the Ministry and ICARDA is to reverse the increasingly poor performance of the land degraded by continuous cropping by integrating leguminous forage crops into the farming systems of the low rainfall zones and to encourage the self-generation of pastures, that is ley farming. (Cocks 1985 pp 1-6)

The proposed improvements are mainly concerned with the management and utilisation of several legumes, a number of which are indigenous, such as *Medicago rigidula* . This species has the ability to survive cold winters, which are very common in northern Syria, and it produces large quantities of herbage and seed yield. The incorporation of the self-generating *medicago* in the rotation accompanied by relevant applications of phosphorus not only provides feed for large numbers of livestock, especially in the difficult summer season,

Figure 3 SHEEP POPULATION - SYRIA 1967-85



Source: Syrian Annual Agricultural Statistical Abstract, 1976 and 1984 and Bureau of Statistics 1986 p175

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and in addition it benefits soil fertility. (Osman 1985 pp 6-7) Carter's (1975) optimism has not been confirmed but it is surely the case that animal feed can be greatly increased in Syria and elsewhere in the region without reducing the production of cereal and food legume crops. He suggested in addition that supplementary feed should be raised on irrigated land and that livestock numbers on the range could be reduced by raising a proportion of the livestock on arable land. (Huss 1978) Others argue that, such is the pressure on the marginal lands of Syria with their unpredictable constraints of limited and erratic supplies of soil moisture for crop production, the most promising avenue is the improvement the water-use efficiency (WUE) of agronomic systems. It has been demonstrated that improved crop and soil management can achieve substantial increases in crop yields through improving WUE and further study should lead to the identification of cultivars with stable yields and high water use efficiency in Syria's marginal zones. (Cooper et al 1986 p45)

Some headway is being made in all these areas but it has to be remembered that farmers and scientists in Syria are trying to wrest agricultural production from a very marginal and variable environment. Some observers (Thomson et al 1986) are very concerned about the viability of recent developments such as the extension of barley cultivation into Zone 5, a practice which can only be hazardous considering the delicate structure of the soils which can easily be destroyed once native vegetaton cover has been removed for cultivation. The trend contradicts the intent of the government agencies responsible for rangeland management which have been attempting to reduce the pressure on the scarce grazing resources of the poorest zones. A very important initiative has been underway for some time within the Ministry of Agriculture which is designed to utilise the grazing areas according to the system known as *Hema*.

This traditional system of grazing management is acceptable to those traditionally using the land as well as to the Government cooperatives currently responsible for the management of the grazing lands. Within this structure legislation was passed and to some extent enforced prohibiting ploughing as well as the protection of grazing rights to *Hema* cooperative members within specified tracts. (Draz 1977a p iii-iv, Bahhady 1980 pp 14-15)) Ideally this system should inbibit overgrazing according to the policy of the Syrian National Programme for Range and Steppe Development (Draz 1977b p13), but both natural disasters such as the 1983 and 1984 droughts and the intractable market demand referred to above continue to frustrate the good intent of national agencies. Finally one aspect of livestock rearing which can only see improvements is the quality of the local *Awassi* sheep breed; experimental evidence from Syria and elsewhere in the region show that very substantial gains can be achieved in the quality and live-weight gain characteristics of the favoured local stock as a result of genetic and management improvements.

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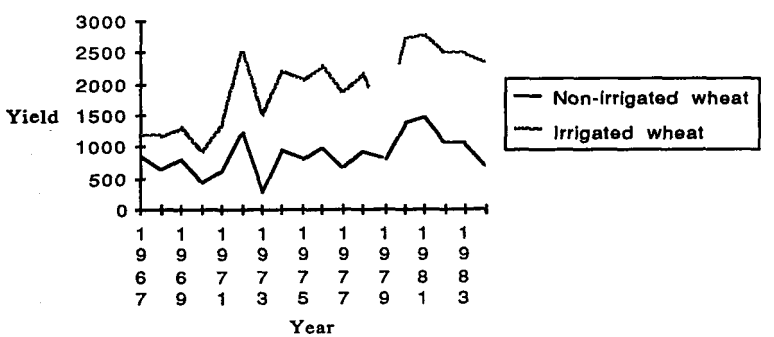
Irrigated land: achievements and prospects

Irrigation is the only strategy which makes agriculture secure in dry countries such as Syria. Yields from irrigated land can be five times those on rainfed tracts, and a secure water supply enables more flexibility in cropping as well as enabling an effective high input and high output system of farming. Figure 3 compares Syria's yield of irrigated and non-irrigated wheat showing that the difference in yield from irrigated and non-itrrigated areas is nearer two times than five. The tirrigated trend also suggests that a high proportion of irrigated wheat in Syria is provided with supplementary water rather than a fully secure supply.

Figure 4 YIELDS OF IRRIGATED AND NON-IRRIGATED WHEAT 1967-84



Source: Syrian Annual Agricultural Statistical Abstract, 1976 and 1984

What then are Syria's options in the irrigated sector? The water resources themselves are an important issue. It has been an assumption behind the plans of the past thirty years that there is sufficient water in the Euphrates system for the cultivation of the large, generally level tracts mainly to the east of Lake Assad and on the northern side of the valley. (Map 1) The alluvial tracts of the Euphrates and to a lesser extent those of the Khabur tributary have been irrigated for millennia and the most important improvement and augmentation of irrigated agriculture during the past thirty years has been in the improvement of irrigation provision in these alluvial areas as well as the significant increase in the utilisation of the Khabur water in the immediate vicinity of the tributary.

The record of the development of new land has been indifferent, but no more so than in equivalent areas worldwide. It is difficult to gain access to up to date information on the areas developed and in progress by the General Organisation for Land Development (GOLD) which carries out the preliminary reclamation and then hands over the projects to the General Organisation for the Exploitation and Development of the Euphrates Basin (GOEDEB), but it is quite clear that only a small fraction of the areas proposed in the early plans have been brought into production, namely the Pilot Project area and the Meskanah Project area. According to the 1983 GOEDEB Annual Statistical Abstract only a limited amount of new land had been developed. Of the 34637 ha nominally accounted as the Pilot Project only 19600 ha had irrigation canals and the Maskanah area covered 26470ha of which 15484ha was for agricultural production. (GOEDEB 1984 p17 and p21) The demand for water exerted by these 35000ha can only be in the order of 350mn m^3 annually, a tiny proportion of the 12 bn m^3 of the Lake Assad storage, or the 26 bn m^3 annual Euphrates flow in Syria. Meanwhile very large tracts of the Meskanah Project area, upwards of 25000ha, are at an advanced stage of reclamation together with extensive tracts to the north and west of Hassakeh.

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It would seem that Syria will in due course attempt to command up to 8 bn m3 of Euphrates and Khabur water and the question about the availability of this amount of water for Syrian irrigated agriculture greatly exercises those planning the future of the nation's agriculture within the anxious hydropolitical circumstances of the international Euphrates Basin. Euphrates water is the key to a significant transformation of Syrian agricultural sector; its availability or not is determining of Syria's agricultural development options for as we shall see the other water resource, groundwater, has already been pushed to its limit and we have learned from the examination of the dryland sector that extraordinary demands are being made there on the ingenuity of scientists and farmers as well as on the cooperative capacity of individuals and rural institutions.

The water balance of the Euphrates is changing rapidly with the implementation of extensive engineering works on the upper Euphrates in Turkey. The plans of the Turkish agricultural authorities make Syria's schemes look very minor. The

South East Anatolian Project (known as the GAP Project) includes provision for the development of 2 million hectares of irrigated and partially irrigated land, almost 1.5 million of which would be watered with Euphrates water. (The scale of such proposals can be put in perspective by considering the total area of irrigated agriculture in a major agricultural country in the region, Egypt, where only 2.5 mn ha are irrigated.) It can be very approximately estimated that the total water requirement from the Euphrates in Turkey will be in the order of 15 bn m^3 annually which can only have a seriously restricting impact on Syria's capability to develop irrigated land, not to speak of the effect on the power generation at the dam on Lake Assad. The only comforting thought for Syria must be that like all such grand development fantasies it will never be fully implemented and that which will be implemented will not materialise until decades after the projected date of completion.(Allan 1983 p243) Meanwhile, however, a very substantial reduction of flow is already being caused by the filling of the first dams and it is estimated that the maximum reduction of flow from this cause will occur in the early 1990s, probably in 1994.(Mitchell 1987) The average flow at the Syrian-Turkish border is recorded variously between 27 and 30 bn m^3. (Table 2) Meanwhile Iraq had become familiar with a flow of over 20 bnm^3/yr, but depending on which period of records used it could be argued that Iraq would be entitled to closer to 30 bnm^3/yr, a volume very close to that which entered Syria in the period prior to the regime imposed by Turkey after the commencement of the filling of the dams in the mid-1980s. At the same time Turkey argues that it is currently providing the 19.7 bnm^3/yr according to its water agreement with Syria.

Clearly the arithmetic is not making sense. If Syria and Iraq are to have any appreciable water for irrigation at least 30 bnm^3/yr of water must cross the Syrian border. Turkey claims that it is only obliged to provide about 20 bnm^3/yr , but according to its engineering plans it would be taking possibly a further 5 bnm3/yr when all the schemes are complete in the GAP Project by 2015. Turkey does argue that the massive increase in storage on the upper Euphrates, reaching over 70 bnm^3, or double the flow of the system, will enable water management for the benefit not only of Turkey but also of the downstream states. (Ozis 1983 p80) It is certainly the case that the control works being constructed by Turkey will have overall benefits in the management of the Euphrates water and there will be some return flow of the water utilised on the Turkish irrigation schemes, but the unavoidably high levels of utilisation which the Turkish plans propose much more than outweigh any benefits for Syria and Iraq brought about by the control of the water. Also the water which does return to the river will be lower in quality through its passage at least once through Turkish soil profiles and there will be a measurable decrease in the quality of water in the river after the irrigation schemes are commissioned. The future of Euphrates water for Syria appears to be one of progressive constraint especially since the GAP Project is such an important one for the Turkish politicians of all political persuasions. The former president Demirel is just as enthusiastic as the ministers currently responsible for the GAP

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Some talk insensitively of diverting an additional 10 bnm^3 of Euphrates water into the Konya Basin.

Table 2 Some data on Euphrates water

	Period of records	Flow in bnm^3/yr
At Keban, Turkey (1)	1937-64	19.920 bnm^3/yr
At Turkish border	1947-80.	30.629
	1937-64.	26.960
At Al Thawra (ACSAD)		26.000
At Hit downstream of Syrian border in Iraq	1930-75.	20.666 bnm^3 /yr
	1937-64.	29.240
Turkish estimates of Euphrates allocations 1987 625 cumecs equivalent to		19.700 bnm^3/yr

Sources: from Mitchell 1987; (1) from Clawson et al 1971; (ACSAD) where indicated

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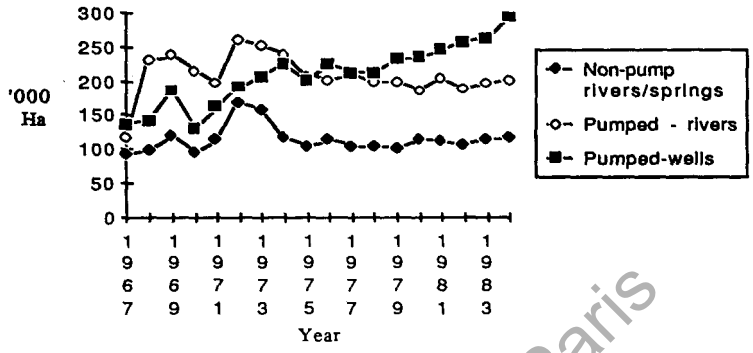
Groundwater in Syria

Syria's record in utilising groundwater has been very good in volume terms in that the trend in use has been steadily upwards during the past two decades. While this is not a surprising fact considering the convenience of groundwater compared with the difficulties of conveying and controlling surface flows, what is surprising is that the volume and rate of increase have exceeded those of the apparently more abundantly available surface flow in Syria's not inconsiderable rivers. By 1975 the area irrigated from groundwater exceeded that fed by water pumped from rivers. By 1984 groundwater was commanding an area just a little less than the total fed from surface flows, both gravity and pump fed. This is a remarkable position considering government policy and reveals the strong preference of farmers for the flexible groundwater source.

Unfortunately groundwater resources are not infinite and there are signs in many parts of the country that the decline in water levels will prevent further extensions of use. In extreme circumstances some groundwater irrigated land may have to revert to rainfed systems. Certainly the rates of increase in this type of irrigation in the 1970s and 1980s will not be sustained in the future. At least the volume of groundwater used will not much increase, although the area commanded may increase as the result of the deployment of more effective methods of water distribution at field level. Trickle systems, for example, can reduce water use by as much as 40 per cent provided farmers are prepared to raise tree and row crops which can be irrigated by the trickle system. The groundwater option is therefore not an uncomplicated one and groundwater

5 IRRIGATED FROM RIVERS AND WELLS, PUMPED AND NON-PUMPED 1967-84



Source: Syrian Annual Agricultural Statistical Abstract, 1976 and 1984

cannot be relied upon to sustain the increase in food production achieved in the past decades.

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Conclusions

Syria has limited agricultural options. Managers of its rainfed sector are struggling with the limits of variable rainfall and unsupportable grazing and cropping pressures. The surface flow resources are more than adequate for the immediate future of irrigated farming and for the development of new lands but the medium and long term situation are clouded by the engineering and political realities determined by the geography of being a downstream user. Groundwater has brought rich returns to investment for the past two decades but it will not provide an equivalent contribution during the next two without considerable investment in the technology of water distribution at the field level. The prospect is not a comfortable one but it is not wholly bleak. There is evidence that adjustments are being made as a result of the experience gained in the recent past . In the rainfed regions the awareness of the need to conserve as well as exploit are recognised and in the development of the new lands the lessons of underestimating the difficulties of utilising poor soils are appreciated to the extent that realistic specifications are being followed in the construction of water distribution systems and especially in the provision of adequate drainage. The impact of these preliminaries will take some time to become evident in the national agricultural production figures but it is certain that they will do so in the coming seasons.

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I should like to thank colleagues in the Department of Geography in the University of Damascus for their advice and especially for their warm hospitality during my stay in Syria in 1986. I should also like to express my gratitude to officials in the Bureau of Statistics in Damascus and to the librarians of the Bureau and of the Central Bank for enabling me to consult national level data relevant to water and agriculture. Syria is fortunate in having a strong tradition in agronomic and economic research in the rainfed areas and this strength is enhanced by the very good applied science carried on at ICARDA and I am very grateful to a number of ICARDA scientists for their comment and advice on many issues of importance in the management of the marginal lands of the region. The information on the Turkish proposals for the Euphrates water were kindly made available by Jonathan Mitchell of the University of Durham although the interpretation of the data is my own as are all the opinions expressed here which have been proposed as a reasonably balanced introductory impression. The challenge of interpreting Syrian rural development after its unfathomable complexity has been encountered through long periods spent in

the farms, the villages and the regional offices of government agencies remains an agreeable prospect for the future.

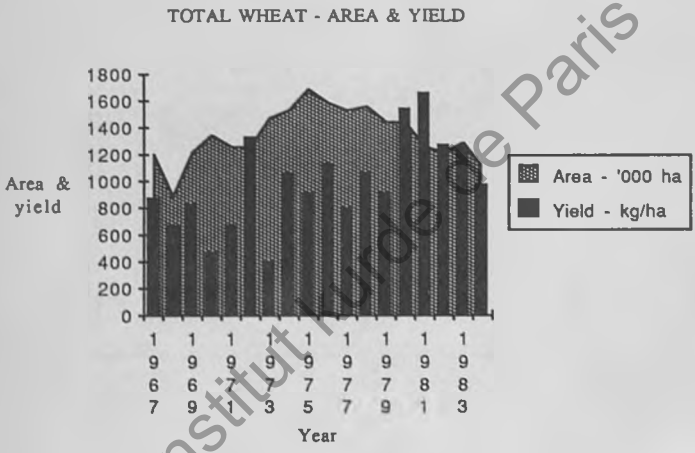
Maps and appendices

Map 1 Irrigation regions - Euphrates Valley

Map 2 Some surface flow details for Syrian rivers

Appendix 1

Figure 4



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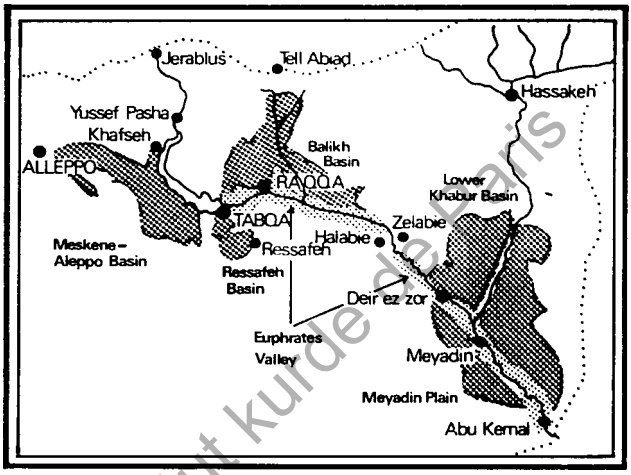
Source: Syrian Annual Agricultural Statistical Abstract, 1976 and 1984

MAP 1

IRRIGATION REGIONS, EUPHRATES VALLEY.



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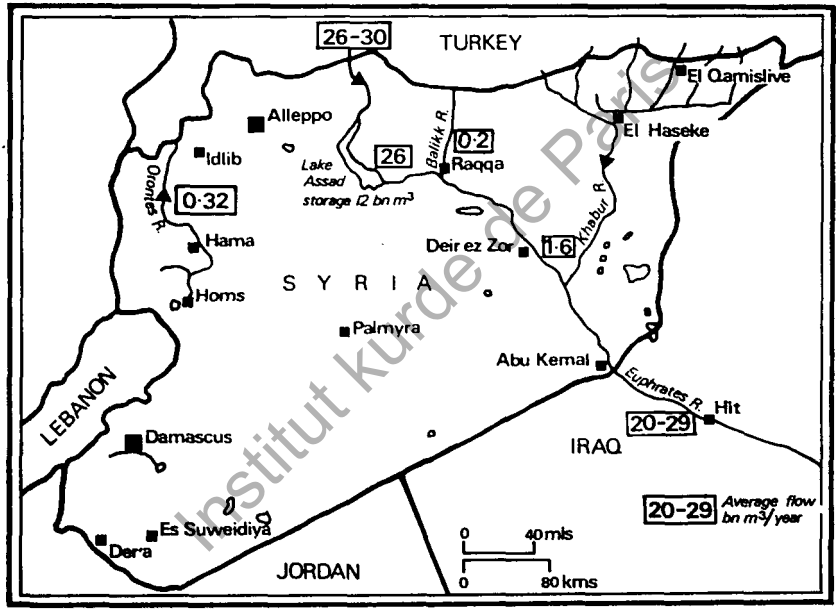
MAP 2

SOME SURFACE FLOW DETAILS FOR SYRIAN RIVERS.



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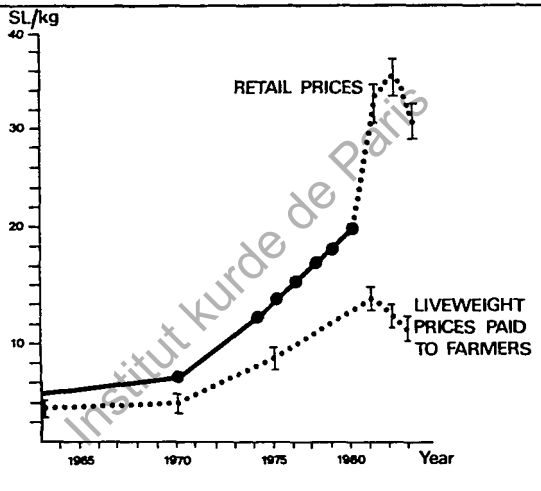
APPENDIX 2

CHANGES IN RETAIL AND LIVEWEIGHT PRICES OF MUTTON AND SHEEP BETWEEN 1963-1982 IN ALEPPO PROVINCE.



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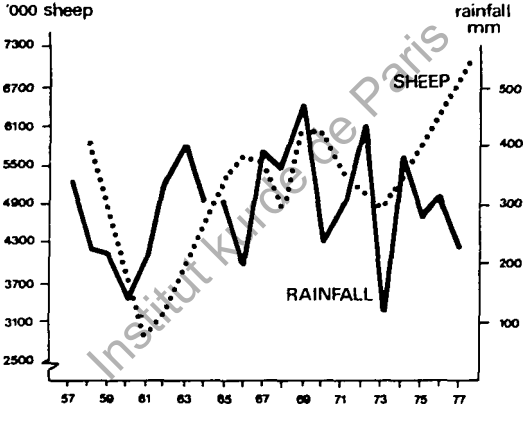
Source: After Joubert 1983 p.27

[1] *The prices are slightly different in other provinces but the phenomenon here is similar*

APPENDIX 3

FLUCTUATIONS IN SHEEP NUMBERS AND RAINFALL.*



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*Rainfall is average for 7 stations throughout Syria

Source: ICARDA, 1980. Farming Systems Program, Project Report No. 1

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SYRIA SINCE 1970

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Abstract: The years from 1970 to 1981 were characterized by a marked expansion of the Syrian economy. Since 1982, however, economic performance has weakened sharply due to a combination of negative natural factors and both external and domestic financial constraints. Although the *agricultural production* was badly hit by low rainfall between 1982 and 1985, great progress has been achieved in this important sector of the economy since 1970. The index of agricultural production in Syria compares very favourably with that of other countries in the Middle East. During the period under investigation, the advancement of the *industrial sector* has been less satisfactory. With the exception of a short industrial boom, which followed the war of 1973 and lasted only two years, the contribution of mining and manufacturing to the G.D.P. has been declining since 1976. *Petroleum* output increased sharply from 4 million tons in 1970 to a record level of 10 million tons in1976, but then declined and stagnated at about 9 million tons per annum. The recently discovered Thayyem oil field, should increase production by 6 million tons per years. Severe *shortages of electrical power* have been one of the major problems of industrial expansion since 1983. The development of Syrian *manufacturing industry*, which was clearly dominated by textile and food processing industries in 1970, has been characterized by increasing diversification and a dramatic expansion of the *chemical industries*. Despite constraints on *private industrial activities*, their contribution to the value added in the manufacturing sector has exceeded the share of the *public sector* enterprises during the recent years. The volume of Syria's *foreign trade* grew dramatically between 1974 and 1981. However, with imports rising much faster than exports, the magnitude of the trade imbalance had increased so alarmingly in 1981 that severe import restrictions were imposed. During the 1970s crude oil and oil products became Syria's principal import and export commodity. While *raw cotton* had provided 43 % of foreign trade earnings in 1970, its share accounted only for 15 % of total recorded exports in 1984. In view of Syria's future economic development, there are encouraging signs that the present economic crisis will soon be replaced by a significant improvement of the economy.

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Biographical note: The author is professor for social and economic geography at the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg. Since 1975 he has carried out a considerable number of extensive field studies in Marocco, Egypt, Syria, and the Yemen Arab Republic. His publications include books and articles on land reclamation and rural change in Egypt, industry and migration in Cairo, rural development, labour migration and nomadism in Syria, and economic development and migration in the Yemen Arab Republic.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SYRIA SINCE 1970

G. Meyer

1. OVERALL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

When President Hafiz al Assad came into power in November 1970 the Syrian Economy had passed through more than a decade of alternating phases of low growth rates, stagnation and decline. The beginning of that period was marked by the prolonged drought of 1958–61 which severely reduced the agricultural output. Political instability and the socialist transformation of the economy through land reform and large-scale nationalization of most of the industrial sector led to a mess exodus of skilled workers and experienced managers along with their capital, particularly after the takeover of the government by the Baath Party in 1963, and this continued to curtail economic expansion during the second half of the 1960s. The Arab-Israeli War of 1967 had further adverse affects on the economic development and stressed the necessity of devoting increased resources to national security.

The new regime of President Assad tried successfully to contribute to a reversal of the economic downtrend by taking measures in the direction of liberalizing rigid governmental controls and adopting a more pragmatic approach to economic development. This policy had just started to pay off, internal stability was gradually returning and the pace of development was beginning to accelerate, when the October 1973 War broke out. Heavy destruction was caused by the bombarding of the harbour of Lataqiya, the oil terminals of Tartus and Baniyas and the very important industrial complex at Homs, where the country's only refinery and its largest electrical power station were targets of Israeli warplanes.

In spite of its devastating effects and economic damage estimated at 1,800 million US-dollars (Fisher 1987 p 668), this war marked the starting point of an unprecedented period of economic expansion. The reconstruction efforts by the Government, combined with further economic liberalization measures and new guarantees against nationalization and confiscation, encouraged investment and created a climate of economic confidence. Assisted financially by the rich Gulf states, helped by high agricultural output due to favourable weather conditions, and supported by increasing oil revenues, the economic growth rates began to soar. As Figure 1 shows, real G.D.P. (at constant prices) rose at an average annual rate of 17.6 per cent in 1974–76. During that period building and construction activities more than doubled (Figure 2), the mining and manufacturing sector grew by 47 per cent, and wholesale and retail trade increased at a rate of 78 per cent.

The subsequent years from 1977 to 1981 were also characterized by economic expansion. The annual growth rate of the real G.D.P., however, was lower than before and averaged only 7.5 per cent. One of the major reasons for this slower pace of economic expansion has to be seen in the heavy drain of public funds which could not be invested in development projects, but had instead to be spent on the prolonged peacekeeping mission in the Lebanon that started in 1976 and cost the equivalent of 75–80 million US-dollars a month (Nyrop 1979 p 106). The interruption in the flow of

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Paper presented at the Conference on Politics and the economy in Syria, convened in the University of London (SOAS) on 20 May 1987.

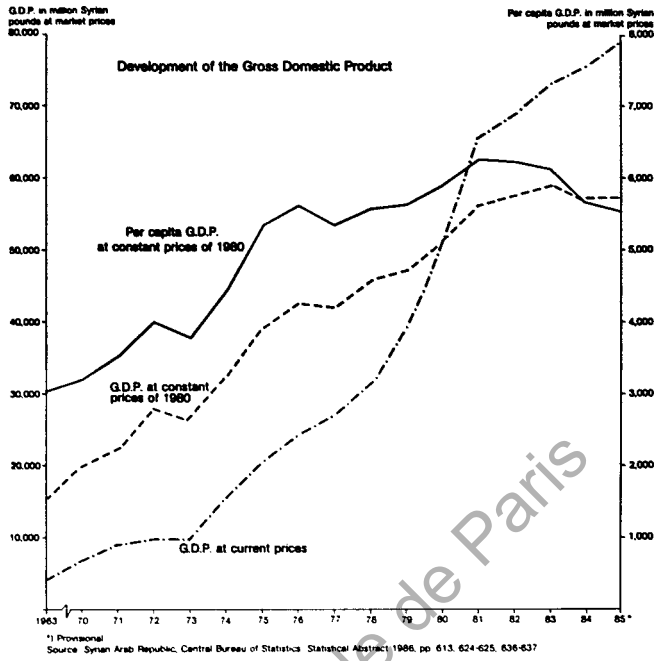

Figure 1. Development of the G.D.P. at current prices, at constant prices, and per capita

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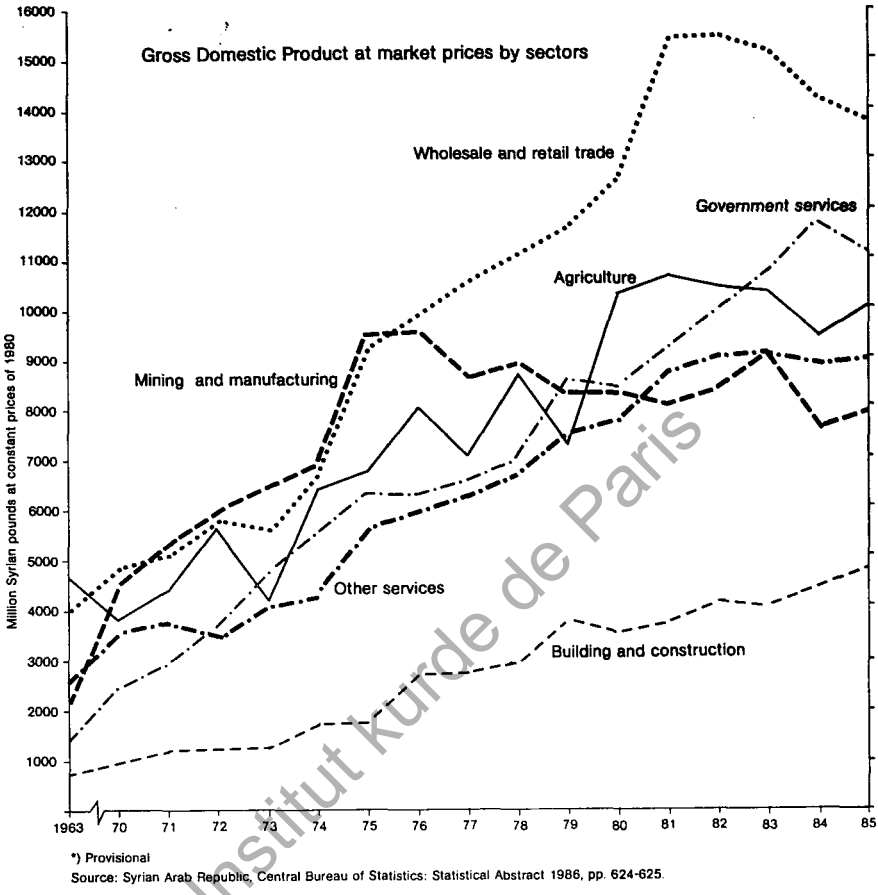
oil transit revenues from Iraq and the temporary reduction of financial aid from the wealthy Gulf states caused further economic difficulties.

In 1982 economic performance weakened sharply and real G.D.P. declined during the 1983–85 period (Figure 1). This deterioration resulted from a combination of negative natural factors and both external and domestic financial constraints. Agricultural production was badly hit by low rainfall during four consecutive years, particularly in 1984 (Figure 2). At the same time the manufacturing sector suffered from reduced availability of agricultural raw materials, production inefficiencies, and cost-price distortions. Dwindling financial aid from other Arab states, the weakening of the international oil market, and a strong demand for imports created serious foreign exchange constraints, which prompted the Government to intensify import controls. The resulting shortages of imported inputs hampered the efficient operation of many projects, particularly in the manufacturing sector. In the service sector, too, growth performance slowed down, largely in response to the decline of the value added in the trading sector which was affected by the bad performance of agriculture and manufacturing, as well as by the restraints on imports and lower contributions from finance and insurance activities.

In 1986 and during the first quarter of 1987 the economy deteriorated further, with the trend continuing even more sharply downward. Although agricultural production had recovered due to improved weather conditions, real value added in the other sectors declined considerably during the worst crisis which had hit the Syrian economy for many years. The main reason for the acuteness of the crisis has to be seen in foreign exchange shortages resulting from the collapse of world oil prices. This development caused not only a big drop in oil exports, but reduced also the flow of remittances from Syrians working in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, and increased the reluctance of the Arab Gulf states to fulfil their aid commitments to Damascus. Economic sanctions imposed



*) Provisional

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract 1986, pp. 624-625.

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Figure 2. Development of the G.D.P. by sectors

by Great Britain and West Germany because of alleged Syrian involvement in terrorist acts added to the country's economic difficulties. At the same time, the temporary closure of the smuggling routes from Lebanon aggravated the problem of supplying the industrial sector with vital inputs and resulted in soaring prices for imported consumer goods.

In the wake of the deterioration of the economy, per capita G.D.P. started to decline in 1981. Four years later it had fallen to the level of 1976 (Figure 1) and continued to decline. The immediate consequence of this downward trend is a lower standard of living for the mass of the Syrian population. Prices of most consumer goods are rising much faster than wages and salaries. In particular prices for commodities which are imported or which depend on foreign inputs are rising sharply, as is shown in Figure 3 by the increase of the price indices for furniture and house utensils, transportation, foodstuff and clothes up to mid-1985. In September of the same year, the Syrian Government raised the prices of many consumer items, including a number of essential products, by up to 144 per cent in order to reflect the increased production costs and to reduce bugetary subsidies. To make these price adjustments more acceptable, wages and salaries in the public sector were

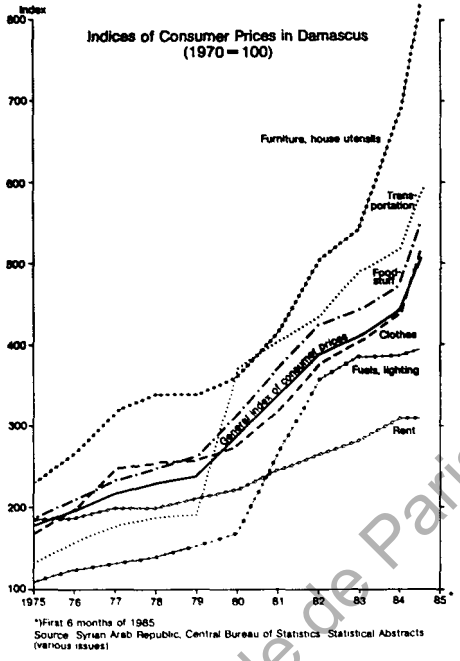

Figure 3. Development of consumer prices in Damascus

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increased by an average of about 20 per cent, which was the first such adjustment since 1980. Following this measure the rate of inflation continued to soar in 1986, while shortages in the supply of many consumer goods became more and more frequent. It is understandable that under such circumstances the dissatisfaction with the Government's economic austerity policy and its high defence expenditures is growing among the Syrian population.

2. AGRICULTURE

Agriculture represents one of the most important foundations on which the Syrian economy is based. Although the proportion of the labour force employed in agriculture dropped sharply from 50.9 per cent in 1970 to an estimated 25.4 per cent in 1984 (Table 1), the overall performance of agriculture during that period was remarkably successful. Contrary to most countries in the Middle East, where the importance of agriculture has been declining considerably in relation to the other sectors of the economy, the development of agriculture in Syria has kept pace with the overall expansion of the national economy: the contribution of agriculture to the G.D.P. has remained almost unchanged at a proportion of about 20 per cent since 1970.

This successful development, however, has also to be seen as a reversal of the agricultural deterioration which occurred during the 1960s and which was mainly attributed to problems caused by the execution of the agrarian reform (Wirth 1971 pp 221-226, Métral 1980 pp 288-305). Under the Assad administration many of these problems were solved, agricultural extension was given high priority, the efficiency of the cooperative system was increased, and more and more of the land which had been expropriated under the agrarian reform law was distributed to former share-croppers and agricultural labourers, who could thus improve their economic situation enormously (Hosry 1981).

Table 1. Development of the labour force by sector and its contribution to the gross domestic product between 1970 and 1984

Sector	Employed persons in per cent*			G.D.P. in per cent	
	1970	1977	1984	1970	1984
Agriculture (including minor activities in forestry and fishing)	50.9	39.1	25.4	20.3	19.7
Mining and quarrying	0.6	0.4	0.8		
Manufacturing	12.3	13.5	15.0	22.0	16.0
Electricity, gas, and water	0.5	0.9	0.9		
Building and construction	7.3	9.0	16.3	3.0	6.6
Wholesale, retail trade (including restaurants and hotels)	9.5	10.4	11.3	20.5	23.5
Transportation, storage, and communications	4.2	6.2	5.7	10.8	8.3
Finance and insurance	0.6	0.7	0.7	10.7	5.8
Community, social, and personal services	14.1	19.8	23.9	12.7	20.1
Total employed persons (in thousands) and G.D.P. at market prices (at current prices, in billion Syrian pounds)	1,468	1,894	2,246	4.43	75.34

*) Figures for 1970 based on full census; 1977 and 1984 estimates from sample surveys.

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract (various issues)

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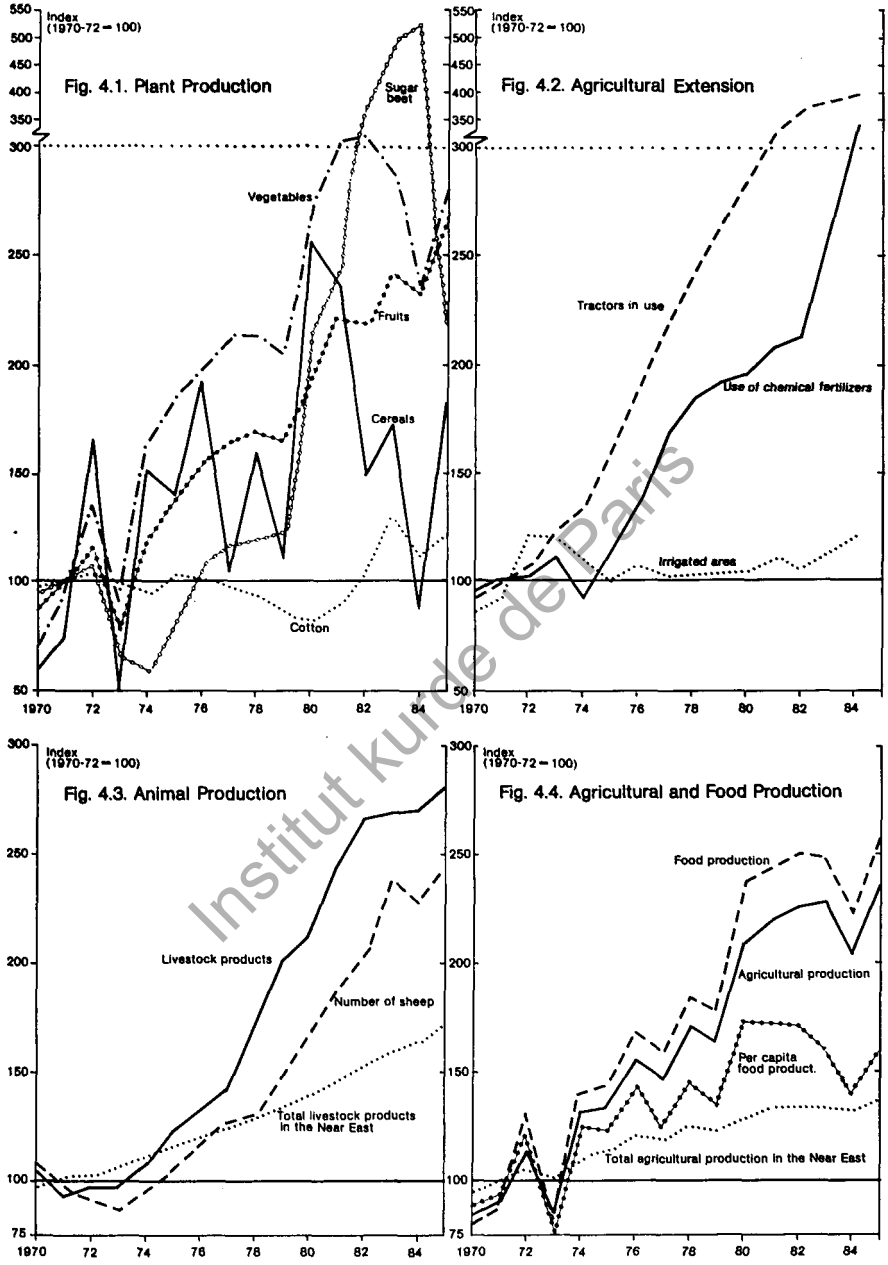
The effects of these measures are clearly visible in the general increase of agricultural production (Figure 4). Due to its heavy dependence on rainfall, however, agricultural output was considerably affected by adverse weather conditions during several years in the 1970s and by a prolonged drought from 1982 to 1985. As Syria's principal crop, and one which is cultivated mostly on a rainfed basis, *cereals* suffered particularly seriously from inadequate rainfalls (Figure 4.1). In 1984 the production of wheat and barley dropped to an exceptionally low level. Most other sectors of plant production are much less affected by annual fluctuations of rainfall, because they are either irrigated or mainly cultivated in the western parts of the country where precipitation is generally higher than in the dominantly cereal growing areas of Central and Northern Syria.

The production of *cotton*, the major industrial crop and important source of export earnings, stagnated and even declined between 1970 and 1981. Since that time, the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform has encouraged cultivation of cotton by setting higher targets in the annual production plans and providing additional incentives for the farmers. After prices paid to cotton growers were increased by 78 per cent, production of this crop rose to a record level in 1983. In spite of lower output in 1984-85 due to a temporary lack of water for irrigation purposes, cotton production is expected to be stimulated again with a view to improving foreign exchange earnings.



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Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstracts (various issues). FAO Production Yearbook (various issues).

Figure 4. Indices of agricultural development in Syria

The most impressive advance in the area of plant production could be seen in the increase of *sugar beet* production which was promoted in combination with the setting up of new sugar refineries. After the bumper crop of 1984, however, the ambitious plans for further expansion were adversely affected by the declining prices on the world sugar market. Sugar could be imported at a price far below the local production costs in Syria. This necessitated the closure of two sugar refineries and a reduction of the area cultivated with sugar beet.

Another characteristic change in plant production is indicated by the fast growth rates of *vegetable and fruit* production. The expectation of high profits motivates the farmers to expand the area planted with such crops (Métral 1984 p 77, Meyer 1984 p 199). These products are in great demand among the rising urban population and are not subject to official price controls. The Ministry of Agriculture encourages production by selling cheap seedlings of fruit-bearing trees to the farmers (Roberts 1986 p 94).

A large proportion of the successful development in plant production since 1970 has to be attributed to agricultural training and extension programmes, the application of improved varieties of seed, and the dramatic increase in the use of *agricultural machinery and chemical fertilizers* (Figure 4.2). At the same time, the high expectations surrounding the *expansion of the irrigated area* promised by the Euphrates project were largely frustrated. Following the initial reclamation of nearly 20,000 ha of irrigated land in the Pilot Project of the Middle Euphrates valley (Meyer 1982 p 567, Rabo 1986 pp 137-145), more than 30,000 ha of old irrigated land were flooded in the reservoir area between 1973 and 1975, and some 4000 ha went out of production every year because of increasing salinity in the Lower Euphrates valley. In addition, severe problems caused by the high gypsum content of the soils in the Balikh-Region delayed the reclamation scheme in Northeast Syria to such an extent, that in 1984 the total area of irrigation (618,000 ha) was still slighty smaller than 12 years before. Although land reclamation in the Meskene-Region is at present making good progress, it is to be expected that the original plans to irrigate up to 640,000 ha in the Euphrates Basin will have to be scaled down considerably, not only because of soil problems and high reclamation costs, but also because of lack of water. As soon as the huge irrigation projects which are now under construction along the Euphrates in Turkey start operating, there will be not enough water left to irrigate the newly reclaimed lands in Syria.

A much brighter picture emerges when looking at the development of *animal production* (Figure 4.3). Thanks to an extensive programme for the improvement of range management and fodder supplies, which was initiated by FAO/UNDP, livestock production in general and sheep breeding in particular has increased in unprecedented fashion (Gurdon 1985 p 104). The measures taken by the Syrian Government to promote mobile sheep-keeping and to integrate the nomadic type of economy into the country's macro-economic development have proved so successful that this concept should also serve as a model for developing nomadism and livestock production in other arid regions of the world (Meyer 1982 p 106, Lewis 1987 pp 175-186).

Summing up the overall development of agriculture, Figure 4.4 indicates the great progress which has been achieved in this important sector of the economy since 1970. The *index of agricultural production* in Syria compares very favourably with the index of total agricultural production in the Near East. Even the *index of per capita food production* exhibited rather impressive growth rates until 1980, although it started from a low base (Manners 1985 p 276). The stagnation and decline of this agricultural indicator during the drought of 1982–85 have since been replaced by a more positive development as weather conditions improved considerably in 1986/87. (For further information about agricultural development in Syria cf. the contributions of N. Lewis, N. Siam and A. Azzawi, and J.A. Allen in this book.)

3. INDUSTRY

In comparison with agriculture the advancement of the industrial sector in Syria since 1970 has been less satisfactory. With the exception of the short industrial boom which followed the war of 1973 and lasted onlytwo years, the contribution of mining and manufacturing to the G.D.P. has been declining both in absolute and relative terms since 1976 (Figure 2). The industrial sector – including mining and quarrying, manufacturing, generation of electricity, gas, and water – had accounted for 22 per cent of the G.D.P. in 1970; 14 years later its proportion had fallen to no more

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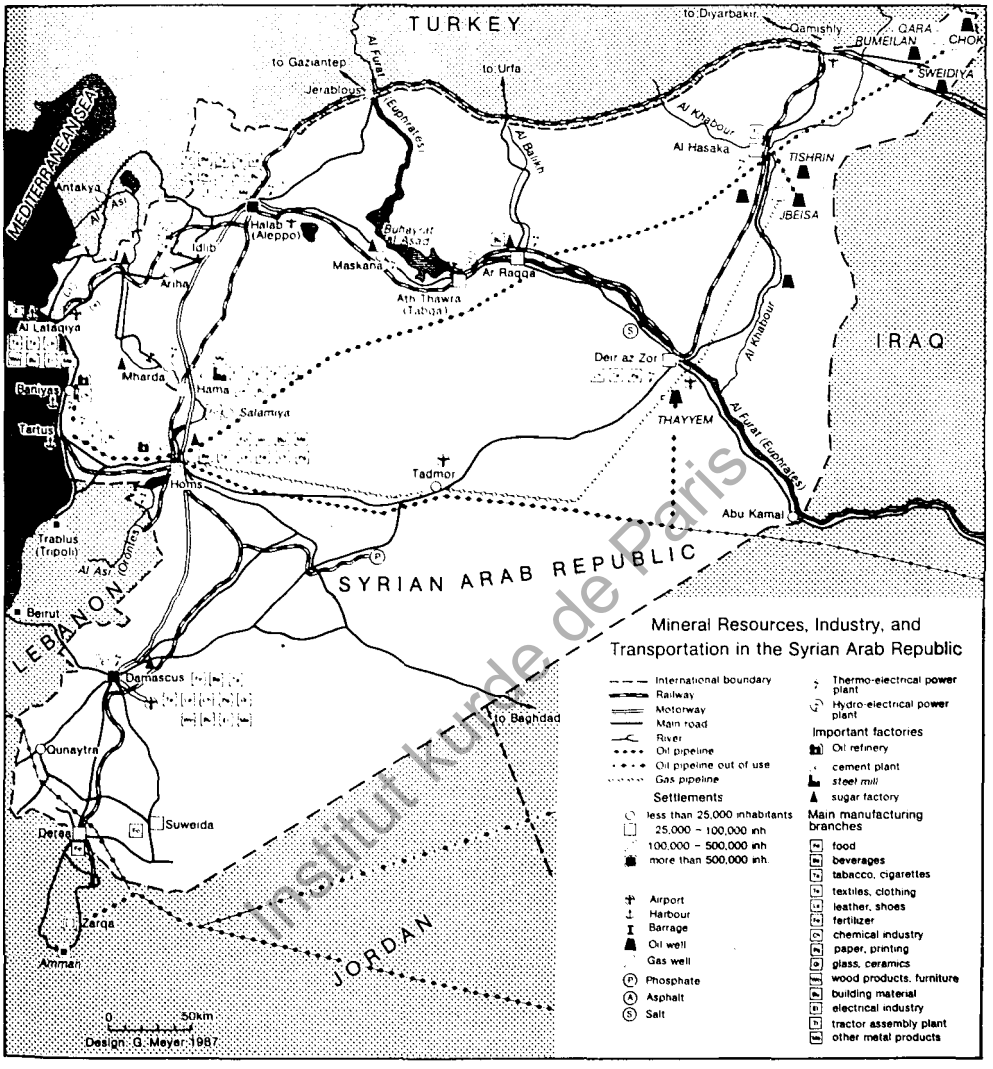

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Figure 5. Mineral resources, industry, and transportation in the Syrian Arab Republic

than 16 per cent. During the same period the labour force working in this branch of the economy had grown slightly from 13.4 per cent to 16.7 per cent (Table 1). Most of Syrian industry is closely tied to agriculture. Although the country has only few mineral resources, their exploitation and processing has become one of the major growth factors in the industrial sector since the 1970s.

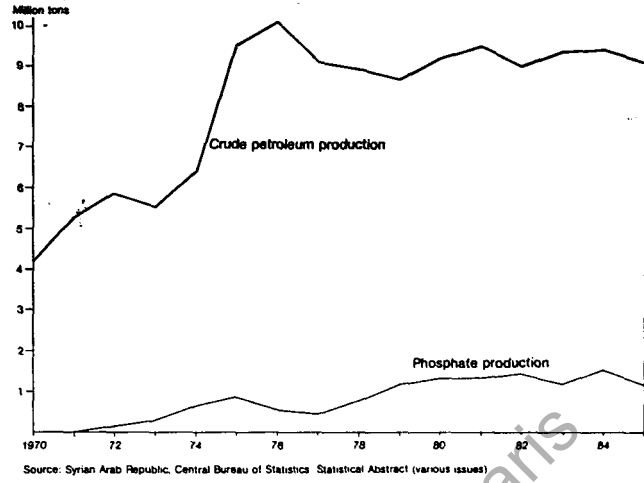

Figure 6. Production of crude petroleum and phosphate (1970–85)

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a. Oil and Mineral Resources

Crude oil constitutes the most important natural resource in Syria. By world standards, however, the country's oil reserves are very small, amounting to only 0.2 per cent of the proven world oil reserves at end of 1985 (MEED 4:11:1986). At the present rate of extraction, the estimated 1.46 billion barrels of known oil deposits could enable output to continue for at least 25 years.

The principal *oil fields* were discovered by American and European firms in the extreme northeastern part of Syria during the late 1950s. After nationalization of the oil industry in 1964 and completion of a pipeline leading to the coast, production in the Sweidiya field started in 1968 and was followed a year later by the start of production in the Qara Chok field (Figure 5). The petroleum extracted from these fields is of low quality with a density ranging from 19 to 25 degrees on the American Petroleum Institute (API) scale and a relatively high sulphur content of 3.5 – 4.5 per cent. The Jbaisa field, which was later discovered to the southwest of the other fields, contains crude oil of higher quality with 40° API and only 0.6 per cent sulphur content.

Petroleum output from the fields in the northeast increased sharply from 4 million tons in 1970 to a record level of 10 million tons in 1976 (Figure 6), but then declined and stagnated at about 9 million tons per annum for the next decade. Because of the need to counteract the decreasing output and to discover new fields, the state-owned Syrian Petroleum Company (SPC) has intensified its exploration activities in recent years. At the same time, the Government has reversed its no-concessions policy and invited foreign companies to engage in petroleum exploration under production sharing agreements with the SPC. Among the new activities undertaken, the greatest success was the discovery of the *Thayyem field* near Deir az Zor by a consortium of Royal Dutch/Shell, Pecten and Deminex of West Germany in 1984. The quality of the oil deposits is high – light crude of 36° API, with a low sulphur content.

After the Thayyem oil field came on stream in October 1986, flow has been built up from the initial 45,000 barrels a day to 60,000 b/d. The Al Furat Oil Company has now called for tenders for the second stage of field development which should take production flow to 120,000 b/d (about 6 million tons per year,Cranfield 1987 p 10). The oil from the Thayyem field is being pumped to the Homs refinery through a pipeline completed in 1986 which links up with the disused Iraq-Syria pipeline.

Until 1976 transit fees from that pipeline had constituted one of the most important budget revenues.During the following two years, however, Iraq stopped pumping oil through Syria because of disagreement over transit fees and the use of the Euphrates water. After the improvement of political relations between Baghdad and Damascus, the Kirkuk-Baniyas pipeline came into use again in 1979, but flow was soon interrupted once more in 1980-81. The final closure came in May 1982, when Syria signed an oil import agreement with Iran, which stipulated the annual supply of 6 million tons of Iranian crude oil. Of this amount, 1 million tons should be a gift, while the rest is provided at reduced prices.

Another important source of oil transit fees, the Trans Arabian Pipeline (Tapline), stopped operating in Lebanon and Syria at the end of 1983 because of accumulated losses and political uncertainties (MEED 14:11:1983). The Tapline had been used to pump Saudi Arabian oil to the terminal at Zahrani, near Sidon in southern Lebanon, and now continues to carry crude up to Zarqa, where Jordan's only refinery is located.

Besides petroleum, Syria has also sizable *gas reserves*. Recoverable deposits for associated gas are estimated at more than 10 billion cubic meters. In addition to this, there are also substantial reserves of nonassociated gas. The US' Marathon Oil Company made two large natural gas discoveries in the Homs region in 1982 and 1985, but further evaluation of the finds is still needed before the company is going to decide whether to exploit these gas fields commercially (MEED 6:7:1985). In view of the vast gas reserves, the Syrian government is at present giving high priority to projects which utilize gas for industrial energy consumption. So far, a gas gathering scheme linking the Sweidiya, Qara Chok, and Rumeilan fields has already been completed and the construction of a gas pipeline running from the Jbeisa gas treatment complex to the ammonia/urea fertilizer works in Homs is due to be finished in 1987. At present that plant uses naphta as feedstock, but it is being converted to gas.

In addition to oil and gas, another important mineral resource is *phosphate*. Total reserves are estimated at 500 million tons. Production of phosphate, which is of low quality with high clorine and moisture content, began in 1971 in two government-operated mines near Tadmor. The output fluctuated considerably during the second half of the 1970s due to changes in world demand, but remained relatively stable with 1.2 – 1.5 million tons per year between 1980 and 1985 (Figure 6). For 1986 a considerable rise in production had been announced.

The exploitation of other mineral reserves is of only minor economic relevance. In this respect, deposits of natural *asphalt* near Al Lataqiya and of pure rock *salt* northeast of Deir az Zor have to be mentioned, as well as sand, gravel, stone, and gypsum, which are mined in various parts of the country and used for construction materials. There are plans to exploit recently discovered *diamond* deposits in the Homs area and agreement has already been reached on setting up a pilot plant for the processing of diamond-bearing rock (MEED 31:1:1987).

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b. Electric Power

Increases in the generation of electricity are to be regarded as the key to much of Syria's future industrial development. After the completion of the Euphrates dam at Tabqa and the installation of eight 100-megawatt turbines in 1977 (Figure 7) this problem seemed solved for many years to come. The hydro-electric power station at Lake Assad was expected to generate about 80 per cent of the country's electric power. Just six years later, however, the high expectations were badly frustrated. The energy produced by the Tabqa power station dropped from 2,500 million kWh per annum to less than 1,500 million kWh. In 1983 and during the following years the turbines could work at only 30–40 per cent capacity due to lack of rainfall and Turkey's increased use of the upper waters of the Euphrates (Roberts 1984 p 55).

The result was a serious *shortage of power*. Soaring demand for electricity from industry and private consumers outstripped supply, so that daily power cuts lasting up to three hours had to be introduced in 1983. Although several new power stations came into service between 1981 and 1985, the extra capacity was still insufficient. Since the beginning of the 1980 demand has

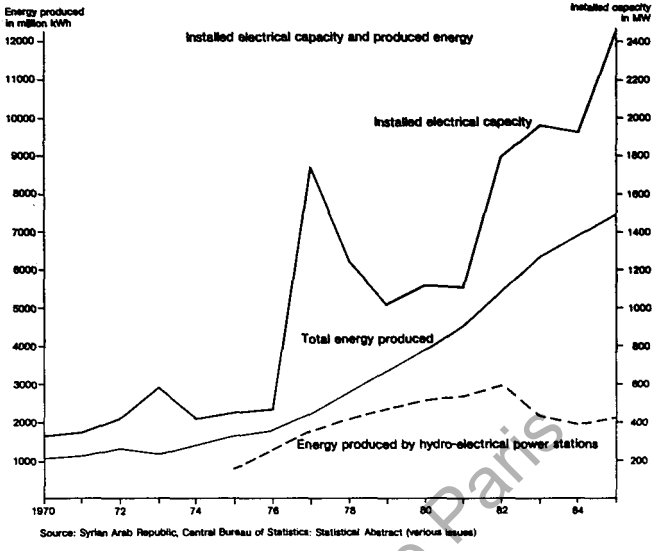

Figure 7. Development of installed electrical capacity and produced energy

increased by about 20 per cent a year (MEED 23.11.1983) as more villages have received electricity, more Syrians have bought air-conditioners and other electrical consumer goods, and more industrial establishments have switched to modern energy consuming machinery. Because the gap between supply and demand continued to grow even more, daily power cuts had to be extended to four hours in February 1986.

To overcome the severe energy crisis, the Syrian government launched an ambitious programme for the construction of new conventional power stations, the increase of capacity in existing power plants, and the building of further hydro-electric dams. In early 1987 the following projects were under way:

- construction of a petroleum coke-fired 120-MW power station at Jandar, south of Homs (tenders invited), a 90-MW power plant at the Thayyem oilfield (tenders invited), a 150-MW gas turbine power station at Sweidiya (contracts offered), a 400-MW thermal power station in southern Damascus (contract signed), and a 300-MW power station south of Al Lataqiya (tenders invited);
- extension of existing power plants: 64-MW at Kattineh, outside Homs (work started), 330-MW at Mharda, west of Hama (under construction), and 340-MW at Baniyas (contract signed);
- construction of two hydro-electrical power stations on the Euphrates: a 64-MW power plant 25 km downstream from the Tabqa dam (due to be completed at end-1986) and a larger power station located between Lake Assad and the Turkish border (planned); erection of three dams on the Khabour river, which will provide some electricity (planned, Hopfinger 1984).

As most of the power stations listed above are still in the state of planning or at an early stage of implementation, it is obvious that the severe shortages of electrical power will remain one of the major hindrances to industrial development in Syria at least until the beginning of the 1990s.

c. Manufacturing

The structure of Syrian manufacturing industry has undergone considerable changes in recent years, as Figure 8 indicates. In 1970 manufacturing activities were clearly dominated by textile and food processing industries which accounted for more than 70 per cent of gross output and

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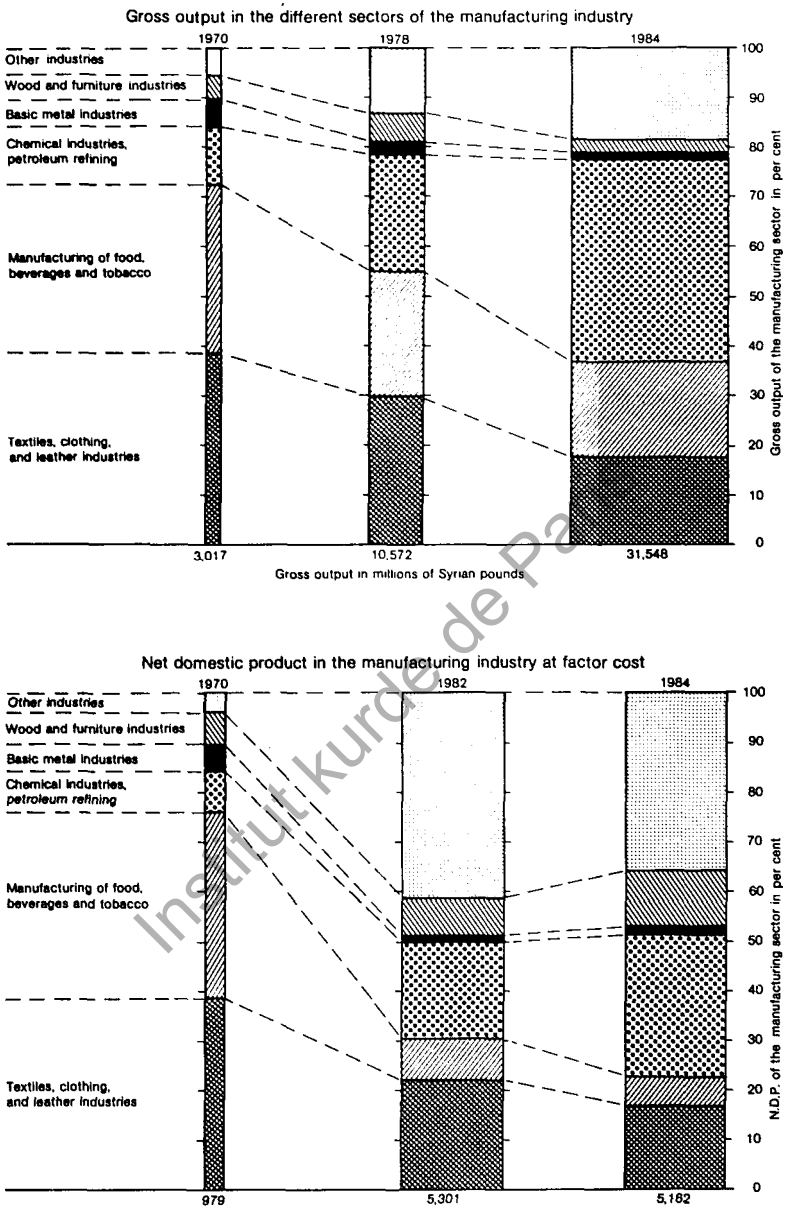

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract (various issues)

Figure 8. Development of gross output and value added in the different sectors of the manufacturing industry

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value added in manufacturing. By 1984 the combined share of gross output in these two branches had declined to 38 per cent while value added, i.e. the contribution to N.D.P. at factor cost, had dropped to as little as 23 per cent. The decline is only partially due to the bad performance of the drought-affected agriculture, which provides most of the raw material for food processing and textile industry. The main reason for this change in the composition of the manufacturing sector has to be seen in the dramatical expansion of other industries, particularly of the chemical industries. They became the most important branch in manufacturing and could increase their share between 1970 and 1984 from only 8 per cent to 30 per cent of total value added in manufacturing.

For a better understanding of the structural changes in the manufacturing sector during the period under investigation, we shall try to roughly analyse the development of the different industries. When the measures of nationalization came into effect in the manufacturing sector in 1964–65, the oldest, largest and most advanced Syrian factories were those of the *textile industry*. In 1965 about 70 per cent of the total labour force working in nationalized manufacturing enterprises were to be found in textile mills (Wirth 1971 p 319), particularly in Aleppo, Damascus and, to a smaller extent, also in Homs. Up to 3000 workers were employed in spinning and weaving factories, which used mainly local cotton as raw material (Longuenesse 1980 p 341). This predominance of very large government-operated mills has been retained in the Syrian textile industry until today. Because of its relatively high standard, the textile industry had received only 7 per cent of the accumulated capital invested in the public manufacturing sector until 1985. That small proportion was mainly spent on the expansion and modernization of existing textile mills and on the construction of several new factories for spinning, weaving, ready-made garments, and wool carpets.

In addition to the industrial establishments of the public sector, a large number of small private factories and workshops – particularly for clothing – is characteristic of the composition of the textile industry. As many of these mills in Aleppo had produced for markets in Iraq and Jordan, they were so severely affected by the deterioration of the political relations between Syria and her Arab neighbours at the beginning of the 1980s that they had to close, causing heavy job losses (MEED 11:3:1983).

In the *processing of food, beverages and tobacco*, the most important change since 1970 has to be seen in the massive public investment into the expansion of *sugar industry*. In addition to three existing sugar factories at Homs, Adra, and Jisr esh Shoughur, four new refineries were built in Maskana, Ar Raqqa, Deir az Zor, and Tal Salhab, to process the beet produced from the Euphrates basin and the Ghab. This very costly attempt to reduce Syria's dependence on sugar imports, appears so far to have largely failed. As mentioned above, two refineries were closed in 1985 because it was much cheaper to import sugar than to produce it locally (Tampier 1985 p 70). For several years one of these mills, the new sugar refinery at Deir az Zor, had made use of only a very small proportion of its capacity (Hannoyer 1980 p 475). Other more successful developments in food processing include the erection of factories for preserved food, such as the new tomato processing plant near Deraa, and the construction of many flour mills. These public industrial projects help to save foreign exchange by enabling Syria to import grain instead of more expensive flour.

By far the largest share of public investment in the fields of manufacturing was made in the *chemical industry*, including the refinement of oil. Until 1985 this industrial branch had received two thirds of the accumulated capitals invested in the public manufacturing sector (Statistical Abstract 1986 p 212). A major part of that capital served to expand Syria's *oil refining* capacity in order to reduce its dependence on imports of certain petrochemical products and to aid it to make the best use of its crude oil resources. So not only the Homs refinery, which had suffered severe damages during the October 1973 War, was rebuilt in 1974–78 and enlarged to an annual capacity of 5.2 million tons, but also a second refinery with a capacity of 6 million tons per year was completed in Baniyas in 1981. Due to the heaviness of most of Syrian petroleum, both refineries mix domestic and imported crude in their production activities. Until 1984 the output of refinery products had increased to 10.2 million tons, of which 63 per cent were used to meet the domestic demand for gas oil, gasoline, fuel oil, and naphtha, while the rest was exported.

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Following the successful expansion in oil refinement, the Syrian government has recently been stressing the necessity for new industrial projects based on the country's natural gas reserves. An initial step in this direction was the completion of the Rumeilan gas treatment works in 1984. The plant has an annual production capacity of 45,000 tons of liquefied petroleum gas and 150 billion cubic metres of non-corrosive gas.

With a view to reducing fertilizer imports and making better use of the phosphate deposits, a large proportion of capital invested in the chemical industry was spent on downstream production of finished *fertilizers* in Homs. There a triple superphosphate plant was built and reached full production capacity of 150,000 tons per year during 1981. The output of this factory is combined with the annual 200,000 tons of urea from a nearby plant, completed in 1979 (Fisher 1987 p 671).

Further important changes, which have considerably transformed the other branches of manufacturing in Syria, include the construction of an integrated *iron and steel* complex in Hama during the 1970s. Thisproject comprises three units: a scrap melting shop with an annual capacity of 120,000 tons, a 1,000-ton-a-year iron rod mill, and a steel pipe plant with a capacity of 20,000 tons per annum. Considerable progress has also been achieved in the Syrian *cement* industry through the construction of four new cement factories in Hama, Adra, Aleppo, and Tartus between 1977 and 1983. In particular, the completion of the cement works in Tartus, which is one of the largest plant of its kind in the Middle East, boosted overall production to just above 5 million tons in 1985. The annual cement production covers domestic demand and leaves a 1 million-ton surplus for export (MEED 10:5:1985).

In signing a 100 million US-dollar contract with an Austro-Italian consortium in 1975 to build a combined *pulp and paper mill* at Deir az Zor the Syrian government was aiming at transfer of most advanced technology and substitution of imports. Technical plans called for locally available straw to be cooked with chemicals in a closed-circuit system, producing pulp and allowing recovery of most of the chemicals for re-use. But when construction was completed in 1980, the recovery system failed to function and the cost of supplying the straw had risen so much that it was cheaper to import pulp to run the paper mill. Thus the economic viability of the project was not only seriously affected by the need to import raw material but also by the high cost of transporting the pulp to the factory's remote site, far away from any sea port. Furthermore, because of Syria's chronic shortage of foreign exchange and the long delays in obtaining letters of credit for importing raw materials, stoppages have been frequent and production is well below half the mill's capacity of 60,000 tons per year (Tampier 1985 p 70).

Difficulties in the supply of imported raw materials and spare parts are also a major problem for most manufacturing enterprises in Syria. This applies particularly to the large *tractor assembly plant* in Aleppo, which started production in 1974. That joint venture between a Spanish company, which provides the tractor parts, and a state-owned Syrian company, which undertakes 55 % of the manufacturing, has been seriously affected by shortages of foreign exchange which has in turn resulted in lengthy interruptions in the flow of inputs needed to maintain production (MEED 23:8:1985).

Nearly all manufacturing projects discussed above, belong to the *public sector*. The emphasis placed on this part of manufacturing industry is certainly justified, because it is here that the most important changes in the composition of the manufacturing sector were introduced, here that by far the largest and most capital intensive factories are to be found, and here that a relatively high number of new jobs have been created (Figure 9). At the same time, one has to keep in mind that a *private sector* also exists, which plays a considerable role in the development of the manufacturing industry. In terms of employment the private sector is actually leading by a wide margin, although its share of total employment in manufacturing decreased slightly from 76 per cent in 1970 to 69 per cent in 1984 (Figure 10). These numerous small factories and workshops have proved to be extremely adaptable to changing economic conditions and have developed a wide range of strategies for economic survival and prosperity, as Wirth showed in a recent study about Aleppo (1984 pp 320-337).

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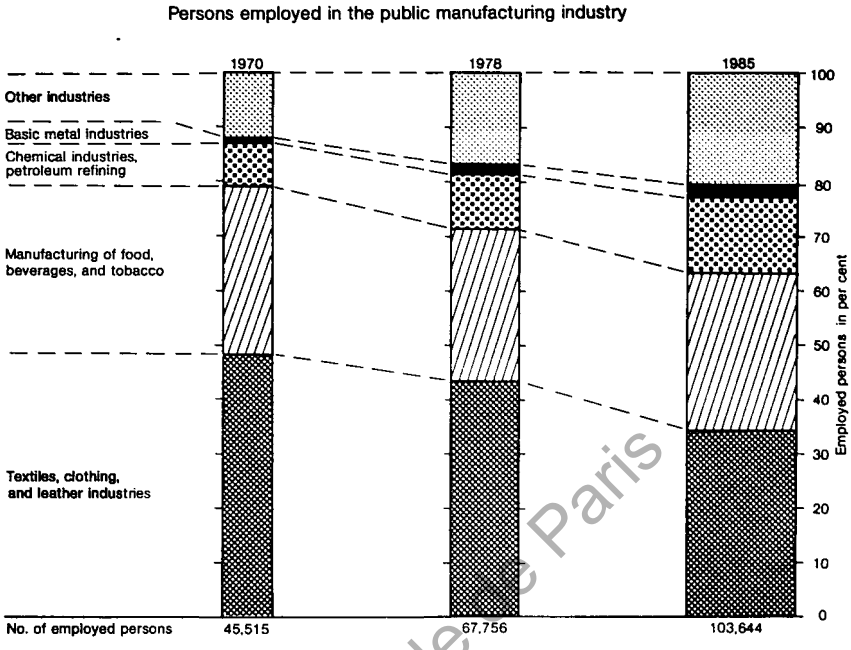

Source: Syrian Arab Republic Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract (various issues)

Figure 9. Employment in the different branches of the public manufacturing sector in 1970, 1978, and 1985

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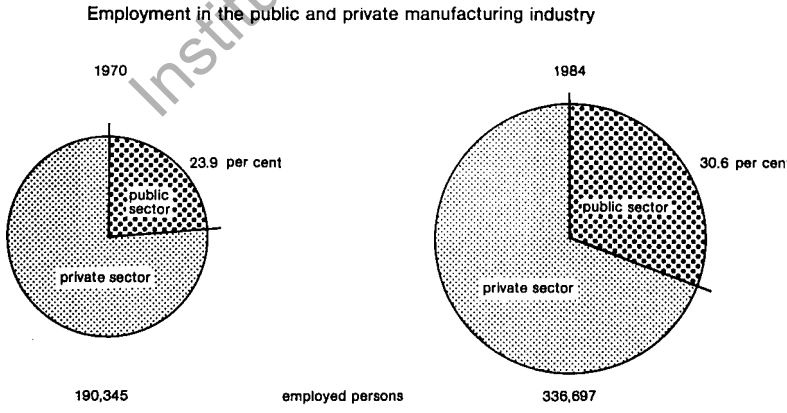

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract 1977 and 1986

Figure 10. Employment in the public and private manufacturing industry in 1970 and 1984

Table 2. Distribution of public and private establishments in the different branches of the manufacturing industry in Syria (1977)

Branch of the manufacturing industry	Percentage of establishments in the	
	public sector	private sector
Textiles, clothing, leather, shoes, ginning of which:	32.0	37.3
- textiles	(8.7)	(7.0)
- clothing	(3.1)	(13.2)
- shoes	(0.8)	(6.1)
Food stuffs and beverages of which:	44.4	18.3
- grinding wheat and coffee	(14.1)	(4.2)
- oils	(2.1)	(1.9)
- bread	(1.8)	(6.9)
- cocoa and chocolate	(0.3)	(2.7)
Chemicals, fertilizers, paints, soap, and plastic	8.4	3.1
Metal products	5.2	15.5
Glass, cement, marble, and stones	3.7	5.5
Printing and binding	3.7	1.4
Manufacturing of wood and furniture	1.6	16.9
Other branches	1.0	2.0
Total number of manufacturing establishments	381	39,426

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract 1978, pp. 698-701.

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There are no detailed figures available which might allow a precise analysis of the changes which have taken place in the private manufacturing sector. But at least a rough idea about the composition of this part of Syrian industry is conveyed by Table 2. Less than 10 persons were employed in the overwhelming majority (98 %) of the more than 39000 establishments registered in the private manufacturing sector in 1977. In those establishments the average number of workers amounted only to 2.2 persons.

The basic composition of the private manufacturing sector has probably remained largely unchanged, as the comparison of the manufacturing projects which were executed in 1971 and 1985 reveals (Table 3). New private manufacturing activities continue to be concentrated in the fields of engineering products (including wood, furniture, and metal products), textiles, food, and chemical products. During the period of investigation the average number of employees per project remained almost constant. At the same time, both the number of projects and the average amount of capital per project rose dramatically, indicating the tremendous potential for growth inherent in the private sector.

This may also be at least one reason for the astounding differences in the recent performance of the private and public manufacturing sectors. Despite constraints on private industrial activities, their contribution to the value added in the manufacturing sector has exceeded the share of the public sector enterprises during the recent years. Data on the main items produced by the private manufacturing sector indicate significant increases in most production lines during 1980–85. Net domestic product in private sector manufacturing rose by an average of 17 per cent

Table 3. Characteristics of manufacturing projects executed in the private sector in 1971 and 1985

Characteristics	Branches of the manufacturing industry				Total
	Textiles	Food	Chemicals	Engineering	
Number of projects					
- 1971	150	81	99	222	522
- 1985	399	125	111	709	1,344
Percentage of projects					
- 1971	27	15	18	40	100
- 1985	30	9	8	53	100
Total number of employees					
- 1971	447	372	262	552	1,633
- 1985	1,113	442	437	2,585	4,577
Average number of employees per project					
- 1971	3.0	4.6	2.6	2.5	3.0
- 1985	2.8	3.5	3.9	3.6	3.4
Average capital per project (in 1000 Syrian pounds)					
- 1971	43	24	25	18	27
- 1985	81	224	341	125	139

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract 1972 and 1986

per year in nominal terms during the 1981–84 period; meanwhile N.D.P. in public sector manufacturing enterprises after rising sharply in 1981, declined by 60 per cent in nominal terms in 1982–83.

It is estimated that most public sector factories have been operating at less than 75 per cent of their full capacity in recent years. The disappointing performance of the public sector industries is not only due to shortages of imported inputs, failures in the supply of electrical power, and declining agricultural production needed for food processing; it also reflects low worker morale as well as a *shortage of skilled manpower and capable managers*, which seriously affects the productivity of many public enterprises. During the 1970s it was common for young technicians and engineers to complete their training programmes in the public industrial sector and then to turn either to the private sector to work for substantially higher salaries or to migrate to the oil-rich Gulf states where even more attractive job opportunities awaited them. This basic pattern has only gradually changed in recent years, after the Syrian government introduced various measures to stop the drain of qualified manpower (Birks, Sinclair 1980 p 55), and after the demand for foreign labour in the Gulf states declined.

In response to the unsatisfactory performance of the public manufacturing sector, emphasis has been placed on increasing the productivity of government-operated factories through improved management and better capacity utilization. The production costs of public enterprises are now closely monitored by a committee, which is authorized to take appropriate decisions, including wage and price adjustments. New industrial training programmes have also been introduced, and a bonus system, which was first applied in textile factories in 1979 and then spread to other branches of the public manufacturing sector (Carr 1980 p 463), has helped to alleviate the labor morale problem. It is anticipated that these combined measures will gradually improve the performance of the public manufacturing enterprises.

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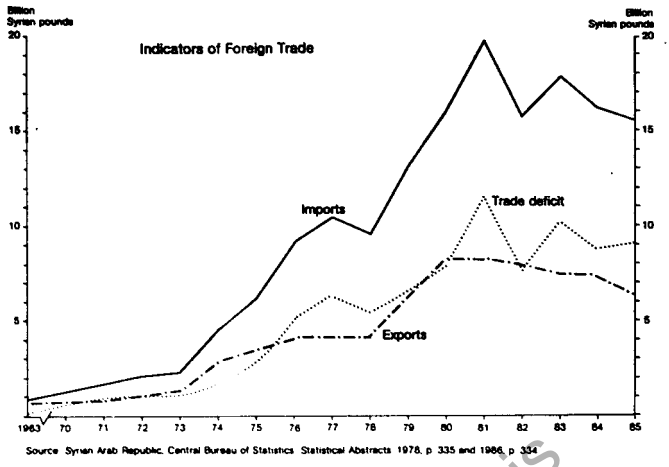

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstracts 1978, p. 335 and 1986, p. 334.

Figure 11. Development of foreign trade

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4. FOREIGN TRADE

Since 1970 the volume of Syria's imports and exports has changed dramatically, as Figure 11 indicates. Until 1973 foreign trade, which is dominated by the public sector, increased very slowly and so did the trade deficit, because the growth rate of imports was only slightly higher than that of exports. This pattern changed completely in the aftermath of the October 1973 War. Imports started to soar due to the rising flow of foreign aid, the rapid increase of investment, particularly in industry and construction, and the growing demand for machinery, equipment, and building materials. At the same time, the value of exports rose considerably in 1974 following the sharp increase in crude oil prices. But then the growth rates declined and exports stagnated during 1976–78, resulting in a steep rise in the trade deficit.

The next big surge in the value of exports in 1979–80 was mainly a consequence of the second oil-price explosion. However, Syria received not only higher revenues for the sale of its crude oil, the country had also to spend an even faster growing amount of foreign exchange on importing light crude oil for mixing with heavy domestic crude oil in the new refineries. In 1981 the magnitude of the trade imbalance had increased so alarmingly that severe import restrictions were imposed. These measures accounted for a significant decline in the trade deficit in 1982. But in the following year the trade deficit widened again and remained at that level in 1984–85 because of lower exports, mainly owing to the weakness of the international oil market, and fluctuating imports in response to the availability of foreign exchange on the official markets.

a. Composition of Imports and Exports

Until the late 1970s main *imports* were usually foodstuffs, industrial raw materials like metal and metal products, machinery, transport equipment, and other manufactured goods (Table 4). This pattern has altered appreciably since 1979 when crude oil and oil products became the principal import commodity, accounting for 25–37 per cent of total recorded imports in 1980–84. During that period imports of foodstuffs increased due to the decline of domestic agricultural output; meanwhile, most other non-oil categories were affected by foreign exchange shortages, so that their shares in total recorded imports fell markedly.

The changes in the composition of Syria's *exports* since 1970 are even more significant than those in her imports. At the beginning of the 1970s, the country's export structure was clearly

Table 4. Changes in the composition of imports between 1970 and 1984

Commodity	Per cent of total recorded imports			
	1970	1975	1980	1984
Petroleum and petroleum products	7.8	6.4	25.3	34.3
Foodstuffs	26.6	21.4	11.9	17.3
Metal and metal products	15.2	14.3	14.0	10.2
Machinery and equipment	12.7	14.9	14.9	10.1
Transport equipment	4.7	13.2	6.3	8.8
Textiles	8.8	5.8	4.1	3.1
Other imports	24.2	24.0	23.5	16.2
Total imports (in millions of Syrian pounds)	1,374	6,236	16,188	16,155

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract (various issues)

Table 5. Changes in the composition of exports between 1970 and 1984

Commodity	Per cent of total recorded exports			
	1970	1976	1980	1984
Petroleum and petroleum products	16.7	70.3	78.8	63.0
Raw cotton	42.8	14.6	8.0	14.8
Textiles	6.6	4.9	4.1	8.7
Other industrial products	1.5	1.1	0.8	3.9
Phosphates	-	-	1.1	1.4
Fruit and vegetables	3.1	1.2	1.7	1.7
Tobacco	2.3	2.4	1.4	0.4
Other agricultural products (plant and animal products, incl. wool, raw hides and leather)	22.4	3.1	1.7	3.7
Other products	4.6	2.4	2.4	2.4
Total exports (in millions of Syrian pounds)	775	3,441	8,273	6,427

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract (various issues)

dominated by agricultural products (Table 5). They provided 71 per cent of the foreign trade earnings, with raw cotton alone having a share of 43 per cent of total recorded exports. Only a few years later agricultural commodities played only a minor role, while crude oil had taken the lion's share of total exports. In 1980 crude petroleum and oil products accounted for 79 per cent of Syria's foreign trade earnings. However, during the following four years the value of oil exports declined by 30 per cent, resulting from increased domestic consumption of refined products, the fall

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of prices for heavy crude oil in the world market, and the lower value of refined products because of reduced imports of light crude oil. During the same period the share of raw cotton rose from 8 to 15 per cent of total recorded exports, and also textiles and other industrial products were able to increase their proportion of Syria's foreign trade earnings considerably.

For the late 1980s it is not difficult to forecast that the exploitation of the Thayyem oilfield, which came on stream in October 1986, will have the most important impact on the composition of Syria's foreign trade. With the completion of the second stage of field development, which should take production flow to 120,000 barrels a day, the country will effectively no longer need to import high-cost, high-quality crude, the cost of which could never be fully balanced by the export of low-value, low-quality domestic crude (Cranfield 1987 p 10).

b. Direction of Foreign Trade

Major changes have been recorded not only in the volume and composition of external trade, but also in its direction (Figure 12). In 1970 the position of the East-European bloc and the EEC countries as Syria's main suppliers of foreign goods was almost balanced: both trading blocs provided about 27 per cent of total recorded imports. In the following years the Socialist countries' share of Syria's imports declined and during 1975–85 fluctuated between 17 and 14 per cent. During the same period, the EEC countries as a group remained the principal trading partner, although their share in total value of imported goods fell from 39 per cent in 1975 to 29 per cent in 1985. This downward trend was mainly due to the steep rise of crude oil imports which until 1981 were mainly provided by Iraq. Since 1982 Iran has been Syria's major supplier of crude oil. This role is clearly reflected in Iran's large share – 18 per cent – of total Syrian imports in 1985. Other important suppliers in the same year were the Federal Republic of Germany (8.2 % of total recorded imports), Libya (7.1 %), Italy (6.9 %), the USA (6.1 %), and the USSR (4.9 %).

In 1970 and 1975 the direction of Syria's exports was roughly equivalent to the geographical origin ofimports described above for the same years. However, the direction of the country's foreign sales changed significantly after a trade agreement had been signed with the ECC in 1977, which stipulated that Syria was to enjoy a 100 per cent tariff cut on exports of petroleum and cotton products to the EEC. The major consequence of that treaty was a dramatic rise in the flow of Syrian crude oil to Italy, who in exchange had to pay 55 per cent of Syria's foreign trade earnings in 1980. Since that year, trade relations with the Socialist countries have improved considerably. New trade agreements were signed in particular with the Soviet Union and Rumania in order to boost bilateral trade. In this way, the two Socialist countries' share of Syria's exports rose to 17 per cent and 24 per cent respectively, although Italy still remained the leading custumer for Syrian goods, taking 31 per cent of the overall total in 1985.

The trade figures presented so far are based only on the officially recorded and published data on imports and exports. This means that two very important sectors of external trade had to be excluded: *imports of military goods and smuggling*. It is estimated that Syrian spending on weapons imports soared from 927 million US-dollars (in constant 1982 dollars) in 1973, to a record 2,371 million dollars in 1982. The total value of weapons imported by Syria during 1979–83 was estimated at 10.5 billion US-dollars (Roberts 1985 p 6); this is more than the total value of recorded exports (107 %) and about 50 per cent of total recorded imports during that period. The vast majority (87 %) of these arms were sold by the Soviet Union.

When it comes to the masive imports channelled illegally through Lebanon, there are not even rough estimates about their value. It is only known that these illegal imports, which are largely financed by remittances from Syrians working abroad, are the basis of a thriving black market, which supplies Syrian customers not only with all kinds of consumer goods, but also with machinery, spare parts, and other essential inputs.

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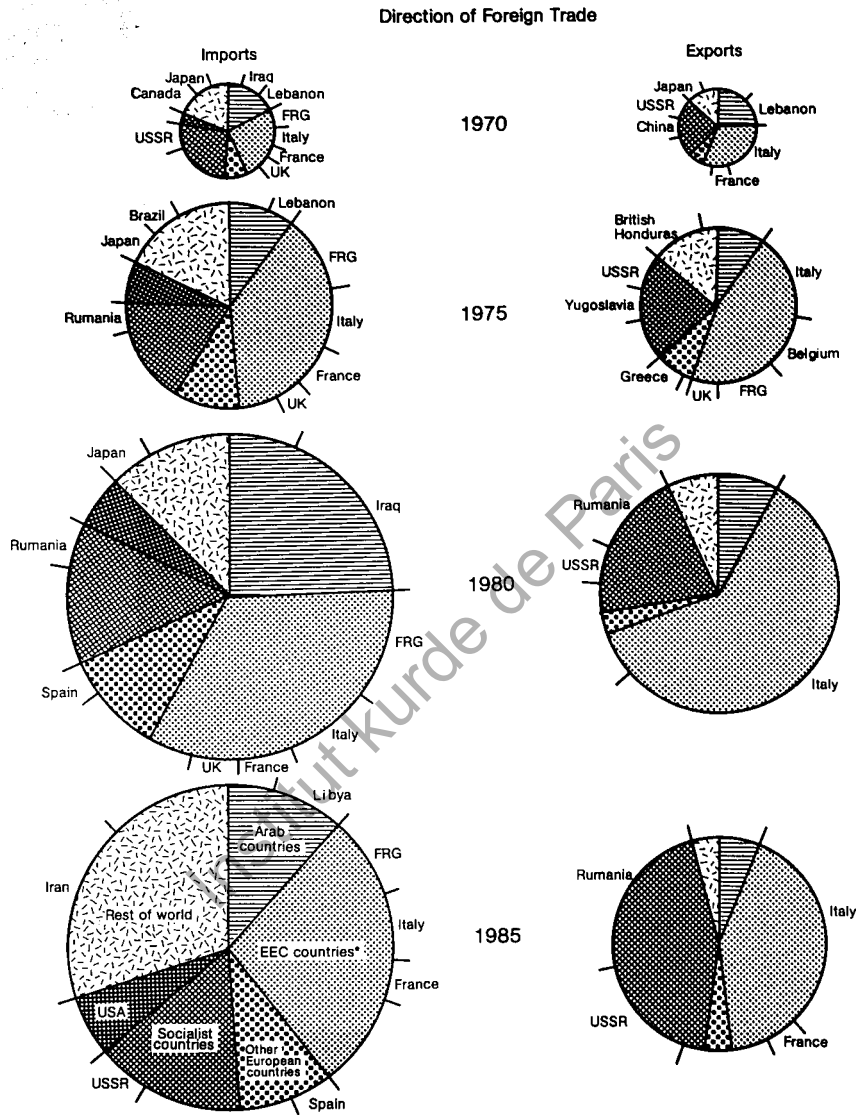

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)* EEC countries: Belgium, Denmark, FRG, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and the UK.

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Central Bureau of Statistics: Statistical Abstract (various issues)

Figure 12. Direction of foreign trade in 1970, 1975, 1980, and 1985

5. ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Syria's future economic development is likely to remain largely dependent on external factors and on the priority which the government attaches to achieving certain goals in its foreign policy, notably in its confrontation with Israel. This meant in the past, that because of Syria's position as a 'front line state' and its military involvement in Lebanon, the government was not prepared to reduce its heavy defense spending, which accounted for 56 per cent of current expenditure in the 1986 budget, so that funds for investment were lacking. However, the acuteness of the present economic crises has forced the Syrian government to change its priorities, as the 1987 budget indicates. For the first time in eight years defense allocations have been cut down by 2.5 million Syrian pounds compared with the 1986 budget. Instead first priority has been attached to the improvement of the economy, in particular to the development of agriculture, the utilization of the oil and gas reservers, and the increase of electricity generating capacity (Handelsblatt 2:4:1987).

This significant change in Syrian policy raises new hopes of an economic recovery. No doubt, dwindling financial aid from oil-rich Arab states and declining remittances from Syrians working abroad will continue to have a negative impact on the economy. But even in the short run there are encouraging sign for a better performance of the Syrian economy. In this context, the brightest prospect is certainly represented by the exploitation of the Thayyem oilfield, which will not only release Syria from its heavy burden of oil imports, but will also alleviate the problem of shortages of foreign exchange, and facilitate a better supply of imported inputs urgently needed in all sectors of the economy. Other positive steps in the direction of economic progress have to be seen in the introduction of more market-related mechanisms to offset the inefficiency of the public sector, and in the serious encouragement of the private sector to play a more active role. Syria's greatest chance for economic improvement, however, rest upon the diversity of its economy; even if one sector is affected by adverse developments, there remain still other options for achieving economic progress.

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REGIONAL GROWTH AND CHANGE IN SYRIA SINCE 1963

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Abstract: Syria's economy has undergone profound structural change since 1963, but the geographic consequences of this transformation have received comparatively little attention. This paper examines regional growth and change in the context of regional development theory, which would generally lead one to expect widening inequalities between center and periphery and growing dominance of the core region. The population and communications data on which this study is based show that growth in Syria has been relatively decentralized. Rank-size and locational relationships among Syria's cities, and the emergence of an integrated transportation network, seem conducive to relatively balanced regional growth, although inequalities remain marked in some spheres.

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Biographical note: Alasdair Drysdale is an Associate Professor of Geography at the University of New Hampshire. He is the author of The Middle East and North Africa: A Political Geography (Oxford University Press, 1985), and his articles on Syria have appeared in the Middle East Journal, International Jpurnal of Middle East Studies, Middle East Insight, Merip Reports, and Current History, as well as in numerous books and encyclopedias.

REGIONAL GROWTH AND CHANGE IN SYRIA SINCE 1963*

Alasdair Drysdale

Syria's economy has undergone a profound structural transformation since the Ba'thi revolution 24 years ago. As the country has industrialized and the mining and service sectors have expanded, the contribution of agriculture to the GDP has fallen sharply. Massive infrastructural investment, particularly in the transportation sector, has facilitated the development of an integrated national economy and linked all major cities with one another and with the ports of al-Ladhiqiyah and Tartus, which have experienced substantial growth. The Euphrates dam has been completed, with important consequences for both agriculture and industry. In addition, nationalization measures have brought major sectors of the economy under state control and large-scale development planning has been introduced. Land reform and rural development programs have touched much of the countryside. Inevitably, there are still profound economic problems, some of the regime's own making, including a huge trade deficit, high inflation, chronic shortages, pervasive corruption, inefficiency, and waste, a bloated, lethargic bureaucracy, ill-conceived or executed plans, and excessive military spending. Nevertheless, economically Syria bears little resemblance to the country it was in 1963.

Changes in Syria's economic structure since 1963 have been examined in some depth (Chatelus 1980, Devlin 1983, Firro 1986, Hannoyer and Seurat 1980, Longuenesse 1980, Metral 1980, Sayigh 1978). However, the geographical consequences of these changes, which are far less obvious, have received comparatively little attention (Drysdale 1981). We are accustomed to asking which sectors of the population benefit or suffer most from a regime's policies. But which regions have gained or lost as a result of the transformation of Syria's economy? This paper attempts to measure macroregional changes since 1963 in the context of regional development theory. In the absence of regional income data, it relies on population and spatial interaction data.

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Regional development theory

To the geographer, center-periphery, urban-rural, and interregional disparities in income and welfare are among the most salient characteristics of underdevelopment (Coates, Johnston and Knox 1977, Gilbert and Goodman 1976, Keeble 1967). Arguably, this disequilibrium, which has profound political, social, and economic ramifications, has not received the attention it deserves among Middle East scholars. The center-periphery concept is central to explanations of the persistence of regional inequalities. In the Marxist view, the center appropriates to itself the surplus produced by the periphery. Centers and peripheries are nested within one another in a spatial hierarchy. At the global level, the industrial developed countries siphon off the surplus value of the the underdeveloped countries. Similarly, within each national unit a center exploits a periphery. This center may be a single metropolis or a core region that dominates a larger hinterland, within which there may be smaller subcenters and subperipheries.

According to neo-classical theories of regional development, the center's advantage, at whatever scale, is temporary. In time, equilibrium will be restored and spatial inequities between center and periphery reduced by a free flow of factors of production. Because economic development will spread automatically from center to periphery, no government intervention is necessary.

An alternative, more widely accepted, view is that regional polarization, not convergence, is the norm. Myrdal (1957) argued that core regions are self-reinforcing magnets of growth and that during the early stages of development increasing spatial inequalities are generated through the operation of circular or cumulative upward causation. Once growth has commenced in a favored location, inflows of labor, skills, capital, and commodities occur spontaneously in a free market to support and perpetuate it. Agglomeration economies further

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concentrate wealth at the center. In addition, a growth region will have negative backwash effects on its periphery, at whose partial expense it grows. Because of the opportunities the center offers, it attracts skilled migrants, entrepreneurs and capital from the hinterland, which reinforces the growth of the center and the downward spiral of the periphery. At the same time, a center may have opposing, beneficial spread effects on its periphery--for example, through growing demand for primary commodities, increased investment, and the spatial diffusion of ideas and technology. For regional equalization to occur, spread effects must obviously exceed backwash effects. Other scholars also noted the cumulative and self-generating momentum of growth areas through multiplier effects and agglomeration processes, but argued that regional polarization, although inevitable in the short term, would ultimately be offset by trickle down effects, and eventually growth would diffuse spatially through the urban hierarchy and produce regional convergence (Hirschman 1958). Williamson demonstrated empirically that regional inequalities widened during the early stages of development but narrowed in the later stages (1965).

Friedmann (1966) placed strong emphasis on the spatial aspects of center-periphery relationships. He proposed a descriptive four-stage model of spatial evolution in which particular emphasis was placed on the development of an urban hierarchy (Figure 1). The first, pre-industrial, phase is characterized by the existence of a number of small independent urban centers spread throughout a large region. Each of these centers serves only its local area. There is no urban hierarchy or nesting of hinterlands to speak of and few or no links between the urban centers. The second, incipient-industrialization, phase is characterized by the emergence of a primate city, which dominates a large hinterland and appropriates the surplus of its expanding periphery. A transportation network begins to link the constituent regions of the state with this core region and spatial interaction increases. Backwash effects are pronounced at the periphery. In the third, transitional, stage toward industrial maturation, the primate city's domination is somewhat reduced with the development of a national urban hierarchy and the emergence of intermediate-sized cities in the periphery with their own hinterlands. As the simple core-periphery structure is gradually transformed into a multinuclear one, spread effects become more apparent at the national level (although within regions backwash still predominates). In the final stage, full-fledged spatial organization is evident and an interdependent network of interacting, hierarchically-arranged cities and their respective hinterlands encompasses all of the national territory. In this phase, regional inequalities have been much reduced. Friedmann also identified four types of region: core regions, or concentrated metropolitan economies with a high capacity for change and innovation; upward-transition regions, or regions that were peripheral to the core but suitable for resource exploitation and development (for example, as a development corridor); resource-frontier regions, or peripheral areas of new settlement; and downward-transition regions, or declining or stagnating regions.

Implicit in the above models is the notion that regional change occurs in conjunction with time-space convergence and increasing spatial interaction, which is made possible by the development of a communications infrastructure. The impact of transportation improvements on regional economic development is incorporated into Taaffe, Morrill, and Gould's (1963) model of network change (Figure 2). This ideal-typical model illustrates how the interaction between the evolution of a transport network and urban growth (and hence regional inequalities) is self-reinforcing. Initially, small ports are scattered along the coastline. Certain of these ports expand as major lines of penetration provide links with inland centers and an enlarged hinterland. In stage three, feeder routes focus on these major ports and inland urban centers grow at strategic points along the main routes. Then, lateral route development occurs, which further enhances the competitive advantages of cities that are major nodes within the transportation network. Eventually, a transport lattice interconnects all the major centers, with high-priority transportation corridors reinforcing the dominance of the largest urban centers and increasing the geographic concentration of economic development. However, this model more accurately describes transport development and urban change in Latin America and Africa than in the Middle East, where the major cities have historically had interior locations.

To what extent does Syria conform to these models of regional development? Some of the most important questions about regional change in Syria cannot be fully answered because of the lack of appropriate data. In addition, some of the most useful data are not available for the entire period since 1963, making time-series analysis difficult. Nevertheless, a crude sense

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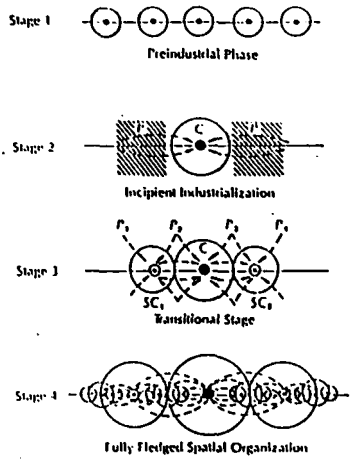

Figure 1. Friedman's (1966) Stages of spatial evolution.

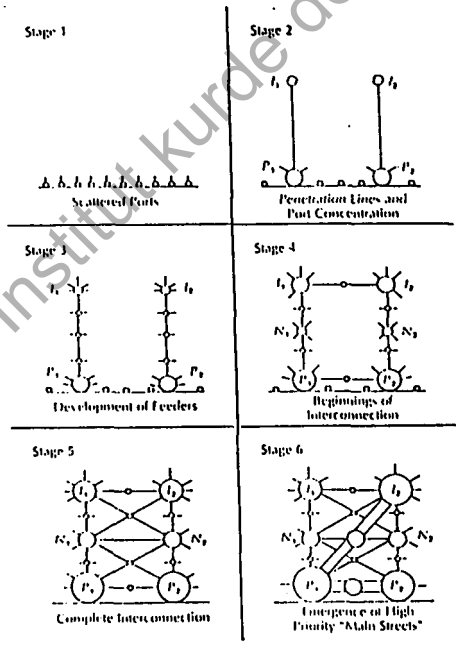

Figure 2. Model of transport development (Taaffe, Morrill, Gould 1963)

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of regional change can be gained from data on population and communications.*

Population

In the twenty-four years since the Ba'th assumed power, Syria's population has doubled from 5.3 million to 10.6 million. How this growth has been apportioned among Syria's provinces might be considered an especially sensitive measure of regional growth and change. Although spatial variations in population growth rates are partly a function of regional differences in crude birth and death rates (with the most developed areas likely to exhibit the lowest rates of natural increase), they also reflect migration patterns, which are shaped by perceptions of economic opportunities and are a form of backwash.

Most models of regional development would lead one to expect a growing concentration of people in the core regions of Damascus and, to a lesser degree, Aleppo. Nevertheless, Syria's population has been surprisingly stable geographically in the past quarter century. At the province level, the current distribution of the population is not significantly different from 1963. Damascus and Aleppo between them had 42.9 percent of all Syrians in the 1960 census and 43.2 percent in the 1981 census (Table 1). Hamah and Dar'a, the provinces whose share of the population grew most, increased their share by only 1.04 and 0.62 percentage points, while Idlib, the province whose share declined most, decreased its share by only 0.89 percentage points (Figure 3). However, five of the six provinces that had relatively fewer people in 1981 than in 1960 were in the north or east of the country: Idlib, Aleppo, al-Raqqah, al-Hasakah, and Dayr al-Zawr. Conversely, the provinces which gained population relatively were generally in the south and west: Hamah, Hims, Damascus, Dar'a, and Suwayda' (Figure 4). These differences become sharper when actual population growth rates are compared (Figure 5). The province with the highest rate of growth between 1960 and 1981 was Dar'a, whose population grew by over 130 percent. However, much of Dar'a's growth can be attributed to the influx of refugees from al-Qunaytirah after the 1967 war, rather than to a booming local economy. To some degree, Damascus and al-Suwayda's high rates of growth also resulted from their proximity to the war front. Hamah's impressive growth, on the other hand, can be explained in part by the Ghab reclamation scheme, which attracted peasants from neighboring provinces, particularly between 1960 and 1970. It remains to be seen what the regime's bombardment of Hamah's chief city in 1982 will have on the province's growth this decade. The lowest rates of growth were experienced along the northern tier, especially in Idlib.

Detailed migration data from the 1981 census are not yet available, so recent trends in population mobility can only be crudely inferred from preliminary results or past studies (Fargues 1979, Samman 1978, Samman 1983). Current patterns will probably resemble those in the 1970 census (aside form war-related migration). In the 1970 census, the geographic distribution of those whose previous place of residence was a province other than the one in which they currently resided approximated that of the population as a whole (Figure 6). The major exception was al-Qunaytirah, which accounted for almost one of every five emigrants. Idlib also contributed a significantly higher percentage of migrants than its share of the total population. The most popular destination for migrants, predictably, was Damascus, which received roughly one-half of the total. Al-Raqqah, the site of the Euphrates dam and large land reclamation projects, also received a disproportionately large share of migrants. The proportion of each province's population hailing from other provinces differed widely. A particularly large share of Damascus and al-Raqqah's populations--almost one-quarter--came from elsewhere, while a strikingly small share of Aleppo's, Dayr al-Zawr's, Idlib's, and al-Hasakah's were nonlocal. The fact that Damascus and al-Raqqah do not have the highest population growth rates while they clearly attract many migrants is attributable, presumably, to lower rates of natural increase, which may reflect the high male/female ratios often found in areas with many immigrants.

In most cases, migrants move to a neighboring province (if they leave their home province at all). Generally, spatial interaction between places is inversely proportional to the

* All data used in this study are from the annual Statistical Abstract of the Syrain Arab Republic.

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Table 1. Distribution of Syrian Population, 1960-81

PROVINCE	% Total 1960	% Total 1970	% Total 1981
Damascus*	22.0	23.1	22.4
Aleppo	21.0	20.9	20.8
Hims	8.8	8.7	9.0
Hamah	7.1	8.2	8.1
Al-Ladhiqiyah*	11.5	11.0	11.0
Dayr al-Zawr	4.8	4.6	4.5
Idlib	7.3	6.1	6.4
Al-Hasakah	7.7	7.4	7.4
Al-Raqqah	3.9	3.9	3.8
Al-Suwayda'	2.2	2.2	2.2
Dar'a	3.7	3.9	4.3
Syria	100.0	100.0	100.0

*Damascus includes Al-Qunaytirah;
Al-Ladhiqiyah includes Tartus

Table 2. Urban Rankings, 1960-81

	1981	1960	Change
Damascus	1	1	+0
Aleppo	2	2	+0
Hims	3	3	+0
Al-Ladhiqiyah	4	5	+1
Hamah	5	4	-1
Al-Qamishli	6	7	+1
Dayr al-Zawr	7	6	-1
Al-Raqqah	8	17	+9
Al-Hasakah	9	10	+1
Jaramana	10		
Tartus	11	15	+4
Idlib	12	16	-4
Duma	13	9	-4
Dar'a	14	12	-2
Al-Thawrah	15		

Table 3. Accessibility Indices

CITY	Index
Aleppo	24
Hamah	25
Al-Raqqah	27
Hims	28
Dayr al-Zawr	32
Al-Ladhiqiyah	33
Damascus	35
Tartus	37
Al-Hasakah	39
Dar'a	44
Al-Qamishli	48
Idlib	

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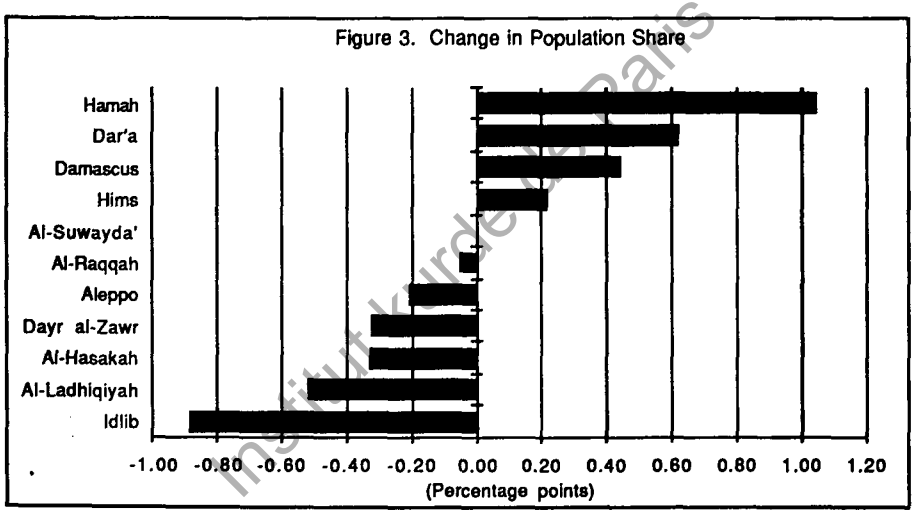

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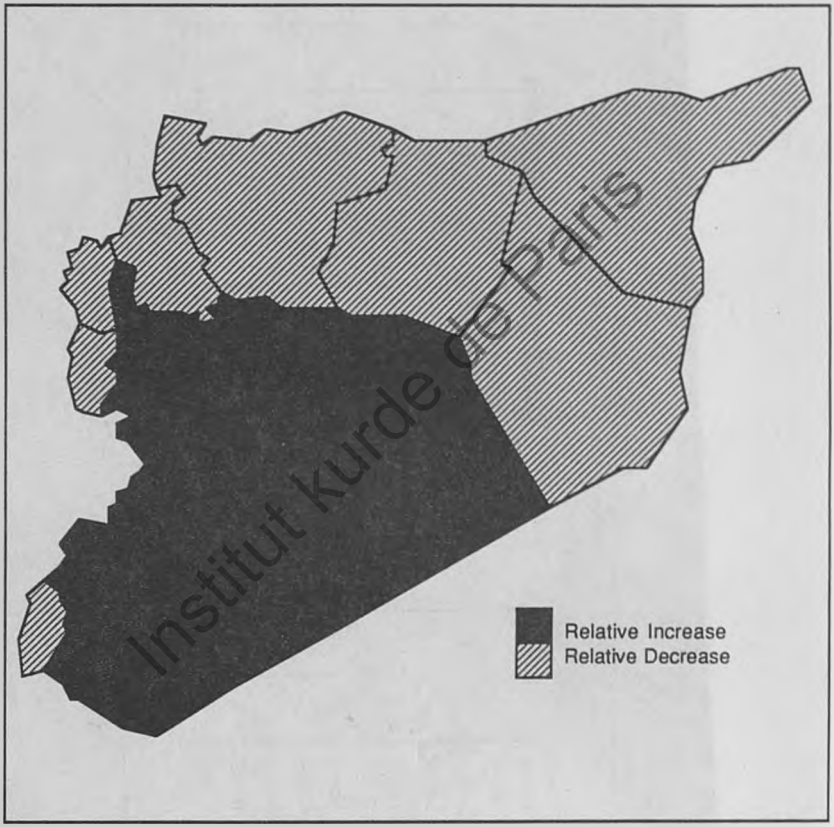

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Figure 4. Relative Population Change, 1960-81

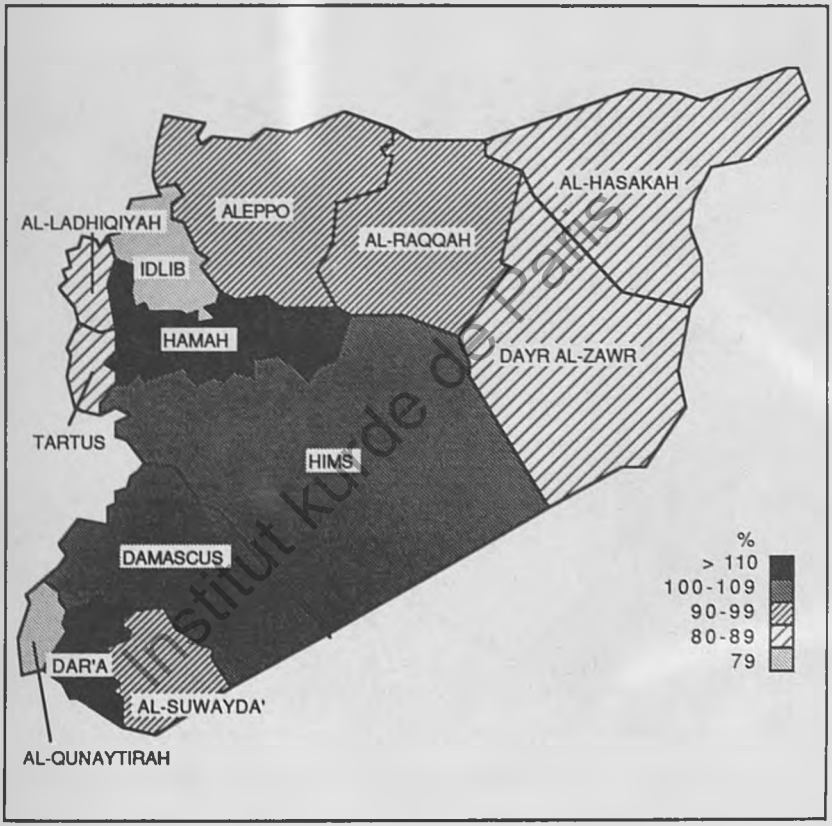

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Figure 5. Population Growth, 1960-81

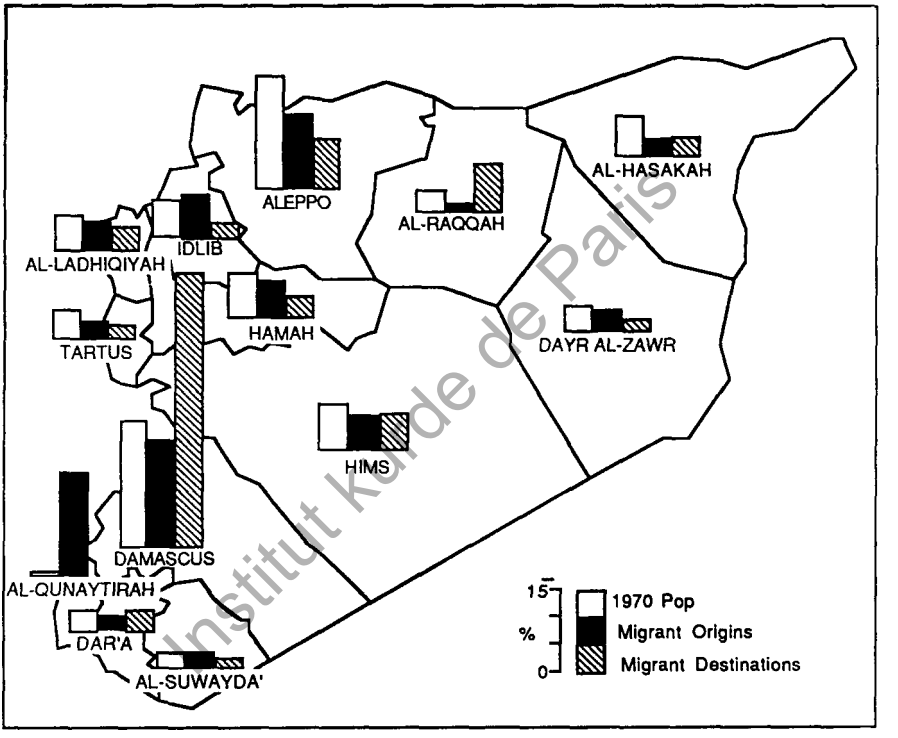

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Figure 6. Origin and Destination of Syrian Migrants, 1970

distance between them and typically exhibits what geographers term 'distance decay' regularities. In addition, migration patterns are shaped by what have been described as 'intervening opportunities'--that is, migrants will typically move to the closest place that can satisfy their needs. Thus, roughly half of migrants to Damascus city are from Damascus, al-Qunaytirah, and Dar'a provinces. In turn, Damascus province fell within the capital's growing suburban and exurban sphere of influence and was the destination of some 58 percent of Damascus city's emigrants. Similarly, almost 40 percent of Aleppo's immigrants were from neighboring Idlib, while roughly the same proportion of its emigrants went to nearby al-Raqqah. Most migration links follow this pattern. However, there are interesting exceptions. Damascus and al-Ladhiqiyah, for example, are closely paired. Over one-half of al-Ladhiqiyah's emigrants went to Damascus, which in turn provided about one quarter of al-Ladhiqiyah's immigrants. Damascus and Tartus likewise were more closely associated through migration than might be expected on the basis of locational factors. Such relatively long-distance migration between noncontiguous provinces suggests that the perceived opportunities in each place were sufficiently great to overcome the frictional effects of distance. The ties between the mostly Alawi coastal provinces and Damascus seem to bear out the impression many Syrians had that there was an influx of people from these regions into the capital--what Sami al-Jundi (1969) referred to as *qawafil al-qarawiyyin*, or caravans of villagers--after the Ba'th came to power. If one excludes migrants to Damascus city from Damascus province and from al-Qunaytirah, roughly one of every five migrants to the capital in 1970 came from al-Ladhiqiyah or Tartus. The final 1981 census figures may well show that the ratio has grown since 1970.

The most significant changes in the geographic distribution of the population have occurred as a result of urbanization. Although the distribution of the population may not have changed greatly at the province level, within provinces there has been a significant redistribution of people. The percentage of Syrians living in urban areas increased from 37 percent in 1960 to 47 percent in 1981. However, the urbanization level in 1981 ranged from 71 percent in Damascus to under 20 percent in Dar'a (Figure 7). The only provinces with an urban majority were Damascus, Aleppo, and Hims. The fastest rates of urban growth were in some of the least urbanized provinces: al-Raqqah, Dar'a, and al-Hasakah. This partly reflects their low base to begin with. The most dramatic urbanization occurred in al-Raqqah province, which was 8 percent urban in 1960 but 39 percent urban in 1981. The town of al-Raqqah grew almost 500 percent between 1960 and 1981. Other cities with notably high rates of growth were al-Hasakah, Tartus, and al-Ladhiqiyah (Figures 8 and 9). Although Damascus and Aleppo provinces had among the lowest rates of urban growth between 1960 and 1981, this is deceptive and reflects their large initial base. Some 58 percent of the increment in urban population during the period was in these two provinces, with Damascus alone taking one-third of additional urban residents (Figure 10). In addition, some 60 percent of the total urban population in Syria in 1981 lived in Damascus and Aleppo provinces. Significantly, these two provinces' share of the total urban population has declined since 1960, although Damascus city's share of the total population has increased very slightly from 11.6 percent to 12.3 percent (Figure 11).

When the top 15 cities are ranked by size, some significant changes in the urban hierarchy are evident. The seven largest cities in 1960 were still the largest ones in 1981, although al-Ladhiqiyah overtook Hamah to become the fourth largest city and al-Qamishli overtook Dayr al-Zawr for sixth place. There was considerable movement among lower ranked cities, however. Al-Raqqah gained nine places between 1960 and 1981 to become Syria's eighth largest city. Jaramana (in Damascus) and Al-Thawrah (in al-Raqqah), which were not classified as cities in 1970, entered the list as the tenth and fifteenth largest cities, respectively. Tartus, which has emerged as Syria's major port, gained four places while Idlib fell four (Table 2). Rank-size relationships in Syria are somewhat idiosyncratic. On the one hand, Syria's urban hierarchy does not conform in important respects to the rank-size rule, which suggests that there is a close relationship between a city's size and rank (namely, that a city of rank r will be 1/rth the size of the first ranked city: for example, Aleppo should be half the size of Damascus, Hims one-third, al-Ladhiqiyah one-fourth, etc). On the other hand, Syria does not conform to the most common alternative pattern in underdeveloped countries, a primate distribution, in which a disproportionate share of a country's population (and wealth) are concentrated in a single capital city and in which there are few if any cities of intermediate

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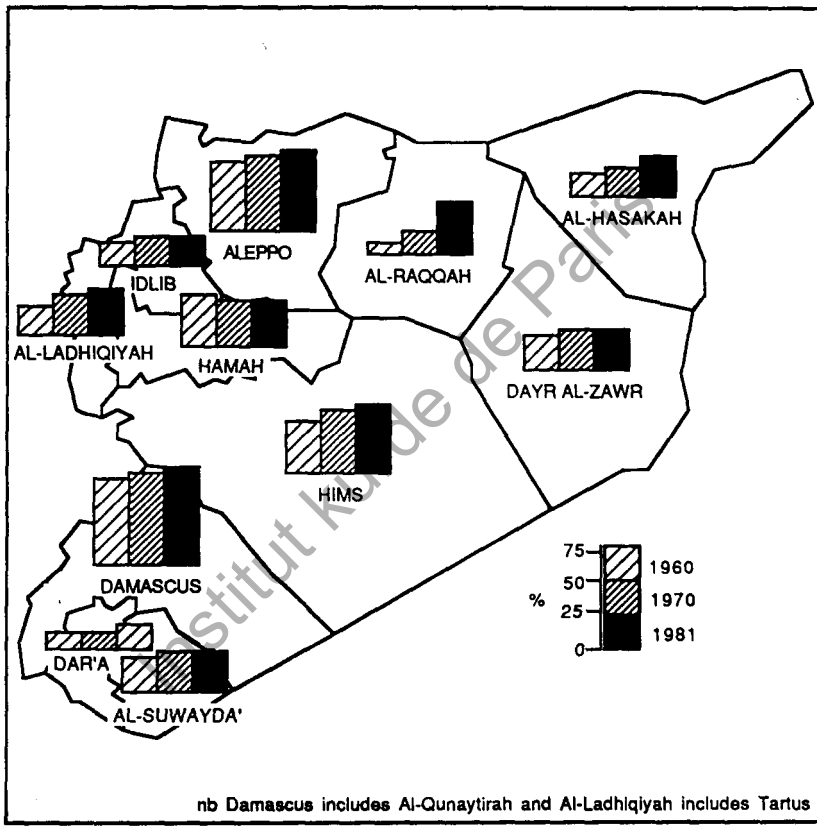

Figure 7. Level of Syrian Urbanization, 1960-81

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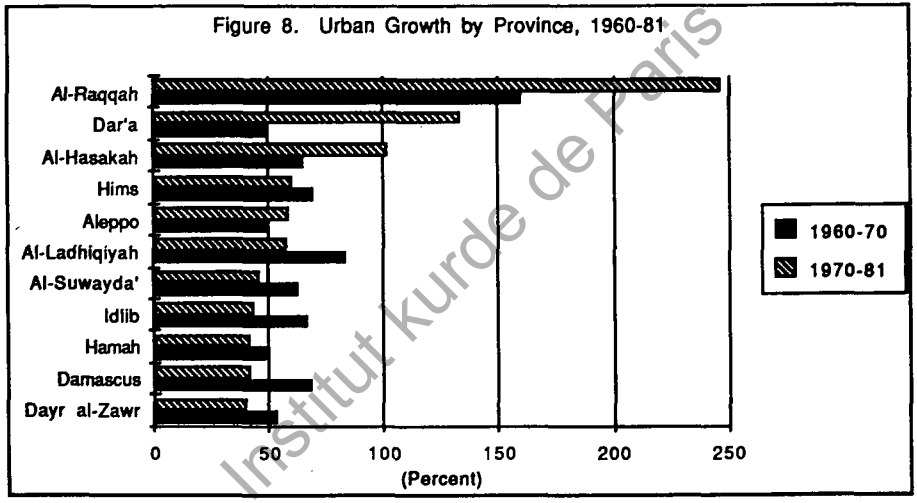

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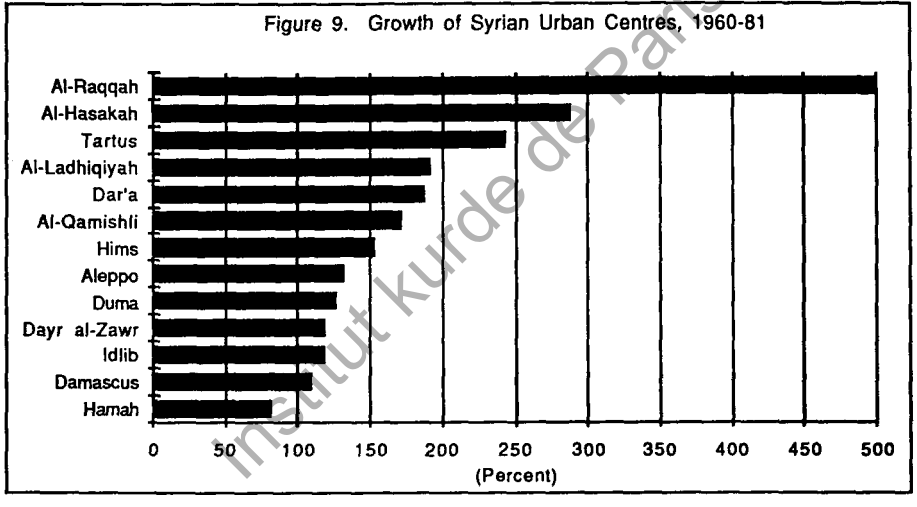

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Figure 10. Distribution of Increment in Urban Population, 1961-80

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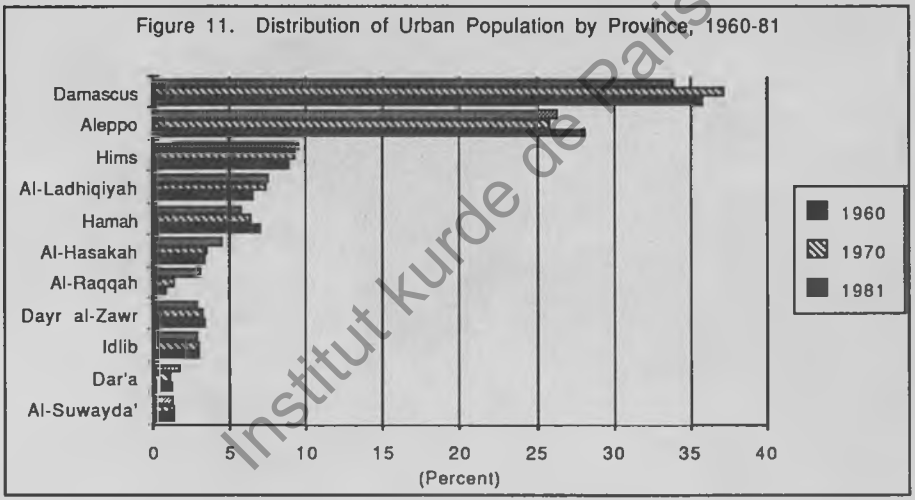

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size. In reality, Aleppo is only slightly smaller than Damascus and Syria has several medium-sized cities.

Arguably, this pattern, when placed in its specific spatial and locational context, discourages the development of extreme regional inequalities and encourages polycentric growth. Damascus and Aleppo, in the northwest and southwest corners of the country, counterbalance one another to some extent and ensure that economic growth is not focused solely around the capital. Indeed, as Syria's space economy develops, its center of gravity may shift away from Damascus. Government efforts to locate new public sector industries in mid-sized provincial towns have also helped to check agglomeration in the Damsacus and Aleppo core regions. Away from the two most important centers, Hims and, to a lesser extent, Hamah have good growth potential in part because of their location midway between Damascus and Aleppo, on the main route between them but far enough away from them to be focal points for their own productive hinterlands. Hims, in particular, has benefited from its central location within the national space economy and from its growing role as a communications hub; with the appropriate planning intervention, it is well positioned to siphon off growth from Syria's two largest cities. To use Friedmann's terminology, the axis of growth between Hamah and Hims could loosely be described as a nascent development corridor within an upward transition region. In the north central region, al-Raqqah has emerged as another nucleus for growth as a result of the Euphrates dam and related irrigation and agricultural projects. As previously noted, an unusually high percentage of its population originally lived elsewhere and the province has urbanized more quickly than any other. In certain respects, it resembles what Friedmann termed a resource frontier region, although plans for the region have not met expectations (Rabo 1984). An additional feature of Syria's urban hierarchy that will prevent excessive domination by Damascus or Aleppo is the fact that neither is a port. The emergence of al-Ladhiqiyah and Tartus as growth poles within the national economy and urban system is largely attributable to their port functions. Despite their late development, economic and geographic factors favor their continued rapid growth. In sum, rank-size and locational relationships within Syria's urban system favor relatively decentralized and, at least by the standards of many Third World countries, relatively balanced multinuclear growth. Syria has not one disproportionately powerful magnet for migrants, like many underdeveloped countries, but several smaller ones. Significantly, while cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants grew by 3.4 percent annually between 1970 and 1980, those with 100,000-499,999 grew by 3.9 percent and those with 20,000-99,999 grew by 8.9 pecent (Samman 1983). The urban spatial system seems well suited to facilitating spread and trickle down effects, although there is no evidence that growth has diffused from mid-sized provincial cities to their rural peripheries. Quite possibly regional convergence is occuring at the province level while polarization is occurring within provinces.

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Communications

A communications infrastructure makes spatial interaction possible and channels it along narrow corridors, which themselves acquire locational advantages. Transportation links facilitate the functional specialization of urban centers and increase the interdependence, integration, and complementarity of regions. They also provide paths for (and thus accelerate) backwash and trickle down effects. In effect, communications are a precondition as well as an integral component of regional change and give structure and form to a space economy. In 1963, one of the most serious impediments to Syria's growth was its deficient transportation infrastructure. The railway network and port facilities were particularly inadequate, partly because of the way in which the British and French drew the region's political map after World War I. One of the real achievements of the Ba'thi regime has been to correct many of these problems. Perhaps more than any other single factor, improvements in Syria's transportation system have helped to decentralize economic growth and to improve the prospects of some of the less developed provinces.

In 1963, Syria had 543 kilometers of ordinary gauge railway track and 301 kilometers of narrow gauge track. However, these were ill-suited to Syria's needs, having been laid when the Levant's boundaries were quite different. Much of the ordinary gauge track, for example, connected Aleppo with Turkey or connected Turkey with Iraq across the northeastern corner of the country. The narrow gauge track was part of the Hijaz line and connected

Damascus with Jordan. Internal links among Syria's main cities and between the coast and interior were nonexistent. By 1984, Syria had almost 1,700 kilometers of ordinary track and 327 kilometers of narrow track. The network connected every major city and gave the ports of al-Ladhiqiyah and Tartus access to a large hinterland. The most important projects involved the building of a line between al-Ladhiqiyah and al-Qamishli in the far northeast and linking Damascus with Hims, Tartus, and Aleppo (Figure 12).

These improvements can be summarized quantitatively by the beta index, which measures the connectivity of networks using simple graph theory. A rail (or any other) network idealized as a graph consists of two elements: a set of vertices (V), which represent nodes, and a set of edges (E), which represent network links. The reduction of a rail network to a system of vertices and edges shows topological position only and ignores Euclidean concepts of distance and direction. However, it permits simple evaluation of a network's efficiency. The beta index expresses the ratio between the number of edges (E) and vertices (V) in a system [ß=E/V]. Where the ratio between edges and vertices is large, the beta index will be high, indicating a well-connected network. Conversely, a low beta index implies a poorly articulated network. If vertices are defined as the twelve Syrian cities with over 50,000 people and edges are defined as all intercity rail links, the beta index improved from 0.25 in 1963 to 0.83 in 1984. However, the beta index is rather crude and reveals nothing about the accessibility of nodes within the network, an important predictor of regional change. The accessibility index measures the topological accessibilty of each vertex to all other vertices by summing the shortest paths between them:

$$Ai = \sum_{i=1}^{n} d_{ij}$$

where d_{ij} is the shortest path from vertex i to vertex j. For example, al-Ladhiqiyah has an accessibility index of 33, meaning that the sum of all shortest path edges or links to all other places in the network is 33. Aleppo and Hamah have the lowest indices in Syria, meaning they have the highest accessibility, while al-Qamishli and Dar'a have the poorest aggregate accessibility (Table 3). Once again, this suggests that the center of gravity of Syria's space economy may increasingly shift away from Damascus. The Taaffe, Morrill and Gould model of transport development (and common sense) would suggest that the economic importance of al-Ladhiqiyah and Tartus, which have been linked to the interior by rail for less than a decade and have eclipsed Beirut only since the mid-1970s, is likely to grow. The fact that many of Syria's top leaders come from the coastal region and appear particularly interested its well-being may accelerate this trend.

Improvements in the road network have also been extensive. Syria had almost 8,000 kilometers of road in 1963 but over 22,000 kilometers by 1983. Asphalted roads increased from 5,000 kilometers to over 16,000 kilometers. Measuring inequities among regions is difficult because the length of a province's road network is determined by its area, terrain, settlement pattern, and population density. Generally speaking, however, considerable geographical equalization has occurred. Because Damascus was already well served in 1963, the road building program has primarily benefited the least developed parts of the country. The length of the road network in al-Raqqah and Hamah, for example, grew by well over 400 percent, compared to only 60 percent in Damascus (Table 4). Whereas Damascus had roughly 20 percent of all roads in 1963, it had about 10 percent in 1983. Nevertheless, certain transportation inequalities have persisted. Damascus, in 1984, accounted for 44 percent of all registered vehicles in Syria, and 53 percent of all private automobiles. Aleppo accounted for an additional 20 percent. In the absence or regional income data, car ownership may be one of the best measures of private wealth available. The fact that the rate of private automobile ownership in Damascus is seventeen times higher than in the provinces of al-Raqqah and Idlib suggests that wealth is still very unequally distributed geographically (Tables 5 and 6).

Traffic flow data provide an especially useful measure of spatial interaction patterns. Unfortunately, statistics on the movement of vehicles among Syrian cities are not readily available. Data on the origin and destination of goods carried in public vehicles are compiled annually, however, and provide a crude indication of commodity flows (Figure 13). Most goods transported in public vehicles originate in Aleppo, al-Hasakah, and, naturally, the

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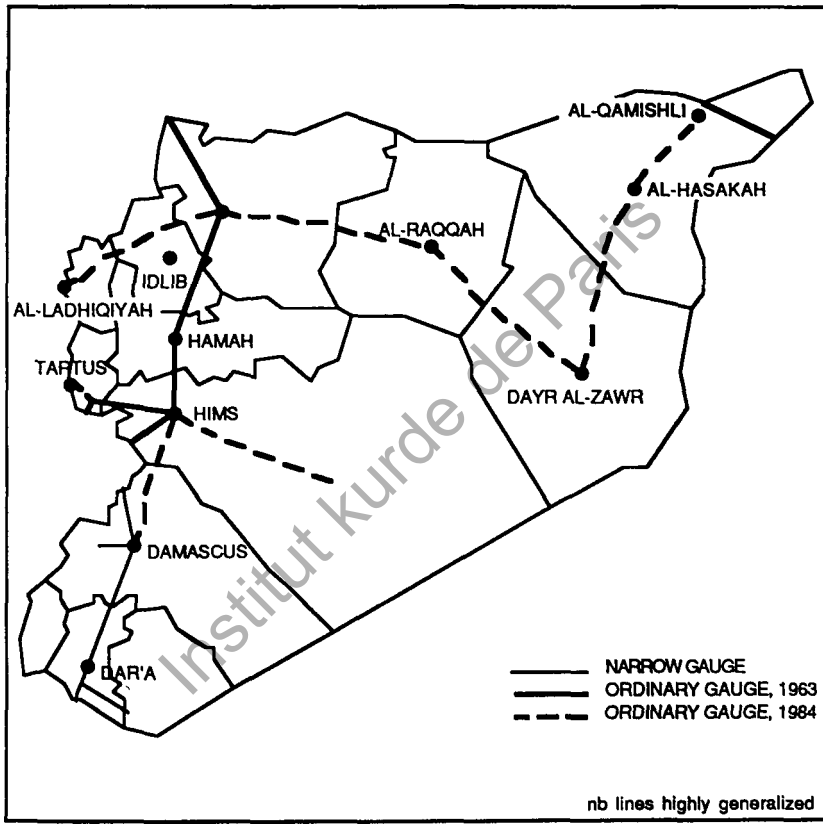

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Figure 12. Main Railway Lines, 1963-84

Table 4. Roads in Syria, 1963-83

PROVINCE	% Total 1963	% Total 1983	% Growth 1963-83	% All Asphalt 1963	% All Asphalt 1983	% Asphalted 1963	% Asphalted 1983	% Growth 1963-83
Damascus	19.8	10.4	50.4	21.5	14.0	67.8	96.6	114.4
Aleppo	9.9	12.3	257.2	13.1	8.8	82.7	51.8	123.7
Hims	10.1	8.5	141.0	13.2	11.1	81.3	94.3	179.7
Hamah	7.5	13.8	423.5	9.3	12.0	77.3	62.9	325.7
Al-Ladhiqiyah	15.2	19.9	274.6	14.4	17.6	59.2	59.8	304.1
Dayr al-Zawr	4.8	5.0	202.7	2.5	3.5	33.1	50.7	363.7
Idlib	7.3	8.6	236.2	8.4	9.9	71.6	83.0	289.4
Al-Hasakah	7.0	5.4	119.2	4.6	5.6	40.9	75.9	307.1
Al-Raqqah	2.6	5.2	473.5	3.3	4.9	79.9	68.6	392.6
Al-Suwayda'	6.7	6.0	156.7	3.9	7.5	36.7	91.1	537.3
Dar'a	9.0	5.1	60.5	5.7	5.1	39.5	73.2	197.9
Syria	100.0	100.0	187.0	100.0	100.0	62.5	72.2	231.7

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Table 5. Vehicles in Syria, 1963-1984

PROVINCE	% Total 1963	% Total 1984	Per/1000 1963	Per/1000 1984
Damascus*	46.8	48.0	16.1	47.2
Aleppo*	27.3	20.1	8.9	20.1
Hims	10.0	8.3	7.3	24.8
Hamah	3.8	6.1	3.6	20.5
Al-Ladhiqiyah	6.1	8.6	3.6	21.1
Dayr al-Zawr	1.8	4.9	2.3	16.0
Al-Hasakah	4.1	4.0	4.9	14.9
Syria	100.0	100.0	7.1	27.3

*Damascus includes Al-Suwayda', al-Qunaytirah, and Dar'a; Aleppo includes Idlib; al-Ladhiqiyah includes Tartus; Dayr al-Zawr includes Al-Raqqah

Table 6. Private Automobiles in Syria, 1963-84

PROVINCE	% AUTOS 1963	% AUTOS 1984	PER/1000 1963	PER/1000 1984
Damascus*	52.4	55.2	10.4	14.5
Aleppo*	27.1	21.3	5.1	5.5
Hims	7.5	8.5	3.1	6.5
Hamah	2.6	3.9	1.4	3.4
Al-Ladhiqiyah	6.4	7.9	2.2	5.0
Dayr al-Zawr	1.3	1.5	1.0	1.3
Al-Hasakah	2.7	1.8	1.9	1.7
Syria	100.0	100.0	4.1	7.0

*Damascus includes Al-Suwayda', al-Qunaytirah, and Dar'a; Aleppo includes Idlib; al-Ladhiqiyah includes Tartus; Dayr al-Zawr includes Al-Raqqah

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Table 7. Telecommunications in Syria, 1973-84

PROVINCE	% Lines 1973	% Lines 1984	% Growth	Lines/1000 1984	% Calls* 1973	% Calls* 1984	% Growth	Calls/1000 1984
Damascus	47.1	39.9	180.3	80.6	27.7	25.9	190.3	1491.3
Aleppo	19.5	17.0	188.9	36.7	10.8	14.8	325.9	910.7
Hims	7.8	6.8	188.2	33.3	12.6	9.3	128.2	1287.3
Hamah	5.2	6.8	330.1	37.5	9.5	8.1	165.6	1276.1
Al-Ladhiqiyah	5.6	7.8	358.8	56.9	6.2	10.4	422.2	2163.8
Dayr al-Zawr	2.3	1.8	167.7	18.5	3.2	2.2	114.7	635.6
Idlib	2.2	3.8	463.1	25.6	5.6	4.4	145.3	863.3
Al-Hasakah	3.2	3.9	292.6	23.3	9.3	6.3	109.9	1084.2
Al-Raqqah	1.5	1.7	295.2	20.2	2.2	3.0	321.5	980.4
Al-Suwayda'	1.3	2.6	568.1	52.3	2.8	1.1	24.2	646.6
Dar'a	1.2	2.6	616.9	28.4	3.3	3.3	209.9	1018.1
Tartus	3.1	5.0	439.3	45.7	6.9	11.1	401.2	2862.6
Al-Qunaytirah	0.0	0.3		43.0	0.0	0.0		0.0
Syria	100.0	100.0	230.9	44.7	100.0	100.0	210.0	1272.1

*Trunk calls

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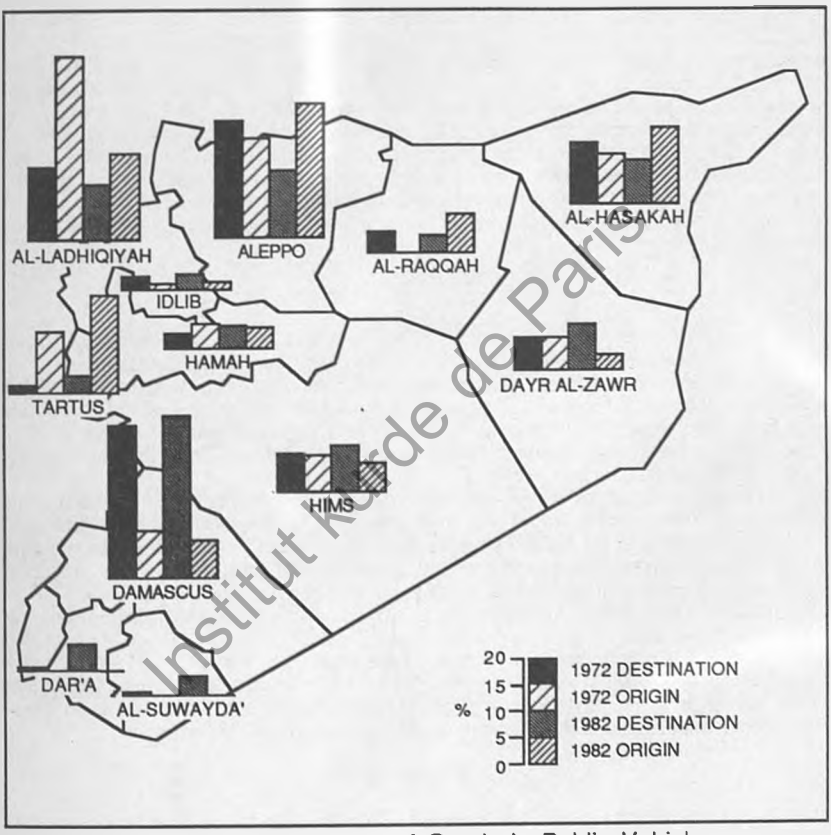

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Figure 13. Movement of Goods in Public Vehicles

coastal provinces of al-Ladhiqiyah and Tartus. The principal destinations, not unexpectedly, are Damascus and Aleppo. Overall, the pattern of movement suggests that Damascus, Aleppo, al-Ladhiqiyah, Tartus, and, to a lesser extent, al-Hasakah constitute the principal hubs within Syria's transport network. As primary generators of interaction, it is reasonable to assume they are also the major foci of economic growth.

Telecommunications are another important form of spatial interaction. Damascus's overall importance in the telecommunications network is clear, but once again there is strong evidence that it is relatively less important than it once was and that the telecommunications infrastructure has become more equitably distributed. Damascus had 40 percent of all telephone lines in 1984 versus 47 percent ten years previously (Table 7). While there were roughly 80 lines per 1,000 people in Damascus in 1984, there were fewer than 19 lines for an equivalent number of people in Dayr al-Zawr. Perhaps a more revealing measure of a place's importance as a node within the telecommunications network is how many trunk calls it generates. Surprisingly, in 1984 Damascus generated only 1,500 trunk calls per 1,000 people whereas Tartus and al-Ladhiqiyah registered 2,800 and 2,200 calls per 1,000 respectively, the largest per capita volume in the country. Indeed, between 1973 and 1984, the volume of calls from these two provinces grew by over 400 percent, twice the national average. By 1984, they accounted for one of every five trunk calls in Syria. Conceivably this may reflect their port functions. Whatever its cause, it suggests an erosion in Damascus's relative importance as a communications hub within the urban system and the decentralization of economic opportunities.

Conclusion

Syria, like other Middle Eastern countries, exhibits acute center-periphery, urban-rural, and interregional inequalities in economic opportunity and social infrastructure. These disparities are evident in differential access to health care, education, electricity, potable water, and adequate housing. Regional income data would, if they were available, undoubtedly emphasize the magnitude of these spatial inequities. Regional inequalities are not directly measured by data on population and communications. Nevertheless, the latter give some indication of regional change.

Perhaps the most striking feature of Syria's development is that it has been relatively decentralized. This is not to say, of course, that there are no inequalities or that Damascus does not have a disproportionate share of the country's wealth. But the urban hierarchy, characterized by two large cities and many intermediate sized ones, and the drive to open up the northeast to development and to link the interior with the coastal region ensure that growth takes place around a number of poles. Rank-size and locational relationships among Syria's cities favour long-term regional convergence and facilitate trickle down effects rather than the emergence of a single, dominant core, as is the case in so many Third World countries. Indeed, the Taaffe, Morrill and Gould (1963) model of transport development, which assigns particular weight to the development of coastal ports, would suggest that al-Ladhiqiyah and Tartus seem especially well positioned to enjoy sustained growth in the future.

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THE BACKGROUND AND ROLE OF THE BAATH IN SYRIA

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Abstract: There is inevitably debate about the importance of the ideological factor in the fortunes of the Syrian Baath and indeed about the exact nature of the Baath's ideology. This paper tries to do justice to the ideological factor compared with others and to determine at least the official and ratified position.

We consider first the historical origins of the Baath. The defeat of the Ottoman Empire, the extinction of the Khalifate, and the presence in the region of the secular nation-state were the most important factors at the time when the leaders of the Baath grew up. Secondly we trace the Baath's rise to power, including the union with Egypt and its failure, which strongly affected the ideology of the Party. A mixture of internal and external factors brought minorities to the fore and entailed conflict with the Sunni establishment in Syria and the Arab world. Neo-Baathism arrived. Thirdly, President Asad, rescuing a bankrupt Neo-Baathist regime, made radical changes in Syria and froze the ideological debate, but left the Baath's ideology and structure surprisingly intact.

Finally, the paper speculates on the Baath's future in Syria and the Arab world; and on the destiny of Syria herself.

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Biographical note: Sir David Roberts is an Honorary Fellow of the Centre of Middle East and Islamic Studies in Durham University. He is a former member of HM Diplomatic Service. He was Head of Chancery in Damascus from I963 to I966, Ambassador there from I973 to I976 and Ambassador in Beirut from I98I to I983. Published works include 'The Exclusive Treaties - A British View' in B. Pridham (ed) The Gulf and the West (I985), and The Ba'th and the Creation of Modern Syria (I987).

THE BACKGROUND AND ROLE OF THE BAATH IN SYRIA

David Roberts

This paper inevitably covers much the same ground as my book, The Ba'th and the Creation of Modern Syria, just published by Croom Helm. It lays rather more stress on Greater Syria to take account of recent events. It also compresses and over-simplifies a complex subject.

Debate about the Baath and Syria all too often takes place from positions so far apart as to make the discussion unreal. Thus one party will explain everything in terms of ideology and be at some pains to trace a consistent thread of doctrine running through events, while the other will dismiss all that as mere theorising and ex post facto rationalisation and concentrate on military, economic and religious factors. Belonging to neither party I have thought it useful to set out certain données at the outset. Their lack of tidy consistency one with another merely reflects the untidy paradoxes which we should learn to expect in political history:

I. The rather vague political theory which Aflaq began to teach to student groups in Damascus in 1940 has become the official ideology of two Arab states whose land runs from the Mediterranean coast to the Iranian frontier and the head of the Gulf. In doing so it has evolved, especially in Syria.

2. Except for brief intervals, Baathist Syria has been isolated in the Arab world.

3. Over a period Syria has followed a 'Shia strategy', to the point of supporting non-Arab but Shia Iran against Iraq, a fellow Arab; and the Baath regime has massacred thousands of Sunni opponents in Syria.

4. Although it has not transformed them, the Baath has profoundly altered the politics of Syria and the Levant, to such an extent that even if the Baath were overthrown in Syria tomorrow it would have left an indelible mark. The contrast with Nasserism, the other secular ideology, is striking and instructive.

These themes will recur throughout the paper.

A second problem is the diversity of the evidence about the exact nature of the Baath's political position. The only safe course seems to be to concentrate on official Party documents which have been ratified by Party Congresses, have not been annulled, and appear to be still in force. I have tried to follow this course in my book and in this paper.

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ORIGINS

To begin with the historical background, some of the Baath's own ideologues, but not Michel Aflaq himself, and most of the Baath's Arab and European apologists, seem to treat the Baath's ideology and the history of the Party in terms of the experiences of the European left. There are inevitable resemblances between the thinking of European and Arab socialists, if only because Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar had their higher education in Europe and secondary education under a French system in the Lebanon and Syria. The same broadly applied to Zaki al-Arsouzi, the Alaouite proto-Baathist. Moreover, Aflaq openly acknowledged certain

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important European influences. Indeed all the evidence is that he and Bitar were much more conscious than unconscious borrowers, as they are sometimes made to appear, at least as far as external cultural and intellectual influences are concerned. They knew what they were doing when they brought something back from Europe, and when Aflaq borrowed from Hegel he borrowed direct.

It is a capital mistake however to derive Baathism from a kind of chain of European thought starting with Plato and running through Rousseau and Marx to the present day. It is even more erroneous to think of Baathism as a deep-seated ideology in the manner in which English socialism can be said to derive from liberalism, Methodism, the industrial movements, Marxism and such roots. This is even true of Baathism's Arab ancestors, particularly Arab nationalism.

The founder of the Baath himself provides useful testimony. Fi Sibil al-Baath (1957) may not be reliable evidence of Michel Aflaq's systematic thought, since it is a collection of speeches and articles composed at various times rather than a continuous treatise, but it can serve well enough as evidence of what he did not think. Items from the early 1940s also show the flavour of early Baathism, as opposed to Baathism formulated later under the pressure of events and with later accretions.

In a speech in 1940, for example, Aflaq (1957, p.6) denounces theories about Arab nationalism in terms of eighteenth century France or of Greece in the time of Plato. Later in the same speech he says:

> Arab nationalism produced a related idea which adds to the sects of the Arabs a new sect and lays on the Arab soul a coating over the existing trivialities which cover it... The Arabs do not need to learn anything new to become nationalists. /My translation/

Now we should not interpret this too rigidly, but it seems to exclude Arab nationalism as a systematic doctrine in Aflaq's view.

Nor is this merely an example of the vagueness of which Aflaq has often found himself justly accused. He is insisting that we must see things in their proper, i.e. their Arab, historical context, and not in analogous and interesting contexts which attract the attention of learned men. He is, rather refreshingly, saying in effect with Bishop Butler, 'Everything is what it is and not some other thing'. Arab nationalism is just a donnée of Arab intellectual and political life.

In 1943 Aflaq (1957, p.60) attacked 'perverted intellectuals' who had lost their Arab spirit and, having been educated abroad, came to power and mis-managed the affairs of their fellow-Arabs. Thus the contamination of foreign thought 'sticks like glue to our lives'. These are remarkable sentiments from an Arab intellectual educated at the Sorbonne and steeped in Hegel.

Likewise it is misleading to see too much anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism, so often thought of as essential ingredients in Baathism, in the early thinking of the Baath. The First Communiqué of the Baath came out on 24 July 1943 and read as follows:

> We represent the Arab spirit against materialistic Communism. We represent living Arab history against dead reaction and synthetic progress. We represent complete Arab nationalism expressing the product of personality against the false materialism which does not go beyond lip-service and which all ethics refute. We represent the gospel of Arabism against professional politics. We represent the new Arab generation.

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The Dirasa Tarikhiya Tahliliya Mujaza li-Nidal Hizb al-Ba'th al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki 1943-1971 (1972, p.14), hereafter 'The Official History', describes this Communiqué explicitly as representing the Party's ideology at that stage; and there can be hardly any doubt that Aflaq drafted it himself. In the early 1940s anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism were in fact the stock-in-trade of the traditional parties attacked in the Communiqué, as for that matter was Arab nationalism.

In 1943 then, on Aflaq's own showing, we must not expect to find the slogans which the Party so freely adopted. In that case, what was the Baath really about? I suggest that we must go back to what had really happened to the Arab world and the Levant in particular.

For four hundred years under Ottoman rule the Arabs of the Levant had lived in an Islamic empire devoted mainly to conquering or repelling the infidel and tax-gathering. Political power, inseperable from Islam, belonged to the Khalifate and Sultanate in Istanbul. If he was a Sunni, the Arab of the Levant was part of the establishment (and often in fact rose high in it). If not, he belonged to a millet, owing allegiance to the Sultan in Istanbul through the head of his confession. What he did not belong to and did not in fact know, was a nation-state, although he had from time to time known autonomous emirs like Fakhreddine or rebellious rulers like Muhammed Ali enjoying the firman from the Sublime Porte. Zeine Zeine in The Emergence of Arab Nationalism (1973, passim) has given a clear account of Ottoman government. In 1918 the system suddenly collapsed with three major consequences. First, there was no Ottoman military machine to hold things together. Secondly, in 1924 Kamal Ataturk extinguished the Khalifate, a much more far-reaching step since that was the fons et origo of all authority (cf Schacht, 1974, p.401). Thirdly, the West brought the Arabs face to face with the secular nation-state.

When the Ottoman military machine collapsed the tide of Western culture and technology, which had already been eroding the Ottoman world, flowed in freely. The Arab world was suddenly exposed to European and American habits and ways of life. But the loss of the Khalifate left a gaping hole. There was an immediate attempt, at a conference held in 1926 in Cairo, to create an Arab Khalifate of the type advocated by Rashid Rida, but it foundered (Enayat, 1982, pp.68-83). The only immediate and tangible result of the attempt was the appearance of the Ikhwan al-Muslimin, a Sunni organisation of fanatics, although there was also the important intellectual and political legacy of the notion of Islamic states as a kind of second-best. Both these products were repugnant to progressive young Arab thinkers of the time. Thirdly, England and France were supreme in military and technical matters and ruled with administrations which were infidel in Muslim eyes and secular in the eyes of all men. The état laïc, or rather a plurality of états, had arrived in the Levant. It was, after all, the most conspicuously successful product of the conquerors.

Such was the world of Aflaq, Bitar and Arsouzi as young men with political ideas. Levantine society was suffering what is called nowadays a crisis of identity. We have the record of Aflaq and Bitar in Paris, their dabbling with Communism and their disillusion with the left when Leon Blum's government in 1936 failed to ratify a constitution giving independence to Syria and the Lebanon. We also know of Aflaq's study of Hegel and Rosenberg and their influence on him. It is small wonder that eventually the Baath sought to build a strong centralist state with a secular ideology.

We have already shown roughly where the Baath stood, or thought it stood, by 1943. Other influences soon came to bear. As a result of the Second World War the imperial power of France had collapsed and England's power had diminished. At the same time Russia, a powerful factor in the Levant since the Treaty of Kutchuk Kainarji in 1774, but largely out of the

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reckoning after the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, returned to the scene as a victor, a super-power and an advocate of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism. With France, Britain and the United States all for various reasons disqualified it was time for a left rather than a right turn. (Hegelian thought would have accommodated either equally well.) The left turn had taken place by the time the Baath formally became a political party in 1947. Eric Rouleau (1967, p.59) has given a highly interesting account in this connection of the evolution of the views of Wahib al-Ghanim, an early Alaouite disciple of Zaki al-Arsouzi, and an important founder-member of the Party. Stalingrad was evidently the turning point for him. Without stressing personal factors overmuch, however, it is instructive to examine the Political Communiqué of the Founding Conference on 7 April 1947. It can be summarised as follows:

> International Relations. Higher Arab interests govern relations with the super-power blocs and support for the United Nations. Friendship is important with all states except Britain, France, Spain, Turkey, Iran [sic] and the United States.
> Arab Policy. The Communique calls on the Arab states to encourage popular direction and a review of agreements and concessions to foreign states and companies.
> Internal Policy. It denounces bourgeois policies and calls for reform of electoral law. The Baath is to raise the social and cultural level of the people.

The Baath had moved to the left. American support for Israel, whose full weight was felt in 1948, completed the process.

So the Baath set forth. The death of the Khalifate had conjured it up, with other ideologies. European thought, especially Hegel's philosophy, and the example of the secular nation-state formed it. Undefined Arab nationalism animated it. And the Yalta Agreement, a fateful sign-post for much of the world, pointed the way it was to go.

THE ASCENT TO POWER

In the interests of concision we can only isolate four main features of the period between the formal launching of the Baath in 1947 and its coming to power in 1963, a bewildering period only exceeded in complexity by the seven years which followed it until the accession of President Asad. Two historical events, the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the Anglo-French expedition to Suez in 1956, demolished parliamentary government in Syria together with moderate, traditional and pro-Western politicians, and put the 'left' in the ascendant. But the following factors gave the Baath the impetus which brought it to power and shaped it:

(a) Its possession of an ideology and a party structure.
(b) Its alliance with Akram Haurani.
(c) Its link with the military in Syria, particularly the Alaouites.
(d) The advent of Nasser.

We tend to underestimate the 1947 Constitution of the Baath (translation Abu Jaber, 1966, Appendix B) because of later developments. Leaving aside the literature of Antun Saadeh on Greater Syria (see below) which was not Pan-Arab in the same strict sense, it was the first piece of Pan-Arab drafting of any consequence, and the first Pan-Arab or Arab nationalist party programme, as opposed to slogans or aspirations to personal advantage. That alone gave the Baath a powerful advantage against political opponents from the traditional parties. The Baath could with some justice claim that it was not moved by opportunism or personal ambition but guided by a public programme adopted by a party after due debate.

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Moreover the programme itself had merit and deserved to attract support. It was socialist but not Communist or Marxist. It prescribed a constitutional and parliamentary regime and an independent judiciary. It protected the family, marriage, public health, trade unions and cultural activity. In foreign policy, it supported Arab nationalism and opposed colonialism. All men of good will could subscribe to that, and all Arab politicians more or less had to. It also preceded any sort of Nasserism by several years; and it is still in force today, as is made clear in a Special Preface published in 1972 (Roberts, 1987, Appendix B).

There was also a party structure much more developed than that of any other party except the Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS) or the banned Syrian Communist Party, both of which were special cases. Once more the important comparison is with the traditional parties. It is uncertain how far the full party organisation as described by Abu Jaber (1966, pp.139-45) was in place, but some of it must have been before 1947 in order to keep the Party active while it was still clandestine. We can date the full establishment with some certainty to just after the Party had failed in the elections for a Constituent Assembly in 1949 and, according to the Official History (p.31) considered 'the beginning of action by the secret organisation'.

Soon the Party had to take account of the Arab Socialist Party set up by Akram Haurani (Official History, p.31). Haurani came from a land-owning family near Hama, had strong connections with the army, was a political opportunist to his fingertips and, unlike any of the Baathist leaders at the time, was a highly effective orator. He had been, and perhaps still was, a clandestine member of the PPS (see below).

The date of the Baath's merger with the Arab Socialist Party is given by the Official History (p.35) as 'the end of 1952'. There is in fact some ambiguity about that date and about the important Pact of Homs against Shishakli but it was certainly at the turn of 1952-3. Akram Haurani joined the leadership of the Baath, whose title was changed to the Baath Arab Socialist Party to accommodate him, the Constitution being otherwise unchanged.

Haurani not only brought political flair into a rather pedagogic leadership, but also better links with the military. The Baath is prone to exaggerate its role in the overthrow of Shishakli but it undoubtedly started to acquire military links which developed rapidly. The Baath's claim that Hafiz al-Asad joined the Baath on its founding in 1947 may belong to hagiography rather than strict history, although it is by no means impossible. But we know of the Alaouite association with the Baath at the time through Zaki al-Arsouzi and Wahib al-Ghanim; and the Alaouite preponderance in the army must have been a vital factor.

The Alaouites, living mainly in the mountain spine of Syria which runs close to and parallel with the Mediterranean coast, are a religious minority with a tribal structure who supplied most of the sous-officiers under the Mandate and later many of the officers of the Syrian army. They were natural allies of the Baath for many reasons including their conflict with feudal Sunni land-owners. Alongside their military significance we must place their religious Shia affinities, whose great importance will become apparent later. (For further information I must refer the reader to the classic studies of Weulersse(1940) and, with much diffidence in such company to Chapter 3 of my own work (1987)).

The Official History (p.39) explicitly records that the merger of the Baath with Haurani brought the Party an accretion of military support. All in all the Baath enjoyed significantly more military support after the end of 1952 and there was a commensurate increase in Alaouite and other minority or sectarian influences from the same date.

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The three preceding features, ideology, the alliance with Haurani and the links with the army were all, so to speak, of the Baath's own making. On their own they would certainly have brought the Baath more power in the state after the overthrow of Shishakli in early 1954, in which the Baath played a prominent part if not quite the decisive part which it was later to claim. But the fourth feature was none of its doing and was the decisive event in its political history. After the revolution of 1952, Gamal Abdul Nasser rose to power in Egypt and from 1955 to 1961 dominated Middle Eastern politics, especially after Suez. No Arab leader could stand out against him except Nuri al-Said in Iraq. Nasser's main goal was Arab unity, which the Baath in its Constitution had already proclaimed to be its own aim, before Nasser was heard of. In the Arab politics of that period, however, it was Syria's lot to be dominated either by Iraq, the Hashemite stronghold, or by Egypt. Suez made Nasser dominant (but Shishakli had already cast Syria's lot in with Egypt against the Hashemites some years earlier). After confused and hectic internal political manoeuvres Syria entered into union with Egypt in February 1958. Patrick Seale has given an admirable account of the period (1965).

Akram Haurani was appointed a Vice-President of the United Arab Republic (UAR), as the union was called; and several Baathists, including Bitar, held important posts. On the other hand Nasser forced the Baath to disband its Syrian organisation, although it kept a Pan-Arab nucleus in Beirut (with Aflaq as Secretary-General) and maintained its organisation in other Arab countries such as Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Apart from the internal pressures which had made the Baath support union, it was the first grand experiment in Arab unity since the founding of the Arab League in 1945; and Arab unity was a central part of the Baath's creed. All seemed set fair, especially when the Hashemite monarchy and Nuri al-Said's government fell in Iraq.

Van Dam (1979, p.46) refers to secret fragments of the Party continuing to operate in Latakia, Deir al-Zor and the Hauran during the union. But more important was the secret Baath Military Committee of Syrian officers stationed in Egypt. The Official History (p.69) records it thus:

> It is worth referring to our military comrades who were banished from the Northern Zone to the Southern Zone without having any fundamental duties delegated to them. They began to contact one another in a core which was later on the organisational starting point for them (our comrades). This bound them to the leadership of the Party; and they were the basic nerve which stopped the separationists and were an essential support for the Revolution of 8 March 1963. [My translation]

At the start the Committee consisted of three Alaouites, Muhammed Umran, Salah Jadid and Hafiz al-Asad, and two Ismailis, Abdul Karim al-Jundi and Ahmed al-Mir, all of whom were later to hold important posts. There was also a meeting in 1960 at Qardaha, the birthplace of Hafiz al-Asad, between Alaouite leaders and army officers to discuss the advancement of Alaouites by way of the Baath (Roberts, 1987, p. 50). In addition to all these secret steps a Pan-Arab Congress of the Party openly criticised the Party's Syrian leaders for their conduct under the union and finally forced the resignation of Baathist ministers.

It was just as well that the Baath did not drop its guard altogether during the union, since things went badly wrong. Abdul Karim Qasim, who came to power in Iraq in 1958, did not join the UAR, thereby delaying the expected millenium. Abdul Hamid Sarraj set up a brutal police regime in Syria to serve Nasser. The Baath fared disastrously in elections held in

Microfilmed at the University of Durham

Syria for the National Union of the UAR. Nasser appointed the Egyptian Field Marshal Abdul Hakim Amir to be his viceroy in Syria, setting the seal on Syria's subjection to Egypt. The Syrian harvest failed.

In September 1961 there was a successful separationist coup d'etat in Syria. Baathist elements of the Akram Haurani wing and the clandestine Qutriyyun (the secret elements in Latakia, Deir al-Zor and the Hauran) participated in varying degrees of complicity. Nasser and Abdul Hakim Amir tried to resist but soon faltered; and the union came to an end.

After some intense internal recriminations , the Party came to office, with Bitar as Prime Minister, after a coup against the separationist regime led by moderate Nasserist and other elements in the army on 8 March 1963. Despite tripartite negotiations for union with Iraq and Egypt and even a tripartite agreement on 17 April, all efforts to set it up foundered. Nasser himself declared the enterprise abandoned after a Nasserist attempt to take power in Damascus on 18 July had ended in bloody failure. The Baath was in power as well as in office.

The Party had now to set its ideological and organisational house in order and prepare for a Pan-Arab Congress in Damascus. But the Baath was a very different Party from the one which had gone into union in 1958.

First, the failure of union had greatly (and justly) reduced the standing of the original leaders. Secondly, it was obviously much more military (Official History, p.97). The soldiers had brought it to power and were not going to relinquish control. Thirdly, it was more sectarian. The Alaouites and other minorities were not only entrenched in the army for historical reasons but in the powerful Military Committee which had been set up under the union and now started to pack the army with Alaouite officers (van Dam, 1974, pp51-63). Fourthly, the Party was more secular, i.e. subscribed less to the Sunni consensus. Nasser gave a clue to this when he denounced the Baath after his abortive coup of 18 July 1963 as being against religion, by which he meant Islam (Roberts, 1987, pp.57-61). Finally, the Baath was more regional in outlook. In disillusion at the failure of the union with Egypt, it was beginning to think in terms of 'Syria First'. I have recently learned that it was at this point that a number of Palestinian Baathists, who had regarded the Party as an instrument of Pan-Arab unity (no doubt in concert with Nasser), began to leave it. This tendency was reinforced by later events and is of some importance in the context of later relations between the Baath in Syria and the PLO.

(All these factors are relevant to the Neo-Baathists who came to power in Salah Jadid's coup of 1966. They are mentioned now to emphasize that they were already important in the Baath in 1963 and indeed had an ancestry going back as far as the clandestine Qutriyyun in Latakia in 1958 and of course the Military Committee. The Neo-Baathist movement was essentially a mixture of these tendencies in accentuated form.)

Such was the atmosphere in which the Baath held its decisive Sixth Pan-Arab Congress in Damascus in October 1963, after Regional Congresses in Damascus and Baghdad immediately before that date. Although the Baath was in power in Syria and Iraq (where there had been a successful coup in February 1963) it had made a sworn enemy of Nasser, still the most powerful political leader in the Middle East; and it badly needed an up-to-date and structured ideology to meet his taunt that it was activated only by personal ambition.

In the event the Pan-Arab Congress approved a report, largely composed by Aflaq, and entitled Ba'dh al-Muntalaqat al-Nadhriya (Some Theoretical Starting Points), hereafter the Muntalaqat. It is far too long even to summarise but may be reduced to four basic propositions

(i) The Party takes Arab nationalism as a basic donnée

of the political situation. The question to be asked is 'What path should Arab nationalism take?'
(ii) Arab unity is the only safe and true path for Arab nationalism. But (drawing on the Egyptian experience) it must be a unit based on common ideology rather than geographical mergers.
(iii) Freedom has to be revolutionary in character since it primarily depends on a successful struggle for Arab unity against colonialism and imperialism. It excludes bourgeois notions of liberty and affection for parliamentary institutions.
(iv) It follows from the preceding points that socialism will be the goal of the Arabs but it will be Arab socialism i.e. a socialist ideology which takes into account the national characteristics of the Arabs.

The Muntalaqat broadly reflected the state of the Party in Syria in 1963. The Baath had moved a good deal to the left since the Constitution of 1947, with concessions to Marxism in political theory and 'the socialist camp' in foreign policy. But it nevertheless also insisted on an adapted form of old-fashioned, ill-defined Arab nationalism, at least in theory. It was verbose and lacked logic, like most party political documents anywhere. But it served its purpose in papering over cracks at the time and proved remarkably durable in subsequent practice.

THE NEO-BAATH

Instead of trying to follow the twists and turns of the rise to power of the Neo-Baathists and of Salah Jadid's regime, I propose to concentrate on four critical topics, namely relations with Iraq, the Arab-Israel War, ideological strife and the Soviet Union.

Hardly had the Sixth Pan-Arab Congress closed, when the Baathist regime in Iraq fell after only eight months in power, despite Syrian attempts to shore it up.

Iraqi Baathists, especially the (Shia) extremist Ali Saadi, had taken a prominent part in the Congress, which had indeed made some quite ambitious arrangements for unity between Syria and Iraq. The fall of the Iraqi Baath regime, whose advent had encouraged the Syrian movement, now left Syria isolated again in the Arab world. It thus accentuated Syria's tendency to 'think her own' and to turn to friends outside the Arab world. There was a period of highly complicated political manoeuvring which ended in the Salah Jadid coup.

After Jadid came to power in February 1966, the defeated Baathists, Aflaq and Amin al-Hafiz found their way to Baghdad. (The other two defeated leaders Umran and Bitar ended their days by assassins' bullets in Beirut and Paris respectively.) This was a thorn in the flesh of the Syrians; and in August 1966 they took a step which alienated Iraq and the Iraqi Baath, it seems irrevocably. They set up a Pan-Arab Command of their own choosing in Damascus, whose illegitimacy outraged the Iraqis and caused them to cling to and exalt the banished Aflaq as the only true Amid of the Baath.

In 1968 the Baath came back to power in Iraq. Hafiz al-Asad, then commanding the Syrian air force, and Mustafa Tlas, commanding the army, tried to reconcile the Syrian and Iraqi parties. They failed; and a major opportunity for the Baath was lost.

Soviet theoreticians like Nureddin Muhiedinnov, later Soviet Ambassador in Damascus, had denounced the Baath in 1959 and relations did not grow warmer until 1965 when the two sides exchanged compliments about

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Soviet aid and Syrian nationalisation. After Salah Jadid's coup, however, things were very different; and the Soviet Union quickly contracted to build the Euphrates Dam. The rise of secularism, since the regime had suppressed Sunni dissidents in 1964 and the appearance of Marxist theoreticians like Yasin al-Hafiz and Jamal al-Atasi won Soviet approval.

Moscow also managed to promote a defensive alliance between Syria and Egypt at the end of 1966. In 1967 both Syria and the Soviet Union contributed, with a Machiavellian incompetence which is a collector's treasure, to Nasser's disastrous moves before the outbreak of the Six-Day War. Vae victis!

For the 1967 war was really the downfall of the Neo-Baath in Syria. First, the regime had exalted the armed forces as well as its own place in the vanguard of the Arabs against Israel. That made it harder to defend an ignominious failure in war. The Israelis seem to have taken the Syrians as much by surprise as they took the Egyptians, but there was dereliction on a grand scale in Syria. Too much of the army was deployed in the interior against internal unrest and too little to face the enemy. Units on the Golan Heights fled headlong to the Ghuta Oasis. But the critical feature of the 1967 war, which the regime most undeservedly survived, was that it also turned Hafiz al-Asad against Salah Jadid, whom he had rescued the previous year during Salim Hatum's abortive coup. From then on he started to work for Jadid's downfall. Thirdly, however, the Israeli victory drove more armed Palestinians into Jordan and hastened the crisis always likely to occur between them and King Husain. In September 1970, when King Husain was suppressing an armed Palestinian attempt to take over his throne and his country, Salah Jadid's regime, which had formed Saiqa as its Palestinian surrogate in 1968, in a last fling sent an armoured brigade into Jordan as far as Irbid to support the Palestinians. Hafiz al-Asad witheld the air force and the attempt failed. Jadid's regime fell to Hafiz al-Asad two months later.

What was Neo-Baathism? It is obviously a convenient term to describe the forces which overthrew Aflaq and Bitar and took over under Salah Jadid. It also obviously included Hafiz al-Asad himself, but its ideology was elusive, to say the least (Roberts, 1987, p100n3). To quote Salah Bitar's last public interview (MERIP No 110, 1982, p.23), 'Everyone had his theory everyone had his social doctrine, since the Party did'nt have any'.

Although the military led the Neo-Baath, and Aflaq and Bitar always lamented their failure to control them, the movement included civilians like Jamal al-Atasi, Ilyas Murkhus and Yasin al-Hafiz. Yusuf Zuayyin was also a civilian leader of the Neo-Baath, who in fact caused oil to replace cotton as Syria's main export through his economic policy. The Neo-Baath can also claim credit for land reform and the creation of peasant organisations, mostly the work of the civilians.

Van Dam (1979, p.39 et passim) has thoroughly demonstrated the effect of sectarianism in Syrian politics, however much the Baath may resent it. He does not claim to explain everything by sectarian factors but leaves us in no doubt of the Alaouite ascendancy. A military leadership in Syria was more or less bound to be strongly Alaouite, if only because of the Alaouite strength in the army. It is also worth noting the consistent denunciation of the Alaouites by the orthodox Sunni (van Dam, 1979, p73 and Abd-Ullah, 1985, passim). Alaouites have dominated the Neo-Baath regime and Hafiz al-Asad preferred binding them to him to trying to dilute their power when he became President.

Another element was secularism, especially that of some Neo-Baath theoreticians. They also drew the fire of the orthodox Sunni and especially the Ikhwan al-Muslimin, since secularism was even more repugnant to the Sunni consensus. But it is important not to exaggerate the extent to which this was an innovation. From the early days of the Baath there was a

conflict between Aflaq's secular ideology and Sunni orthodoxy despite his efforts to avoid or conceal it. The difference, but a vital one in practical politics, was that the Neo-Baathists did not attempt to conceal it. In the last resort the Islamic doctrine of political obligation is not compatible with a secular ideology. Apart from that, however, there was now disillusion with an Arab union whose tone under Egyptian leadership would have been inescapably Sunni (or if not the Ikhwan al-Muslimin of Egypt would assuredly know the reason why). This disillusion itself encouraged a secular view of Arab politics.

Last of all there is regionalism, the main singularity of the Neo-Baath. Under their pressure before they came to power and under their rule afterwards, the Regional Command grew in power and the Pan-Arab Command dwindled. The Neo-Baathists though much more in Syrian terms. It is fair to describe this as 'Syria First', the belief that the Baath should establish itself in Syria before embarking on Pan-Arab adventures. Syria First led quickly to Greater Syria.

But it would be misleading to suggest that Greater Syria was an ideological novelty which came on the scene at about the time of Salah Jadid's coup. The notion of a geographical 'natural' Syria of far greater extent than the frontiers of the Syrian Arab Republic goes back to antiquity, and cannot be traced here. The Syrian National Congress in Damascus which proclaimed Faisal King of Syria in 1920 demanded that such a political unit be set up. Henri Lammens, the Belgian Jesuit, formulated the idea with great clarity and elegance in La Syrie: un précis historique in 1921, which was an established history text-book in the Levant. Antun Saadeh, Greek Orthodox like Aflaq, and like Aflaq seeking a non-confessional ideology to fill the gap left by the Khalifate, propounded the doctrine of Greater Syria in his book Nushu al-Ummam (1938). He wrote it in prison in 1935, having founded a political party to promote his view at the American University of Beirut on 16 November 1932, about eight years before Aflaq formed the first Baathist discussion groups. It is sometimes called the Syrian National Party (SNP) and sometimes the Parti Populaire Syrien (PPS).

The Party and its doctrine are thus both regional, i.e. of the Levant, and secular, i.e. non-confessional. They have always appealed to the minorities in Syria and the Lebanon and offer a counter-poise to the Sunni, who favoured a Pan-Arab unity in which they would be the majority and would, they hoped, inherit the role which had unquestionably been theirs under the Ottoman Empire. The party won its first electoral successes in 1937 in the Tel Kalakh, Husn al-Akrad and Latakia areas of Syria, all in Alaouite territory.

Akram Haurani was a member of the PPS and Salah Jadid belonged to a PPS family. The doctrine had been latent in the Baath for a long time; and nothing could have been more natural than the way it came to the surface after the separationist coup of 1961 and still more after Salah Jadid's coup in 1966.

PRESIDENT HAFIZ AL-ASAD

All the evidence suggests that when Hafiz al-Asad took over in November 1970, Syria was in such a condition that the Party was only too happy to hand everything over to the strong man to clear up the mess which they had brought about between them. Nor did he fail them. There is no space here to tell how he re-organised the armed forces, brought Syria back for a time into the Arab fold, and mitigated the horrors caused by the Neo-Baath in the civil life of the country. Nor can we deal with his inspiring leadership of the country in the Arab-Israel War of 1973, which I saw on the spot for myself in Damascus.

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The old guard, Neo-Baathist purists, Arab liberals and their sympathisers in the West, all hold that the Baath in effect died when Hafiz al-Asad took over. A stronger case could be made for the view that he revived it after it had all but expired under Salah Jadid.

Article Eight of the Syrian Constitution, ratified in 1973, describes the Baath thus:

> The Arab Socialist Baath Party is the leading party of the society and state; it leads a progressive national front which endeavours to reunite the potentials of the masses of people and put them to the service of the objectives of the Arab nation.

Some would fervently dispute the last dozen words, but otherwise it is a true bill. This is directly foreshadowed in a passage in the Muntalaqat (p.86), 'A principal party leading a front of political forces, exercising revolutionary powers, does not necessarily lead to relinquishing democracy'. The only other parties now surviving in the National Progressive Front are the Communists and the Arab Socialist Union. Both are debarred from activity among students and the armed forces.

The Constitution armed the President with powers which would have pleased General de Gaulle. Article 84 provided thus for the succession:

> Candidature for the post of the Presidency of the Republic is issued by the Council of the People on a proposition submitted by the Regional leadership of the Baath Arab Socialist Party. Candidature is put to a referendum of citizens.

Constitutionally, therefore, the Syrian Baath controls the succession; but President Asad, as Secretary-General controls the Syrian Baath.

In ideological terms the Constitution of 1973 restored the Party to roughly the position it held in 1963. The President removed some of the flagrant abuses of the Jadid regime, by providing for a People's Council with consultative powers. He also gave the Party, especially the Regional Command, a defined position of power in the state. In effect the Corrective Movement, as it is called, swung the pendulum back to October 1963, when the Party approved the Muntalaqat. He also stopped the pendulum from swinging any more. For the ideological debate was frozen. I know of no subsequent ideological text which enjoys the canonical status of the Muntalaqat, and numerous references to it attest to its primacy. In a public statement on his election in 1971, President Asad said, 'We will not be theorists. We have no practical or theoretical interest in turning any people against us' (Pennar, 1973, p112).

Moreover, the personality cult of President Asad marks the watershed. It is plainly a deliberate act of state policy since it is utterly alien to President Asad's unobtrusive personal charm and impeccable politeness. References to him in the Official History (p108) confirm the cult. When I was first in Syria under a Baathist government it was rare to see the photograph of any Baathist leader or publicity of any kind related to one man. Now the state apparatus is devoted to the glorification of the President. Ideological debate belonged to the time of what the late Edouard Saab (1968, p132-3) described as the 'direction collégiale' of the Party. Now there is one leader and no debate.

There was always a price to be paid in subsequent years for President Asad's rescue operation in 1970-73, and the Baath as his partner has had to pay its share of that price. Two themes which are hard to disentangle from each other run through the later years, and have challenged

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the Baath's political position. They are, first, the Alaouite ascendancy and the Shia strategy it has adopted; and secondly, the conflict between an essentially secular ideology and Sunni doctrines of political obigation.

President Asad had to reinforce the Alaouite ascendancy in order to secure his personal base of power. He did so partly by granting commercial and fiscal privileges to officers in the army. Procurement and contracting by the industrial establishment of the army offered an avenue to wealth for Alaouites who had hitherto never engaged in commerce. The urban traders and magnates, predominantly Sunni, bitterly resented the policy .

The Alaouite Ascendancy also needed constitutional sanction; and this too caused sectarian strife. The first draft of the new Constituion of 1973 merely provided that 'Islamic jurisprudence is an important element of Syrian Law' (Article 3). This provoked widespread Sunni riots in Aleppo, Homs and Hama, exactly following the precedent of earlier years. President Asad thereupon sent a message to the People's Council substituting a new Article 3 to read, 'The religion of the Head of the Republic is Islam'(Permanent Constitution, 1973). This also caused trouble because the President was an Alaouite, until Musa Sadr, a famous Shia divine in the Lebanon of Iranian origin and later the creator of the Shia militia Amal, provided a fatwa saying that Alaouites were a sort of Shia, and therefore Muslim (Roberts, 1987, p.105). This was to have major consequences. The regime started on a policy of co-operation with the Shia which provoked Sunni agitation in Syria (perhaps helped from Iraq). This in turn drove the regime further down the road.

Thus Syria helped the Shia in the Lebanon, an action which was conveniently in harmony with her quarrel with the Palestinians, who had a feud with the Shia over land in the south of the Lebanon. Gradually the Shia strategy evolved, leading to Syria's ever-increasing isolation in the Arab world, but giving her a powerful grip on the Lebanon where the Shia, whose representation had for a long time been less than their growing numbers seemed to warrant, were rapidly overtaking the Sunni, who for complex reasons were by then declining in influence. One of the periodic meetings of the Alaouites, including religious leaders took place in mid-August, 1980, again at Qardaha. This was just before the formal outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, in which Syria declared her support for non-Arab but Shia Iran against Iraq. The Shia strategy was now in full operation.

In 1981 Syria allowed Iranian terrorists to establish themselves with the Hizbullah in the Beqa Valley. In November that year they blew up the Iraqi Embassy in Beirut. This and similar operations could not have taken place without active Syrian support.

In 1979 and 1980 there was a campaign of murder against Alaouites, many of them agricultural settlers, in the Hama area. There was a particularly frightful massacre of Alaouite artillery cadets in Aleppo. There were severe reprisals against the Syrian Sunni and especially the Ikhwan al-Muslimin by the authorities, using force under Alaouite commanders and with a high Alaouite component. The Sunni showed defiance again in Hama in February 1982. Syrian forces, mainly Alaouite troops under Rifaat al-Asad massacred about 20,000.

All this is a far cry from the aspirations of the Baath in 1947. The demands of Realpolitik on Syria have greatly reinforced the attractions of Greater Syria, to which as we have seen the Baath was already inclined. There is no space here to discuss Syria's motives for invading the Lebanon. The action was quite compatible with Baathism in regarding Arab juridical frontiers as of no account in the face of higher political imperatives, and accorded admirably with the promotion of Greater Syria at the expense, or as the Syrians would allege for the benefit, of the Lebanese.

Moreover, Egypt moved from Sinai Two in 1975 under Kissinger's auspices, which Syria claimed vehemently was in breach of a personal undertaking by Kissinger to President Asad, to Camp David. Syria had to fend for herself, being now estranged from Egypt as well as Iraq. She looked on Greater Syria as a protective device rather than as an instrument for national aggrandizement, although it would be idle to pretend that the latter was not a powerful motive.

But still greater insurance was required. In his early days in power, President Asad had resisted the proposal of a treaty with the Soviet Union such as Egypt and Iraq had concluded. By early 1980, certainly, he had decided that Syria needed one and in October that year he signed a full-dress Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation. Article 6 is the key provision of the Treaty. It reads as follows:

> In the event of situations arising which threaten peace or security of either side or pose a threat to peace or violate peace and security throughout the world, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately enter into contact with each other with a view to co-ordinating their positions and co-operating in order to remove the threat which has arisen and to restore peace.

The whole text is important. It should be noted that Article 6 assures Syria of an element of Soviet protection, the main object. But the requirement of consultation also inhibits Syria to some extent from unilateral action.

THE PRESENT

Syria is now the largest Arab military power in the region apart from Egypt. She has neither the technology nor the skills in command that Israel enjoys, but is the one Arab power with which Israel has appeared to avoid conflict a outrance. It is an exalted but dangerous position.

One reason why the Party now has less power than before is the existence of a group round the President, popularly called the Jama'a. They are mostly Alaouites in prominent positions in the General Staff and Intelligence, but include Sunni such as Hikmat Shihabi, the Chief of Staff, and Muhammed al-Khuli, the Chief of Air Force Intelligence. It is not by any means unusual in many states for groups of this kind to form round an executive President, especially during a crisis. It is noteworthy, moreover, that there is evidence (Dawisha, 1980, pp100-101) that three civilian Party members, Mahmud al-Ayyubi (Prime Minister), Abdullah al-Ahmar (Assistant Secretary-General) and Muhammed Bajbouj(Assistant Secretary-General of the Regional Command), were in the inner group making decisions during the invasion of the Lebanon in 1976. Nevertheless, the general picture is undoubtedly one of a predominantly Alaouite military group close to the President.

None of this means that the Party is no longer of importance, although it may not be exactly the 'socialist vanguard' mentioned in the Muntalaqat, as it once aspired to be. It still permeates the armed forces, the civil service and the professions, including higher education. Through the organisations of workers and peasants it acts as the link between the central power and the masses, even if Bitar in his last interview (1982, p.23) was understandably sceptical about this arrangement.

The Party also fills the role once played by the powerful family or the haut fonctionnaire under the Mandate and the Ottoman Empire. The essential role of patronage in the Levant is sometimes hard to explain to

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those who have never lived there and is apt to be taken for granted by those who have. The Baath has brought about changes in Syrian society which are likely to endure and by enduring sustain the Baath itself. The provinces have gained power at the expense of Damascus. The peasants, despite Aflaq's uncritical Marxist denigration of agriculture, have gained power too. Young men have altogether more power in Syria in proportion to the elderly than they used to have. The large landowners have simply dropped out of the political game. This may not amount to the 'socialist transformation' for which the Neo-Baathists yearned, but it is irrevocable change. The whole subject is well discussed by Olson in The Baath and Syria (1982, p.178-83 et passim).

The membership of the Party has increased considerably being perhaps 100,000 nowadays compared with around 10,000 in 1970. As a result, although the cell structure of the Party on the model of an intelligence network persists, with the clandestinity that accompanies it, the Party now wears the aspect of an official establishment to which it is an advantage to belong rather than a conspiratorial elite as of old.

FUTURE

Syrians are reputed to absorb politics and ideology at a tender age, but a Syrian born in 1950 will hardly have known any politics or ideology other than Baathist versions of them. Suez (dimly), the failure of the union with Egypt, and the 1967 war with Israel, followed by President Asad's assumption of power at the end of 1970, will form his background. He will have grown up and reached a position of power and influence, or aspired to one, in an essentially Baathist society. A Syrian born ten years later will hardly know of anything but Baathism, unless he has spent much of his time abroad.

The ruling regime in Syria has two major internal problems. The first is the succession. The potential Alaouite successors to President Asad at present seem either to be unacceptable, like his brother Rifaat al-Asad, or not of sufficient calibre. Yet the Alaouites dare not hand over to anyone else for fear of the reprisals that might then fall upon them. To compound the problem the Alaouites themselves have rival factions. Rifaat al-Asad has from time to time threatened to usurp the leadership, but is at present held in check. Under the latest amendment to the Constitution (1985) there are now three Vice-Presidents, Abdul Halim Khaddam, Rifaat al-Asad and Zuhair Mushariqa; and a solution might be either a troika of rulers or a figurehead President. In either case the Party could play an important role in holding things together.(Zuhair Mushariqa is very much an apparatchik and all three have Party ties of some strength.)

The second problem is numerical. The Alaouites are about 12 per cent of the population of Syria. A reconciliation between them and the Sunni (70 per cent approximately) is to say the least unlikely. Yet the Baath Party crosses the boundaries of both confessions, and a solution within the Party's frame-work is therefore not to be excluded. It is indeed hard to envisage any other. After the Command of the armed forces, the next focus of power in the hierarchy is the Regional Command of the Party, with both civilian and military members.

As far as the Levant is concerned, there is already in Syria a confluence of the two surviving secular ideologies, Baathism and Greater Syria. This may be a sufficient counter-poise to the Sunni consensus. Unless the situation in the Middle East is exceptionally favourable, however, it is also likely to need a Shia alliance, or the equivalent. Experience so far suggests that a 'balance of power' policy requires this reinforcement of Syria's position, or at least that Syria's rulers will think that it does, which produces the same consequences.

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If the tide in Arab affairs ran towards social reform and politics took a leftward turn in the region the Baath as a whole would be formidable with an inter-Arab organisation, a structured ideology and party hierarchy, and the advantage of at least appearing to transcend personal politics. Equally, however, it is to be noted that no secular ideology has yet been able to become the acknowledged successor to the Khalifate. Nasserism and Qaddafiism are conspicuous examples. On present evidence it looks as if any Pan-Arab movement must have a substantial Islamic content if it is to capture the Arab imagination. Baathism as originally conceived by Aflaq was an attempt to bring this about, but Greater Syria and Neo-Baathism, both avowedly secular ideologies, seem to be excluded.

To look more widely is to open vast perspectives. A settlement of the Iran-Iraq War which did not disrupt the status quo (perhaps even an uneasy modus vivendi) would release Iraq from her pre-occupations. She would then be a formidable rival in the region with her superior military and economic potential; and she might still be Baathist. A modus vivendi in the Arab-Israel dispute would permit and perhaps compel Egypt and Iraq to renew the competition for influence over Syria which dominated the Levant from 1945 to 1967. Another effect of such a modus vivendi might be to leave the Arab states more leisure and incentive to pursue the age-old quarrel between the Sunni and Shia.

Leaving imponderables aside, we should perhaps return to the point of departure. Baathism is the official ideology of Arab countries extending from the Mediterranean coast to the Iranian frontier and the head of the Gulf. In Syria, at least, its position seems secure. Any approach to the intricate problems of the Levant and the Middle East will for the foreseeable future have to take account of the Baath. Its shadow does not grow less.

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The State and the Intellectuals in Modern Syria the Case of Tib Tizini-A Draft

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This paper attempts to situate the writings of an influential Marxist political thinker, Tib Tizini, in terms of the politics and culture of modern Syria. To do this we turn to a model of Syrian history, which emphasizes an internal dynamic, a model quite useful for the study of intellectuals, yet one , which is somewhat at variance with the dominant ethnic-mosaic model generally relied on in Syrian studies. It thus seems appropriate to begin with a discussion of paradigms after, which we propose to analyze hegemony in Syria through the concept of Historical Road, a concept introduced by the Italian Communist Antonio Gramsci in his studies of Italy and Russia. Following Gramsci's approach, we characterize the dynamics of Syria through its various phases from the Mandate up to the late 1960's as similar to the dynamics of Italy and Egypt, i.e. we can term Syrian history of this period," Italian Road". We then find a fundamental rupture, i.e., a break with the logic of this past history and experience of an Italian Road sort. This rupture occurs in the late 1960's and early 1970's; it is followed by a social formation whose internal social dynamic corresponds to a Russsian Road state. Against this historical background, it is possible to interpret the formulations of the dominant writers, to pose the question of what choices they made within the framework of their constraints. The last section of the paper raises the problem of interpreting the specifically political discourse in Russian Road regimes, its reliance on vagueness and

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the use of codes . These two parts of the paper , first the conflicts in Syrian thought during the Italian and Russian Road phases and second the problems of reading political writings from Russian road regimes come together in an interpretation of two books by the professor and radical thinker Tib Tizini.

The role of the intellectuals and the state in modern Syria is an undeveloped field in Western language studies. The reasons are the usual ones- inappropriate paradigms and lack of accurate information in an accessible form. The chief culprit in the first category is the ethnic- mosaic approach called in Syrian studies Alawite-ism. (1) By privileging the more static and self-enclosing features of society like race and ethnicity, the ethnic-mosaic approach actually conceals change by making it appear as random intergroup conflict. This is not to dismiss race and ethnicity. They are important in most countries, even those like Syria where they are not the juridical or legal political basis of rule. They are of course essential categories for a historian concerned with ideology. But ideology is only a part of and not the whole of historical determination , as many leading writers have also made it out to be thereby falling into error.

Syrian history of the Mandate through the mid 1960's follows the pattern which Gramsci discerned for Italy, and which in Middle Eastern history one finds also in the case of Egypt.(2) In such" Italian-Road" states, the ruling class plays off a class order composed of citizens against a peasantry. While most of the class order is urban, it overlaps with the rural capitalist classes of the most prosperous regions or "Piedmont" to use Gramsci's formulation. Thus we claim that the Syrian countryside

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has an advanced and politically influential region, its Piedmont, near Hims and Hama, and its wealth in Latakia and its "Southern Question" or its poverty and absentee landlords from the Jazira. The main phases of Syrian and Italian history whether one looks to the colonial period or beyond were corporatist or liberal. During liberal ages, open-market capitalism flourished. Liberal ages prompt the development of a labor movements; labor movements frighten the middle classes, who reluctantly give their allegiance to corporatists , promising growth through discipline. Thus while Syria never produced a Mussolini or an Abd al-Nasir, the officer regimes in Syria did tend toward the same ideology of economic self-sufficiency, freedom from imperialist control, and support of national industry in the manner of the other examples cited. Just as the Mezzagorno supported , the Italian idealist critic Benedetto Croce, so the Jazira has its Naples (wrongly called a"Vatican") for the famous sufi Ahmad Jiznawi at Tall Ma'ruf. (3) As is the case with Italy and Egypt, the theatre plays a major cultural role in Syria; infact the main trend in theatre, the Syro-Egyptian School, has long shown a strong Italian influence. In contrast to the etatism of Iraqi theatre, the Syrian theatre is a commercial theatre.

From a comparative history perspective, the unusual development in Syrian history was the structural and political change in the period 1966-1970, which we term a rupture. From the Italian Road perspective on Syria, one would have expected a gradual loosening of the state controls and a return to a liberal age, as actually took place in Egypt, following upon the 1967 defeat and the general stagnation. Instead in Syria, a change

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took place to a new form of polity , which bore no organic relation to the politics which went before. Of course, there was a surface continuity; many influential people retained their positions of authority, but the structure as a structure underwent a fundamental change, independently of the people. Ideologies of the left and the right underwent subtle changes, and finally the role of intellectuals changed, as we show below in the case of a major thinker, Tib Tizini, whose writings span this watershed.

Let us begin with a more detailed look at the social transformation including the rupture. Where the old regime promoted the development of a broad-based citizenry , largely urban and middle class in nature, one with heavy mercantile leanings, the new regime favored the narrower citizenry of the Party member, and the middle classes of the capital city. The New Ba'th perceived the middle classes of provincial towns to be adversaries and it dropped the favoritism of advanced rural areas , the Piedmonts. In the view of the new regime, secularly- minded liberals or Muslim-oriented groups are equated with alternative centers of power and thus are a threat. As a result, liberalism could only exist if it joined the state and did not try to function from civil society. Naturally , the lawyers guild and many prominent individuals resisted the imposition of a Russian Road regime and on occasion the regime assasinated liberal patriots to the amazement of onlookers. The rupture appear to have both defeated and traumatized the secular middle classes , suggesting that on some levels even though they were the primary victims they partly internalized the structural logic of the

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changes. Active opposition to the New Ba'th fell to the Muslim Brotherhood, which grew in the 1970's , and galvanized support from constituencies, which saw themselves recently delegitimated, including older religious groups like the sufi orders, and more generally the economically disaffected strata of the middle class seeking welfare. The regime clashed with the Muslim Brotherhood, denouncing it, even through the Mufti of Damascus, and attacked it militarily. Finally the shift to a Russian-Road type of regime was also accompanied by a change in attitude toward the peasantry from one of cultural condescension, shown in the humor of the old theatre to a more functionalist one, one with a more radical sense of the peasant as " other".

Several features of Syria after 1970 have direct parallels to Russian and Soviet history. In Russia, the pressure on the peasantry found an outlet in the peasant spiritual quest for Saint Sophia, the Great Mother; the Islamic equivalent , Fatima, important in Turkey and in Iraq among the underclasses emerges in the Jazira among the" Kurdish" peasantry. The Jewish Question in Syria after 1970 comes to resemble the one of a Russian-style autocracy and no longer one of an Egyptian corporatist nationalism. Thus, in recent years, Western liberals express concern over the right of Jews to leave Syria, a right denied them by a state, which needs them. Finally, the structural logic of the regime led to internal massacres or pogroms such as in Hama in 1982. As in the Russian case, the state claimed no bond and could expect no loyalty.

Turning to the intellectual life of the 1970's, one feels the weight of a preeminent Damascus over the secondary towns

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reflected in a number of domains, e.g. in the cult of Ommayad court history. Preeminence also translates into social isolation; isolation of the national capital and its culture from the rest of the country induces cosmopolitanism , a concern with self and world, reflected in recent Syrian thought in a fascination with the universal thinker, Ibn Khaldun, and for the world historian Arnold Toynbee. The rise of a Russian-Road culture transformed the Syrian relation to the Palestine question as well. One finds a breakdown of the moral legalistic outlook toward the Lebanese and the Palestinians found in the 1960's emphasis on the progressive struggle of all Arab peoples against Zionism. In the 1970's, the Neo-Ba'th took a more pragmatic, chesslike approach, which, if never fully-articulated , made the Palestinians sacrificial pawns as was the case in Jordan in 1970. Similarly, Lebanon in Ba'thi thought went from an old irredentist region to a frontier with its own distinct function. This change appeared in the Syrian support for the Maronites.

Culture transitions are not so smooth as military coups. The 1970's has been witness to an ongoing collision between the new Ba'thi culture and the rearguard of old Middle class culture in the universities and in the theatre. The Ba'this expanded the technical faculty in the University of Damascus and opened a new technical university, the Ba'thi University. However, they did not made deep inroads into the Language Academy; its leadership and much of the membership came from the liberal past.(4) For their part, the Syrian liberal intellectuals have not had the power to write social and provincial history as this would be an open challenge to the new political division of peasant and

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citizen. In what seems like a compromise the regime has tolerated the writing of some social history by foreigners. French scholars at the French Archeological Institute , following an Annales-School approach, have often been the beneficiary of unusual research opportunities. Such politics would appear the best way to explain the broader range of concerns of the French in their Damascus institute than in the sister institute in Cairo over the past generation. For example, the urban historian, Jean-Paul Pascual and the labor historian, Elizabeth Longueresse have had no counterpart in the French Cairo scene. Further the greatest French scholarship on Egypt, the writings of Andre Raymond, was actually done from Damascus.

An appropriate place to look in Syrian thought to find the transition to a Russian - road regime comes in the treatment of the peasant question in scholarly work and in fiction. The regime's involvement in the peasant question has been of course quite important given the social base of the later Ba'th and given as well the long sentimental history of the early Ba'th going back to Ikram Hourani. Far more than Iraq, Syria has developed the peasant as a literary figure. In some Syrian stories the peasant returns to the village from the city by choice, this was never the case in Iraq. (5) What the later Ba'th undertook by itself and with foreign scholarly help was to deny historical agency to the peasant. One of Syria's greatest historians, Dr.' Abd Allah Hanna, disputed the Ba'thi view of history in a series of books on peasant movements in modern Syrian history. The government's response was to deny him a university job. (6)

Despite many concessions , which liberals have made, they

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still wage a struggle to control the direction of university life. The Ba'this encouraged Arab-oriented foci like the much-touted center for the history of Arab Science at the University of Aleppo. The center's publication, an international journal issued from the late 1970's onward, has been a regime emblem. The Ba'this have emphasized the importance of Damascus against the rest of the country by concentrating the ancient remains such as from Ebla in the Mathaf Dimashq(The National Museum) located in Damascus. The party has also tried to influence the writing of modern history by getting more emphasis placed on the genealogy of the political elite. This is apparent from the great weight given to the political memoirs of the official heroes of the party . A prime example is Antun Sa'ada's struggles against the French from 1921 onward, which appear in thirteen volumes of memoirs published between 1975 and 1984. But there is resistance; the liberal establishment in the universities attempted a cautious challenge to the party-oriented hero history in such ventures as the Bilad al-Sham Conferences, cosponsored in the 1970's with the University of Jordan. These conferences on "geographical Syria" amalgamated a range of critics of Ba'th party hagiography.

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To make this clear let us consider the second Bilad Al-Sham conference, an academic conference, held in Damascus in 1978 as a political event ; it had 72 participants, none apparently from the East Bloc.(7) Western scholars , who were invited, were encouraged to publish social historical studies, a point to which we have already drawn attention. Among the Syrian contributions was a paper on Palestine and Zionism by a specialist on that

subject, Dr. Ahmad Tarabayn, chairman of the History Department of the University of Damascus. The specialist on women's studies at the University of Damascus, Dr. Layla Sabbagh, gave a paper on Arab women before Islam. Dr. 'Abd al-Karim Rafeq, also from the history department of the University of Damascus, gave a a paper on his speciality, Ottoman Syria. Rafeq represented the more explicitly liberal trend. While noting decline in the Ottoman period, he found much worth studying in it as well. At the conference, Ahmad Tarabayn disagreed with Rafeq's views. Gossip turned what was political as we have tried to show in this paper into something personal or even communal. Age as well as ideology was a factor. Some of the Ba'this were younger than the liberals; the formation of the well-known liberals was before the historical rupture of the late 1960's e.g., such figures as Zafir Al-Qasimi, the editor of the Qamus Sina'at Shamiya clearly had Muhammad Kurd 'Ali as a model.

Also attending the conference was a contingent of liberal historians from Jordan including Nicola Ziadeh, Sulayman Musa and Adnan Bakhit. The Ba'this apparently had them on the defensive. Adnan Bakhit gave a brief intervention defending the Princeton Millet Conference against the charge that it was Zionist-inspired. A Turkish historian, Erjumend Kuran, gave a paper on the Arab nationalist hero Sati' Al-Husri, insisting that he was an Ottoman intellectual and that he got his ideas on Arab nationalism from Ziya Gokalp. The radical historians of Syria, arguably those best-respected in the Arab world, Badr Al-Siba'i, Dhuqan Qarqut and Abdullah Hanna were not invited. One, Abdullah Hanna, came and commented on papers from the floor.

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The most logical interpretation of the conference is that as a whole , it was a form of liberal praxis to influence the direction of the Ba'th, but that it failed. It failed not simply because of the distribution of opinion at a given moment but because Ba'th Party rule itself had changed. The irredentist notion of historical Syria proposed by the conference was now irrelevant to the Ba'th's conception of the new Lebanon and Jordan as a Syrian Frontier and to the New Ba'th's approach to the Palestinians. The Ba'thi strategy was no longer irredentist but had become one of stirring up the water politically or culturally in Lebanon and Jordan to divert problems off the homefront. The Palestinian question in Syria had changed in an equally fundamental sense. In the post 1970 phase, the stereotype of Palestinians in Syria went from the emblem of Arabism to that of troublemaker; the regime accuses Palestinians when sabotage takes place in Damascus.

The area of the greatest impact of liberalism in Syrian society has no doubt been in the theatre , far more there than in the university. Theatre as we noted above has great prestige in Syria; for many years the Ba'th scarcely attempted to penetrate it, a significant concession for a mobilization regime, which would tend to want to dramatize political committment through theatre. Through the 1950's and 1960's, state subsidies to a number of theatres appear to have been more of a recognition of their popularity than an effective means of their control. However, In 1977, regime pressure on the stage was apparent when the Ministry of Culture and National Guidance began to publish a theatre criticism journal. Through all these years, as we noted

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above, the liberal trend had emphasized Italian- style comedy and melodrama as its favored form, sharing with Egypt in a Syro-Lebanese- Egyptian tradition of such genres. Furthermore, throughout this century, aspiring actors from these countries have gone to study in Italy and for their part the Italians, e.g., the readership of the Italian orientalist journal , Oriente Moderno, have been among the Europeans most interested in Syrian and Egyptian culture .

Yet as early as the 1950's and 1960's, the liberal outlook of many writers dictated an increasingly serious repertoire in the theatre. This new orientation was at first somewhat internationalist, but by the 1970's, increasingly Syrian producers drew from the works of Syrian playrights. Among the new Syrian playrights was Mustafa Hallaj , whose " A Special Night Festival For Dresden" along with other plays dealt with war and human responsibility in the aftermath of the 1967 defeat. Another prominent playright of recent years, Ali Uqla Ursan, produced a play in 1979 called " The Masks" in which human communication has been sharply diminished and men have been turned into spectators. Sadala Wanus, an even better known playright , also made use of masks. Like Brecht, he sought to involve the audience . Walid Iklasi another major voice evoked the alienation and despair felt by intellectuals in the 1970's.(8)

To turn now toward our more narrow theme of Tib Tizini, one should observe that the conflict of the Ba'th and the liberals conditioned the direction of Marxist thought in Syria not just because Marxist thought was also produced in these same universities but because of the close but uncomfortable alliance of the CP and the Ba'th. Thus, when we find the Party interested

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in the liberal version of Marxism of a Roger Garaudy, it is not possible to avoid looking at it as political flirtation. This makes some sense as liberalism itself was undergoing fundamental changes in the 1970's as well, forcing the party to make a fateful choice, either to stand pat or to try to fight the Ba'th again. Of course, as Syrian liberalism became more elitist, the matter was resolved; the CP retained its inside position and gained by its loyalty to the Ba'th. In doing so, however, it limited the range of critical thought it could permit.

As a prelude to a discussion of Tizini's main themes, We now turn from the problems of the party, the state, and the university culture to more specific problems of how to read political books from a Russian Road state, be it those of the ruling party or those of its allies. Such writings are often vague; explanations for events appear to be the result of the will of the party luminaries. But, fortunately here again , we can take general sociological models , like the Russian Road , to help in clarifying what would be an appropriate type of analysis. This comparative approach reveals that infact a miasma of vague terms and unclear references to key personalities offered as causal explanation of everything are general features of political writings in dozens of countries. If for Syria, the figure Hafiz Al-Asad or more generally Alawite-ism is supposed to explain everything and if primary sources and major Syrian commentary literature support such a claim, then a comparative approach to Russian Road regimes reminds us that even the cult of Stalin , while once equally omnipresent in the Russian context as Asad is today in the Syrian one, does not have to stifle the

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writing of Russian history. In a recent book on the subject of elite political discourse, Peter Dale , an English orientalist, who studied the Japanese elite culture, found a Japanese word, Nihonjinron, for the miasmic blanket effect of Japanese uniqueness.(9) Nihonjinron implies among other things that only Japanese can understand Japan and even if one rejects this as a self-serving obscurantism, the miasma makes it difficult to distinguish trends sharply, as writers from across the cultural and political spectrum impute that their ideas arose from those of the political leadership.

The problem of interpretation of texts is compounded in the case of the Syrian Communists for various other reasons as well. First, given that were really so powerless in the official context, it is difficult to know how much they believed in the official verbal games and how much they simply complied outwardly with them. This opens up a related problem of how one should interpret the writings of any of the Marxist grupuscules, which flickered on and off during the Mandate? Second, how does the elitist organization of the party, one characterized in all accounts as dominated by a single individual, Khalid Bakdash, affect what is written? Going back one step, should we interpret this centralized organization of the party as a result of Bakdash or as a reflection of the party's alliance with a state of a certain sort, which it mirrors? Whatever the results of such inquiries, one subject is made clear by comparative study. There has been little room in recent times for the kind of factionalism , in thought or deed, common enough in the Egyptian or Indian Communist parties.

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The Syrian Communist Party's intolerance toward deviation is obviously a point of some importance for interpreting the writing of the past generation. A brief chronology of the major events of the Party will serve to make clear the constraints of critical thought.(10) When the party joined the ruling alliance, and the form was a Russian road state, the CP began to share in the general paranoia of coups and conspiracies, although some such attributes existed even earlier. For example in 1965, when a Communist splinter group with Maoist tendencies , the Arab Workers and Peasants, arose the official CP had its members arrested. Thereafter the Party was able to crush a number of splinter movements calling for democracy in the Party. These became common around 1970 when the Party had joined the ruling alliance. One such splinter group of that period was the Arab Communist Marxist Leninist Party; another arose in 1972 backing the stand of Daniel Ni'mah for party democracy over against Bakdash. This was followed in later years by the more clandestine opposition of Riyad al-Turk. In addition to democratic opposition, another trend within Syrian communism concerned itself more directly with the context of Marxism in Syria. Some of the well-known writings of Ilyas Murqus and Tayyib Tizini, to which we shall turn presently, reveal the attempt by left intelllectuals to ground the party policy in principles and analyses and not simply in the realpolitik of the stronger partner in the alliance.

Turning now to the Marxist theoretical writing of Tib Tizini, a professor of philosophy and sociology in Hims, one finds the conflicts both of the university and of the Party ,

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which we have been outlining. Tizini's analyses are also attempts to adjust to the profound changes of Syria crossing the watershed of the early 1970's and then confronting the challenge of the Muslim Brotherhood. They take the form of a literary challenge as well as Tizini eschews the jargon of Marxism and Ba'thism , neither invoking code words nor the names of luminaries to create his explanations or to justify his ideas. In his Program for a New Conceptualization For Arab Thought in The Middle Ages(1971), Tizini distinguished between materialist and idealist trends in philosophy in early Greek history, pursuing the discussion over into the medieval Arab culture. In contrast to Husayn Muruwah, the Lebanese writer, and to several other Islamic Marxists, Tizini does not find philosophy in the Arabian peninsula, although he noted an atomist trend disguised in a religious idiom. Philosophy in the Arab world crystallized in Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. Among the distinguishing features of this book was his inclusion of Al-Maqrizi, the Egyptian Mamluk historian. Tizini treated al-Maqrizi as the only distinguished student of Ibn Khaldun(11). He saw Al-Maqrizi as living in a society witnessing the penetration of feudalism on a wide scale, with a concommitant debasement of the pre-existing capitalist sector. Al-Maqrizi did not offer a new abstract approach but applied in detail the prescriptions of the Muqaddima focussing more deeply than his teacher had on the role of various personalities and their sensibilities in the molecular movement of society. Al-Maqrizi's approach was materialist, focussing on price fluctuation and Nile water supply as the base of social upheaval as in his Ighathat al-umma bi-kashf al-ghumma. To the

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above he conjoined numerous insights about social class and oppression. The interest of the ruler in amassing wealth was an important and critical focus. While Tizini's interpretation of al-Maqrizi, given here in quite an abbreviated manner, has some obvious novelty for specialists, our interest lies in its rationale for Syrian thought after the defeat of 1967. One surmises that Tizini introduced Al-Maqrizi, a medieval empiricist and an author, who portrayed the details of middle class life under threat, to convey the breakdown of his own civil society.

Let us turn [redacted] now to consider Tizini's major work of recent times. In doing so, it is helpful to recall that the period termed here, Russian Road, is more familiar in Syrian thought as the emergency conditions resulting from the invasion of Lebanon in 1982. These events crystallized in the minds of a large number of people the need to take a new critical look at Syria. For some, who were radical , this meant to abandon the idea that the state of emrgency was temporary. Tizini's book from this period was Hawla mishkilat al-thawra wa al-thaqafa fi al-'alim al-thalith, al-watan al-'Arabi namudhajan, marhala ma ba'd Bayrut 1982(Damascus, 1983)(fourth edition). This book, a theoretical study of revolution and culture in the Third World, was widely read in the Arab world. For Tizini, the theoretical extroversion to Third Worldism from the earlier Arab-Islamicism is a significant change. One finds in it the Russian Road view of a Third World state confronted by imperialism over the Italian road stress on internal factors like feudalism.

Among other claims, Tizini sets out to prove that states, which have mixed social formations, cannot follow the path of

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historical development of the West or the East Bloc. The implementation of new technology does not have the same political effects(12)Infact nothing short of a new empirical approach is required for every aspect of society. The present reality has no past model. It is an alliance of a feudally-oriented ruling class with world imperialism blocking the growth of organized working classes in the Third World. The blocked development of working classes results in a weakening of progressive social ideology, even of thought.

Conclusion

Despite its diversity and richness, Syrian intellectual life has not been a part of Western research. The researcher faces all the problems , which go with undeveloped fields, among them, inappropriate paradigms and lack of information. This paper argued that the orientalist approach, which relies on an ethnic-mosaic image of Syria, has never produced an historical understanding of modern Syria, either from the left or from the right, inside or outside of universities. For this reason , we adopt an alternative approach indebted to Gramsci's concept of Historical Roads and to his theory of intellectuals. We postulated that the surface appearance of ethnicity would not have the same explanatory factor as class and region as Gramsci understood them in his analysis of Italy. To this claim, we added yet another, that in recent years Syria witnessed a fundamental discontinuity, a rupture with its own past, one going well-beyond the conflict of generations or shifting phases within the same Historical Road. This we discern in the structural transformations in Syria in the late 1960's, one, which

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eliminated the role of the liberal and of civil society as independent forces against the state. We tried to prove these points by pointing to cultural trends, discussing the politics of a Syrian history conference and of the theatre. Finally, we focussed on an important thinker Tib Tizini, one somehow neglected in Western scholarship. A parting thought. Writers like Sadiq Al-Azm, Husayn Muruwah, Ilyas Murqus, Tib Tizini and others would serve as interesting doctoral dissertations topics . Tizini began as part of a generation looking for a revolutionary heritage in Islam. Later caught up in the Lebanese invasion, he tried to relate the impact of imperialism to Syrian and Lebanese politics.(13)

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FOOTNOTES

1-A typical book in this paradigm is Nikolaos Van Dam, The Struggle for Power in Syria(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

2-Antonio Gramsci," Notes on Italian History," Selections From The Prison Notebooks edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. (LONDON: LAWRENCE + WISHART, 1971) CH. 3.

3-Frederik De Jong, " Les Confreries Mystiques Musulmanes au Machreq Arabe: Centres de Gravites, Signes de Declin et de Renaissance," inLes Ordres Mystiques Dans L'Islam -Cheminements et Situation Actuelle,edited by A. Popovic and G. Veinstein(Paris: CNRS, 1985)p. 215.

4- the Majalla of the Arab Language Academy of Damascus periodically lists the year in which members joined. This leaves little question about 'Adnan al-Khatib and Husni Subh, et. al.

5-The point is a contrast of Syria and Iraq before they converge in a Russian road model , i.e., state versus peasantry. For Syria, Samir Ruhi Faysal,Malamih fi al-riwaya Al-Suriya(Damascus, 1979)pp. 242ff. ; for Iraq, Baqir Jawwad Al-Zajjaji, Al-Riwaya Al-'Iraqiya wa qadiya al-rif,(Baghdad, 1980).

6-Antonino Pellitteri, " 'Abd Allah Hanna, storico marxista del movimento operaio Siro-Libanese," Oriente Moderno v. 58(1978) pp. 69-78.

7- I base this on my notes as a participant.

8-There are many accounts of Syrian drama; two recent articles by Admer Gouryh are" Recent Trends in Syrian Drama,"World Literature Today v.60(1986) pp. 216-220 ; "The Fictional World of Walid Iklasi," ibid. v.58(1984) pp.23-27.

9-Peter Dale,The Myth of Japanese Uniqueness(New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986).

10-Richard Staar(ed.) Yearbook on International Communist Affairs(Stanford: Hoover, 1986).

11- Tib Tizini, Ru'ya..., p.398.

12-Tib Tizini, Hawla mishkilat...,p. 418.

13- A book on Tizini and Husayn Muruwah is, Tawfiq Sallum (ed.)Al-Marksiya wa al-turath Al-'Arabi Al-Islami(Beirut, 1980).

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REPONSES LOCALES A UNE POLITIQUE CULTURELLE

De la scolarisation des filles dans les campagnes de Hama

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Abstract: Dans le cadre d'une politique visant à transformer la société et plus particulièrement à rééquilibrer les rapports ville-campagne, l'Etat syrien a depuis un quart de siécle multiplié les interventions en milieu rural dans le but de susciter et orienter développement économique et changement culturel, encadrement des productions et des populations.

La formation donnée à la jeunesse masculine et féminine dans les écoles lycées, universités et les organisations populaires engagent des changement en profondeur de la société. La redistribution des rôles et statuts féminins est une question particulièrement sensible dans le débat qui s'instaure autour de la modernité.

Par delà les déterminants économiques, quel poids donner aux représentations, aux identités locales et aux appartenances communautaires?

Le mohafaza de Hama avec sa diversité de populations et ses caractéristiques historiques est un lieu où l'application de la politique culturelle suscite des réponses diversifiées et controversées.

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Paper presented at the Conference on Politics and the economy in Syria convened in the University of London (SOAS) on 20 May 1987.

THE CONCEPT OF GREATER SYRIA

Ghayth Armanazi

Abstract: It has become fashionable to link the regional strategy of the Syrian leadership - especially its assertiveness and determination to exercise ultimate control over its wider Levantine environment that have become increasingly manifest over the last decade - with a vision of a Greater Syria that is assumned to be the guiding light of that leadership.

This paper traces the historical roots of Greater Syria, beginning with the early frustrated attempts at Arab independence centred on a united Syrian kingdom with Damascus as its capital. It also discusses the Arab unity projects of the 1930s and 1940s which - prior to the establishment of the League of Arab States - focused almost entirely on versions of Greater Syria. The Greater Syria Plan of Amir Abdullah, the Fertile Crescent Project of Nuri Al Said and the ideology of Antun Saadeh's Syrian Social Nationalist Party are placed in this context.

In today's Syria, although Baathism is the official ideology - an ideology which in theory rejects regional Arabism in favour of the purist ideal of a united Arab Nation from the Atlantic to the Gulf - there are indications that a process of gradual consolidation within geographically distinct regions is seen as a more realistic approach towards achieving the ultimate national goal of full Arab unity. The assumed premises for such a policy - a concept akin to Greater Syria - is muted, but there are increasing signs that it is being more openly aired in higher Syrian political circles.

Biographical note: Mr. Armanazi is a writer on Arab politics

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SYRIA'S REGIONAL RELATIONS

Ivor Lucas

Abstract: Syrians believe that history has bequeathed them a legacy entitling them to Arab leadership. But this aspiration has been frustrated by the challenges from other contenders and by Syria's own internal preoccupations.
In the Arab/Israel context, Syria demands a comprehensive solution based on a negotiation between equals. She suspects Jordan and the PLO of willingness to reach a partial settlement, and is determined to frustrate this while at the same time controlling the PLO's "militant tendency".
Syria has an ambivalent relationship with Saudi Arabia although their regimes have little in common. Syrian economic weakness and Saudi political vulnerability combine to produce a community of interests.
Rivalry with Iraq has dictated an unnatural alliance with non-Arab, religious extremist Iran. But the strains are beginning to show, not least in Lebanon where Syria's objectives are incompatible with Iran's, while Syria's role both in Lebanon and in the Gulf War increases her isolation in the Arab world. Nevertheless, Syria's aim in Lebanon is tutelage rather than take-over.
Isolation will not in itself cause a change in Syria's alignments; Syria remains a vital element in the Arab/Israel issue; and "Greater Syria" is more of a pipe-dream than a policy option. The West accordingly has to deal with Syria "warts and all": and to do so could promote the underlying Western interest in Middle East stability.

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Biographical note: Ivor Lucas is a former diplomat whose career was spent mainly in the Arab world and included appointments as British Ambassador to Oman (1979-81) and to Syria (1982-84).

SYRIA'S REGIONAL RELATIONS

Ivor Lucas

Background

"It is unwise," wrote Albert Hourani (1946 p 146), "to ignore the historic imagination of peoples, even when its content is partly legend and only partly history". All Arabs possess such an imagination. Syrians have a more vivid one than most. Viewing the sweep of history from Umayyad times, when for 100 years from 650 to 750 AD Damascus was the centre of the new Arab Empire; through the Crusades from the 12th to the 14th centuries, when geographical Syria saw the intrusion of the Christian West repelled; to the Arab Renaissance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, of which Syria has justifiable claims to have been the cradle, Syrians believe that they have inherited an historical legacy which entitles them to be leaders of the region in general and champions of the Arab cause in particular.

Two factors have tended to spoil this vision. The first is the age-old challenge from other contenders for the regional title. In more recent times Egypt, by virtue of its large population, comparative military strength and relative sophistication, was virtually acknowledged as the leader of the Arab World until Anwar Sadat abandoned the role in favour of the dubious advantages of peace with Israel. Iraq was then well-placed to don the mantle of leadership: rich in resources which included other natural advantages in addition to oil, and with a population neither too large nor too small, she lost her chance when she became embroiled in the continuing and debilitating war with Iran. Saudi Arabia's enormous financial strength and the King's position as Custodian of the Holy Places meant that she too might have been a front-runner in the leadership stakes - except that this horse was a reluctant starter: the Saudis prefer to exercise their influence in quieter, more subtle ways than by assuming open leadership. Nevertheless whether these contenders were actual, potential or unwilling, none of them was prepared to see Syria become the Arab champion: as we shall see, regional rivalries have overridden the need for Arab unity, and in the process no dominant power has emerged.

The second factor damaging the prospect of Syrian supremacy has been Syria's failure to get its own act together. Until 1970, the independence which Syria had gained 25 years earlier was characterised by political instability. The heterogeneous society which history had bequeathed her along with the visions of regional hegemony had combined with external pressures to produce a series of coups, counter-coups and changes of govern-ment, most of them associated with the military and influenced by the aims of outside powers to win over Syria to their particular causes. (Patrick Seale (1965) gives the best account of this process up to 1958). The

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emergence in 1970 of Hafiz al Asad as leader of the Ba'thist regime which had first come to power in 1963 heralded a new stability, albeit largely under the aegis of a minority group. The Alawis from the Latakia area of north-western Syria constituted about 10% of the total population. But they had the advantages over the Sunni majority, which had ruled the country for 20 years up to 1963, of cohesion, a defined ideology (at least in the early stages) and control of what came to be the three levers of power in Syria - the Ba'th Party, the armed forces, and the intelligence services. Moreover, social and economic progress was widespread in the first flush of Ba'thist rule, and the previously underprivileged found a place in the sun.

Despite this, the regime has not had things by any means all its own way. Stability has come to be regarded by some Syrians as having been bought at too great a price in terms of authoritarian rule. Religious and other opposition (sometimes masquerading under a cloak of religious respectability) has resented the ruling group's becoming - as opponents see it - both "too secular and too sectarian". Such feelings were manifested most strongly in the Hama uprising of spring 1982, the ruthless repression of which virtually silenced the opposition for some years, though there were signs in 1985 and 1986 of renewed dissatisfaction. A further problem has been the economy, suffering from the burden of defence expenditure, doctrinaire policies, declining production in a number of spheres, and persistent drought. Preoccupation with the Lebanese imbroglio has added to President Asad's political and economic difficulties. He has not therefore been able consistently to assert the regional authority which he may have thought history had assigned him and which his shrewdness and pragmatism have enabled him to demonstrate now and again.

Against this background of external rivalry and internal discontent, let us now examine in greater detail the constraints imposed by Syria's relations with the other principal players on the regional stage.

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Arab/Israel; Jordan & PLO

Pride of place must be given to Syria's attitude to the question affecting all regional politics, whether foreign or domestic: the Arab/Israel conflict. President Asad's approach is a combination of the severely practical and the frankly idealistic. Events have shown, in his view, that it is useless to contemplate negotiating with the Israelis unless and until one can do so from a position of approximate parity or, as he calls it, "strategic balance". This includes military strength but embraces also political, economic and technological equality. Syrians argue that Camp David, together with the subsequent Egyptian/Israeli peace treaty, and "Camp Shultz" (as they referred to the abortive Lebanese/Israeli accord of 17 May 1983 which they were able to torpedo within a year), show only too clearly what happens if negotiations are conducted on any other basis than parity: the result is a partial (in both senses of the word) solution instead of a just and comprehensive settlement. Hence Syrian opposition to the kind of "capitulationist" peace-process which Damascus saw King Hussain and Chairman Arafat trying to initiate, with maximum encouragement but minimum help from the United States, between 1984 and 1986. To the objection that this "no-negotiation" stance is all very well, but that it may equally result in the Israelis securing their objectives - by default - pending the achievement by the Arabs of "strategic balance"

and that meanwhile the Palestinians are suffering under the harsh yoke of occupation, the Syrian response is twofold. First, that "strategic balance" may not take all that long, in view of the political and economic disarray within Israel and the increasingly strong position of the Arabs. Secondly, even if it were to take 200 years, that is no longer than it took to expel the Crusaders, and right and justice will again triumph in the end. Whatever else may be thought of it, this argument seems to say something about the Syrian capacity for self-delusion (a defect not characteristic of Hafiz al Asad himself); and about Syrian sympathies for the Palestinians as people, as distinct from their feelings about the Palestine cause. A more positive aspect of the Syrian approach, however, is that it counsels restraint in provoking an Israeli attack on Syria until Syria is ready for it. Despite the Israeli "annexation" of the Golan Heights in December 1981 following their earlier occupation of this Syrian territory, the disengagement agreement in the area negotiated by Kissinger in 1974 continues to be observed. Syria's involvement in hostilities when Israel invaded Lebanon in June 1982 was the least that the "throbbing heart of Arabdom" could do, and was in any case brief.

Given this particular Syrian approach to the Palestine issue, and Syria's general ambitions to dominate the region, it is clear that Damascus will stop at nothing to prevent a "peace process" from which it is excluded and which could lead to another Israeli bite at the Arab cherry. It is doubtful whether even an independent Palestinian state would meet with Syrian approval unless it were to be under Syrian tutelage.

How far Syria felt obliged to undermine the Hussain/Arafat axis, or was content to leave it to American diplomacy - or the lack of it - to achieve its collapse, is a matter for debate. At all events, the break between the Jordanian monarch and the PLO Chairman was a double blessing for Syria. It led to one of those not infrequent rapprochements between Amman and Damascus, though it is doubtful whether this one will prove any more durable than the others. Apart from the obvious incompatibility of the two regimes - the "moderate" traditional, monarchy and the "hard-line", socialist, dictatorship - it is difficult to see a reconciliation taking place so long as each supports a different side in the Gulf War.

The break was also a further blow to Arafat, from whom Asad had finally become estranged in 1983, when the PLO Chairman publicly denounced the Syrian President, in Damascus of all places, for allegedly supporting the PLO factions which had broken away from the Organisation's mainstream under Arafat. The rupture between these two leaders underlines Syria's ambivalent attitude towards the PLO as a whole. Asad distrusts the "moderates" in the movement as liable to conclude a separate peace with Israel; but equally he is apprehensive that the "militants" might involve Syria in hostilities with Israel at times and places not of his choosing. For both reasons he wishes to establish Syrian control over the PLO. But the return of PLO fighters to Lebanon following their virtual expulsion in 1982 shows that Arafat is almost as great a survivor as Asad himself.

Saudi Arabia

If the regimes in Amman and Damascus are fundamentally incompatible, how much more so those in Damascus and Riyadh. Yet Syria and Saudi Arabia continue to indulge in a love/hate relationship which must puzzle the

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analysts. Part of the explanation has lain over the years in such transient factors as common hostility towards the Hashemites or friendship with Egypt; and personal relationships like that of Yusuf Yasin, the Syrian foreign affairs adviser to the House of Sa'ud in the 1950s or of Crown Prince Abdullah, connected by marriage with the Asad family today, and the principal "contact man" between Riyadh and Damascus. But the main reason for current Syrian friendly feelings towards the Kingdom is that of all the signatories to the Baghdad agreements of 1978 whereby Syria was promised $1.8 billion annually as one of the "confrontation states" the Saudis alone have continued to honour their commitments - though not necessarily to the extent originally envisaged.

Their payments have become such a significant factor in propping up the ailing Syrian economy that the question is often asked why the Saudis do not extract policy concessions in return e.g. by getting Syria to modify her "hard-line" over Arab/Israel. The answer is probably the same as that to the similar question often put to the Americans in the Israeli context: i.e. the claim that to try to use economic leverage would not make the recipients behave any better and might make them behave a good deal worse. Hafiz al Asad is certainly not the man to accept dictation whether from Riyadh or from Moscow. (One Russian Ambassador in Damascus complained that "the Syrians take everything from the Soviet Union except advice"). A further reason for Saudi complaisance may well be their recognition that Syria is, after all, the major combatant against Israel: to help her financially therefore eases the conscience. More negatively perhaps, the House of Saud perceives its vulnerability to radical Arab criticism of its close association with the West, and particularly with Washington, and reckons that such criticism could well be orchestrated from Damascus if it were to suit the regime there to do so. The Saudi/Syrian relationship is, in short, based on a somewhat uneasy community of interests.

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Iraq/Iran

But the most difficult of all Syria's regional relationships to understand are those with Iraq and Iran. Prima facie, Damascus and Baghdad have much in common: their Arabdom; their shared history; their ruling Ba'th Parties; the dominance of a minority group in each regime (Alawis in Damascus, Tikritis in Baghdad); and, of course, their hostility to Israel. At the same time, there is much dividing Damascus and Tehran: the traditional enmity between Arab and Persian; the secular nature of the Asad regime and its determination to root out religious extremism within its own borders; its self-professed championship of the Arab cause - all very difficult to reconcile with an alliance with the epitome of Muslim fundamentalism in the region and with a state at war with one of Syria's Arab brothers.

The reality behind Syria's relations with Iraq is, however, that of an historical rivalry between Damascus and Baghdad since the days when the Abbasids usurped the leadership of the Arab empire from the Umayyads, reinforced in modern times by the antipathy between the two factions of the Ba'th Party (a kind of Moscow/Peking syndrome) and by the obsessive hatred between Hafiz al Asad and Saddam Hussain. The Syrians claim that their partnership with Iran has nothing to do with Arabism nor with Islam: it is

simply that Saddam has betrayed the Arab cause by diverting both attention and resources from the primary struggle against Israel by his foolhardy war against the Iranian Revolution, while Iran is committed as whole-heartedly as Syria to the confrontation with the "Zionist entity", which makes them natural allies. The alliance has been cemented - albeit with a few cracks from time to time - by the highly advantageous oil-and-economic agreement which Syria secured from Iran in 1982 when Damascus dealt the doughty blow against Baghdad of closing the pipeline through Syria to the Mediterranean which was then Iraq's principal outlet for its oil exports. What Syria sacrificed in terms of oil supplies and transit payments as a result of the closure was amply compensated by its agreement with Tehran.

Nevertheless, the Damascus/Tehran axis must have come under increasing strain. The activities of Khomeini's proteges in Lebanon, the Hizbollah, have not only contributed to the continuing instability there which Syria has been trying to resolve, but have presented a direct challenge to Syrian interests and could even threaten Damascus with a Muslim fundamentalist regime on her western flank in Beirut as well as the possibility of another on her eastern flank in Baghdad should the alliance succeed in toppling Saddam. Secondly, despite repeated Syrian protestations of assurances by Iran that she has no intention of occupying Arab territory, this line has become increasingly difficult to sustain, particularly since the incursion into the Fao peninsula early in 1986, and the further advance towards Basra a year later. The growing preoccupation of the Arab world with the threat from Tehran, and the extension and escalation of the Gulf War, inevitably put great strain on Syria's relations with the rest of the Arab world with the exception of the maverick regimes in Libya and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. Thirdly, the "Irangate" revelations in Washington have exposed connections between Iran and Israel which make something of a dent in the Syrian argument about the shared hostility of Damascus and Tehran towards Tel Aviv.

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Lebanon

Another issue which has tended to isolate Syria from her brother Arabs is her role in Lebanon. Looked at from a Syrian point of view, this has been essentially to hold the balance of power, which has meant throwing Syrian weight in the scales in favour of different parties to the conflict at different times, thus exposing Damascus to the charge of self-seeking opportunism at the least, and pursuing her alleged "Greater Syria" ambitions at the most. While there can be no doubt that Syria has been pursuing her own interests in Lebanon - which of the contending factions, whether inside or outside the country, has not? - a more charitable interpretation deserves consideration.

Syrians regard Syria and Lebanon (not without justification, both geographical and historical) as "two countries but one people". They therefore believe that the relationship between Damascus and Beirut is of a wholly different order from that between Beirut and any other capital. Hence their rejection of any idea that the presence of Israeli forces in Lebanon following the invasion of June 1982 was on a par with the presence of their own, which had the additional sanction of the Arab League and of (certain) Lebanese Governments. It was partly on the rock of this rejection that the 17 May 1983 accord between Israel and Lebanon, negotiated under American auspices (and therefore dubbed by the Syrians "Camp Shultz") foundered.

But the more fundamental reason why the proposed Israel/Lebanon treaty was scuppered by Damascus was that it would have undermined Syria's political and security objectives in Lebanon. These are:

(a) to ensure that Lebanon never becomes a channel through which an Israeli attack can be launched on Syria itself;

(b) to preserve Syrian influence in Beirut and totally exclude that of Israel;

(c) to bring about a more equitable balance of political power among the Lebanese both for its own sake and because this would best suit Syrian interests;

(d) to maintain Lebanon's Arab identity, and particularly to avoid her following Egypt out of the Arab ranks.

On this analysis, Syria does not wish to swallow Lebanon whole: to attempt to do so would risk choking, and at a time when Syria has enough indigestible items on her own plate. Syrian interests would best be served by a united and nominally independent Lebanon under her tutelage. For some time following the abrogation in March 1984 of the 17 May 1983 accord, it seemed possible that this aim might be achieved. Vice President Khaddam in particular worked feverishly to reconcile the conflicting groups in Lebanon on the basis of a constitutional settlement which he had first put forward in 1976. But not for the first time Damascus was to find that it was easier to destroy than to create. The differences among the Lebanese themselves, and their inability to think in terms wider than those of clan or confessional interests, combined with (understandable) suspicion of the Syrian role to produce a continuing cycle of violence and mistrust. Lebanon has become little more than a corpse, and the vultures vying for the pickings now include predominantly the Tehran-backed Shi'a and the Arafat-led Palestinians. The increasing role being played by these two elements was not the least of the reasons which prompted Asad to intervene in strength once more in February this year, in the search for security and a political settlement.

The Syrians recognise that the Shi'a, as the underprivileged one-third of the Lebanese population, are especially deserving of greater representation in the government of the country than they have traditionally enjoyed. The failure of the moderate Shi'a leadership to achieve this, despite their own sacrifices and Syrian efforts, makes it vulnerable to more extreme Shi'a elements with the Hizbollah in the vanguard. As for the Palestinians, PLO fighters have seeped back into Lebanon in considerable strength since their expulsion in 1982/3. While sympathising with their general anti-Israeli posture, the Syrians have serious reservations about them: Asad would not wish the Palestinians to provoke Israel into action which would involve Syria before she is ready for a confrontation; nor would he want the Palestinians - least of all those loyal to Arafat - to make a take-over bid for the government in Beirut. But even Asad's shrewdness has not yet found a way through the Byzantine complexities of the Lebanese internal scene, exacerbated by the struggle for power between Shi'a and Palestinians, and further complicated by his own relations with Iran. It has, however, counselled him to stop short of an outright annexation (pace the advocates of the "Greater Syria" theory) with the incalculable reper-

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cussions which this could involve. Whether such a move, or a more limited degree of Syrian hegemony of the kind suggested earlier as the more likely Syrian objective, would be better or worse for the regional and the wider international situation is a question discussed briefly at the end of this paper.

Others

It remains to say something of Syria's relations with the other important or notable countries in the region. While Egypt has remained in a backwater since the treaty with Israel, there are many Arabs who, given the right conditions, would gladly welcome her back into the Arab mainstream with all her claims to its leadership. The Syrians are not among them. Even if the essential prerequisite (for them) of tearing up the Camp David agreements and their aftermath were fulfilled, Damascus would not readily accept the challenge for regional supremacy which Cairo would then present. Syrian fingers were burned during the United Arab Republic experiment of 1958-61, and again when Egypt "defected" in the 1973 war, and the scars have yet to heal.

Further along the North African littoral lies the land with which Syria has been theoretically united since 1980. But co-habitation with Libya has not proved a comfortable experience. Syria has gained little in material terms from her richer partner. The moral support which they have given each other has been offset for Syria by the embarrassment of association with the Arab leader who is mistrusted by almost all the others. Not the least awkward consequence of this kiss of death was the uncomfortable menage a trois with Morocco when Qaddafi contracted that most unlikely Union in 1984.

Syria's best friend in the Maghreb has been Algeria, with whom she was joined in the "Steadfastness Front", as well as the common pursuit of socialism. But Algeria under Chadli ben Jadid has been moving in more moderate directions, which has to some extent distanced her from Syria, and left the P.D.R.Y. as the closest to Syria of all the Arab regimes.

Turkey deserves a mention as being Syria's largest neighbour with some of the problems which that implies: the dormant question of the Hatay, the border area ceded to Turkey in 1939 through the machinations of the French mandatory power - a loss which Syria has never accepted (official maps still show the frontier where it was before the cession); Turkish control of the upper reaches of the Euphrates, with consequent disputes over the effects of dam construction on the flow of water further down the river; and the perennial Kurdish question which has recently impinged on Turkish-Syrian relations. But by and large the relationship between the neighbours follows an even course, with history as well as geography exerting a natural influence.

Conclusions

Syria is variously described as being "isolated" in the Arab world because of her secular and radical domestic policies and her "hard-line" foreign policies; or as the key to the Arab/Israel problem because, as Kissinger put it, "the Arabs cannot make war without Egypt, nor peace without Syria";

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or as harbouring dangerous expansionist plans in the shape of "Greater Syria", which would unite under her banner the lands of what used to be called "geographical Syria" - i.e. the present-day Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Israel, including the occupied territories.

There is clearly truth in all these scenarios. But a few concluding remarks on each of them may be worth making.

First, as regards "isolation", this is a familiar position for the Syrians to find themselves in, and is unlikely in itself to cause them to change their policies. But there is nothing immutable about those policies themselves. Of course, so long as the Ba'th are in command the country will remain a secular state, and hostility towards Israel will continue. Within these parameters, however, there are differing views - on how the economy should be run, for example - and even a change of foreign alignments cannot be ruled out if balance of power considerations should dictate it. While Hafiz al Asad remains at the helm, policy will be formulated and conducted in a cautious and pragmatic manner. From the point of view of the outside world there is perhaps something to be said for a ship which steers a predictable, if contrary, course rather than one proceeding in unforeseeable and arbitrary directions. Moreover, the Syrian ship of state is unlikely to be handled as skilfully with another hand on the tiller than that of the present pilot. Even the removal of that hand would not necessarily mean a complete change of crew rather than a less effective captain. Therefore, short of outside events occurring which were beyond Syria's control, or a "palace revolution" being brought about by internecine quarrels, which at the moment appear unlikely, it would be prudent to assume that we are going to have to deal with Syria more or less as we know it for the foreseeable future. This means inter alia that "isolation" will be accepted if necessary, but equally the circumstances underlying it could change.

Secondly, as regards Syria's holding the "key" to the Arab/Israel issue, it is clear that any attempt to reach a settlement must take account of Syrian views, if only because of the negative, wrecking role which Syria can play. The "peace process" has so far got nowhere largely because the friends of the "moderate" Arabs have not given them the backing they need in order to proceed in the face of Syrian opposition. The West must surely decide whether to extend that support or to accept a Syrian-style approach to the problem. Either way, a significant change is implied in various entrenched attitudes. Recent more positive approaches towards proposals for an international conference, and American reactions to the revelations about Israeli activities in the Tower report and the Pollard case, suggest grounds for mild optimism in this connection.

Thirdly, one of the inhibiting factors about dialogue with Syria, apart from the unacceptable nature of the regime and its intractable hostility towards Israel, is the suspicion that to encourage Syria is to promote the realisation of Syrian aggrandisement in the shape of "Greater Syria". It is perhaps worth recalling that this aspiration had respectable antecedents when it was a cause espoused by King Abdullah and by Nuri Sa'id in the 1940s - each, of course, in different forms and for his own different reasons. My own view is that for Damascus it is a pipe-dream rather than a policy option. Certainly Syria wants to have the decisive voice in the region, but this does not necessarily mean extinguishing all others.

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If this assessment is correct, would such a Syrian role in the region automatically be contrary to Western interests? One distinguished historian of the Middle East (Longrigg S H 1958 pp 107, 108) commented that after World War I

> "A Syrian State including the whole of geographical Syria would from the outset have enjoyed important advantages, and Europe would have been spared at least one reiterated and not ill-founded reproach".

Although we cannot turn the clock back, and the circumstances of 1987 are very different from those of 1920, some of the same considerations still apply. Of course, if Syria is regarded as a Soviet satellite then any extension of her influence is ipso facto bad. But I do not happen to believe that this is the case - nor that it will be unless United States policies make it so. My reading of Western interests in the area is that they require above all stability. Syrian hegemony could at least help to provide that - at a price. If the West is not prepared to pay that price - which would be perfectly understandable - then it must logically adopt the alternative policy, which is to give full support to the moderates. At present, we appear to be doing neither, and to be getting the worst of both worlds: our friends are weakened and humiliated while those who are not our friends are gaining in influence.

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SYRIA AND THE SUPER-POWERS

Introduction

According to "Kissinger's Law", appearance and reality seldom meet in the Middle East. This is certainly true of Syria's relations with the Super-Powers. Anyone sitting in Damascus and reading the press, watching the television or listening to the radio would have the impression that the Soviet Union was the eternal friend of Syria and the United States her implacable foe. The fog of propaganda is not entirely misleading; but it conceals some important nuances. The object of this short paper is to try to disentangle the appearance from the reality.

Syria and the West

First of all, it is necessary to make some general observations about Syrian attitudes to the West. Both historically and geographically Syria has for the most part looked towards the West. The influence of the British and the French in the present century may not have been altogether benign, but so far as the Syrian populace thinks about the non-Arab outside world at all, it thinks in terms of Western Europe, the Americas and West Africa rather than the Eastern Bloc: there are, of course, substantial expatriate communities in South America and West Africa. This orientation is particularly true of the middle class and the merchant community: it is to Europe and the United States that they send their children to be educated if they can afford to send them abroad; it is there that they go for holidays or for medical treatment; it is in that direction that they prefer to do their business. In these respects the Eastern Bloc hardly has a look-in except to the extent that it can provide scholarships, cheap credit or economic aid.

Does this preference for the West extend to the Ba'thist regime? It is after all dedicated to socialism and opposed to imperialism. Its economy is run on lines similar to those of Eastern Europe, with 75% in the hands of the public sector, and constrained by the straitjacket of bureaucratic centralisation. Nevertheless I believe that very few even of the ruling clique in Damascus feel any natural affinity with the Soviet Bloc. How, then, to explain the close relationship which exists between the two, and which although it is not as close as the regime likes to make it appear is still real enough?

Syria and the U.S.S.R.

The truth is that it is a marriage of convenience - or, as an American correspondent in Damascus corrected me when I ventured that observation, a "cohabitation of convenience". Syria's relationships with the Super-Powers are dominated, as her foreign policy across the board is dominated, by the conflict with Israel. With one Super-Power irrevocably dedicated to undeviating support of "the Zionist Entity", the Syrians feel that they have no choice but to reinsure with the other. They need the diplomatic support which Moscow has been prepared to give to the Arab cause. Even more, they need the arms which Moscow has been prepared to supply. There is no doubt that it is the latter aspect which has led some observers to assume that, dependent as she is on Russian military equipment (for which a year or or so ago she was estimated to owe $15 billion), Syria must be nothing less than a Soviet satellite.

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Nothing could be more wrong. President Asad is very much his own man, and no more disposed to take orders from Moscow than from Riyadh, with whom a similar economic dependence appears to exist. One Soviet Ambassador in Damascus was reported to have complained that "The Syrians take everything from the Soviet Union - except advice". There are numerous examples of serious differences of opinion between Moscow and Damascus on Middle Eastern policy, in particular over Syria's intervention in Lebanon in 1976, and her attitude to Yasser Arafat. There is reason to believe that in the aftermath of the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 Asad sought to reach with the Russians some kind of understanding which would go beyond the existing 1980 Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation and be more akin to the strategic agreement which had recently been concluded between Israel and the United States. But the price demanded by the Kremlin was too high, in terms of both external and internal Syrian policies, and Asad rejected Soviet attempts to interfere in these fields.

The 1982 crisis provided, in fact, something of a litmus test of the Syrian-Soviet relationship, in two respects. First, the 1980 Treaty provides for little more than "consultation" between the two sides in the event of outside aggression against either. The comparatively passive role adopted by the Soviets during the invasion and the involvement of Syria in limited hostilities with the Israelis, made it all too clear that the Russians did not consider themselves committed to direct support of their Syrian ally where hostilities took place outside Syrian territory. Secondly, the help which Moscow did provide, in the form of armaments, was compared very unfavourably by the Syrians with the quality of the weaponry which the Israelis had acquired from the Americans. Such was Syrian discontent on both these counts that, once hostilities were over, the Kremlin felt obliged to reinforce its position in Syria by sending more up-to-date and sophisticated equipment, including SAM missiles of a type which had not previously been deployed outside the Warsaw Pact countries, and which required the presence of additional Soviet military "advisers" in Syria. This move in turn reinforced American convictions that Syria was indeed a Soviet satellite, and that the "evil empire" was exploiting the situation to make further expansionist inroads into the Middle East, whereas the more likely explanation is that the Russians were trying to make up lost ground rather than new advances.

We have seen that one of the features of the Syrian-Soviet relationship from the point of view of Damascus is uncertainty about the extent of the Soviet commitment. Moscow's support for the Arab cause is unlikely to go as far as Damascus might wish. There is a lingering suspicion that in certain circumstances Soviet global interests might impel the Russians to do a deal with the Americans in the Arab/Israel context over the heads of their Arab friends: this in part explains Syrian coyness over the proposal for an international conference on the Middle East. There has also been disappointment with the quality of the project aid rendered by the Eastern Bloc - for example, in the case of the Euphrates Dam "showpiece". This prestige project was completed by the Soviet Union in the mid-1970's, but its hydro-electric potential has already been overtaken by increased domestic requirements, while the irrigation results have, for technical and financial reasons, failed to come up to expectations.

On the Soviet side there are also grounds for uneasiness. The Kremlin's control over its wayward ally, as already suggested, is extremely limited. Although Asad is commendably cautious, the possibility cannot be ruled out that he might

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involve the Russians in the unacceptable dilemma between involvement in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation with the United States in the area - which is the last thing they want - and being seen to abandon their Arab friends. Above all, with the examples of Egypt, Somalia and Iraq before them, the Russians can never be quite sure that their relations with Syria will not go the same way if it should suit the master tactician Asad to switch his alignments.

Such a sea-change must seem highly unlikely in present circumstances - and altogether impossible if one were to take at face value Syrian rhetoric about the United States. But we now come to the reality of Syrian-American relations.

Syria and the U.S.

Of course, the Syrians deeply distrust United States policy in the Middle East, from its part in the creation of the Israeli state, and its undeviating support for Israel since, through American efforts to enlist Arab states in regional defence arrangements aimed at the Soviet Union, to what Syrians see as United States complicity in the removal of Egypt, and attempts to remove Lebanon, from the Arab front line. Damascus has also been remarkably shrewd in its assessments of U.S. policy in the area. I recall in particular a day in December 1983. The Americans had just [illegible] in attacking Syrian positions in Lebanon for the first time, in response to earlier Syrian action against U.S. reconnaissance flights over the region. A Foreign Office Minister happened to be visiting at the time, so we had the opportunity to obtain a first-hand account of Syrian reactions to the incident, and to counsel caution against the increasing spiral of violence. The Syrian Foreign Minister was very cool. They had no intention of escalating the conflict. On the contrary, they meant to sit tight, confident that if they did not give in to U.S. pressures in Lebanon at the time, Washington would either have to admit failure or give the screw further turns, to the point at which American public opinion would finally call a halt. He compared the situation in this respect to that in Vietnam years before. It was not a bad judgement. Within weeks, Syria had gained kudos by handing over to Jesse Jackson the pilot who had survived the American raid; the Multi-National Force had withdrawn from Lebanon; the Muslims had occupied West Beirut; the Lebanese Army had disintegrated; the 17 May accord between Israel and Lebanon which was anathema to Syria had been scrapped; and the Israelis had begun to evacuate Southern Lebanon. The Americans had failed to resolve their own dilemma: whether to "clobber" the Syrians - which would have had incalculable consequences throughout the Middle East - or to reach some accommodation with them - which would have conflicted with Washington's entrenched prejudices. In the event, they did neither: and the policy of drift has continued to this day.

Despite all this, the Syrians recognise that if the Arab/Israel issue is ever to be settled it will be through American rather than through Russian efforts. They have only rarely blocked channels of communication with Washington. On the personal level, relations between Americans and Syrians are cordial. Asad achieved a considerable rapport with both Kissinger and Carter, and the former's shuttle diplomacy resulting in the disengagement agreement in the Golan has stood the test of time. From my own personal observation I would say that practical contacts between the U.S. Embassy in Damascus and the Syrian Foreign Ministry were closer and more frequent than those of the Soviet Embassy.

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The trouble is that at the political level in Washington, where in any case the Middle East is not an issue of foreign policy but of domestic politics, Syria is seen through a pink looking glass: everything is back to front, and most things that go wrong are ascribed to Communist machinations. Syria is emphatically not a Soviet puppet - and I cannot see her becoming one except through the self-fulfilling prophecy of policies which sometimes seem designed to bring about precisely the state of affairs they are trying to avoid. I recall another visiting British Minister asking his Syrian counterpart who was the best friend the Russians had in the Middle East. Without hesitation, the Syrian replied: "Ronald Reagan". There was, he added, hardly any need for the Kremlin to lift a finger in pursuit of their objectives in the region - the Americans did it all for them. Considering the catalogue of clumsy actions and errors of judgement which have characterised the Administration's approach to the area, and which are too numerous to detail further here, one can see what he meant. Indeed, it is surprising that the Soviets have not made greater inroads than they have.

Conclusion

Accordingly, my contention is that Syria's relations with the Soviet Union are nothing like as good - nor those with the United States nearly as bad - as appearances would indicate, or as the Syrian authorities care to portray them. Western - and particularly American - policies have driven the Syrians literally and metaphorically into the arms of the Russians. It would be wishful thinking to believe that a fundamental change in this scenario is likely, still less imminent: the imperatives as seen from Washington are all too obvious, which leaves Damascus little choice. Yet it was Kissinger himself who observed that the Arabs could not make war without Egypt, nor peace without Syria. If the Americans genuinely want peace in the Middle East, some revision of their attitudes to Israel - and, by implication, to Syria - is called for. A more even-handed approach by Washington to the underlying problem of the Middle East might not find Damascus unresponsive.

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