The Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya
Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy
Institute for Policy and Strategy

Bashar's Syria: The Regime and its Strategic Worldview

Shmuel Bar

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Institute for Policy and Strategy
Interdisciplinary Center (IDC)
Herzliya, Israel

Introduction

The Syrian regime—and to a certain extent modern Syria in the broader sense—is the handwork of Hafez al-Asad. His thirty-year autocratic rule (before which he also had wielded considerable influence in the regime of his predecessor) has made distinguishing between the president and the state almost impossible. The hallmark of the Asad regime, which set it apart from its predecessors, was its strong hold on power and stability in a country which in the twenty years prior to its rise had experienced numerous coup d'états and a constant sense of instability. Since the triple crisis of the early 1980s (rebellion of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hafez al-Asad's health crisis and the challenge to the regime by his brother, Rif'at), the regime has been stable: domestic opposition was rare and was dealt with summarily; global and regional events such as the fall of the Soviet bloc, the first Gulf war, and the Israeli–Arab peace process did not seem to affect the country's stability

The passage from the founder of the regime to his son has changed much of this. Analysis of the structure of the regime and its decision-making process should now include not only a description of the forces within the regime and an attempt to decode the intentions of the President, but should place a heavier emphasis on the interests and intentions of the circles surrounding him: the family, the nomenklatura, advisors, friends, and forces within the regime that are jockeying for the residual political power which has been made available by the demise of the centralist and all-powerful Hafez al-Asad. Furthermore, the stability of the regime is no longer to be taken for granted. The perception that Bashar is less politically adept than his father, Bashar's own initial reformist steps which opened a door to unprecedented internal dissent, the fall of the Ba'th regime in Iraq, the declared U.S. policy of democratization in the Arab world, and the fallout of events in Lebanon all place a question mark over the future of the regime. Certain domestic processes are interpreted by many within and outside Syria as signs of regime failure and thus encourage further opposition.[1] An analysis of the regime today must therefore look forward to potential alternatives which may exist.

This study focuses on a number of issues that are relevant to the makeup of the Syrian regime, its regional strategy and world view, and its behavior in relations with other states.

This study is based on a project which took place at the Institute for Policy and Strategy. The Project team included Ms. Rachel Machtiger and Shmuel Bachar. Contributors to the project included: Dr. Israel Elad-Altman, Brig. Gen (rtd.) Amos Gilboa, Dr. Reuven Erlich, Dr. Mordechai Keidar, Prof. Moshe Maoz, Maj. Gen (rtd.) Uri Sagi, and Prof. Eyal Zisser.

The House that Asad Built

The Regime and its Power Bases

The President. The Syrian regime was tailored by and for Hafez al-Asad. Hafez al-Asad was not only the anchor for national identification, but the sole source and focus of real power as well. Ex officio, the president controls all the pillars of power: he is the secretary general of the Ba'th party (which controls the parliament), commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the authority for all the intelligence services. His informal power goes even further. The models for Asad's regime were the autocratic Communist regimes of Eastern Europe, particularly the Ceausescu regime in Rumania. The analogies can be seen in the centralized control of the leader, the terminology of the personality cult, the marginal role of the party that was ostensibly in power, and the dominant role of the family in the regime, creating a sense of monarchy (according to a neologism—a *jamlakah*—a hybrid of a republic, *jumhuriya*, and a monarchy, *mamlakah*).[2] According to al-Asad himself, he was also influenced by the North Korean regime of Kim Il Sung.

The identification of the state with the president is epitomized in the pervasive personality cult surrounding him. The singular role of the "leader" (*qa'id*) was expressed in regime slogans, reminding the Syrian that he is a citizen of *Suriya al-Asad* (Asad's Syria). References to the leader contain superlatives borrowed from both Stalinist terminology and customary Islamic sycophancy. He was the "The Leader of the March" (of the Ba'th of Syria) (*qai'd al-masira*), the "Eternal Leader" (*al-qa'id ila al-abd*), the "Builder of Syria" (*bani Suriyya*), the "Hope of the Nation" (*amal al-ummah*), "Hafez (guardian—a play on the meaning of Hafez al-Asad's name) of honor" (*Hafez al-Karamah*), the "Struggler" (*munadil*), the "Hero of Tishrin ("*batal Tishreen*" for both the month of *tishrin al-thani*, November, in which Asad took power and *tishrin al-awal*, October of the 1973 war). He is likened to the Muslim hero Salah a-Din al-Ayoubi (Saladin). His attributes, according to the Syrian press and the inscriptions over his ubiquitous posters, include wisdom, courage, generosity, genius, statesmanship, and compassion. Above all, he is described as inspiring in the people love and loyalty.[3] At the same time, Asad was portrayed as a quintessentially Islamic leader (in spite of his being an Alawite and, in the eyes of most Sunnis, not even a Muslim). He was described as "a believing Muslim" who loved Allah and his people and the relationship between him and the people was presented in terms of a *baya'* (Islamic oath of allegiance). One of the highlights of this can be seen in the inscription from the Qur'an adorning the building around Hafez al-Asad's tomb: "Oh Ye who Believe! Obey Allah and Obey his Prophet and those who are in authority among you!"[4] This verse has been used by Muslim regimes and their Islamic establishments for centuries to legitimize their rule and delegitimize rebellion against them.

The philosophy of the regime can be read between the lines of these titles. The source of legitimacy under Hafez al-Asad was the person of the president himself and not his "election" as president or the Ba'th party of which he was "general secretary." He was described as an almost supernatural being of infinite wisdom, worthy of being obeyed without question.

The decision-making process within the Syrian regime under Hafez al-Asad was centralized at the presidential level. The "buck" began and ended with the President. Though he seemed to trust his close advisors, Asad was firmly in control of the decision-making process in both political and military areas (though he seemed to have been much less involved in economic decision making, such as it was, during decades of economic stagnation). The Hafez al-Asad system had little room for delegation of authority in matters
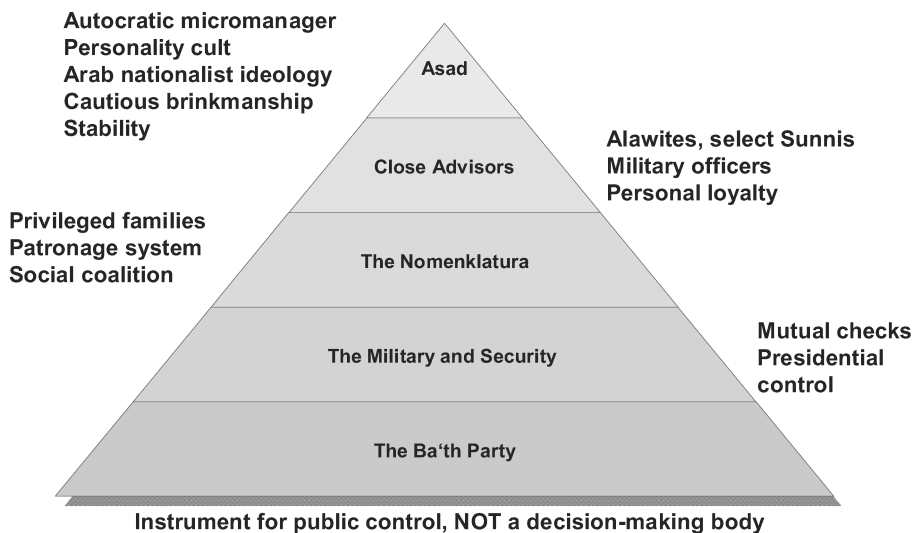
of political importance and no institutionalized bureaucratic process for making decisions on war and peace. A case in point would be the decision to go to war in 1973, which was decided on in a meeting between Presidents Sadat and Asad and was handed down to the military. It appears that little or no strategic planning preceded Asad's decision to join the war. Similarly, the Syrian preparations for the peace process with Israel were clearly "top-down"; the president provided the strategic goals and determined what information he needed and the bureaucracy provided the papers. The bureaucracy was notoriously unable or unwilling to provide the president with options that he himself had not proposed or to analyze the pros and cons of the policy that the leader had handed down. This weakness did not go as far as the terror which pervaded the Iraqi leadership, and which prevented it from warning Saddam of his miscalculations. It was more like long-conditioned subservience to the leader.

Hafez al-Asad was not an advocate of "groupthink"; his way to access opinions and information from his subordinates was in direct one-on-one reporting of the latter to the president. Asad was rarely known to hold multiparticipatory consultations or participate in "brainstorming" sessions of a large numbers of individuals. It is said that during military operations in Lebanon, he would circumvent the chain of command in order to get reports from lower-ranking officers in the field. In doing so, however, he did not "consult," but merely gathered information. Rarely did any of these subordinates receive any feedback from the president. This centralist and "micromanagement" leadership style, along with total loyalty to the president and a clear allocation of areas of responsibility, restrained court intrigues and limited blatant rivalries amoung members of the leadership. Asad's leadership style may have derived of a *divida et impera* tactic; by limiting the exposure of his senior deputies to the information that was brought before him, he could maintain a high level of uncertainty between members of the elite and control the balance of power among them. It has also been postulated that he acted out of distrust of the efficacy of consensus mechanisms and self-confidence in his own ability to integrate information brought before him.

The Syrian decision-making process under Asad also left no room for true strategic intelligence and net assessment by professional analytical experts; the information brought to the president seems to be relatively raw intelligence, with little strategic context or policy recommendations. The Syrian bureaucracy lacked a culture of scenario building and discussing sundry alternatives.[5] As a result, the information background and analysis of the situation available to the president for decision making were based primarily on the personal knowledge and analysis of senior advisors who directly participated in the decision-making process. The Syrian regime had not developed professional support for decision making such as the sort that exists in a "Cabinet Office" (in the U.K.), The American National Security Council, or Israel's Planning Branch. The absence of a mechanism of this sort with a remit and responsibility that derives from its constitutional duties rather than loyalty to the psresident is not an oversight. Such an apparatus would be incompatible with the autocratic leadership that the Syrian regime is built on.

The upshot of this leadership style was the development of a well-suited party and regime bureaucracy. This was particularly manifested in political and military areas, which were also the main areas in which Asad tended to make decisions, and less so in the sphere of the economy. This individualist management style was also the rule in lower echelons of the party and the regime. During the Hafez al-Asad era the Ba'th party lost the internal decision making mechanisms that existed in the pre-regime Ba'th. The party became an instrument for collecting information on the domestic theatre and mobilizing support for the decisions that the leader took, but was not a real participant in the decision-making process

The House that Hafez Built

Autocratic micromanager
Personality cult
Arab nationalist ideology
Cautious brinkmanship
Stability

Asad

Close Advisors

Alawites, select Sunnis
Military officers
Personal loyalty

Privileged families
Patronage system
Social coalition

The Nomenklatura

The Military and Security

Mutual checks
Presidential
control

The Ba'th Party

Instrument for public control, NOT a decision-making body

Figure 1. The power bases of the Syrian regime.

itself. True, all of the President's inner circle were senior members of the party (almost always members of the Regional Command), but their input in the decision-making process was not related to their formal party status, but due to their membership in the president's "gang" (*jama' a*)—fellow officers who were part of the original junta that brought Asad to power, a bond stronger than Asad's ties with his brothers. These persons were both the main source of advice for the president and his main source of information on issues.

While the Syrian constitution defines formal constitutional authorities, real power is exercised through ad hoc methods of balancing one force against the other. The Syrian regime maintains a powerless legislative branch dominated by the Ba'th party as part of the nominal "National Progressive Front."[6] The technocratic executive also is not a vehicle of power; those ministers who wield formal power (for example, the minister of defence and prime minister) do so not by dint of their membership in the formal executive, but of their belonging to the informal inner circle, a *de facto* "cabinet" of the President's main political, military and security advisors (see Figure 1).

The Military-Security Complex

The Syrian military is one of the primary mainstays of the regime. Its functions under the Ba'th regime include not only defence of the country in the face of Israeli, Turkish and, to a certain extent, Iraqi threats, but also domestic duties of counterterrorism and gathering intelligence on potential subversion.

The fact that Hafez al-Asad came to power through the military has painted the regime with the color of a "military regime." However, the regime has been in power as a civilian regime for three decades and effectively subordinated the military to its rule. It is not clear today to what extent the military can be seen as a distinct political entity with clear objectives.

The High Command of the Syrian military became notoriously elderly during the Hafez al-Asad era. According to the standing regulations, an officer was expected to be either promoted or discharged upon approaching the age of sixty. However, the senior echelon of the military received special dispensations to remain in service past the age of retirement. As a result, the natural flow of promotion in the military was disrupted at the higher levels.

The Ba'th party apparatus in the military and the civilian organs do not interact below the level of the Regional Congress, where the military has a number of seats, and, of course, in the Regional Command. This, however, is on a purely formal level. On the practical level, Syria has been under martial law since 1963. The military and the "civilian" *mukhabarat* have extensive powers in the civilian sector. Furthermore, in the Hafez al-Asad era four of the "old guard" members of the Regional Command (Asad himself, Rif'at al-Asad until he was deposed, Mustafa Tlas, and Hikmat Shihabi) were "military" and other prominent party figures stood at the helm of the *mokhabarat*.

The relationship between the party and the *mokhabarat* does not seem to be direct. The heads of the various apparatuses answer to the president directly in all matters. Their remit is to safeguard the regime and prevent dissident activity. In this context, any activity that calls for "de-Ba'thification" of the regime is viewed as subversive. There is, however, no indication that the policy of the apparatuses toward various expressions of dissident voices is officially determined in consultation with party bodies. Rather, there are indications that different agencies act on their own, according to their own reading of the threats to the regime implicit in a certain activity, and according to their own interests. This frequently brings the different agencies, and even different local branches of the agency, into conflict. A prime example is the inconsistency of the policy towards the "civil society" movement; it has been reported by Syrians involved in the movement that while one branch of an agency in one city cracked down on lower-level members of the movement for public reading of documents relating to the movement, the authors of those documents in another city were untouched. Similarly, one prominent dissident had his passport taken away by one agency and shortly afterwards had a new passport issued with the help of a rival agency, with a guarantee by the head of that agency that he would be protected.[7]

Communities, Tribes and Families

The Syrian regime alternatively has been described as a "Ba'thist" regime, an "Alawite" regime, and a regime of the "military" and the "security apparatuses." All of these appellations are valid to one degree or another. But more than any of these, the Syrian regime is the regime of a well-defined Syrian nomenklatura which is not exclusively Ba'thist, Alawite, or military. The description of an "Alawite" regime imposed on a Sunni country, for example, does not do justice to the complex relationship of the regime to the Alawite and the other communities (Sunni, Druze, Christian, Yazidis, and Isma'ilis). The term Ba'thist regime implies party control of the state (along the lines of the Communist party in the former Soviet Union), which is not the case in Syria.

A more accurate description of the Syrian regime would be "confessional coalitionism." First, not all the Alawite families enjoy the same status in the regime; Asad's Kalabiyya tribe along with allied tribes (see below), is predominant. Second, the centrality of the Alawites was (and is) enabled by according two other Syrian minorities (Druze and Isma'ilis) privileges not warranted by their relative size in the population and by cooping the rural and tribal Sunni sector, which previously had been denied social mobility. The predominance of these formerly unprivileged Sunnis is evident in the list of prominent Syrians of the Hafez al-Asad era.[8] After he had consolidated power, Asad also coopted the Damascene Sunni

economic elite, from the 1980s onward.[9] This symbiosis between the Alawite military elite and the Sunni business sector was based on senior military officers providing protection and guaranteeing the monopolistic control of certain sectors, receiving a considerable proportion of the resulting lucrative returns.

The Syrian regime is based on a complex patronage system. Patronage lines may derive from a variety of relationships. These may include any of the following:

- **Family power bases:** These are particularly strong in the Alawite, Druze, and Isma'ili communities and in the rural Sunni milieu. They include extended family members, at least cousins and occasionally more distant relations. Frequently, these power bases are at odds with competing families (very frequently distant relatives) in the same area.[10]
- **Party/bureaucracy power bases:** These include branches of the party, "popular organizations," bureaus, and so forth.
- **Communal or region-based power bases:** Members of the "old guard" built their own power bases within their communities. This was done by channelling funds to their home areas or tribes and providing perks to those close to them. From the point of view of the leadership, the most important of these power bases are in Alawite areas, since they provide access to senior figures in the military and security forces.
- **Military protégées:** The members of the old guard, who headed the Syrian military and security services for years, still have former subordinates of high rank through whom they can wield influence.
  Economic power bases: Almost all of the "old guard" have amassed fortunes, and they control different sectors of the Syrian economy. This form of influence is particularly significant in the case of Sunni nonmilitary leaders, who lack the two former channels of influence.
- **Foreign relations:** Relationships with countries with leverage over the present leadership, such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, and France.

The predominant elements in the Syrian regime are in the inner circle of advisors surrounding the president. This inner circle usually includes all the heads of the security services and the military, a few political figures with personal experience, diplomatic abilities, or other personal traits that accord them added value in the eyes of the president. During the long era of Hafez al-Asad, there was almost a perfect correlation between the members of the inner circle and the president's "old boys club"—fellow officers who were part of the original junta that brought Asad to power. The strength of this bond was greater than that of Asad's family ties. The brothers Rifaat and Jamil al-Asad (the latter died in December 2004) were pushed aside at an early stage, while old comrades such as Mustafa Tlas and 'Abd al-Halim Khadam remained in power to supervise the transfer of authority to Bashar. These persons were both the main source of advice for the president and his main source of information on the issues under study.

Since the fall of the Iraqi regime, the importance of the tribal sector in Syria has risen. The Sunni tribes of Northeast of Syria have not played a central role in the Ba'th party in the past. The porosity of the Syrian-Iraqi border and the threat of infiltration of radical Islamic elements inimical to the Syrian regime itself enhanced their status for the regime. The tribes were also instrumental in bringing the Sunni Iraqi insurgents, some belonging to the same tribes on the Iraqi side, to Syria and linking them up with the regime. The area of Ramadi on the Iraqi side of the border and Abu Kamal on the Syrian border is widely perceived as more Iraqi than Syrian; the Arabic dialect spoken in this region has more in common with the Iraqi dialect of the neighboring region than with the Syrian of the Dir

a-Zur province to which they belong. The main tribes of the area—the Shammar, 'Anaza, Agadat, al-Jabouri and al-Fawzil—have most of their clans in Iraq. During the first Gulf War (1990–1991), the region was considered to be highly sympathetic to Saddam Hussein and was a source of domestic unrest during the Syrian participation in the coalition. It has also been claimed that historically, the Ba'th party in the region was closely affiliated with the Michel 'Aflaq–Salah Jadid faction of the party that was deposed and exiled to Iraq. Later, Saddam Hussein was reputed to have cultivated close relations with many of the heads of the tribes in this area.

Many Syrian sources—including those who were in opposition to the Hafez al-Asad—point out that Hafez al-Asad himself was not implicated directly in accumulating his own personal fortune and lived an austere life. The system, though, was indispensable; in order to control the country, Hafez al-Asad needed to guarantee the loyalty of the various power brokers. This could only be done through allowing them the perquisites that derive from power. The system of corruption in the party and the regime, though, has been intermittently on the public agenda in Syria since the mid 1970s. Anticorruption campaigns were launched (August 1977–March 1978; January 1985–1987; and the campaign lead by Basil al-Asad until his death in 1993).

The Ba'th Party. The Ba'th party portrays itself as the true representative of the masses in Syria. From the point of view of its presence among those masses, there is some justification for this claim. The number of members of the party in Syria is approximately 1.8 million, which accounts for about 18 percent of the adult population.[11] Here the party is a vehicle for the maintenance of the nomenklatura, but it has not succeeded (or even made a serious effort) in inculcating the Ba'th ideology to wide strata of society.

The Ba'th party originally arose as a middle-class movement, but was taken over by the military, which viewed the middle class with suspicion and excluded it. However, throughout years of the Ba'th rule, a new middle class emerged, incorporating parts of the old Syrian middle class and a new bourgeoisie, which grew under the Ba'th regime and shared with the regime a vested interest in continued stability. This sector has been effectively incorporated into the Ba'th party through professional organizations and unions that serve both as vehicles for social promotion and instruments of the party for supervision of these potentially subversive sectors.

On the social level, the Ba'th Party is essentially a vehicle for social mobility and a patronage network for achieving perquisites from the regime. Since not all members of extended families are party members, this number can also be viewed as representing a larger number of citizens who enjoy privileges by dint of their party-member relatives. While this network is based on the party, it is actually a transformation of the model of the traditional "*zaïm*," networks prevalent in much of the Arab world and specifically in Syria and Lebanon – the old-style village boss or leader. The *zu'ama* play an intermediate role between the citizens and the state, taking their share of concessions, controlling monopolies, and blocking any competition. They respect each others' areas of control and have a common interest in preserving the system.

The secularism of the party is an important source of legitimacy. It is estimated that about 25 percent of the population of Syria are non-Sunni Muslims (Alawites, Druze, Isma'ilis), or non-muslims (Christians). Others are Sunni non-Arabs (Kurds, Circassians, Turkomans) who are traditionally less orthodox than Sunni Arabs and also fear the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood. For this large minority, Ba'th secularism is a bulwark against Sunni domination and Islamic fundamentalism.[12] This message is exploited by the regime

domestically and in implicit messages to foreign audiences to buttress its legitimacy, as the lesser of two evils.

The Ba'th party was founded in Syria in the 1940s as an Arab nationalist party advocating Arab unity, socialism and secular nonsectarianism. The "nonsectarianism" of the party derived from French cultural influences, the preponderance of non-Muslims (Christians, Alawites and Druze) among the founders of the party, and the division into confessional communities[13] of the population in Syria and Lebanon. The party grew in popularity and spread outside of the Levant during the heyday of Arab nationalism in the 1950s and the 1960s. The idealism of the early Ba'th was demonstrated when it willingly dismantled itself to be part of the United Arab Republic (1958–1961) which merged Egypt and Syria with Egyptian President Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser at the helm.[14]

The organizational principles of the Syrian Ba'th party are based on the "internal statute" (*nizam dakhili*) that was approved by the last "National Congress" in July 1980. These principles closely resemble those of communist parties of the mid-twentieth century. They include:

1. A transnational superstructure, the "National Command" (analogous to the Comintern[15] of the Communist Party);
2. Strict mechanisms for control of membership and stages for achieving full membership in the party;
3. A hierarchal structure, which duplicates itself in each level of the party (national, regional, and local);
4. Formal electoral mechanisms for representation of the roots of the party with checks and balances to guarantee the predominance of the party leadership; and
5. Committees and popular organizations for mobilization of the party membership, and mechanisms of "criticism" and "self criticism" to preserve ideological conformity;

The pan-Arab elements of the party structure, like the revolutionarism of the Ba'th ideology, have fallen into desuetude. The party in Syria is typical of a ruling one-party regime. Its organs reflect organizational concepts of a small revolutionary party and of a transnational pan-Arab party. In fact, it is a Syrian party par excellence with only vestiges of atrophied formal bodies that maintain the "pan-Arab" character of the party. The constituent bodies of the Syrian Ba'th party include the following:

1. The National (Arab) Command,
2. The Regional Secretary,
3. The Regional Command,
4. Bureaus and Committees of the Regional Command,
5. The Central Committee,
6. The Regional Congress,
7. Popular Organizations,
8. Workers and Professional Associations,
9. Branches, Sub-Branches, Sections and Cells, and
10. The party in the military and the security services.

The relationship between the various bodies of the party is vertical and hierarchical with very few perceptible horizontal interrelationships. There is no evidence of "interministerial" bodies composed of different bureaus or of ad hoc bodies for dealing with a specific problem. Thus, for example, even though the "Preparation Bureau" is the predominant body dealing with ideological texts and control, it does not seem to have any foothold within the military, which is completely dominated by the Military Committee. Another example may be the

National Union of Students, which operates within the universities as a separate Ba'th party body; not all the students who are members of the party are involved in the union. As a result there may be in any one sector (university, town) overlapping party bodies which cover the population. The relationship between these bodies is depicted in the diagram in the appendix.

The erosion of Ba'th pan-Arabism was evident early on in the split between the Syrian and Iraqi parties,[16] and in the decline—until its virtual disappearance—of the "National Command."[17] In both the Syrian and the Iraqi "Ba'th" parties the ideological dimension became secondary and in neither country has there been any real intellectual activity for further development of Ba'th ideology. Most of the Ba'th members in both countries have little or no knowledge of the primary sources of the party. The Ba'th doctrine that they subscribe to is a "sloganized" ideology, consisting of a limited number of dictums, most of which reflect the subordination of the doctrine to the particular leadership cult in each country and do not express real political doctrines. Intellectual activity on ideological issues, to the extent that it continued to exist, was the territory of elder Ba'thists who eventually died out and the supporters of the party outside of Syria and Iraq, such as the proxy Ba'th parties in Jordan and Lebanon.

The ascendancy to power of the Ba'th in Syria (1963) and of Hafez al-Asad (1970) brought about a transformation of the Syrian Ba'th's view of the role of the party: from an elite "leading the masses" to an instrument for mass mobilization. This transformation was reflected in the drive for mass recruitment of members, without the cautious balances that the party had established in its clandestine years (see below—membership) and in a marginalization of ideology in the party. The latter trend towards a utilitarian and nonideological party is evident in the neglect, during the decades of Ba'th rule in Damascus, of any real development of ideological texts or theories based on Ba'th ideology. Unlike other (ostensibly) highly ideological systems that rose and fell in the twentieth century, the Ba'thist ideology does not have deep roots even among the members of the party. This dearth of ideological activity stands in stark contrast to the importance that other ostensibly ideological regimes—particularly the Communist regimes of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the PRC—ascribed to study of ideological texts of Marxism-Leninism and to developing contemporary theories that could explain current affairs in a manner compatible with the ideology.

This trend can be explained in light of the pragmatic and Machiavellian autocracy of Hafez al-Asad, and his desire to be as unfettered as possible by constraints outside his own control. It facilitated the regime's freedom of political maneuver, unshackled by ideological contradictions. Prime examples are Syria's rejection of an almost total consensus among the Arab states on the Iran–Iraq war: Ba'th secular ideology and Arab identity notwithstanding, Damascus was almost alone among the Arabs in supporting Iran. Despite the obvious inconsistency with the principles of Arab solidarity, however, there is no evidence that the Syrian position generated any protest within the Ba'th party.

Marginalization of the ideology allowed for a de facto legitimization of Syrian nationalism as well. Ba'thist rhetoric notwithstanding, the Syrian Ba'th has always been more "Syrian" than "Arab." Thus, Syria's regional policies accord top priority to Syria's particularistic interests, and the Syrian regime has promoted a Syrian nationalism based on the centrality of Syria (Damascus) to the Arab Nation. The legacy of the Umayyads (661–750) and Salah ad-Din (d. 1193) is invoked to justify Syrian leadership, at least in the territory considered *Bilad al-sham* (the country of Syria) or *Suriya al-Kubra* (Greater Syria). Consequently, the Syrian regime has never reconciled itself to the complete independence of its neighbours—Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. This is particularly evident in the case

of Lebanon, with which Syria has never (even before the Syrian occupation of 1975) exchanged embassies on the grounds that there is no need for embassies between two parts of the same country.

The ideology of pan-Arabism remained in the rhetoric of the Ba'th party, but the word "Arab" became more and more a code word for Syria. The overt emphasis on "Arab" identity serves the regime's interests:

- **Domestically**—to discourage signs of localism and sectarianism, on one hand, and to obfuscate the sectarian nature of the Alawite-led regime, as the other.
- **Outwards to the Arab world**—the implicit message is that Syria is willing to sacrifice its own local interests for those of the "Arab Nation," and it will prefer the interests of other Arabs over any other circle of association that Syria may be in (Islamic, nonaligned). However, it expects other countries to do the same. Thus the ideology is translated into a demand that Arab countries respect Syria's vital interests as defined by Damascus. When these encompass such wideranging issues such as Lebanon and the Israeli-Arab conflict, this position, when accepted, provided Syria with disproportional regional status. In practical terms, this allowed Syria to demand and receive across-the-board Arab recognition of its own vested interests in Lebanon and vis-à-vis Israel. This was expressed in Arab League summits and Syria's leverage over the other Arabs in the international arena.

Party membership usually involves entire families. Many of the families do not rise to the national level and continue to provide the local strongmen to the branches of the party in their home areas. While there is not enough detailed information on the party apparatus on the branch level, it is widely known that many positions are allocated on a nepotistic basis.

The centralist nature of the Syrian regime under Hafez al-Asad restricted the potential for party power bases to develop past the local level. The fact that the Regional Congress was not convened for fifteen years, and the Central Committee played no more than a rubber stamp role, limited the ability of senior party members to develop independent power bases. For the time being Bashar's policy of strengthening the party as a power base for himself has been counterbalanced by his infusion of extraparty technocrats into key posts.

There is no real distinction between power bases of the Ba'th party and those of the regime or the country in general. All the above power bases are also intimately intertwined; while not all economic or military power bases are tribal based, those that are not frequently marry into the tribal system in order to cement their power base. At the same time, a tribal power base alone is not enough; the prominent families and tribes use their social leverage to gain positions in the party apparatus, to appoint their sons to senior posts in the army, and to create economic power bases for themselves. The nodal relationships between echelons of the regime allow those at the top ranks of the regime to bestow privileges and thus to guarantee the loyalty of those beneath them. These privileges include:

- **Membership in the party**—The recruitment system described above delegates authority to the Branch Command (in fact, the Branch Secretary) to approve the membership of a candidate in the party.
- **Party and public office**—The Branch Commands have extensive control over the process of elections to the constituent bodies of the party in the Branch and recommend people for office in the local government to which they belong.
- **Protection from harassment** by the *mokhabarat*.

- **Ability to provide local needs**—Many sources have recounted stories of local entrepreneurs who, after having been exhausted by government bureaucracy, took recourse to the local party chiefs and succeeded in cutting the red tape.

The legislative body in Syria is the "People's Assembly" (*majlis al-shab*). The People's Assembly lacks any decision-making authority or influence. It is composed of 250 delegates elected regionally every four years. Approximately 60 percent of its members represented the Progressive National Front, an umbrella organization of all the political parties officially permitted to operate in Syria, foremost among them the Ba'th Party. The remaining 40 percent of its members are independents.

During most of the Hafez al-Asad era the composition of the regime and relative status of the groups in it were relatively stable. High officials gained and lost influence with the Presidential Palace, but in contrast to other similar regimes, Syria knew little change and no massive purge of the regime since Hafez al-Asad came to power. This stability within the regime was due to the cohesiveness of the original junta and its loyalty to Hafez al-Asad. Most of the military leaders and party officials in the regime had accompanied Hafez al-Asad during his most trying times, creating a true sense of loyalty.

Ideology and Worldview

The ideology of the Syrian Ba'th is a mélange of nineteenth-century nationalism and twentieth-century humanistic idealism. The main tenets of this ideology were forged by its founders Michel Aflaq, Zaki al-Arsuzi, and and Salah al-Bitar during the 1940s in the heyday of nationalism, anticolonialism, and socialism. This ideology was heavily influenced by French philosophical currents of the mid-twentieth century (Henri Bergson and others) and nineteenth-century German nationalist philosophers (Herder, Fichte, and others), with which the founders of the Ba'th became acquainted during their studies in France. This ideology has not changed substantially or evolved with changing circumstances.

The defining ideological documents of the Syrian Ba'th are the party constitution[18] that was accepted in the first party Congress in April 1947 and the "Points of Departure" (*muntalaqat*)[19] that were ratified in the sixth National Congress in October 1963. Party Congresses since have authorized de facto incremental changes in the weight of various parts of the ideology, but there have been no formal amendments of these documents since they were written.

The slogan of the Ba'th is "Unity, Freedom, Socialism." This slogan encapsulates the main tenets of the party (to be detailed below):

1. Arab Unity—the belief in the natural unity of the Arab nation.
2. Freedom from "imperialist" and "colonialist" yokes, implying not only political but also cultural emancipation from western influences (as liberally defined by the party so as to purge only those influences that they objected to) and economic self-reliance.
3. Socialism—a tenet which should be interpreted according to a particular brand of Ba'th socialism, based ostensibly on "Arab" traditions.
4. Other tenets include modernism, equality of the sexes, and human rights (albeit honored in all Ba'th regimes more in the breach than in the observance).

The core tenet of the Ba'th is the innate unity of the Arab Nation. This nation, according to the Ba'th constitution, is

distinguished by characteristics that are manifest in its consecutive revivals. It is
stamped with the fertility of vivacity and creativity, the capability to renewal and
resurrection [and] has an eternal mission that appears in innovative forms and is
integrated in all stages of history . . . renewing human values, motivating human
advancement and developing the harmony and cooperation among nations.[20]

This convoluted panegyric to the nature of the Arab Nation reflects the ideological roots
of the party in nineteenth-century European nationalism. The description of the character-
istics of the Arab Nation are reminiscent of the *Volksgeist* (National Spirit) proposed in the
late eighteenth-century Germany by the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder,[21]
and later by J. C. Fichte.[22] It refers obliquely to the thesis proposed by Arnold Toynbee, that
nations are born and die, and that their steady decline is part of a process leading inevitably
to their demise. The Arab Nation, according to the Ba'th, does not fit that paradigm. It
is "eternal" and has innate qualities of self-regeneration into different manifestations in
different stages of history. This Germanic concept of national character did not develop in
the basic tenets of the Ba'th into an Arab Fascism. It is tempered by the French humanist
background of the founders of the Ba'th, by determining that the special attributes of the
Arab Nation play a role in the advancement of the whole of mankind.

The Ba'th constitution also demarcates the **borders** of the Arab Nation. They are from
the Taurus and Bishkek Mountains (Kyrgyzstan), to the Basra Gulf, the Arab Sea, the
mountains of Ethiopia, the Sahara Desert, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean. This
definition leaves no room for ethnic or religious identity or for national pluralism within
the Arab Nation.

The goal of the party is **unity** of the Arab Nation. This unity is not the result of historic
coincidence (Renan's[23] definition of a nation as "a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the
feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make
in the future"), but of metaphysical design and manifest destiny. "Arabism" (*'arubah*) is the
abstract and noble quality of the Arab Nation and it is expressed in the very structure of the
Arabic language (Arsuzi[24] even emphasized the unique quality of the Arabic language).[25]
This ideology reflected an authentic attempt to invent a common denominator for the Arabic
speaking fragments of the Ottoman Empire and the different regional political entities that
had been created by Western colonialism. Federations and unifications of existing states
can be stepping stones for Arab unity, but true unity must be based on a common ideology:
freedom and socialist democracy.[26] The goal of unity, though, is not an end in itself, but
a means for the Arabs to regain their place among the nations and to play a role in world
civilization and a process that can only be implemented through a spiritual and social
revolution that will eliminate the forces that have imposed backwardness on the Arabs:
imperialism and colonialism from outside, and feudalism from within.

The goal of unity and the definition of the Arabs are closely linked to the **secularism**
of the Ba'th. In his writings, Michel Aflaq tended to equate religion in general with the
traditional social and economic order that the party had vowed to topple, and with oppression
of the weak and wide-scale corruption. In his words: ". . . the oppressed who see religion in
this era a weapon that the oppressors rely upon . . . those who exploit the corrupt situation
exploit this corruption (i.e. religion) because it drugs the people and because it prevents
the people from a revolution against its oppressors and its enslavers."[27] This secularism
was evident in the "Declaration of Principles" that the party published when it assumed
power in 1960; it determined that "the educational policy of the party is to create a new
generation of Arabs that believes in the unity of the nation and the eternity of its mission."
The secularism of the Ba'th was even more emphasized in the ideological discourse of the

pre-Asad era. Thus, for example, one could read in the organ of the Syrian army before 1967 the assertion (which evoked public protest, but nevertheless exemplified the Ba'th thinking of the time) that the values of "feudalism and imperialism" had turned the Arab Man into a "submissive human being who knows nothing but to declare that there is no strength but that of the Supreme and the Almighty." The solution is to build the new Socialist Arab Man, who realizes that God, religion, feudalism, and all the values that dominated society are nothing but mummies.[28]

This secularism is no surprise, taking into account the fact that the ideological founder—Michel Aflaq—was not a Muslim but a Greek Orthodox. The only way that non-Muslims Arabs could integrate into an ideal of the united Arab world would be under a secular ideology. Therefore, the Ba'th was born as a quintessentially secular movement. "Arabism" is not contingent on, or the result of, Islam, but rather was inherent in the Arabs before Islam. Islam was a force that woke the latent potential of the Arabs, and having fulfilled its role, is no longer necessary as a driving force—that role having been taken over by secular nationalism.

The Ba'th concept of "**freedom**" refers not to individual freedoms or civil rights, but to the liberation of the Arab nation as a collective from the domination of the West (including that of Zionism and the State of Israel) and the constraints that have been imposed upon its self-determination and self-expression by Western colonialism, as a prerequisite for fulfilling its national potential and unity. This concept too has a metaphysical side to it: liberation from colonialism is not one single formal act of independence, but a process that calls for developing national self-reliance (a concept that is reminiscent of the North Korean "Chuche"[29]) and "nonalignment."

The third element in the Ba'th slogan, "**socialism**," is the economic conclusion of the two former elements. It too draws on ideas from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western socialism, which the founders absorbed during their studies in France. Because the process of "auto-emancipation"[30] of the Arabs from colonial yoke calls for economic development commensurate with the manifest destiny of the Arabs, they require a suitable economic doctrine. In practice, the economic doctrine of the Ba'th eschewed private enterprise and called for a state directed economy, much like the USSR. According to the basic documents of the party: the national wealth is the property of the state; the traditional distribution (i.e. the holding of most arable land by absentee landowners who leaded the land out to the peasants) is unjust and therefore it must be corrected; farming land should be allocated according to the capability to husband it; factories will be cooperative; trade will be controlled by the state. Nevertheless, the early theoreticians of the Ba'th went to great pains to stress that Ba'th socialism is not equivalent to cosmopolitan Communism and antinationalist Marxism; the Arabs are to be united not only in the denial of "sectarianism" or "communalism" within Arab society (rejection of any national distinction between Muslims, Alawites, Christians, etc.), but also in the absence of any contrast between the "working class" and any other. Other prominent aspects of Ba'th socialism which are highlighted by the Syrian regime include "modernism," equality, and women's rights.[31]

The main focus of the Ba'th ideology, however, was and remains "Arab Nationalism." Because Ba'th ideology was "Pan-Arab" in essence, it saw local patriotism as an aberration caused by the colonialist division of the Arab world. Syrian patriotism therefore was to be submersed into a wider Arab patriotism. The ideological precedence accorded to the Syria's "Arabism" as opposed to its "Syrian" character is expressed in the very name of the country: The Arab (!) Syrian Republic (*al-Jumhuriyya al-'Arabiya al-Suriyya*). This priority is even more accentuated in the complete absence of the name of Syria from the name of the ruling party. The party itself is "The Arab Socialist Ba'th Party" (*Hizb al-Ba'th*

al-'Arabi al-Ishtiraki) and the Syrian branch is simply "The Syrian Region" (al-qutr al-suri). Based as it is on "Arab identity" and on the heterodox Alawite sect, the Syrian Ba'th ideology is uneasy with slogans of a wider "Islamic Nation."[32]

The attitude of the Ba'th to Islam is complex. Islam is viewed as an instrument for providing legitimacy to the regime, but rejected as a core identity in lieu of the Arab one. This is expressed in the efforts that the regime invested in achieving Islamic legitimacy for the Alawites[33]; demonstrated observance by Hafez al-Asadof orthodox Islamic rituals such as the lesser pilgrimage ('umrah, the pilgrimage to Mecca not in the haj season) to Mecca; participation in prayers in Sunni mosques and fasting during Ramadan; promotion of Islamic culture such as Qur'an reading and building of mosques; and the use of Islamic terminology to mobilize public support of the leader.

At the same time, the Ba'th regime clearly distanced itself from a populist radical interpretation of Islam. Obviously, the option of aligning with the radical Muslim Brotherhood was never an option, since the fundamentalist movement would never accept an Alawite as a bona fide Muslim. The party position on Islamic issues attempted to reconcile the political need for Islamic legitimacy on one hand with its secular ideology, the impracticality of an Alawite leader representing the orthodox Islamic mores, and the leader's secular and modernist bent on the other hand. The result is a unique Syrian Ba'th interpretation of Islam tailored to legitimize a non-Sunni leader of a Sunni state and to delegitimize the radical Islamist opposition. Hafez al-Asad is quoted in an official Ba'th text as supporting a "universalistic" interpretation of religion:

> Even if we disagree about the road that leads to Allah, the important thing is (that this is) Allah and that we all worship him. It is not the right of anyone to impose on the others his path to Allah . . . Allah is for all and he regards all men as equal . . . every human is free how he prays, how he worships and how he sees Allah.[34]

This message is transmitted in numerous quotes of Hafez al-Asad and in official propaganda channels.[35] On the practical level, the Ba'th regime gave full support to the moderate messages of the Sufi-oriented Chief Mufti of Damascus, Sheikh Ahmad Kufataru, who founded with the blessing of the regime the Abu al-Nour Foundation that preaches a modernist ecumenical Islam.[36] The very fact that the official declarations of allegiance of the party and the regime do not open with the traditional bismallah, but make use of ambiguous and ecumenical terms such as Allah al-'Azim (Great God), al-ta'ala (the Almighty) and so forth, is also indicative of this tendency.[37]

The Regime of Bashar al-Asad

Bashar Al-Asad

Over six years after his death, the legacy of Hafez al-Asad is still clearly evident in the structure and workings of the regime he founded. The elements of his regime—the Asad family, the "old guard" of military officers and party bureaucrats, the checks and balances of the various security services, the role of the Alawite community, and the involvement of the portions of the Sunni elite—all remain in place. Moreover, the basic political orientation and values of Hafez al-Asad remain a potent legacy to which Bashar al-Asad is bound, both as his father's son and as the successor who cannot allow himself to squander the

"achievements" of the regime and alienate the elite. There are, however, also fundamental differences. Over the decades, the regime's apparatus served more as an instrument for the implementation of policy than a mechanism for policy formation. Under Bashar, however, this apparatus has taken an increasingly pivotal role in the formulation of decisions.

Bashar al-Asad ascended to the office of President of Syria upon the death of his father in June 2000 at the age of 35, after six years of grooming after the death of his father's preferred successor, his brother Basil, in a car accident. While there is little comparison in Syrian political circles between Bashar and his late brother, he is constantly being appraised with reference to his father's shadow. Hafez al-Asad was perceived as a leader with a clear sense of history and strategy, who calculated his moves and their consequences years and decades ahead. The most devoted Asad watchers cannot remember a decision on his part that was taken impulsively or without careful assessment, calculation, and preparation for the long-range implications. It is mainly in this trait that Bashar is found wanting. His reactions to pressure both from within the regime and from the international community are often seen as rash and "tactical." He is seen by many as more impulsive than his risk-averse father, and, at the same time, more insular due to his lack of hands-on political experience, merely aiming to survive and without any clear strategic concept.[38]

Despite his image as a young and Westernized individual, Bashar's assimilation of Western ideas could not have been very deep. He attended Syrian schools in the early days of the Ba'th regime. A perfunctory reading of the textbooks from which Bashar most probably gleaned his knowledge of history, international relations, and regional politics shows a two-dimensional world composed of the brave and noble Arabs and evil and conspiratorial colonial powers and Jews. When he came to the United Kingdom it was to specialize in ophthalmology. His courses did not provide insights into Western concepts of philosophy, government, or international relations, and his study load made interaction with local culture sparse. In any case, to the extent that he was exposed to Western thought, it was when he was already an adult, with preshaped political ideals and values.

Before the death of his brother, Bashar was little known to the Syrian public. He was not the object of the personality cult that was cultivated around Hafez al-Asad and his heir apparent, Basil. The fact that he was not even provided nominal military training before being sent to gain a higher education as a medical doctor (the profession that his father had aspired to but abandoned in favor of a military career) was also indicative of his being prepared for a life of obscurity and not expected to play even a minor role in the regime (in contrast to monarchies like Jordan, in which all sons and daughters of the royal family are groomed in one way or another for royal functions). It is a moot question whether his personality was the cause or the result of his being distanced from public office.

Some observers note that Bashar's profound need to prove that he is worthy to fill the shoes of his father is linked both to the fact that he was his father's second choice and to his own rather distant relationship with his father. In contrast to his two elder siblings, Bushra and Basil—who had for some time a father who had not yet been recognized as a national icon and mythological figure—Bashar was born on 11 September 1965. When he was five years old, his father was already president of Syria. Indeed, when Bashar mentions his father in public, or frequently even in private, he does not refer to him as "my father," but as President Hafez al-Asad.

Until assuming the office of president, the only formal position Bashar al-Asad held was chairman of the Syrian Computer Society.[39] Nevertheless, he began to wield a degree of informal power under the watchful eyes of his father's advisors. The Syrian propaganda machine projected an image of Bashar as a modest, unassuming, introverted intellectual, gentle, and polite, a hard worker who avoided the special attention and privileges that

naturally come with the status of the president's son, and a lover of technology and scientific progress.

Bashar inherited Syria from his father along with the structure of the regime and the singular role of the president within it. In this context, he also inherited the personality cult, with appropriate adaptations to his age, background, personality, and education. Instead of military imagery and allusions to heroes of the past, the cult of Bashar emphases his wide education, modernism, and—most significantly—his role as the carrier of the legacy of his father and personification of his last will. He has been poetically referred to as the "Lion Cub" (a play on the name Asad, which means "lion" in Arabic). Islamic allusions also have been recruited to legitimize the succession. An article in the regime newspaper *al-Thawra* best expressed this by addressing the late President, saying: "You remain forever and Bashar, the Hope, is your replacement (*khalifah*)."[40] The use of the word *khalifah* (caliph) immediately evokes allusions of the status of the Prophet Mohammad, whose successors had divine authority as the "replacements" (caliphs) of the Apostle of God. Bashar's "coronation" was in fact reminiscent more of royal succession than of a presidential regime; the day before his father's death he had no official position either in the party or the state structure. His succession had to be "legalized" by changing the constitution (clause 83 stipulated that the minimum age for the president should be 40, while Bashar was at the time of succession was only 34 years old) and by a "referendum."

The young president is portrayed in the Syrian media as representing the continuity and stability that Hafez al-Asad gave to the Syrian people; enjoying a strong international status; being loved by the Syrian people; strong and decisive, not hesitating to act against corruption, including by taking on the strongest of Syria's elite; and combining in his personality both the inherited wisdom and political acumen of his father (who held Syria together and granted it stability) and the zest and modernity of youth.[41] These motifs are part of the daily propaganda fare that the Syrian citizen receives as part of the burgeoning personality cult of the new president. Upon his election, Bashar was reputed to have issued orders to put a halt to the more sycophantic expressions. No significant change can be identified, though.

This attempt to pass on the cult of adulation of Hafez al-Asad to his son-successor has not been smooth. The underlying reasons for the acceptance of that cult—awe and fear of a president who had achieved domestic deterrence by actually using his oppressive power— are either nonexistent or considerably weaker in the case of Bashar than was the case with his father. While the instruments of oppression did not disappear upon Bashar's accession, their deterrence was weakened by the new president's bid for "openness" and clemency. The changes in the leadership of the security organizations (see below) also reduced their intimidation of the public.

Bashar's stature as president in the eyes of the Syrian public— and more significantly in the eyes of the mainstays of the regime—is handicapped by factors inherent in the process that brought him to power: (1) his arrival at power not by his own manipulation of power within the regime but by the will of his dead father (in a country in which all previous leaders since independence have come to power by coups of one sort or another); (2) the fact that he was not his father's original choice for succession; (3) the relatively limited—in time and scope—period of political apprenticeship, particularly the lack of real military training or experience; (4) the presence within the regime of a formidable "old guard" which, by virtue of having been privy to the wills and ways of the late father and president for a longer period than Bashar himself had, wields "moral weight."

Along with all the above, as in any case in which a leader who ruled for decades is succeeded by a younger successor, the comparison favors the former. On the other hand,

Bashar al-Asad enjoys one great advantage, the lack of an alternative either for the elite or for the opposition. This can be encapsulated in the saying that was heard in Damascus after his appointment: "*ma fi gheiru*" (there is nobody else).[42] Rather than attempting to disprove this image, Bashar makes full use of it, sending messages out to the world that any alternative to him would be worse.

Bashar's lack of practical political experience makes it difficult to draw a comprehensive picture of his political *modus operandi* and makes him something of an enigma for political analysts. Bashar's main activities since he was appointed as heir apparent were in the Lebanese theater, where he was responsible for contacts with the Lebanese factions. However, it is difficult to appraise his own political style and impulses from Syria's policies in Lebanon during that period; he was always under the tutelage of members of the "old guard" (Ghazi Kana'an, 'Abd al-Halim Khadam, Rustum Ghazali) who had wide experience in the Lebanese arena. In any case, the ultimate decisions were made by Hafez al-Asad and, in those cases in which Bashar had been directly involved, there was little to differentiate his decision making from that of his mentors. In none of these cases have specific decisions been attributed to Bashar alone or to his overruling of others. An interesting case in point is Bashar's involvement in the crackdown on the last stronghold of his uncle, Rifaat al-Asad, in Latakiya in October 1999 and the arrest of a large number of Rifaat's supporters. The crackdown was viewed as particularly ruthless, as it was against members of the Asad clan in an Alawite city and a message regarding Bashar's ability to wield force if necessary.

Bashar has never been directly involved in war. His military training was limited or even fictitious (a crash course as a tank commander and commission as captain in 1994, and a swift rise in rank to major in 1995, lieutenant colonel in 1997, full colonel in 1997 and lieutenant general and field marshal in June 2000). This lack of personal experience reflects not only on his ability to direct military operations but on the extent of his aversion to acts that may deteriorate to war. While his father was considered to be a master of brinkmanship, he was, in the final analysis, a cautious leader. This was, to a great extent, due to his having met up with the realities of defeat in war both as commander of the Air Force in 1967 and as president in 1973 and 1982. Bashar's fast-track military training since Basil's death in 1994 did not provide him with a real understanding of military and strategic matters, and he relies on his circle of advisors. Consequently, whereas his father's strategic behavior was, for the most part, the result of his own decisions and strategic thinking, Bashar's decisions depend heavily on the advice he has been given.

Many accounts point out Bashar's well-cultivated and soft-spoken—almost self-effacing and ingratiating—manner in his meetings with foreigners. A major strand in almost all these interactions is Bashar's attempt to convey the impression that he is not a dictator and to obtain his listener's sympathy for his domestic obstacles and patience with his genuine efforts to reform Syria. This strand is absent from his meetings with Syrians and Lebanese. The "Dr. Bashar" image projected to foreigners contrasts sharply with narratives of "Mr. President" al-Asad's behavior in meetings with Syrians and Lebanese. One telling account is about the last meeting (24 August 2004) between Bashar and former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. According to al-Hariri's nonpublic account immediately after the meeting, Bashar "blew up" and behaved like a prosecutor in a trial; he fired one accusation after another at al-Hariri, accusing him of serving Israel and sabotaging Syrian interests and threatening him directly.[43] Hariri reportedly said that Assad told him, "This is not about Emile Lahhoud, it is about Bashar al-Assad." He also threatened that if Jumblatt had Druze in Lebanon, then he had Druze in Syria and that he was "ready to do anything" to get his way in Lebanon.

Similar behavior on the part of Bashar has been recorded in his interactions with other Syrians and Lebanese. One explanation proposed is that Bashar treats foreigners over whom he has no power with deference but allows himself to intimidate those over whom he has power—Syrians and Lebanese.

One facet of Bashar's personal behavior that came as a surprise to many has been what seems to be an unabashed admiration of the personality of the leader of the Lebanese Hezbollah, Hasan Nassrallah. The outward signs of this attitude are Bashar's willingness to invite Nassrallah to the presidential palace and even to allow Hezbollah fighters to march on special occasions in Latakiya. This openness to the leader of a Lebanese faction diverges fundamentally from Hafez al-Asad's policy of keeping the Lebanese factions at arms length and allowing the security bureaucracy to deal with them. There is, of course, no authoritative explanation for Bashar's seeming fascination with the Shi'ite leader; however, some observers have attributed it to a psychological need for a charismatic and authoritative role model in lieu of his father. Others have noted that for Bashar, who is acutely aware of his leadership deficiencies, became an admirer of a man who has the very leadership traits that he lacks. This admiration—almost adulation—of Hasan Nassrallah has intensified since the last Israeli–Lebanese war in July–August 2006; Bashar's speeches increasingly bear the imprint of the arguments and rhetoric of Hezbollah and Iran and Bashar's commitment to his alliance with Nassrallah has grown. The question may be raised as to what extent, under these psychological conditions, the patron-proxy relationship between Syria and Hezbollah has not been reversed.

Bashar as a "Reformer"

A major question frequently raised with regard to Bashar Asad is his commitment to reform—or at least to change—in the Syrian political system. The prevalent perception both within Syria and in the West upon Bashar's rise to the presidency had been that he could be expected to initiate a process of political and economic liberalization.

There is no consensus among observers regarding the commitment of Bashar al-Asad to political reform. Some have described Bashar as a "restrained reformer" whose interactions with the Western world has convinced him that only political and economic reform can guarantee the survival of the regime.[44] According to this view, he is genuinely conscious of Syria's image in the West and the need to integrate into the global economy and the global culture, and is aware that this can not be done without some degree of liberalization. This view is supported by Bashar's credentials as a reformer, which began to evolve shortly after his return from London and his selection as heir apparent, when he led, during the second half of the 1990s, an "anticorruption" campaign. Bashar's youth, technophile proclivities and education in the UK, and medical profession were presumed to have opened him up to the West. Even his marriage to a British-born woman with Western views on politics, women's rights, and other issues is widely interpreted as an indication of his reformist leanings. Various statements he himself had made, including remarks in his inaugural address regarding democratic thinking and tolerance of political differences, fed expectations that he would promote political reform and liberalization.

Bashar contributed to this impression by a number of steps he took upon his ascendance to power that seemed to show his awareness of the expectations of the Syrian public and desire to meet those expectations. These included freeing political prisoners who had been held for years without due process of law, permitting Syrians who had left the country to return, a bid to draw wealthy expatriates, and liberalizing access to foreign media (particularly through satellite dishes). Realizing that the rampant corruption within the regime was

a major cause for disaffection, he focused on anticorruption campaigns and opening the door to constructive criticism of the shortcomings of the regime bureaucracy.

All these steps were accompanied by a sweeping rejuvenation of the military, security, and party apparatuses and steps to guarantee the satisfaction of the bureaucracy.[45] The "stability," or stagnancy, of the military and security apparatuses came to an end even before Hafez al-Asad's death. Some of the old guard were not favorably disposed towards the president's plans for crowning his son, either out of principle, personal ambition or due to strained relations with Bashar or some of his confidantes. Hafez al-Asad began moving some of these figures aside even before his death. The fact that many of them were already septuagenarians facilitated this process. Since Bashar came to power, this natural flow has been renewed, though the top echelons of the military are still older than their counterparts in other components of the regime and none are from Bashar's own generation.[46] This policy created instability in key cardinal pillars the regime.

Since Bashar took power, the majority (over sixty percent) of the officials of the regime, party, and local government and members of Parliament had been replaced by younger figures. This was implemented primarily through imposed retirement of officials over the age of sixty. This turnover stood in stark contrast to the three decades of stagnant stability under Hafez al-Asad. This process was particularly evident in the Ba'th party, where the majority of representatives to the Tenth Party Congress were new faces.

Bashar's detractors, however, point out that these changes were aimed more at appointing people who would owe their positions to Bashar than at facilitating real reform by rejuvenation of the regime. The new appointees were not people from outside the *ancien régime*, but younger members of the regime who had had climbed the ladders of the hierarchy but been blocked by the lack of mobility at the top. Bashar also projected a genuine desire for governmental reform. Unlike his father, who saw the economy as secondary to national political goals, Bashar subscribes to an "economo-centric" view of politics. He recognizes the priority of modernizing Syria's economy and is aware that to do so he must gain the goodwill of the West. This entails creating a functional bureaucracy to replace of the feudal system that thrived under his father. It also is notable that Bashar actually "inherited" the modernization and anticorruption agenda from his late brother Basil, who had also promoted it when he had been "heir apparent" and had recycled methods used by their father to crack down on Rifa't al-Asad in the early 1980s. The campaign was engineered to strengthen Bashar's public standing by identifying him with a populist issue, but at no stage in his prepresidential career nor since he has become president has he risked confrontation with the inner circle of the regime in order to fight corruption. Those who were accused of corruption were no more nor less corrupt than others whose status in the regime have precluded action against them (such as 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam, Ghazi Kana'an, Maher al-Asad, Asef Shawkat and others).

Bashar has also gone on record formally as supporting a "democratization process" in Syria and frequently has mentioned 2007 elections as key to the next major stage in this process. Bashar's accession therefore raised expectations both inside Syria and in the international community for a "white revolution" of democratization and liberalization in the country. Once the intelligentsia felt that there was a chink in the ideological uniformity of the regime and that the regime had lost its will, undercurrents of diversity came to the fore. This gave birth to what was popularly known as the "Damascus Spring" of 2001— an outburst of the hitherto suppressed intellectual and civil-society circles, particularly in Damascus, and the founding of a large number of "clubs" for political debate.

However, there are indications that Bashar's concept of "Syrian democracy" lacks many of the essential elements of the Western paradigm of democracy. Bashar's "Syrian

democracy" must be founded on Syrian history, culture and "personality." In Bashar's eyes, "Freedom and democracy are only instruments, just like stability. The goal is progress and growth."[47] Along with this definition of the "proactive" goal of the regime, the "defensive" goal is preservation of "unity" and "stability." Popular participation is manifested in the involvement of the people in promoting the country's growth according to the plans of the regime, not in defining the very identity or nature of the regime. The instruments for popular participation are the same ones that the regime has used for decades for effecting social control.

Syria, according to Bashar, is much too fragile for "instant democracy"; opening the door wide for freedom of speech is tantamount to permitting intercommunal conflict and chaos. Since the "unity" and "cohesion" of the people and the stability of the nation are the loftiest of national values and goals, the charge against members of the opposition is that they impinge on these very values in the service of foreign enemies of Syria. Western sponsorship of a Syrian "civil society" is presented as an attempt to replace the indigenous Syrian "civil society," based on government-regulated clubs and charities and tribal institutions, with a foreign concept. The result of such chaos will not be the victory of liberal forces that the West is trying to sponsor, but of radical Islamic forces that are lying in wait to take advantage of a breakdown of the regime. The cases of Algeria since the early 1990s and the civil war in Lebanon and Iraq after the fall of the Ba'th regime are cited to prove the folly of uncontrolled democratization. In many of his meetings with western representatives, he hints at a period of 3–5 years needed to "prepare" Syria for democracy and asks for the West to be forbearing with him, not to pressure him for reforms and to allow him to make progress toward democracy at a pace that suits the social and economic make-up of Syria.

The "Damascus Spring" came to an end after less than a year. It was followed by "The Damascus Winter" of January 2002, with the arrest of Syrian intellectuals and parliamentary backbenchers. The nature of the renewed suppression, however, was different from that which Syria knew in the past; instead of summary arrests and disappearances of dissidents, the regime initiated public trials, albeit with forged evidence and predetermined verdicts, but open and with ostensible legal defense and media cover. In doing so it appears that the regime felt that it could ward off some of the international criticism of its actions.

The emphasis on institutionalized repression, as opposed to the more arbitrary use of force that Syria was accustomed to, was also manifested in Bashar's "anticorruption" campaign. Officials who had fallen from grace were accused of corruption.[48] Some were made an example of through "due process," while others were accused through leaks to the Lebanese press,[49] but none were either summarily executed or surreptitiously incarcerated.

The crackdown on civil society was accompanied by a declared "reactivation" of the Ba'th party; members of the regional command council were sent to mobilize support for the regime's actions. Bashar's reactivation of the party as a central instrument for achieving legitimacy reflects his need to augment his legitimacy. Unlike his father, Bashar relies on the party and needs to coopt it. Moreover, the party plays an important role in Bashar's sociopolitical worldview; he perceives it as occupying the societal space that the civil-society movement claims for itself. Therefore, revitalization of the party is not a mere propaganda ploy but an attempt to replace the civil-society movement with a government-controlled "civil society."

While the role of Bashar in initiating the reform process is not debated, his role in the decision to put a halt to it is. Analysts sympathetic to Bashar and his reformist credentials have interpreted the regime's abrupt halt of the liberalization process as occurring for various reasons. The main explanations include: (1) pressures on the president from the "old guard" and the Ba'th party, who feared a Gorbachev syndrome and demanded an immediate halt

to the growing threat. Some analysts refer to "ultimatums" that the "old guard" issued to the new president; (2) unilateral and unauthorized action on the part of the security forces, which forced a fait accompli on the president without first obtaining his acquiescence, (3) Bashar himself initiating steps against the reformists in order to ingratiate himself with the "old guard," hoping to win its support and consolidate his power and then implement further reforms, (4) and the rise of Ariel Sharon to power in Israel, which strengthened the hardliners in Damascus, which who Bashar then had to accommodate them.

All these versions, though, do not do justice to Bashar's own vested interest in the survival and continuity of the regime in its existing form. An alternative version which has become more and more accepted by most Syria watchers and the opposition inside Syria is as follows: (1) Bashar believed he could open the door to incremental reforms and did not expect the groundswell of demands for full civil liberties. Bashar had understood the need for instruments of political expression as a means for "letting off steam," but not as a form of popular participation in government. Neither Bashar nor the rest of the elite were prepared for the rapid spread of demands for increasing freedom and the growing willingness to criticize the regime, enabled by breaking of the "Complex of Fear." (2) The crackdown reflected Bashar's core beliefs that the direction that civil society took was incompatible with the vital interests of the regime and its survival. (3) The revitalization of the party at this stage also is commensurate with Bashar's own statements that the public desire for participation, which was manifested in the breakout of the civil-society movement, could be satisfied by adjustments in the political structure of the Ba'th party and the PNF. (4) The attempts to create a semblance of due process of law in arrests and indictment of oppositionist figures does not represent an acceptance of the principle of separation of branches of government, but rather a shift from openly arbitrary authoritarianism to institutionalized authoritarianism. (5) The slogans of the Bashar al-Asad period in Syria, "change within the framework of continuity" and "reform and development,"—are indicative of these domestic priorities.

One of the arguments in favor of Bashar's reformist image is the fact that he is considered a technophile; even before his appointment as president, Bashar was touted as a member of the "internet generation" of leaders that had arisen in the Arab world, such as Kings Mohammad VI of Morocco and Abdallah II of Jordan. The use of his medical title (Dr. Bashar al-Asad) in public statements and the allusions to expectation of change in the personality cult (Bashar's pictures were captioned "the hope" and "the future") also lends itself to the notion that he is a new brand of leader. His Western education and affection for computer technology created the impression that he would promote modernization of Syria on all levels—political, technological, and economic. This expectation that Bashar's technophile tendencies inexorably would lead him to political openness and liberalization also seems to have been a chimera. Bashar is definitely a technophile on the personal level but he by no means is a proponent of the free and anarchistic culture represented by the Internet revolution. Technology seems to be, for Bashar, a two-edged sword. He regards it as necessary for Syria to develop itself and win a place in the modern world. But, at the same time, according to Bashar,

> a huge influx of information and ideas made possible by the communications and IT revolution . . . has made room for theories and projects, as well as lifestyles which have overwhelmed Arabs and threatened their existence and cultural identity, and has increased the doubts and scepticism in the mind of young Arabs. The forces behind these events have created an illusory virtual reality . . . which drives us in a direction identified by others. . . . This leads in the end to the

cultural, political and moral collapse of the Arab individual and his ultimate defeat even without a fight.[50]

The general impression from the above analysis and from various statements by Bashar al-Asad—both public and private—is that he is not a "closet reformer" held hostage in the hands of an "old guard," but views political liberalization (as opposed to economic "opening") as foreign, if not an existential threat to the regime. The reasons for this analysis include the following:

- First of all, the oft-invoked argument that Bashar is captive in the hands of an "old guard" loses its credibility as time goes on and Bashar has strengthened his grip. During the last five years, the "old guard" that had served Hafez al-Asad has been all but eliminated from key positions of authority and its ability to influence of pressure the president has been greatly reduced.
- There is no doubt, even among those who see Bashar as a reformer, that, like his father, Bashar's strategic goal is the survival of the regime. There are no signs that he sees himself as the "receiver" of the regime in the historic process of its dismantling or that he desires to play the role of a Syrian Juan Carlos or Gorbachev. Bashar's concept of liberalization is borrowed from the Chinese reforms or the Egyptian *infitah* under Sadat in the 1970s and not from the Soviet Glasnost under Gorbachev. Hence, his drive for liberalization remains qualified by his acceptance of the overriding priority of regime survival.
- Bashar also remains true—at least on the rhetoric level—to the ideal of Arab nationalism. It seems that this is not merely a vestige of an obsolete strategic worldview or a demonstration of filial fidelity to the father's vision, but is a means for creating a semblance of domestic cohesiveness and common identity in a society divided by local interests and communal identities.

Decision Making under Bashar

The model of hypercentralist decision making that characterized the regime of Hafez al-Asad faded with Bashar's rise to power for various reasons:

- The "gang" surrounding the president did not have the same status with Bashar as with his father. Bashar naturally felt the need for alternative channels of information and advisors who were more attuned to his world view.
- The "fading away" of the "old guard" in Bashar's regime and the integration of younger technocrats has changed some of the bureaucratic psychology in the party and opened the door for more internal debate.
- Bashar's ability to rely on the military and the *mokhabarat* is considerably less than his father's and his tendency to accord the party a more central role as a power base has altered the relationship between the party and the president. More than in the past, the party has become a natural platform to influence the leader.
- On the other hand—and to a certain extent in contradiction to the enhanced status of the party—Bashar's tendency to surround himself with nonparty member technocrats and Western-educated academicians has weakened the exclusivity of the party.
- Bashar clearly has neither the ability nor the proclivity of his father for multitasking, and micromanaging, and obviously prefers the delegation of authority. In many areas, Bashar is reported to preside over "consultations" with experts on various matters and is said to be willing to listen to opinions and advice on various issues, and not only

from the person whose "portfolio" the subject belongs to.[51] Furthermore, the result of these "consultations" under Bashar tends to be the adoption of a consensus. This willingness to listen to different opinions seems to encourage competition among the elite for the ear of the president. This, too, strengthens those relatively new but now senior figures in the party who can manufacture a group consensus. In cases in which these officials also have executive powers delegated to them, they find themselves operating in the terra incognita of a decentralized regime and allow themselves to take actions that their predecessors would not have dared to contemplate in the days of the senior Asad.

- In the Hafez al-Asad era, the various organs of the regime carried out the president's orders out of a combination of personal loyalty, fear, deference to the wisdom of his decisions, and faith in the stability of the existing order. These components are considerably lower in regard to Bashar. The operational hierarchy does not owe him the same loyalty that his father's "gang" did and he lacks the aura of personal authority that makes subordinates obey orders even when they do not really understand them. The faith in the future of the regime and the existing order has diminished greatly.

With the fading of the old guard in Bashar's regime and the integration of younger technocrats, some of the bureaucratic psychology in the regime has changed and opened the door for more internal debate. However, while the inner circle has changed, the "intelligence culture" of the Syrian has not. Therefore, while Bashar has expressed his belief that Syria needs to revamp its bureaucracy, he has taken no steps to create an autonomous national security mechanism. At the same time, none of the present heads of the security or military apparatuses have relations with Bashar that come close to the intimacy that his father had with his confidantes. The turnover of senior officials in key positions is indicative of this situation. Unlike his father, Bashar has no personal relationship with most of his advisors. This limits the influence of many of these advisors on the President at any given time or on any specific issue.

As a result, Bashar's capability to implement his decisions—such as they are—is considerably less than his father had. According to one count, by the end of 2003 Bashar had personally issued as president no less than 1900 decrees, laws, and administrative orders; most have been ignored or blocked by the Ba'th party bureaucracy. Examples include Bashar's decree (June 2003) to grant individual amnesty to exiled oppositionists, which remained a dead letter, blocked by the *Mukhabarat*; and Decision 408, mentioned above, which calls for separation of the party apparatus from that of the state, and which had no real impact. If anything, the role of the party apparatus in running the state has grown, and the decision to return lands that were expropriated in the agrarian reforms of the early days of the Ba'th regime were blocked by the party (to whose members the lands had been transferred).

It is noteworthy that among Bashar's younger civilian advisors and top Ba'th figures in the Regional Command, there are no conspicuous experts on international affairs or strategy. This remains the fiefdom of the military establishment. Nevertheless, the changes in Syria's strategic posture from the late president's circumspect brinkmanship and tendency to hedge his bets when having to rely on other Arab (or any other) allies to Bashar's embracing of Iraq, Iran, and Hezbollah as Syria's "strategic hinterland" indicates influences other than those of the old guard.

Five years after Bashar came to power, the "generation factor" has become less pivotal. The incumbent leadership and bureaucracy is, for the most part, appointed by Bashar and,

except for those with family, economic or tribal power bases of their own, beholden to him for their status. But even the relatively independent status of these "oligarchs" is regime dependent. Unlike many of the "oligarchs" of the former Soviet Union (and the present Russian leadership), who had metamorphosed from Soviet nomenklatura to post-Soviet leaders and oligarchs, the Syrian elite is well aware that in case of regime change "'á la Middle East," they stand little chance of surviving as an elite (or even surviving physically), either collectively or individually. This understanding underlines the sense of "hang together or hang separately" within the regime.

The ostensibly objective factors of resources (economy) and geopolitics are interpreted differently by various figures in the elite and these differences have a bearing on the entire decision-making process. Many of the elite see a healthier economy as a *sine qua non* for regime resilience and survival and therefore call for economic reforms. Others point out that Syria muddled through the entire Hafez al-Asad era with a sick economy, subordinating economic considerations to those of regional politics (to achieve a strong regional status for Syria), domestic control, and elite cohesion (by providing economic perquisites to the elite and denying them to the general public).

The predominance of regional politics also is debated. While some see Syrian regional relevance as a necessary condition for creating regional and international interest in the survival of the regime, others claim that Syria's regional involvement (in Lebanon, and Iraq, and with the Palestinians) is actually counterproductive to the survival of the regime. The price of Syria's support for Palestinian terrorism, Lebanese instability and Iraqi insurgency, they claim, far outweighs their benefits as tools for maintaining Syria's regional status. It appears that this debate is integrated into the day-to-day decision-making process in Damascus.

As a result, the "reading" of communications arriving from foreign powers (including the U.S.) is deeply colored by the composition of the people advising Bashar when the communication is dealt with. While the Syrian ambassadors in Washington and London are Bashar's appointees, there is little indication that their reporting or advice carries enough weight to counterbalance the combined advice of the people surrounding Bashar in Damascus.[52] The regime's incompetence in reading strategic conditions was manifested in its behavior toward the Mehlis report.[53] There is no doubt that during the process of the Mehlis inquiry, the regime saw it and UNSC 1559 as no more than ploys for putting pressure on Syria. It did not understand that it was incrementally losing its legitimacy and allowing the U.S. to set the stage for even harsher sanctions.

Bashar, however, has retained one trait of his father's policies: an aversion to direct military confrontation with Israel. This aversion was amply demonstrated when escalation between Israel and Hezbollah in the Har Dov/Shab'a area[54] between the Golan Heights and Lebanon threatened to spill over into an Israeli–Syrian confrontation. Each time that possibility appeared, Asad took care not to respond, even to Israeli bombing of Syrian military sites and a Palestinian training camp near Damascus.

Decision making, of course, is only a point on a vector beginning with collection and analysis of information regarding important issues and ending in implementation of the decisions. The process under Bashar is weak not only in the first stage (collecting correct information) and in the decision making itself (weighing contingencies and consequences, hedging risks, and mapping courses) but also in the implementation of decisions.

Hafez al-Asad was probably best known for his tough negotiating tactics—long hours of meetings without any breaks, filibuster monologues on the history of the region, and refusal to speak any language other than Arabic. He was, however, also known for his reliability once an agreement was concluded.

To what extent can the negotiation style of Hafez al-Asad be attributed to cultural or national values and therefore be expected in Bashar's regime or in future Syrian regimes? It appears that what has come to be known as "Syrian negotiation techniques" (mainly in negotiations between Syria and Israel via the American conduit) were quintessentially those of Hafez al-Asad. Unlike cases such as Iran, Japan, China, and the U.S., where certain negotiation styles can be attributed to cultural characteristics and values, this does not seem tenable in the Syrian case. Hafez al-Asad brought to his negotiation style the personal background of a military officer from a minority community with a culture of defensive secrecy. He had fought his way up, had betrayed, and had been betrayed and had honed his style over decades. Bashar has none of these factors in his background.

Bashar has been involved in too few negotiations with the outside world since he came to power to construct a reliable picture of his negotiation style or even indicate that he would have a personal involvement of the sort his father had in Syrian negotiations with foreign parties. This is not necessarily because the opportunity has not arisen, but rather because Bashar is hesitant to place himself in a position that would force him to take strategic decisions. This is particularly a problem since the long rule of Hafez al-Asad left his son with no other model for negotiation.

In those few cases in which Bashar has been involved in negotiation, a number of traits have come to light:

- Bashar is said to be well briefed before meetings with foreign representatives. However, he seems to have less of a capacity than his father to make use of these details. A case in point is the confrontation with the U.S. over the pumping of Iraqi oil in the Syrian pipeline.
- Bashar does not negotiate or take decisions alone, he depends on his team and defers to them. He has a distinct need to merge with the consensus of his advisors. But unlike his father, his counselors change both according to the issue discussed and frequently by chance. The dynamics between these advisors therefore is a constant struggle for the ear of the president. The absence of coherent schools of policy among the advisors and the predominance of personal considerations among the advisors may contribute to what seems to be an erratic decision-making process under Bashar. His lack of self-confidence almost precludes his overruling of impasses created by his lieutenants.
- Bashar tends to make liberal use of his apparent weak position. In messages through back channels and even in direct meetings he points out that he is not in total control (in his words: "not a dictator") and is constrained by the mentality of the "old guard" and the "structure" of the regime. Such a resort to apologetics would never have been used by his predecessor and is rather reminiscent of the explanations/excuses that Yasser Arafat was accustomed to make to justify his lack of complete control.

A possible window into the negotiation style of the Bashar al-Asad regime is the EU–Syria negotiations over an association agreement in the context of the Barcelona process with the EU. Syria participated in the Barcelona Conference in 1995 and in the Barcelona Declaration. The Framework Convention necessary for starting the implementation of cooperation under the MEDA programme was only signed in 2000. Negotiations for an Association Agreement, the second main pillar of the EU–Mediterranean partnership, started in 1998, but little progress was made in the first four years. At the end of 2001, progress was made. Since then, progress in the negotiations and in related economic and legal reforms has been made by the government under Prime Minister Al-Otari, which took over in September 2003. In December 2003 an understanding was reached on all issues except

the provisions for nonproliferation of WMD. Finally, an agreement on the text for such provisions was agreed upon in September 2004 and negotiators from the commission and the Syrian Government initialled the texts of the agreement on 19 October 2004. The agreement has since been submitted to the political authorities at both sides (the Council in the EU case) for final approval and signature.[55]

The expedition of the negotiations with the EU was attributed by EU officials to the government reshuffle in Damascus, which brought in reform-minded ministers at most technical and sector ministries but moreover to Bashar's personal "hands on" intervention in the process, overruling the fossilized bureaucracy. The follow-up of the agreement, though, is indicative of the real process. While Bashar apparently did make decisions that enabled the signing of the agreement, he could not impose on a static and stagnant bureaucracy the dynamism needed to solve the multitude of detailed sub-issues necessary to implement the agreement. The Syrian economic bureaucracy had been trained to manage a static economy, wherein most aspects of a free enterprise economy were forbidden except for a selected few, regulated and usually in the exclusive hands of certain members of the nomenklatura. Hence, the Syrian bureaucracy never had to develop the tools that exist in liberal states for constant updating and adjustment of the minute details of taxes, levies, customs, export and import agreements, and so forth.

Translated to the political realm, an ideological worldview that was no less static than the economy and dictated from above (and by Hafez al-Asad's desire to set Syria's policy personally) spared the bureaucracy the need to develop a decision-support mechanism with tools for creative scenario building and presentation of alternatives that diverge from the president's directives. In Syrian negotiations with Israel, this was manifested in the perception of Israeli negotiators that their Syrian interlocutors lacked the wide latitude that they had and that attempts to propose "creative solutions" were an exercise in futility.

Syrian negotiating acumen has been put to the test in the wake of the Mehlis report on the al-Hariri assassination. In an attempt to indicate Syrian willingness to cooperate with the investigation, Bashar sent letters to members of the UN Security Council before the discussion of the report. According to diplomats who reviewed the letters, there were at least two slightly different versions of Asad's letter, diplomats said. One version was delivered to the United States, Britain, and France, and it included the sentence: "I have declared that Syria is innocent of this crime, and I am ready to follow up action to bring to trial any Syrian who could be proved by concrete evidence to have had connection with this crime." A second version omitting the pledge went to other Security Council members.[56] The difference between the two versions raises serious questions regarding the reasoning behind it. It should have been obvious to any Syrian with experience in the UN that the latter version would come to light and damage the credibility of the former.

Given the lack of trust between Syria and the U.S. administration, Syrian negotiating tactics resort to back channels and attempts to influence the administration through public opinion. One example is the letter sent on 5 October 2005 to Congresswoman Sue Kelly, which reiterates the Syrian stance.[57] Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Daradari has stated that there will be a number of political reforms in Syria regarding the parties law, the Kurdish question, and political prisoners. Also, the decree (96 of 2005 issued on 28 October) on the formation of an investigatory committee to "investigate any Syrian civilian or military persons in all issues related to the mission of the independent international investigation committee, formed in April by the UN Security Council resolution 1595," to be headed by the public prosecutor of the Republic of Syria and the membership of the military public prosecutor and a judge nominated by the justice minster, should also be seen as an attempt to play for time and to influence international public opinion.

Family Power Bases under Bashar

Family power bases are arguably the most consistent characteristic of the patronage system. Bashar al-Asad came to the presidency of Syria not because he was Bashar but because he was al-Asad. There is no doubt that he is highly aware of the fact that he was chosen in order to keep the family in power and is beholden to the family and the main pillars of power, not only for his election but also for his continued rule. This commitment, however, is not mere power politics: the nuclear al-Asad family is close-knit and the main constraint on Bashar's rule is the extended Asad family. These include, in the inner circle of the family:

1. Bashar's mother Anisa Makhlouf, who is widely perceived as the "keeper of the seal" of Hafez al-Asad's legacy and of family cohesiveness.
2. Bashar's elder sister Bushra, an assertive and domineering figure, and her husband, Asef Shawkat, who are widely considered the most influential of the clan. The couple has even been popularly dubbed "the royal couple." Ironically, Asef is probably the most similar to the late president in his political and security *modus operandi*. He is intelligent, low key, and eschews military uniforms when not necessary, preferring expensive suits. He is self-confident, businesslike and street-wise. Not having been born into the "first family," or even belonging to one of the more prominent Alawite families, he is perceived as being a "self-made man," who consolidated power with his own resources and his own levers and ambitions. His performance as a young officer in suppressing the Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in Northern Syria also contributes to his reputation for ruthlessness. Bushra is viewed as an "iron lady," the power behind both her brother, Bashar, and her husband. Her stubborn character was manifested in her marriage—eloping with Asef without her parents' prior approval and forcing them to accept him. She is educated (she has a PhD) and is widely considered the most appropriate to follow in the role of her father, were she not a woman.
3. Bashar's younger brother. Maher is considered the most volatile, "thuggish," and uncontrollable member of the family. He is a colonel in the Republican Guards and commands the brigade stationed around Damascus.
4. Bashar's younger brother, Majed, who is emotionally or mentally retarded.

The second circle of the family includes:

1. The Makhluf family (Bashar's mother's family), including Adnan Makhluf and the sons Rami and Ihab, whose wealth is estimated at over $3 billion, with a hold over real estate, banking, free trade zones along the Lebanese border, duty free shops, and Syriatel (the mobile phone network). Rami Makhluf is said to be particularly close to Bushra and her husband, as well as having common business dealings with Maher. A third member of the family, Mohannad Makhluf, lives in the U.S.
2. The Shaleesh family, including Gen. Dhu al-Himma (Zuheir) Shalish, Asef Isa Shaleesh, the general manager of SES (which traded in arms with Iraq), first cousin of Bashar. Maj. Gen. Dhu Himma Shaleesh (major shareholder in SES) heads an elite presidential security group.

The al-Asad family is fractured along a number of fault lines:

- The split between Hafez al-Asad and his brothers Rif'at and Jamil in the 1980s, which has carried over to the second generation;
- The conflict between Maher al-Asad and his brother-in-law, Asef Shawkat;[58]

- The ups and downs in relations between the Makhlouf family and Maher al-Asad on one hand, and the close relations between Bushra and Rami Makhlouf on the other; and
- The "black sheep" of the family, Bashar's second cousin Numeir al-Asad, who led a gang in Latakiya and was arrested, and Mundher al-Asad, the son of Bashar's uncle Jamil, who was arrested (2005) at Beirut airport.

Obviously, Bashar's level of commitment to the various branches of the extended family differs from one to the other. It is widely believed that the restraining hand of his mother holds him and Maher back from taking over some of their cousins' assets. Therefore, it can be expected that at some point Bashar may "crack down" on the corruption of his cousins, and thus prove again his anticorruption and reformist tendencies. According to some reports, there already has been tension between Maher and Rami Makhlouf and the family has considered moving the center of its activities to Dubai.

Other members of the older generation of the Asad family have been sidelined or even banished. These include Hafez al-Asad's brother, Rifaat Al-Asad, and his son Somar (Hafez al-Asad's other brother, Jamal, died in late 2004 and had been marginalized for some time prior to his death). Rifa't and Somar are the only members of the family who clearly are opposed to the rule of Bashar. Rifa't ran afoul of his brother when he seemed to be making a bid for power during Hafez al-Asad's illness in 1981, and he eventually left Syria for exile in Europe (though he continued to hold the formal title of vice president for security). Rif'at continues to promote his candidacy as a replacement for Bashar. He has little influence inside Syria and his record as the head of the infamous "Defence Companies" that were instrumental in putting down the Muslim Brotherhood in Ham'ah in 1981 is a political handicap for any future non-Ba'th regime. However, he has certain strengths: it is said that he still commands some loyalty inside the army and the Alawite community; he has a close personal relationship with Saudi Arabia's new King Abdallah (one of Rifaat's wives is a sister of King Abdallah's wife); his polygamous marriages, along with the marriages of his sons and daughters, have produced strong alliances and crosscutting ties with prominent families and prestigious clans within Syria.

A member of the nonorganic family who appears to have had a growing personal influence over Bashar is his wife Asma (Emma) Akhras al-Asad. Asma was born in London in 1975, the daughter of a wealthy Sunni family of Syrian origin. Her father, Fawaz Akhras, was a cardiologist and her mother Sahar served as first secretary at the Syrian Embassy in London. Asma took a degree from King's College at London University and worked as an economic analyst.[59] Little is known about the relations between Bashar and Asma prior to their marriage, except that Bashar met Asma during his studies in London and stayed in contact with her, though their marriage after he became president came as a surprise to many and was not preceded by any reporting on their courtship. The couple have three children, Hafez, Zein, and Kareem. According to some reports, Bashar's mother opposed the marriage on the grounds that Asma was Sunni. Lately, there have been reports about difficulties in the life of the couple and extended visits of Asma with her family in London.

Some sources have pointed out that Asma's father, though he lived outside Syria, was very much a Syrian patriot and passed down to his daughter a pan-Arab worldview. She is said to be in favor of economic and technological reform, but there is very little information regarding her modes and areas of influence, or the extent to which she attempts to promote her ideas in the face of the opposition of other family members. Unlike Bashar's mother, who rarely appeared in public, Asma has played a relatively prominent public role.[60] However, there is no sign that Asma is involved in any of the wider consultations that Bashar holds

with his advisors, belongs to any cliques within the regime, or has had any influence on nondomestic issues (such as Lebanon or the peace process with Israel).

According to some sources, Asma's father Fawaz and her younger brother Eyad[61] also have influence on the president in domestic areas. There is no evidence that Asma's other brother Feras (a student of medicine) is involved in political decision making.

Alongside the extended al-Asad family the main family power bases in Syria are in the major Alawite families such as Nasef Kheir Bek, Khouli, Haydar, Kana'an, Umran, and Duba. These families composed the nomenklatura in the days of Hafez al-Asad, and many of the second generation are still to be found in the party and state organs, and particularly in the military.

Many of these families have forged marriage links with each other and even with prominent Sunni families. Prime examples of these include:

- In the al-Asad family, Rif'at al-Asad is arguably the front runner in forging alliances through marriage. He is married to four women: Amira, a cousin from his own tribe, Sana' Makhlouf (from the 'Alawite Makhlouf family that Bashar's mother comes from), Raja Barakat (from the wealthy Sunni Damascene Barakat family), Lina al-Khayer (from the powerful Alawite al-Khayer tribe) and the sister of the wife of King 'Abdallah of Saudi Arabia. The second generation of Rif'at's family has cemented his ties within the Alawite community. His daughter Lamia is married to 'Ala al-Fayad, the son of General Shafiq al-Fayad (from the prominent Alawite al-Fayad clan of Rifa't's own Kalabiyya tribe). His eldest son Mudar is married to May Haydar, the daughter of the multimillionaire Mohammad Haydar (of the Alawite Khayyatin tribe), and his daughter Tumadhir is married to Mu'ein Nasef Kheir Bek. The marriage of Bashar al-Asad to British-born Sunni Asma al-Akhras does not seem to have been politically motivated. Bushra's marriage to Asef Shawkat also was not politically advantageous. Asef Shawkat was a divorced military officer who comes from a minor Alawite tribe.
- **The Tlas family** is linked by marriage and the aristocratic Sunni al-Jabiri family of Aleppo through Tlas' wife Lamia and Firas Tlas' wife Rania. The Tlas family is also linked by marriage to the upper class Damascene Kheir family (through Manaf's wife, Tal'a). The al-Jabiri clan includes the reformist Mustafa al-Jabiri. Firas Tlas is a businessman and heads the MAS (Min Ajli Suriya, "For the Sake of Syria") financial group and Manaf Tlas is a senior officer in the Republican Guard, close to Bashar and since June 2000 a member of the Ba'th party Central Committee. His eldest daughter Nahed is the widow of the Paris-based Syrian multimillionaire arms dealer Akram al-Oujje and currently lives as a socialite in Paris and is associated with the highest political echelons in France.
- **The Kheir Bek clan** of the Alawite Kalabiyya tribe (the tribe of the Asad family) is represented throughout the party and the security apparatuses.[62] The family is also connected by marriage to the family of former Vice President 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam and to the Assad family through the marriage of Rif'at's daughter, Tumadhir to Mu'ein Nasef Kheir Bek.
- **The Makhlouf family** (of the Alawite Haddadin tribe) is connected to the al-Asad family by Anisa Makhlouf (Bashar's mother) and Sana' Makhlouf (one of Rif'at al-Asad's four wives).
- **The Kana'an family** (the head of which was Ghazi Kana'an, the interior minister who "commited suicide" in the wake of the Mehlis report) also belongs to the Kalabiyya tribe. Ghazi Kana'an is a distant relation of Bashar's mother and the Kana'an

family is also linked by marriage to the al-Asad family through the marriage of Ghazi's son, Yarob to the daughter of Jamil al-Asad.

- **The Fayad family**—the children of Shafiq al-Fayad (retired General of the old guard from the Alawtie Kalabiyya tribe) have all married into the old Syrian elite. His son 'Ala is married to the daughter of Rif'at al-Asad, his son Marwan is married to Nada Nahas (Shi'ite, the family owns the Nahass Group[63]), and another son, George, is married to Rania Boulad (a Christian).
- **The Khaddam family**—'Abd al-Halim Khaddam has two sons (Jamal and Jihad) and one daughter. One of his sons married into the old Damascene al-Attasi family. His grand-daughter (who was known in social circles in Damascus for her ostentatious flaunting of her wealth) is married to the son of Rafiq al-Hariri.
- **Other family connections include:** 'Ali Duba's son, Nidal is married to the eldest daughter of former Syrian Minister of Information, Mohammad Salman.

"Old Guard—"Young Guard"

The Fading of the "Old Soldiers." Bashar's position as leader of the party is handicapped by the presence within the regime of a formidable "old guard." By virtue of having been privy to the wills and ways of the late father and president for a longer period than Bashar himself (as one observer noted, these are "the men whom Bashar calls "uncle"), and having a common experience of struggle when the party was clandestine, these men possess a "moral weight" and are a constant reminder of Hafez al-Asad's legacy.

This constraint has been the object of much debate among observers of Syrian politics. For the first years after Bashar al-Asad came to power, the predominant question was that of his relations with this "old guard." These relationships began to lose their cohesion only towards the end of the Hafez al-Asad era, when some of them looked askance at the hereditary succession scenario that Hafez al-Asad had designed, and the ill leader decided to put aside loyalty to his old comrades in favor of clearing the field for his son and heir. This preemptive "purge" resulted in the dismissal of key figures of the old guard such as Hikmat Shihabi (Chief of Staff, retired in 1998), Mohammad Khouli (Air Force Commander, retired in 1999), Adnan Makhlouf (Republican Guard Commander, retired in 1995), Ali Duba (Military Intelligence Chief, retired in 1999 and seen frequently in Europe), and others.

Later, after Bashar came to power, he effectively moved aside most of the residual "old guard." Some were sent out to pasture with honor (such as Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas and Chief of Staff 'Ali Aslan) and others forced into exile (including former Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi and former Vice President 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam) and others even "committed suicide" (such as former Prime Minister Mohammad Zu'bi and Interior Minister Ghazi Kana'an).[64] The former head of internal security, Bahjat Suleiman, who was considered close to Bashar al-Asad, was removed from his post, apparently on the urging of Asef Shawkat.[65] Most of these former members of the leadership no longer hold any positions of formal power or influence (even as members of the "Central Committee"). The long decades that they were ensconced in their positions in the party and the government, and the patronage system that they developed, suggest that they should still have some residual power through their protégées and heirs even after their forced retirement. This does not seem to be the case. The picture that arises from the present alignment of the "old guard" is that they have been effectively neutralized, and any residual power they wield is mainly through a community of interests within the party bureaucracy, their economic power, and Bashar's breaking with those who represent his father's heritage.

The question arises as to what extent the links of these "purged" members of the old elite remained intact and they can still wield influence. From observations of a number of these figures, it seems that their influence within the party waned a short time after they left their positions of power. For example:

- **Hikmat Shihabi** spends most of his time outside of Syria (Paris and the U.S., where his sons live). He fled Syria via Lebanon when Hafez al-Asad was on his death bed and Syrian papers leaked that he was to be indicted for corruption. Sources claim that his fall from grace was precipitated by his close relations with Rafiq al-Hariri.
- **Mustafa Tlas** has remained Head of the Military Committee, but has apparently retired to his "literary" occupations and intends to write his memoirs. He does, however, maintain a certain level of influence through his sons Manaf and Firas and through the incumbent Minister of Defense, Hasan Turkemani, who was his Chief of Staff. Tlas does not enjoy a high esteem among the educated young generation of the party.[66]
- **'Abd al-Halim Khaddam** supported Bashar upon his father's death, but nonetheless he was forced out of his position as vice president and retained no official party position. His demotion in rank apparently was due to his close relations with Rafiq al-Hariri and his criticism of his assassination. Since the tenth Congress he has been in Paris with his family and in January 2006 he openly broke with Bashar, insinuating that Syria was responsible for the murder of al-Hariri and that such an act could not have been perpetrated without the President's acquiescence.[67]
- **Ali Duba** fell from grace after he refused to support Bashar as successor. He is known as a gambler who spends much of his time at the gambling centers of Europe. Of his two sons (Mohammad and Samer), one has left Syria and works as a medical doctor in the UK and the other is in prison.

The rest of the "old guard" (see the Appendix) has virtually disappeared from the radar screen of Syrian politics. Even taking into account that most of them are septuagenarians, if not older, this seems to indicate that either they have lost their power bases or have come to terms with their retirement.

The "Young Guard." With the "old guard" pushed aside, the regime is witness to the gradual coming of age of a young guard. The nature of the young guard and the extent to which it wields power is therefore the cardinal question. The shift from the old guard to the new elite surrounding Bashar al-Asad has disrupted the traditional patronage networks. The younger generation of those same families, however, feel and demonstrate much less of an affinity to their ancestral homes or even to their "Alawite" identity; Bashar and Maher are both married to Sunni women, as are the sons of Mustafa Tlas and other "sons of the bosses" (a*bna' al-mas'oulin*). Since most of them were born and bred in Damascus—at best in the city of Ladhaqiyya—they even lack the distinct Alawite accent and the savvy to curry favor within the intricate system of families and tribes. Their reference group is no longer the Alawite tribes they sprang from, but their associates in the military, business, or academic worlds in Damascus, most of them Sunnis.

Within the young guard one can define four main groups:

1. Sons and daughters of the "old guard." These "princelings" were born into privilege and learned from their fathers the art of wielding power in order to gain further privilege.

2. The "second generation" within the military and security apparatuses. Prominent among these are Alawite officers who came under Bashar's command in the Republican Guard, along with various senior officers in the military who were promoted by Bashar.[68]
3. The young generation of the civilian branch of the Ba'th party. These are party members who owe the rapid advance in their position to their association with Bashar. Many of them were educated in the West and support measured change in the party in order to guarantee the survival of the regime.[69]
4. Western-educated academics who became associated with Bashar before he became president. Most of these came into Bashar's orbit during the last decade after he became "heir apparent." These individuals can be classified, largely, as Western—mainly American and British-educated academicians with postgraduate degrees and an academic track record in institutions abroad, most of them in the areas of economy and social sciences. In addition, a number of Bashar's associates from the Syrian Computer Society are also counted among his circle of friends.[70] The average age of these individuals is slightly older than Bashar, in the mid-40s and −50s. Not all of these are active members of the Ba'th party, though they are all part of the Ba'th establishment and certainly are not opposed to the party. In his prepresidency days, Bashar al-Asad was accustomed to meet with this crowd in the fashionable "Gemini" restaurant in the new city of Damascus.

The most prominent representatives of the "young guard" surrounding Bashar al-Asad can be seen in the Figure 2.

The main differences between the two "guards" can be summarized as follows:

Old Guard	Young Guard
First generation fought for power	Second generation, born into privilege
Personal loyalty to Hafez al-Asad	Less personal loyalty, vested interests
Used to an autocratic micromanager	Used to consultation and consensus
Centralist decision making	De-centralization of decision making
Clear definition of authority	Ambiguity of authority
Little familiarity with Western culture	Educated in U.S. and U.K.
Socialist-Arab Nationalists	Ideological pragmatists
Support state controlled economy	Support wider private economy
Military technocrats, experienced war and defeat	Academic technocrats; no experiences with war

The "Young Guard" in the Ba'th. The middle ranks of the Ba'th party have also undergone a massive "face lift" since Bashar al-Asad came to power. This process is evident from the composition of the institutions on the national level (when not noted otherwise, the use of the word "national" refers to Syria and not to the Ba'thist use of "national" to signify the Pan-Arab institutions of the party: the Regional Command, the Central Committee, and the Regional Congress. Many of these are "second generation" Ba'thists who grew up with the privileges of belonging to families with close links to the centers of power.

This process that is identified with Bashar al-Asad began even before his formal election as President. The 9th Congress was engineered as the first step in the marginalization of the old guard, which had kept its grip on the party apparatus for thirty years. This was implemented by allowing certain "democratic" procedures at the root level of the party. Following the Congress, the leaders of the party branches were gradually replaced (July

"Young Guard"

The Asad Family
•Maher al-Asad
•Asef Shawkat
•Bushra al-Asad
•Assma al-Asad
•Rami & Ihab Makhluf
•Dhu al-Himma & Asef Shaleesh
•Numeir al–Asad

Military
•Fouad Nassif Kheir–Bek
•Manaf Tlas
•Mohamad Mansoura

(Non–Family) Business sector
•Firas Tlas
•Ayman 'Abd al–Nur
•Samir Seifan
•Jihad & Jamal Khaddam

Western educated academicians
•Abdallah Daradari
•Nabil Sukkar
•Riad al–Abrash
•Ghasan al–Rifa'I
•Sa'adallah al-Qala
•Buthaina Sha'aban
•Muhammad al-Hussein

Young Ba'athists
•Haytham Satayhi
•Ayman 'abd al–Nur
•Butheina Sha'aban
•Iyad Ghazal
•Majed SHadoud
•Ghiyab Barakat
•Walid al–Bouz

The Syrian Computer Society
•Sami al–Khiyami
•Imad Mustafa
•Mahir al–Mujtahid
•Sa'adallah Awa al-Kallah
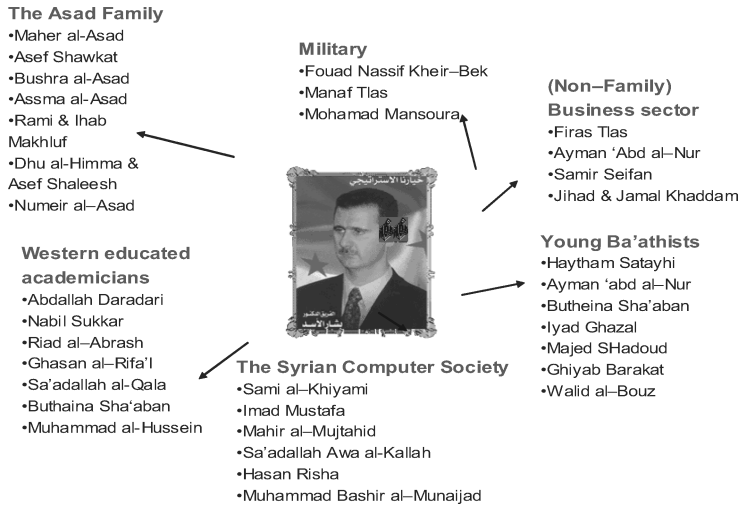•Hasan Risha
•Muhammad Bashir al–Munaijad

Figure 2. The Syrian Young Guard.

2003). This process was repeated prior to the 10th Congress. Thus, by the end of 2005, the face of the various bodies of the Ba'th party had been fundamentally altered. This drive for rejuvenation is common among many young leaders who have inherited their fathers' positions. Kings Abdallah of Jordan and Mohammad of Morocco have taken such steps, as had King Hussein when he came to the throne. The motivation behind these steps also is common: it is difficult for a leader to take over an authoritarian position when his close advisors are people who remember him as a child, or who can draw on their experience of decisions that the leader's omnipotent and omniscient parent had taken in similar circumstances.

Until recently there has been little open discussion within the Syrian Ba'th of formal changes in ideological axioms or traditional slogans. This derived both from ideological conservatism and a sense of the irrelevance of the ideology. Hence, the debate regarding reform focused not on the credo of the party, but on its practical application. Practical reforms in the party itself have been marginal. They include more freedom in elections on the local level of the party, instructions (July 2004) to the media to refer to party members as "Mr." and not as "Comrade" (*rafiq*), and so fourth. Open discussion of ideological reform has increased since Bashar al-Asad came to power, and was particularly explicit during the period leading up to the 10th Regional Congress (June 2005). Since then, the demands for reform within the party have died down, or at least are not voiced in official party organs.

The "reformist trend" within the Ba'th party is clearly identified with the younger generation. However, while most of those who are identified as reformists belong to the young guard, not all of those identified as members of the "young guard" are in favor of reforms. There is no indication that the younger members of the Ba'th nomenklatura—the Asad family or the second generation of the original leaders of the regime—favor reforms that would divest them of their privileges and the economic monopolies they control. The young generation of the military and the *mokhabarat* also has shown no evidence that they are in favor of true economic or political reform.

The reformist trend within the party is represented mainly by second-tier younger party members who have recently climbed the ladders of the hierarchy (branch heads and members of the Central Committee and of the Regional Congress), but have been blocked by the lack of mobility at the top. Prime examples include:

- Haytham Satayhi: Served in the Presidential Office under Hafez al-Asad, there he came to know Bashar. Currently a member of the Regional Command,
- Ayman 'abd al-Nur: Ba'thist economist who calls for reform but supports Bashar,
- Buthayna Sha'aban: Hafez al-Asad's personal interpreter, and an ardent Ba'thist,
- Iyad Ghazal: Second generation party official, currently DG of the Syrian Railways,
- Majed Shadoud: Former member of the Regional Command,
- Ghiyab Barakat: Member of the Syrian Computer Society, former member of the Regional Command,
- Walid al-Bouz: Former Governor of Quneitra, Member of the Regional Command,
- Riad al-Abrash: Former IMF economist and economics professor,
- Mohammad al-Hussein: Minister of Economy, Formerly Professor of Economy at Aleppo University,
- Hasan Risha: PhD in Engineering from Leningrad Polytechnic, member of the Syrian Computer Society,
- Mahdi Dakhlallah: Pro-reformist former member of the staff of the National Command, was editor of *al-Ba'th*, Minister of Information, and
- Bilal Turkemani: The son of the Minister of Defense who owns the weekly Abyad wa-Aswad (Black and White) which is identified with demands for reform abrogating the emergency laws.

In many cases, reformists within the party (see above) are the scions of senior and powerful party members and enjoy political latitude by virtue of their protection. Such cases include:

- Iyad Ghazal, the reformist-minded director of Syria Rail, is the son of the governor of Deraa and apparently enjoys his protection,
- Bilal Hasan Turkemani is the son of Defense Minister Hasan Turkemani,
- Nabil 'Amran is the son of the powerful Alawite 'Amran clan of the Haddadin tribe, and
- Ayman 'Abd al-Nur is also a second generation Ba'th member, who became active in the party thanks to his father,

These Ba'thist reformists do not represent an internal party phenomenon alone but should be seen in the context of the burgeoning "civil-society movement" (*harakat al-mujtama' al-madani*), which emerged almost immediately after Bashar came to power (a period popularly referred to as the "Damascus Spring" that began in early 2001) and was suppressed in the winter of 2001 (the "Damascus Winter"). Many of the Ba'thist reformists mentioned above are outspoken advocates of the reformist movement[71] and differ from it mainly in their choice to continue to attempt to influence the existing order from within. The reformist trend of intellectuals and youth within the party has been dubbed by the Syrian "Samizdat" press the "Jasmine Revolution." This was supposed to have been a "white revolution" initiated by Bashar along the lines of Sadat's policy of purging the "pillars of power" in the former regime of Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser and allowing criticism of the former regime ("de-Nasserization") from 1971 on. The goal of this "revolution" was not to topple the party or the regime but to transform it through reform of the party and the state institutions, and by broadening democracy within the party. Reformists had pinned their

hopes on the 10th Regional Congress and were deeply frustrated by its lukewarm conclusion. These nascent reform tendencies have been further dampened by the international crisis in the wake of the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri and the Mehlis report. The sense of a foreign conspiracy against Syria has been exploited by the leadership to shore up domestic support and suppress voices for reform.

The question of the relations between the Ba'thist reformists and Bashar al-Asad is one of the most debated issues in Syria. On one hand there is no doubt that Bashar is close to many of the reformists, particularly those affiliated with the Syrian Computer Society. Many of these, though, are academicians who are not active in the party or even are not party members. Even those reformists who are party activists are mid-level members without large constituencies and without patronage networks of their own. So even if Bashar likes their ideas, many of them are impractical on a political level.[72] This is because, at the end of the day, implementation of ideas in the Syrian regime requires the support of the bureaucracy, which believes it will be damaged by reforms and modernization.

The 10th Regional Congress was held under the slogan of "development, renewal and reform" (*tatwir, tahdith wa-islah*). The "reformist" trend was evident already in the campaigning of the candidates for the 10th Regional Congress. Those who were elected did not mention Lebanon or Syria's foreign relations; their focus was almost exclusively domestic. The candidates called for administrative reforms, improving the public sector, broadening the free market, and improving healthcare and schools. All asked for better qualified public servants and administrative reform. Many of them criticized the opportunism of the party leadership (stopping short of the president, of course) and the system of clientalism and patronage.

The results of the elections for the delegates to the Congress (April 2005) precipitated protest among Ba'th members in the branches of Damascus and the University of Damascus. The elections for the posts of secretary of the local branch (*far'a*) and sub-branches (*shu'ba*) returned all the old party officials without even one new candidate. Since party procedures actually precluded simultaneous change of more than ten percent of the party leadership, there was no expectation of a sea change. The results, though, were seen as far exceeding the most cynical warnings. The frustration of the young party members found its way into the alternative press of "civil society" and the internet. They claimed that the incumbent party leaders had prevented them from campaigning and presenting their resumes and positions, and did not even publish the names of candidates. Since both candidates and voters did not hold frequent party meetings, most voters did not know the new candidates. A petition was circulated by prominent reform-minded party members (one name associated with this petition was a Bashar confidante, Ayman 'Abd al-Nour) complaining about the corruption of the elections and demanding that 100 known reformers be added to the Party Congress. As a result, 100–150 delegates were added at the last moment, including the reformist Ayman 'Abd al-Nour, who had failed to be elected in his own branch.[73]

Nevertheless, the general sense among the reformists was one of failure.[74] According to one individual who witnessed the preparations for the Congress and its deliberations, "the old vested interests won out . . . new reformers were closed out of the election process and almost all the old regional leaders and district leaders were voted back in because it was illegal to campaign. The political machine ensured that its leaders would retain their cars, offices and privileges."[75] This complaint was raised not only by young would-be delegates, but by some older party members such as Dr. Zuhayr Ibrahim Jabour of Tishreen University[76] and Dr. Ahmad al-Hajj Ali, a member of the Ba'th "Committee to Develop Party Thought" and ex-head of the Bureau of the Central Committee.[77] Even some of the party's official propagandists joined the call for democratization at the branch level that

would allow the younger generation to come to the fore, and for "self-criticism," purging the party of "flaws, exploitation, and interests" and of those who had "harmed the party and the public morality and have contributed to the creation of an image unbecoming to the party due to their personal or family behavior and due to their lack of integrity."[78]

Despite the disappointment of the elections, the Congress was preceded by rumors that it would make "courageous decisions" and Bashar's own declaration that the Congress would be "the greatest leap in the history of Syria." The Congress was expected to deal particularly with the bleak domestic scene,[79] though it was also widely expected that the resolutions of the Congress would change the very essence of the party and of its hold on the regime. Some of the more far-reaching specific expectations that were voiced— including by delegates to the Congress included.[80] A new party law would permit: the formation of political parties outside of the NPF, as long as they are not based on "ethnicity, religion or regionalism" (i.e., neither Islamist nor Kurdish), and changing Article 8 of the constitution, which defines the role of the Ba'th party in the state;[81] endorsement of free parliamentary elections in 2007; granting citizenship to the 100,000 disenfranchised Kurds in the Hasakah region;[82] abrogation of the state of emergency that has existed since 1963 and of law 49 of 1980, which stipulates capital punishment for membership in the Muslim Brotherhood; changing the triple slogan of the party (Unity, Freedom, Socialism) to "Unity, Democracy, Social Justice" in a bid to gradually turn it into a "social democrat" party, along the lines of processes that Communist parties in the former Soviet bloc went through; dismantling the national (pan-Arab) leadership, and finally, changing the name of the party to "The Ba'th Arab Socialist Party in the Syrian Region" (i.e. to downplay the pan-Arab ideology of the party) or to the "Democratic (Ba'th) Party" (to emphasize the "democratic" character of the party), and defining the party as a "democratic socialist national (*Qawmi*-pan-Arab national) political organization which struggles for achieving the great goals of the Arab Nation for Unity, Freedom and Socialism," based on "the principles of citizenship and democracy and respect of human rights and implementation of justice among the citizens."

These expectations were, to a large extent, based on the assumption that Bashar was a "closet reformer" who could not show his true colors because of the interference of the "old guard." Many Syrians expected the 10th Congress to imitate the 1996 conference of the Soviet Communist Party under Gorbachev. These expectations were not unfounded; they took their cue from Bashar's own public statements and those of his confidants.[83] Most of the Ba'th reformers, though—and certainly the civil-society movement—had no illusions that they could achieve even some of those goals. They realized that the goal of the party leadership was "to repair—not to reform," and that this should be done step by step and not by leaps and bounds. One informed source claims that the reformists intentionally spread rumors about far-reaching reforms in order to create a level of expectation that would help set the stage for further pressure on the regime after the Congress failed to deliver.

The 10th Congress was not the doctrinal watershed that pre-Congress rumors had prophesied. The Ba'th doctrine was not changed, but rather played down and relegated to minor reiterations of the original ideals of the party. Article 8 of the constitution and the "internal regime" remained in force and none of the reforms listed above were adopted. Arab unity is mentioned *en passant* and the demand for revolution and socialism in the entire Arab world is not mentioned at all. In fact, the 10th Congress was used by Bashar to revive the party as a mainstay of the regime and as an instrument for control of the public space, which the civil society movement had encroached upon. This was reflected in the composition of the delegates, the newly elected bodies, the agenda and the final resolutions of the Congress.

Hence, the Congress did not represent a trend for "de-Ba'thification" of the regime, but rather for "re-Ba'thification" after a decade of the party's irrelevance under the strong leadership of Hafez al-Asad. The main changes therefore were personal: a large number of octogenarian delegates were sent home[84] and second-generation members took their place. The "rejuvenation" did not replace old mindsets with new ones, but rather fulfilled the need of the thirty-nine-year-old president to promote people who would be committed to him personally and to rid himself of his "uncles"—old Ba'thists who had been loyal to his father and who could conceivably serve as an "ideological compass" and might protest any divergence from his father's line.

Nevertheless, the Congress was marketed to the Syrian public as having given its blessing to democratization, separation of the party from the government mechanism, economic reform, and a war against corruption. The first meetings of the Regional Command after the Congress (August 2005) were dedicated to these issues, particularly to the issue of corruption and forming a committee to draw up a new concept of the relationship between the party and the regime.[85] It appears, though, that there is no longer any real anticipation in the Syrian public for real reform, and the declarations of the leadership are derisively dubbed "declaration reform" (*islah bilaghi*).

A central motif coming out of the 10th Congress was the need for "re-activation" (*tanshit*) of the party. However, there is no evidence that the party has become more active or changed any of its traditional modes of operation. The personal changes in the party on the eve of the Congress and in the Congress itself have, in essence, frozen the situation for the next few years. The next "target date" for possible changes in the party may be (but does not have to be) the proposed date for "free" elections in 2007. This is also the date that many of the party reformists are now aiming at to renew their pressure for changes in the party structure and second-echelon leadership.

Syria's intelligence and security services (collectively known as the "intelligence" (*mokhabarat*) are the mainstay of the regime (see Figure 3). They are ubiquitous and involved in all aspects of public activity: political, social, and economic. Their authorization is necessary for almost any civilian activity. These apparatuses operate through a system of redundancy which serves the president to monitor any possible internal threat.

The main security and intelligence apparatuses in Syria include:

- General Security Directorate (GSD) (*Idarat al-Amn al-'Amm*) is the main intelligence apparatus, with responsibility for three areas: internal security, external security, and Palestinian affairs. The GSD is organized into three branches dealing with these three areas. It controls the civil police and the border guards, and has primary responsibility for maintaining surveillance over the Ba'th Party, the civilian bureaucracy, and the general populace.
- The Political Security Directorate (PSD) (*Idarat al-Amn al-Siyasi*) is responsible for political intelligence and security and monitoring and disrupting political dissent and foreign subversion, as opposed to criminal and civil policing. It is divided into the Internal Security Department (ISD) and the External Security Department (ESD).
- Military Intelligence (MI) (*Shu'bat al-Mokhabarat al-'Askariyya*) is nominally responsible for classic military intelligence and field security. It is, however, an extremely influential force. MI controls the Military Police, who provide security for elements of the ruling elite, and the Office of the Chief of Reconnaissance, which is probably responsible for strategic and tactical military intelligence collection, collation, and analysis. It is also responsible for carrying out unconventional warfare operations and intelligence operations such as assassinations and terrorism.

The Military and Security Apparatuses

National Security Advisor
Hisham Ikhtiar ('41)
2005

Ministry Of Defense
Hasan Turkemani ('35)
2004

Ministry of Interior
Ghazi Kanaan (suicide, 10.2005)

Chief of Staff
Ali Habib ('39)
2004

Political Security Dir
Mohammad Mansoura ('50)
2005

Bashar al-Asad
('65) 2000

Republican Guard
Ali Hasan 1995
Maher al-Asad ('68)
Brig. Gen. 'Abd al-Fatah al-Qudsi (RGS)
'Adnan al-Assad (cmd. Unit 549)

General Intelligence (State Security)
Ali Mamluk ('54) – 2005
Hasan Khaluf – 2005

Dept. Internal Security (251)
Fuad Nassif Kheir-bak ('50)
2005

Dep. External Security
Ayad Mahmoud

Dept. Palestinian Security

Military Intelligence
Assef Shawkat ('50) – 2005
Sa'id Samour – 2005

Air Force Intelligence
Iz a–Din Isma'il ('47)
2002

Figure 3. Heads of the Syrian Security Appartuses and their dates of appointment.

- Air Force Intelligence (AFI) (*Idarat al-Mokhabarat al-Jawiyya*) was the predominant apparatus under Hafez al-Asad and was responsible for operations against the Islamic opposition and terrorist operations abroad (e.g., the attempt to bomb an El-Al aircraft in London in 1986).[86]

Though these agencies are nominally subordinate to different commands (the military and the Interior Ministry), they in fact operate under the direct control of the president. Like their formal lines of command, the formal division of tasks between them is of little relevance. The different security services always have maintained a certain level of competition, and this is encouraged by the president. They monitor each other no less than they do the general public. The real indication of the relative predominance of one or another of the services is the intimacy of the head of that service with the president.

Since Bashar's rise to power and the subsequent changes in the command of the security apparatuses, the rivalry between them seems to have worsened. In March 2005 the conflict between Asef Shawkat (who had just been appointed as Head of DMI) and Ghazi Kana'an (Minister of Interior) over areas of authority in northern Syria came to the surface.

The "Young Guard" in Government. The Syrian government (the cabinet) is a body that "manages" the country but does not "rule" and has never held any real power. In the days of Hafez al-Asad it was populated by Ba'th loyalists who did not presume to have any real influence on the decisions of the regime, but at the same time were not "technocrats" in the sense that they had the professional backgrounds to perform their ministerial duties. In this sense, the Bashar era has changed the picture. The government, per se, is still not privy to any real decision making on strategic matters or on areas relating to intelligence. However, it appears that economic ministers do have more power over their specific areas of responsibility.

Like other components of the regime, the government was characterized by stagnation. Prime Minister Mohammad al-Zu'bi was in the post for thirteen years, until March 2000. The government began a process of rejuvenation toward the beginning of Bashar's

rule. Veteran ministers gradually were replaced by younger technocrats.[87] The first Bashar al-Asad cabinet (December 13, 2001) saw more young technocrats appointed to senior positions. [88] The Bashar era also ushered in a semblance of accountability for blatant failure on the governmental level. In September 2003, three years after Miro was appointed as prime minister, his government was defined as a "total failure" and he was replaced by Naji al-Otari,[89] who had served as deputy Prime Minister. The al-'Atari cabinet included an additional reshuffling of ministers that brought in even more young technocrats, who now comprised half of the cabinet.[90] Still, Bashar did not dare appoint a "young guard" technocrat to the post of prime minister.

Bashar has not tried to initiate change through the Peoples Assembly by changing its structure or its authority. The first elections to the Assembly during Bashar's term of office were held on March 23, 2003. Out of 10, 405 candidates, 163 delegates were from the Progressive National Front, 132 represented the Ba'th Party, and 31 represented its satellite parties. Nevertheless, the new Assembly was younger and fresher: 178 of the delegates were new faces, most of them young.

The Domestic Arena

Syria presents to the world, but less convincingly to the Syrian public, the image of a monolithic state and society. The refrain of "national unity" and references to the citizens of the country as "brothers" or "family" are ubiquitous. They appear in speeches, in official slogans, and in the daily press. The regime does not allow expressions of communal identity to find their way into the media; the people of Syria are the "Syrian Arab People." However, despite decades of enforced unity, Syria remains a country divided according to communal lines. The stability that the country enjoyed for decades has been along an "equality of misery." That is, citizens within Syria knew that they were all equally oppressed by the regime and that such suppression was the lot of citizens of other neighboring countries (Iraq)—or alternatively, the citizens of other countries, such as Lebanon, suffered from endemic instability.

The image of stability belies the reality, which under the surface is known to all Syrians. This is the reality of "communalism" (*ta'ifiya*), or the primary (or even exclusive) identification of the individual with his ethnic or religious community. This is reflected in the low rate of intermarriages and intermingling—even within the cities—and in a general sense of acrimony among the different communities. But for the most part it does not seem to be at a level that would engender communal strife on the Balkan or Iraqi scale. Recently, tensions have flared up among Sunnis, Isma'ilis, and Alawites and between Kurds and the regime in northern Syria, and some have even deteriorated into small-scale conflicts. This, too, serves the regime, which projects an implicit warning that the only alternative to it is a return to the instability of the pre-Ba'th era, or even disintegration of the country and deterioration into a "Balkan" or "Iraqi" reality.

Syria is faced by a serious threat to the stability of the regime. While this threat is not accompanied by widespread violence, as in the period of the Muslim Brotherhood uprising in the late 1970s and early 1980s, it is no less severe. There is a general sense in the country of decay of the regime and a disintegration of authority. The factors relevant to this situation include:

- The deteriorating economic situation;
- Signs of loss of control in peripheral regions, and even a weakening of the "implied deterrence" that was always assumed by the regime, causing the populace to test the waters of the regime's tolerance[91];

- Disruption of the "hierarchy of corruption"; "chaotic corruption" as opposed to the old "organized corruption," and severe economic problems;
- Inconsistency in dealing with the opposition, causing a loss of deterrence; and
- Ambiguity of authority, breeding "authority grabs." In this context, it is noteworthy that the long reign of the Ba'th regime has effectively destroyed the traditional structure of local authority (*wujahah*, literally. "men with faces") in Syrian society and at the same time has prevented, in most parts of the country, the growth of an alternative civil society.

These factors are reflected in diverse groupings of the Syrian public which pose a potential threat to the regime. These include:

- Democratic Opposition: The "Civil Society," intellectuals, former political prisoners and individuals educated abroad, with a genuine reformist agenda.
- Internal opposition: Junior Ba'th backbenchers calling for political reform as a means to achieve mobility within the stagnant regime, on one hand, and the remnants of the "old guard," which perceive Bashar as having forfeited the assets that his father left him.
- Islamic Opposition: Members of the old Islamic opposition, particularly the Muslim Brotherhood.
- Kurdish Opposition: Outlawed Kurdish parties, Kurdish unrest exacerbated by discrimination, and Iraq-inspired irredentism.

The Economy

The Syrian economy[92] suffers from a perennial crisis of budget shortfalls, inflation (10 percent), unemployment, and trade imbalance. Its per capita income is about US$1,200, its population of 17.6 million grows at about 2.6 percent per annum, and the workforce grows at about 4 percent per annum. The per annum growth of 2–3 percent does not reach the 5 percent target that the World Bank has determined is necessary for Syria to maintain its present status. Unemployment is estimated officially at 12 percent but may be up to 25 percent. The private sector is dwarfed by the public sector and the latter has actually grown proportionally since Bashar came to power. The preponderance of the government sector is visible also in the fact that government expenditure accounts for at least 35 percent of the GDP and about 20 percent of the employed population are government workers.[93] The budget allocates almost half of the state revenue to military and security expenditures and the external debt stands at about $21 billion, 96 percent of the GDP.[94]

The Syrian economy is largely dependent on revenues from oil production. Oil presently contributes 20 percent of GDP, two-thirds of exports, and half of government revenues (about 15 percent of GDP), but is likely to be exhausted in the late 2020s. Syria may become a net oil importer within a few years.[95] New exploration operations are not promising at the moment. In the 1980s, it had closed the Iraqi oil pipes and had been compensated by Iran with large oil shipments. In the 2000s it allowed Iraq to export through the Karkouk–Banias pipelines, using cheap oil for local consumption and to boost its own exports. Today, it seems that there is no political configuration that Syria can take similar advantage of.[96] The Syrian government has already announced that subsidies for fuel will be phased out by 2010. Cuts in subsidies, however, will have severe economic ramifications in terms of rising prices and further domestic instability.

The Alawites

The integration of the Alawite community (also known as Nusseiris) into modern Syria was not a foregone conclusion in the early days of the country. Ironically, it was Hafez al-Asad's father, Suleiman al-Asad, who petitioned the French, along with five other Alawite notables, to attach the Alawite territory to Lebanon and not to Syria because "... in Syria, the official religion of the state is Islam, and according to Islam, the Alawites are considered infidels ... The spirit of hatred and fanaticism imbedded in the hearts of the Arab Muslims against everything that is non-Muslim has been perpetually nurtured by the Islamic religion. There is no hope that the situation will ever change. Therefore, the abolition of the Mandate will expose the minorities in Syria to the dangers of death and annihilation, not to mention that it will annihilate the freedom of thought and belief."[97]

Today, the Alawites are without doubt the main pillar of the Syrian regime, but they are not the only one. References to an "Alawite regime" are simplistic and do not do justice to the complex system of coalitions of interests that Hafez al-Asad built over the years. Thus, while the main political elite of Syria today is Alawite, not all elements of the Alawite community have benefited from elite status. The Alawite community is composed of six major tribes,[98] each one of which comprises a number of interrelated families. Foremost among them, of course, is the al-Asad family itself, which hails from the Kalabiyya tribe in the city of Kardahah in Northern Syria. Naturally, the Kalabiyya tribe plays a central role in the regime, along with the Hadadin tribe, to which Bashar's mother belongs, and the Khayatin tribe, which traditionally is allied with the Kalabiyya.[99]

The Alawites in general are prominent in the military and security apparatuses. While they represent approximately 12 percent of the population, the Alawites hold almost 90 percent of the top posts of the military and security. Even where Sunnis ostensibly are in control, they are augmented by Alawite deputies. The predominance of the Alawites in the military predates the present regime. It was due to the low social status of the Alawites as domestic and menial labourers for the Sunni gentry of northern Syria that many of its sons sought social mobility in a military career. Consequently, the Alawites already played a prominent role in the military regimes that ruled Syria before the "reform movement," which brought Hafez al-Asad to the helm in 1970. It was, however, the Asad regime that finally cemented Alawite control of the Ba'th party and of the country.

Though not all of the Alawite tribes play an equal role in the regime, the Alawite region in general has profited from preferential treatment. Once being the poorest area of Syria, the Alawite region has become the richest and most modernized. The Alawites have become the economic and political elite. This prosperity to some extent has been at the expense of the hitherto cultural and economic centres of northern Syria, particularly Ham'ah, Homs, and Aleppo, and generates resentment towards the Alawites, particularly among their immediate neighbors.[100] This resentment is said to impose a sense of solidarity on all parts of the Alawite community with the regime, out of fear that change may bring about the fall of the Alawite predominance all together and precipitate revenge by the Sunnis and Isma'ilis. Furthermore, as a heterodox sect of Shi'ite Islam, which many Sunnis claim has diverged so far from the tenets of orthodox Islam so as not be considered Muslim,[101] the Alawite predominance in the regime has been its Achilles heel and a justification, in the eyes of the Islamist movements, to rise up against it. This became particularly evident during the uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood in northern Syria (1976–1981), which was fuelled by the claim that the regime was ruled by "heretics."

But is there an "Alawite leadership" separate to that of the regime? Observers of the Syrian regime mention a nebulous "Alawite Leadership" organized in a "National Council"

(*Majlis Milli*), composed of eighteen members of the tribes, which is purported to have influence over the Alawite community and to which the president defers.[102] In the early 1980s the Alawites organized themselves in a state-sanctioned militia, "Ali al-Murtada," headed by Jamil al-Asad (Hafez al-Asad's brother). In the past, the Alawite clerics, *rijal al-din,* were the leaders of the community as a whole. They played a pivotal role in representing the Alawites before the French colonial rulers and in the early days of independence. While there is no doubt that the Alawites are the main pillar of the Syrian regime, there today is no sign of a separate leadership that wields such influence. The centralism of the Ba'th regime could not tolerate such a "shadow government," particularly one with moral sway over the top leadership of the military and the security services. For example, it is claimed that some of the Alawite religious leaders were against the actions of the regime in 1980 in the North and that some officers refused to participate. The regime therefore acted to reduce the power of the *rijal al-din* and to reduce the hold of the Alawite religion over the members of the community.

This policy also coincided with the regime's interest in countering the ideological rationale of the Muslim Brotherhood and in boosting its own Islamic credentials. This has been done in various ways: *fatwas* declaring the Alawites to be Shi'ite Muslims;[103] emphasising the orthodox Islamic behavior of the president himself;[104] "Islamization" of the Alawites through building of Sunni style mosques[105] and minimizing any reference to a distinct Alawite religion or Alawite region.[106] There are in Syria hundreds of Sunni religious schools, while there is not a single school that specializes in teaching the Alawite religion.

Finally, the "old guard" Alawite elite created an intricate network of patronage to care for the interests of their ancestral home towns. However, with the shift from the "old guard" to the "new guard" under Bashar, and Bashar's own efforts at administrative modernization, these networks began to wane as a new system of economic alliances gradually replaced the old patronage system. The bond of the big-city-born young guard to their parents' home villages and to their extended tribal relatives is considerably weaker, and they are naturally less committed to supporting a community that cannot directly influence their day-to-day power struggles. As a result, there is a growing dissatisfaction among the Alawites in the Alawite region. This may have the effect of weakening the loyalty of the Alawites to the al-Asad dynasty and result in a search for an alternative leadership that can preserve the privileges of the community.

These power bases are closely linked to the families and the tribal networks that build them. For many years, the economic power bases of the party officials were state companies in which the major families had embedded their members. While the largest private companies in Syria are owned by families with close ties to the al-Asad family, non-Baa'th entrepreneurs have become more and more visible over the last five years. Many of these are identified with the second generation of the party nomenklatura. It should be noted that most of the "sons of the bosses" do not hold official positions in the party, though it may be assumed that most are party members. Other private companies are linked to members of the Syrian Computer Society. The most significant companies in the private sector that are connected to the party or the regime are:

- The MAS (*Min Ajli Suriya*, "For the Sake of Syria") Group is owned by the Tlas family (Firas Tlas). MAS has massive holdings in the defense acquisition, telecommunications, and media sectors. It has been rumored that Firas has close business cooperation with Rifa't al-Asad's sons. Since 2004, Firas has also funded

Syria-News, a website run by the Syrian Economic Center (SEC), which was established in 1995.

- Ramak is the holding company of the Makhlouf family, headed by Rami Makhlouf and his sons, the twin brothers Hafez and Ihab. The Makhlouf family is arguably the richest family in Syria. The main company of the family is Syriatel (Syria's cell phone provider). Other enterprises associated with the family are the state "Real Estate Bank" (and through it access to available capital); free trade zones along the border with Lebanon, imports of Mercedes cars, duty-free shops, the tobacco import monopoly, luxurious shopping malls, etc. Rami Makhluf has extensive holdings in the U.S. Virgin Islands, which have been the subject of litigation,[107] resulting in the appointment of his brother Ihab as caretaker for his U.S. company. Rami Makhlouf also is deeply invested with Maher al-Asad in various ventures in Lebanon. In mid-2005 Rami Makhlouf began to move part of his assets to the Gulf states. This was interpreted as indicating either that he had fallen out with his cousin Bashar or that he feared that the anticorruption campaign the party had launched might choose him as a scapegoat. This interpretation seems somewhat unlikely. Before he became president, Bashar was linked to Rami Makhlouf's business and used to make contacts for him in his official meetings.[108]
- SES International is owned by the Shaleesh family. The company was accused of involvement in deals as a go-between for more than fifty contracts for tens of millions of dollars of military equipment for the Iraqi regime.
- The Khaddam Group is headed by Jihad Khaddam and his brother, Jamal. It held a monopoly on food processing ventures ('Afiyya Nourishment) and various restaurant-related sectors in Syria. Since the 10th Congress, the family has gradually moved its business outside of Syria and is now in exile.
- The Hamsho Family owns Hamsho International. The head of the family, Mohammad Saber Hamsho, is a member of parliament and on the board of the Syrian Computer Society.
- The Inana Group is an IT company headed by Firas Bakour, a member of the Syrian Computer Society.
- The Nahhas Group is owned by Saeb Nahhas. His daughter is married to the son of Shafiq al-Fayad.

Syrian control of Lebanon became a source of economic power for many of the above. Some examples include:

- The drug trade in the Baqa'a valley, which provided a financial base for many of the senior officers in the Syrian army.
- Cellular telecommunications are a major source of revenue. The value of this market is assessed at 30 million dollars. In 1994, two ten-year contracts were awarded to two cellular phone companies, LibanCell and Cellis. The former is owned by Ali and Nizar Dalloul, sons of former Defense Minister Mohsen Dalloul, who was close to Rafiq Hariri, Khaddam, Hikmat Shihabi, and Ghazi Kana'an, whereas the latter was dominated by the Miqati family (Najib, Taha, and 'Azmi), close friends of Bashar al-Asad. In addition, Rami Makhlouf operates an illegal telephone exchange network in Lebanon through his proxy, Pierre Fatouch, a Lebanese businessman who owns a whisky plant in Baqa'a, diverting phone calls from the Lebanese network to Syriatel.[109]
- Duty-free shops controlled by the Ramak group (Makhlouf).

- Other prominent Syrians who were involved in the Lebanese economy include General Mohammad Issa Duba (the brother of 'Ali Duba, former head of Military Intelligence), Mohammad Hamsho (Syrian member of parliament, head of Hamsho International, Iham Sa'id (the son of former GID director, Majid Sa'id), and Mohammad Nasef.

The Sunnis

In its early days the Ba'th regime formed a coalition with the rural Sunni elites, deposing the urban Sunni elites from their traditional predominance in Syrian society. This however has changed. First, many of the "rural elites" have become part of a new urban elite; second, the regime gradually widened its base among the Sunnis and coopted many of the rich Sunni families.

The Sunni business elite of Damascus was upset at the assassination of al-Hariri, with whom many had business connections and who was regarded as a symbol of economic success. Some even claim that he was seen as a possible example of how the Sunni business sector could regain power, even when military power was concentrated in the hands of others. The tension between Syria and Lebanon was not only bad for the business concerns of Alawite generals but also for Sunni businessmen. There are a few signs that the murder has caused some rumblings in this community against the Alawite elite, but for the time being there are no signs of organized opposition by this group, which values, above all, stability.

The Sunni tribes of Eastern Syria (mainly along the border with Iraq and with trans-border affiliations with the corresponding Iraqi tribes) had been sidelined during the decades of the Hafez al-Asad regime. Bashar, however, is reputed to have made an attempt to cultivate their loyalty. This policy began even before the U.S. occupation of Iraq, but has accelerated since then. The prospects of a breakup of Iraq into Shi'ite, Kurdish, and Sunni areas would leave the Iraqi tribes with a stronger dependence on the Syrian tribes. The Syrian tribes participated in the monthly meetings of the Iraqi tribes and Ba'thists in Damascus from October 2003 on, and in December 2004 Bashar himself honored the meeting with his presence.[110]

Druze, Isma'ilis, Christians, and Kurds

Syria's religious minorities—Druze, Isma'ilis, and Christians—enjoy a special status under the Ba'th-Alawite regime. They are, in effect, members of the "coalition" of social elements that Hafez al-Asad built over the years. The former two are well-integrated into the military and bureaucracy, whereas the latter play a pivotal role in the economy. All three communities have something to lose by the fall of the regime, particularly if the alternative is a Sunni—possibly Islamist—regime that would not safeguard their status and would impose Sunni Islam on the heterodox Islamic sects or relegate them to second class citizenship.

The Druze and the Isma'ilis are, like the Alawites, a heterodox Shi'ite sect which has been coopted into the regime. The Druze of Syria mainly hail from the Golan and the Lebanese border and have no history of clashes with the Alawites, most whom inhabit the far north of the country. On the other hand, the Isma'ilis are traditional rivals of their Alawite neighbors in the northwestern part of the country. This rivalry was manifested in bloody clashes between Isma'ilis and Alawites in the towns of Qadmous and Misyaf in mid-2005, which resulted in attacks on Alawite houses and stores.

The Christian community in Syria numbers about one million, about 6.5 percent of the population. It is split into a number of sects. The sense of disintegration of authority in Syria and the revival of the Assyrian community in Iraq ignited demonstrations by the Assyrian Christians in the city of Hasakah. In October 2004, thousands of Assyrians protested the killing of two Assyrians by Muslims, who accused them of supporting the Americans. Developments in Iraq have also affected the relations between Syria's Christian Assyrians and the regime. The identification by Syrian Sunnis of the Assyrians with the U.S. in Iraq has generated anti-Assyrian sentiment in Syria.

The Kurds in Syria are second-class citizens. The regime's attitude toward the two-million-strong Kurdish minority in the northeastern Hasakah province is symptomatic of its practice of raising hopes and then dashing them. Since Bashar came to power, the regime has made some overtures toward the Kurdish community, among them signaling that a rectification of historic grievances may be in sight. Bashar himself visited Hasakah in 2002—the first such visit of the president ever.

The rise of the Kurdish factor in Iraq had an effect on the Kurds in Syria. In March 2004, a brawl between fans of Kurdish and Arab football teams in the northern Kurdish region of Hasaka set off a tide of unrest that developed into widespread Kurdish antiregime violence, which spread to the Kurdish quarter of Damascus and the University of Damascus. Another significant incident that heightened the tensions between the regime and the Kurds was the disappearance, apparent arrest, and subsequent death (apparently due to torture) of the eminent Kurdish Sheikh Mohammad Ma'shuq al-Khiznawi (May 2005), who had been active in calling for reforms in Syria.

The Kurdish protests erupted against a historical background of discrimination against Kurds, including the constant refusal of the regime to accord Syrian citizenship to hundreds of thousands of Kurds living in that region, and who were, according to the regime, of Iraqi origin. Before the June 2005 Ba'th Party Congress, the regime allowed Kurdish groups to field papers that would grant equal rights to Kurds, and particularly accord citizenship to about 200,000 Kurds inside Syria who lack any citizenship (*al-maktumin*). The Congress did not finally discuss the issue. In the wake of the pressures on Syria as a result of the Mehlis report on the al-Hariri affair, Syrian Ba'th officials have been reviving the possibility of enfranchisement of the stateless Kurds of Syria.[111]

Nevertheless, the options for these minorities are between an Alawite-led regime in which they have some stake and a Sunni—potentially Islamic-Salafi—regime that would be much more inimical to their interests. Fear of Sunni rule, which motivated their participation in the Ba'th regime's coalition, seems to have increased because of events in Iraq. Hence, while there have been outbreaks of sectarian violence between Alawites and Isma'ilis, it seems that these minorities remain loyal to the regime, at least according to the slogan noted above: *ma fi gheiru*—there is nothing else.

Civil Society

A civil society may be defined for the purposes of this study as voluntary social or political association within a "space" in a country that is not controlled by the government, and which is democratic and tolerant in that it is not exclusive; it accepts that organizations with different values and interests all operate within the same space. The Ba'th regime was in total control over the entire public space, relying on intimidation and deterrence to maintain its hold over society, but did not really invest in mass ideological indoctrination. Like Machiavelli, Asad knew that it was better to be feared than to be loved.

Syrian civil society—such as it is after decades of Ba'th rule—came into the spotlight a short time after Bashar came to power. It existed in the preindependence era and came to the fore for short bursts in the late 1970s and the late 1980s (in the wake of the fall of the Soviet bloc). This is, in essence, a movement of the Damascene middle class. Many of the figures currently involved in the civil-society movement were involved in previous attempts to forge a civil society and paid dearly, serving years in prison.

During the second half of 2000 (the "Damascus Spring"), the expectation that Bashar would promote far-reaching reforms and liberalization encouraged intellectuals and young Baathist backbenchers to preempt the anticipated reforms initiating a public debate on the nature of the regime and its policies. Some of the civil society forums, which were formed immediately after Bashar came to power by known and tolerated civil libertarians, received at least tacit encouragement from key "old guard" figures in the regime, and this strengthened the feeling that the new president looked kindly on the movement. The movement transformed quickly into a mass movement of the Damascene intelligentsia. The "Damascus Spring" reflected genuine expectations for change on the part of the intelligentsia, coupled with the popular perception that the new president was proreform. The "defection" of Bashar to the side of the "old guard"—whether on the basis of his own convictions or because he was weak and overruled—served to radicalize the opposition and its demands. The sense that the regime is less resolute than in the past, the spillover of the Lebanese "Cedar Revolution," and international pressure on Syria all encourage the opposition inside Syria to continue to pressure the regime.

The ideological basis of the Syrian civil-society movement counters the regime's argument against imitation or "import" of foreign social ideologies by tracing its own back to the Ottoman Tanzimat and the rise of the concept of citizenship and voluntary association, in contrast to the status of "subjects" and organic affiliation. The basic documents of the movement—the Statement of the 99 and the later Statement of the 1000—are evidence that it is well aware of the red lines of the regime and avoids crossing them. Thus, for example, demands included ending the state of emergency and granting political freedoms—of expression, economic rights, and women's rights—but did not call for political pluralism or regime change. Later statements attributed to the same grouping also refrained from radically confrontational demands and employed the regime's own logic in attempting to persuade it to reform.

As noted above, the "Damascus Spring" turned into a "Damascus Winter" by the beginning of 2001 with the arrests of dissidents and closures of the political "clubs" that had been formed. While this situation has not changed, some elements of the Syrian civil-society movement have continued to promote their ideas. The latest document of this movement, The Damascus Declaration for Democratic National Change,[112] has stronger wording than previous documents and reflects the feeling that the regime is under siege and that only far-reaching democratization may satisfy the West. It calls for "establishment of a democratic national regime" in a process that must be "peaceful, gradual, founded on accord, and based on dialogue and recognition of the other." Some opposition figures inside Syria (such as Riyad al-Turk) have gone even further and demanded Bashar's resignation (i.e., the dismantling of the regime) as an exit from the international crisis that the Mehlis report has created.

One can distinguish three main schools of thought within the Syrian opposition regarding ways to bring about regime change:

1. "Gradualists" who feel that the regime can be deconstructed through incremental empowerment of the people and increasing restrictions on the arbitrary power of the regime.

This attitude can be found among reformists and "back-benchers" within the Ba'th party, some of the new technocrat, elite and even some of the more moderate Islamic opposition. For some of the first category, this seems not to reflect a genuine desire to change the regime, but rather an attempt to reduce the pressure on it for immediate reform.

2. "Internationalists" who believe that concentrated international pressure can eventually bring about reform or even regime change. These are, for the most part, the opposition in exile. This attitude is self-serving, since lobbying abroad is their main vocation and they have no real assets inside Syria. However, some representatives of the opposition base their faith in international pressure on the capitulation of the regime to international pressure on Lebanon.

3. "Revolutionaries" who are inspired by the Lebanese "Cedar Revolution" and the rapid decline in the regime's authority within the country since Bashar came to power and believe that the East European model can be imitated in Syria. These are, in the eyes of the regime, probably the most dangerous; many have been jailed and harassed and others have been forced into exile after having refused to be coopted. Many who hold this position are members of the old opposition, the Muslim Brotherhood and other parties that were banned during the Hafez al-Asad reign, but remained free or loosely affiliated with the regime.

The diversity of the Syrian civil-society movement is also its undoing. The movement seems almost incapable of drawing up an agreed strategy for any length of time. Most of the intellectuals in the movement are loners who are accustomed to working alone and lack the "art of association."[113] Another handicap of the civil-society movement is that most of its leaders are identified as "tolerated opposition" by the regime and many enjoy privileges of protection. Their willingness to expose themselves as they did and to initiate clubs and petitions was linked to their perception that the new regime was willing to accept such action. Once the regime turned on them, most were not willing to pay the price of becoming a nontolerated opposition.

While various parts of the Syrian civil society are at odds with the regime, they are by no means pro-West or pro-American. Many individuals within the civil society tend to be "leftist" in their political outlooks and—not unlike the regime—view the U.S. as an "imperialist" and "neocolonialist" superpower that attempts to impose its hegemony over the Arab world by military force. This anti-American attitude was clearly manifested in the demonstrations held in Damascus during the first stages of the American operation in Iraq. At the same time, the opposition utilizes the "lessons" from the American occupation of Iraq and warns the regime that the occupation was made possible by the lack of public legitimacy, since "a people under oppression cannot defend their country." Therefore, reforms would strengthen the legitimacy of the regime and its resilience against an American invasion.[114]

In late 2003 the Syrian reform party (*Hizb al-Islah al-Suri*) was founded in Washington, headed by a Syrian-American businessman, Farid Nahid al-Ghadri. The party attempted to set itself up as an alliance of opposition parties but it has not gained a real foothold in Syria. Even individuals close to al-Ghadri have expressed cynicism regarding his claims to represent a viable alternative to the regime.

The regime acts against this opposition in a variety of ways. These include direct repression through arrests, preventing its members from holding public office and other, more subtle, forms of harassment. Overtures by the regime to the opposition have frequently turned out to be traps: A short time after he came to power Bashar offered Syrians who had gone into exile (among other reasons, to evade military service) to return and to pay monetary compensation. Many returned, were arrested upon their arrival and later released.

Many of the Muslim Brotherhood leaders who were convinced to return to Syria also were arrested. This behavior has been interpreted both as evidence of Bashar's own duplicity and of his lack of control over the security services. There have been cases of opposition leaders who have found themselves harassed by one intelligence organization and "protected" by another. While some have interpreted this as sophisticated coordinated role-playing, others claim that the rivalry between the various security services is too deep to implement such a game and that such actions represent real differences of opinion regarding how to deal with a specific individual. In at least one case, an extremely vocal opposition figure had his passport taken away, then returned. Finally, he was offered a choice: to accept a post as minister in the cabinet or to go into exile. The person chose the second option.

Opposition from Inside the Regime

The deterioration of Syria's international and regional status, the loss of control over Lebanon, and the deteriorating economic and security situation are already generating criticism of Bashar's performance as President. One apt description has it that, "Bashar inherited a functional regime in a dysfunctional country and now has created a dysfunctional regime in a dysfunctional country."

The main source of discontent is the remnants of the old guard, particularly those who have been moved away from their levers of power or deposed. These include people like Hikmat Shihabi (with close ties to Israelis, the al-Hariri faction in Lebanon and Americans), Ali Duba; Mohammad Nasef Kheir Bek (representing the strong Kheir Bek Alawite clan), Abd al-Halim Khaddam (representing the old Ba'th and ideological rectitude), Mohammad Zuheir Masharka, Mustafa Tlas (usually perceived as doggedly loyal to the late president and who therefore probably would not try to overthrow his son), Bahjat Suleiman (former confidante and mentor of Bashar who was downgraded from his position in the General Intelligence), Hassan Khalil (former Head of Military Intelligence), Adnan Badr al-Hassan (former Head of Political Intelligence), and Ali Aslan (former Chief of Staff).

The al-Hariri affair, however, has the potential to initiate internal struggles. Bashar is already notorious for folding under international pressure. His statement that Syria will hold an investigation of its own and punish those responsible for the assassination may be a ploy to fend off international pressure. Some members of the regime—particularly those who fear that the investigation may serve as a tool for purging them—may decide to preempt such a step. The primary suspects in this regard are Asef Shawkat and Maher al-Asad. It is unclear, however, to what extent the two are capable of cooperating. The conventional wisdom in Syria is that the bad blood between them precludes such cooperation.[115]

Another potential threat from inside the regime comes from young officers, who may stage a traditional coup d'état. There is no way of knowing among whom or from where such a coup may be brewing. It is, however, conceivable that a coalition of senior officers who have lost the economic benefits that Lebanon accorded may develop into an internal opposition capable of such a coup. In the past, it was assumed that the intelligence apparatuses were strong enough to detect such a movement. This should not be taken for granted today, either because the capability of the Syrian intelligence has diminished or because its loyalty to Bashar is not absolute.

Islam and Islamic Opposition

Twenty years after the suppression of the rebellion of the Muslim Brotherhood in northern Syria, there is a discernable drift in Syria towards Islam. This trend is characterized by a return to the mosque, both as a reaction to the regime and as way to deal with the difficult

economic situation. The return to Islam is manifest in the wearing of traditional dress, in the plethora of Islamic book stores that have cropped up in Damascus and other cities, and in the growth of Islamic Institutes (600 new institutes for memorizing the Quran and madrasas) founded under the auspices of the regime in the time of Hafez al-Asad as a counterbalance to the Muslim Brotherhood. Another salient phenomenon is the large number of Syrian families that receive charity from Islamic NGOs (estimated at about seventy-five thousand).

It is difficult to distinguish between the warnings of the Syrian regime that its downfall would bring to power radical Islamic movements and the real threat that Islamism poses in Syria. It seems, though, that one of the main motivators of Islamic radicalism in Syria is the legitimacy crisis that stems from the Alawite nature of the regime. The heterodox nature of the Alawite religion has been the Achilles heel of the regime. Whereas radical Islamists in other Muslim countries had to prove the individual deviation of their rulers or regimes in order to warrant declaring them as infidels (and hence, legitimizing rebellion), viewing the Alawites as non-Muslims provides adequate justification for rebellion. Therefore, from an early stage the Asad regime set as one of its primary objectives boosting its Islamic credentials and the Islamic legitimacy of the Alawites in general. This has been done in various ways, as noted above.[116]

The main Islamist force in Syria arguably is the Muslim Brotherhood (MB). The movement was involved in a bloody uprising against the regime in the late 1970s and early 1980s, which resulted in the regime's crackdown in the north of the country and total destruction of large parts of the city of Ham'ah in February 1982, with estimated tens of thousands of civilians killed. The ideology of the Brotherhood at the time based its rejection of the regime on grounds of being *takfir* (declaring as heretics). Years after it was totally uprooted in Syria, the movement began to reach an accommodation with the regime and many of its exiled leaders returned to Syria. Others drifted away from the focus on Syria.[117]

Today, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood officially has renounced the use of violence against the regime and is attempting to create a public image that may facilitate its integration in the political process of the country, either in the course of "democratization" of the present regime, or in the wake of its fall and the rise of a coalition of opposition forces. After Bashar took office the MB made efforts to reach out to him. In May 2001, the group prepared a "National Honour Pact," accepting the democratic process and, for the first time, recognizing the regime's legitimacy. Later, in 2004, senior Syrian officials, including Bashar, met with leaders who had ties to the Brotherhood. In the end, however, the negotiations fizzled.

The attempt on the part of the MB to project a moderate image focuses on four main issues: violence (the MB leadership reiterates that it has renounced violence); willingness to accept a democratic regime in Syria; retraction of the *takfir* of the Alawites; willingness to accept the Islamic legitimacy of the Sufi trends, which are relatively strong in Syria; and refraining from calling for the destruction of Israel or taking anti-Semitic positions. It is not clear, however, to what extent these positions, which are expressed in the Political Program of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood" and in interviews with the exiled leader of the movement, 'Ali Sader a-Din Bayanouni,[118] are widely accepted by the rank and file of the movement or to what extent the mainstream of the MB represents the majority of the Islamic tendency inside Syria.

The Islamist trend in Syria, though, is not solely domestically grown. It is encouraged by the double standard of the regime in openly supporting Palestinian Hamas and Jihad and Lebanese Hezbollah, while suppressing its own Islamist forces and by identification with the al Qaeda attacks on the United States.

Since the death of Hafez al-Asad, and increasingly since the fall of the Iraqi regime, the infiltration of anti-Alawite and anti-Shi'ite Wahhabi elements into Syria has intensified.

These elements find resonance in the north of the country, which was the heart of the Muslim Brotherhood rebellion of the 1980s.[119] The weakening of the regime will contribute to the ascendancy of these elements. At the same time, the traditional Muslim Brotherhood of Syria remains a potential force, both as claimants for national leadership—if and when the regime falls—as rivals of the even more radical Wahhabis.

Worldview and Defense Strategy

Syria's geography and history have been pivotal factors in forming the regime's strategy. The main elements of these and their effects are:

- Absence of a tradition of national unity (the regions that today comprise modern Syria were completely separate provinces of the Ottoman Empire, with little in common),
- Strong neighbors (Israel and Turkey) allied with the United States with whom Syria has ongoing territorial disputes, and
- Lack of natural riches.

Syria's regional role was the greatest achievement of Hafez al-Asad, who played a part on the Arab stage that transcended Syria's objective geographical and economic significance. This did not seem to derive—as with Sadam Hussein—from dictatorial megalomania, but from an ideological attachment to the ideal of "Arabism" and anticolonialism, and from a belief that only through representation of Arabism in general could Syria play a role in the region.

His policies in this regard bore fruit. Throughout the decades of his rule, Syria became the main interlocutor for all things in Lebanon, and was seen as a central actor in the Israeli–Arab peace process (not only the Israeli–Syrian negotiations but also the Palestinian track). He used his relationship with Iran to counterbalance Iraq, to deter Israel, and to cultivate the relationship with Saudi Arabia to guarantee Syria's economy and support for Syria's status in Lebanon.

A major component of Syria's strategic policy is calculated use, with relative impunity, of terrorist organizations. Syria is almost a "founding father" of the U.S. list of state sponsors of international terrorism, providing Hezbollah, HAMAS, PFLP-GC, the PIJ, and other terrorist organizations refuge and basing privileges. Its use of terror, though, has usually been measured and with a clear view not to act in a manner that would precipitate an extreme reaction on the part of the West or Israel. Thus, while Syria has encouraged and even provided material and planning support to Palestinian terrorist organizations, it consistently has prohibited any terrorist attacks from the Golan Heights into Israel. Syria also was cautious in its use of terrorism against Turkey. It provided support through hosting of the PKK (and in the past the Armenian terrorist organization, ASALA) in Lebanon. However, when finally severely challenged by Turkey, Syria cut off its support of the PKK and ASALA and occasionally, under American pressure, has lowered the profile of its hosting certain Palestinian organizations. Syria also took care never to allow "the tail to wag the dog"; when necessary Syrian intelligence clamped down on recalcitrant terrorist organizations and reduced the level of Iranian Revolutionary Guard activity in Lebanon. All terrorist organizations were customarily handled by the various security and intelligence apparatuses dedicated to that purpose (the "Fidayin Security" and parts of the DGI), and their leaders rarely saw the inside of the Presidential Palace.

Hafez al-Asad's strategic foreign policy had clear goals: to enhance Syria's regional status; to prevent a separate peace between Israel and Jordan, Lebanon, and the Palestinians; to cultivate good relations with external powers (Russia, Europe, and the Gulf Arabs);

and to challenge, when necessary, the designs of the United States in the region. For him, maintaining Syria's position as a "swing state" vis-à-vis the Israeli–Arab peace process was essential for discouraging the U.S. from total confrontation with Damascus. The conventional wisdom in the Middle East and in most Western foreign ministries was that there can be no Arab–Israeli war without Egypt and no enduring Arab–Israeli peace without Syria. Along with these strategic considerations, Syrian Realpolitik in the Hafez al-Asad era dictated a pragmatic "wait and see" attitude in times of crisis and caution, so as not to burn bridges with any country.

While "wait and see" was a preferred policy in times of crisis, Hafez al-Asad had a clear reading of the strategic map, by which he divined when a crisis was becoming a new strategic reality, and he used this to formulate his day-to-day policies. This map showed the real balance of power between the two superpowers, and Asad had no illusions regarding the independent capabilities of Syria or of the Arabs in general. Having lost the Golan Heights to Israel in the 1967 war, and having ended the 1973 war with the Golan lost again, and Damascus in the range of Israeli artillery. Hafez al-Asad realized that Syria alone could not overcome Israel, supported as it was by the United States. The prospects for a united Arab effort (the "joint struggle") were also low after Egypt entered into a peace process with Israel. The result of this conclusion was Asad's concept of "strategic parity" with Israel. This strategic parity was based on: (1) building up Syria's own military power in order to pose a credible military threat to Israel, and (2) an enhanced relationship with the USSR as an essential component of Syria's national security. These two elements were to be augmented by gaining Arab support for Syria's goals in the peace process (including preventing any "separate peace" after the defection of Egypt), and development of relations with the U.S. so as to weaken, as far as possible, the US-Israel commitment.[120]

This strategy, however, sustained a series of fatal blows during the last decade of Hafez al-Asad's lifetime. Syria all but lost the support of its superpower patron (the USSR) and did not succeed in its approaches to the U.S. or Europe. The changes in the Soviet Union that preceded its demise reduced Moscow's generosity in terms of military hardware to its client regimes, including Syria, and at the same time Syria's economic situation limited its indigenous ability to build its military machine. The Arab collective through which Syria had influenced processes in the region was all but defunct by the early 1990s. Developments in the Israeli–Arab conflict also took their toll; the Israeli–Palestinian and Israeli–Jordanian agreements left Syria alone, particularly after the failure of the Asad–Clinton Geneva summit in 2000. Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon threatened the legitimacy of Syria's military presence in that country. By the time of Hafez al-Asad's death, Syria had no viable military strategy vis-à-vis Israel.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1990, Asad succeeded temporarily in forging a regional role for Syria by participating in the U.S.-led coalition to expel the Iraqi army from Kuwait in 1991, adhering to the sanctions on the Iraqi regime during the 1990s, and maintaining Syria's status in the renewed Israeli–Arab peace process after the Madrid Peace Conference. This role provided Syria with tacit guarantees for its continuing domination of Lebanon and an exemption from attempts to interfere in its domestic affairs. All this changed after the events of 9/11. It is difficult to know how Hafez al-Asad would have navigated Syria's ship through the strategic changes in the wake of those events. His successor, though, has left himself with almost no strategic cards with which to play on the international and regional fronts. As a result, the Syrian regime has become vulnerable in the field of its most vital interests—the domestic front.

The Syrian relationship with Iran may also be seen in the context of compensation for the fallen pillar of Soviet backing. It filled in with Syrian need for an ally in Lebanon (trough

Iran's proxy, Hezbollah) and for a counterbalance to Iraq. The relationship with Iran also served Damascus as a crucial bargaining chip in the relations with the U.S. and Israel. The religious aspect too was not absent: Shi'ite Iran accorded full legitimacy to the Alawites in Damascus, which seen as an important bridge to Islamic recognition. All of these remained relevant in the era of Bashar al-Asad, and were augmented by Bashar's admiration for Iran's defiance toward the U.S. and Israel and his belief that Iran could serve as a strategic base.

Some of Hafez al-Asad's perception of the balance of military power remains integrated into the thinking of the Syrian military elite. The Syrian military command is acutely aware of its conventional and nonconventional inferiority vis-à-vis all its potential rivals—particularly Israel, but Turkey as well. It has attempted to balance this inferiority through the acquisition of chemical weapons (CW) and ballistic delivery systems, and by asymmetric proxy warfare against Israel (through support of Hezbollah and Palestinian organizations), and against the U.S. in Iraq by permitting elements of the former Iraqi regime and Islamists to operate from the Syrian–Iraqi border. While acquisition of CW and Medium Range Ballistic Missiles (MRBMs) were seen as defensible military activities, the Syrian leadership always has been aware that support of terror may be a two-edged sword. This awareness predates the lessons of 9/11 and goes back to the repercussions of the Syrian wave of international terrorism in 1986 (the attempts to bomb El-Al planes in London and Madrid), and Turkish military pressure in response to Syrian support of the PKK.

The relative continuity of the Syrian military command (as opposed to the accelerated changes in the senior levels of the intelligence and security services) has helped to preserve its traditional strategic worldview. There are, however, indications that some of Bashar's younger, Western-educated advisors have been counselling him on areas of national security. This advice does not necessarily lead to caution. The fact that civilian advisors who have no military experience advise the president seems to neutralize some of the caution of the military advisors. Bashar's own lack of military experience also seems to affect his decisions. It is claimed that Bashar feels a need to counter the image of a weak leader (in contrast to his father), and this need manifests itself in bursts of political and military machismo.

Bashar came to power in a period of accelerated changes in Syria's strategic environment. These changes came one after another: (1) the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon was implemented a short time before Bashar took office; (2) a short time later, the Lebanese arena began to adjust itself to the new situation and attempts to exploit the Israeli withdrawal in order to evict Syria from Lebanon began; (3) the Palestinian Intifadah broke out a few months later and then; (4) the election of Ariel Sharon as Prime Minister of Israel, which was interpreted from Damascus as a sharp turn to a hard-line policy in Jerusalem; (5) the attacks of 9/11; and (6) the subsequent Global War on Terrorism; (7) the occupation of Afghanistan; and finally, (8) the invasion of Iraq and toppling of the Ba'th regime in Baghdad.

All of these developments chipped away at Syria's regional and international status. Bashar's handling of these crises also underscored his lack of experience—or perhaps his lack of political acumen—and an unimpressive and even erratic learning curve. At the same time, the change in the Syrian leadership from the veteran father, respected for his age and political tenacity, to his young and inexperienced son also had a negative effect on Syria's regional standing.

Despite all these obvious changes in Syria's strategic environment, Bashar seems unable or unwilling to break with the main strategic principles of his father's regime. Many of his speeches and statements for domestic consumption reflect loyalty to the worldview of his father, combined with a deficient understanding of the foreign political implications of his

statements.[121] His behavior raises questions as to what extent he has a strategy—either that which he inherited or of his own—which goes further than preservation of the regime. In any case, Bashar's foreign policy behavior at the present stage is clearly defensive and reactive. It includes:

- Attempts to reach a *modus vivendi* with Washington, at least so as not to provide a pretext to the United States or Israel to step up their campaign against the regime. Bashar seems resigned to American hostility to his regime, and does not seem to believe that there is an option for a stable positive relationship with the United States, at least under the present administration.
- Attempts to improve relations with Russia and Europe as a counterbalance to the hostility of the United States. This policy—at least on the European front—has soured in the wake of the murder of al-Hariri and the rupture of his relations with France.
- Cultivating the strategic relationship with Iran, much as Bashar attempted to lean on Iraq before the war.
- Dangling the prospects of gradual democratization (by the presidential elections of 2007) and warning of the chaos that would emerge from regime change, in order to deter attempts to remove the regime.
- Occasional willingness to renew negotiations with Israel and restrain the pro-Syrian Palestinian factions.
- Attempts to create "nuisance value" for Syria by measured support of the Iraqi insurgency, along with signals that he may change that policy in return for a suitable political (and economic) compensation.

Israel

To judge by Syrian rhetoric, Israel is by far the prime strategic concern of the regime in Damascus. While the occupation of the Golan Heights is the official rationale for Syria's enmity toward Israel, Syrian hostility toward Israel goes much further. Israel is portrayed as a cunning, aggressive, evil foreign entity implanted in the heart of the Arab world, plotting to take over the entire Arab homeland—from the Nile to the Euphrates, Syria included. Alongside the hostility to Israel, Syria has also promoted wider anti-Semitism through publication of books such as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Nevertheless, Syria had made progress toward acceptance of some sort of peace agreement with Israel during the 1990s and up to Hafez al-Asad's death. Toward the end of the 1990s Hafez al-Asad (like Bashar after him) declared that the peace option is Syria's "strategic option," though he and other spokespeople from the regime took care not to give the impression that Syria had abandoned the military option. It is difficult to assess whether or not Hafez al-Asad was really reconciled with the idea of a full peace (with diplomatic relations and normalization) with Israel. However, Syrian positions in the negotiations seemed to indicate that he had crossed that Rubicon and many Israelis who had been involved in the negotiations received that impression from their Syrian interlocutors.

However, even if this is so, it is not to be taken for granted that this acceptance of the fact of Israel's existence was passed on to Bashar. Upon his ascendancy to the presidency, some officials in Israel expected that Bashar would be more receptive to peace with Israel than his father had been. This expectation was in line with forecasts that Bashar, by virtue of his youth and Western orientation, would initiate a process of democratization, or at least liberalization, in Syria. The assumption was that if Bashar indeed desired to turn to the

West—and specifically to the U.S.—he would have to present a more flexible position on peace with Israel. These assumptions turned out to be misleading. In many ways, Bashar's rhetoric regarding Israel echo statements that were heard from his father decades before. These include:

- Blatantly anti-Semitic statements drawing on Christian and Muslim demonization of the Jews.[122]
- Nonacceptance of Israel as a "real entity" with a real attachment to its land. Statements to this effect also echo Arab propaganda from the 1970s, which portrayed Israel as a sort of artificial "Crusader Kingdom" of uprooted people who, if given the opportunity, would return to the countries from whence they came.[123]
- Statements to the effect that even if a peace agreement with Israel were to be concluded, the Arabs could not accept Israel as part of the region and would continue to see it as a threat.[124]
- Statements aimed at lowering the priority of peace with Israel. Syria, according to Bashar, wants peace but "an honourable peace" and can wait until such a peace is attainable. Peace should be reached from a position of strength. This strength must include a credible deterrence of Israel, which can derive from military capabilities or even Arab solidarity. Until this deterrence is achieved, any peace that is reached would be a "peace of the weak."[125] The lack of urgency is echoed in a "public opinion poll" published in Damascus in which a clear majority of Syrians agreed that peace with Israel would not promote a solution to Syria's economic problems, and might even exacerbate them. These results should be seen more as a reflection of the regime's line that peace with Israel is not a necessary condition for solving Syria's real problems and therefore should be accorded a lower priority than real public sentiment.

It is difficult to differentiate between *rhetoric*, which plays a central role in Syrian national mobilization and regional status (and thereby serves to buttress the regime's "nationalist" status), and true strategic assessment. Were Syrian rhetoric a true reflection of Syrian assessments, it would be translated into Syrian readiness for a potential Israeli attack each time that the Syrian propaganda machine sounded the alarms about possible Israeli aggression. In fact, the Syrian Army's level of preparedness has been diminishing constantly over the last decades and there have been few cases of real tension or concentration of large forces on the border between the two countries.

For the Syrian regime the conflict with Israel seems to consist of a number of "layers":

- The ideological layer: As opposed to recognition of Israel's existence, this layer includes the ideology of Pan-Arabism and subsequent rejection of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish State superimposed on Arab Palestine. This layer dictates not only the attitude toward Israel, but towardthe Palestinian leadership—the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. The Ba'th ideology does not distinguish between one part of the Arab homeland and another, and hence does not recognize exclusive Palestinian sovereignty over the Palestinian problem. The problem is an "Arab issue" and must be resolved in accordance with Arab consensus. Hence no Arab country—even the Palestinians—has the right to conclude a separate peace with Israel. The PLO, according to this viewpoint, has been given the task of representing the Palestinian issue by the Arabs and is accountable to the Arabs. It is not an autonomous national liberation leadership that can decide on its own path according to its understanding of the Palestinian interests. This ideological principle, though, had already been

moderated by Hafez al-Asad (May 1994) in statements that the Palestinianswere "responsible for their problem" and that once they had reached an agreement with Israel, the Arabs could follow suit.[126]

- The bilateral Syrian–Israeli layer: Syria has an interest in keeping channels of communication with Israel open in order to preclude miscalculations that would result in a military confrontation. This pragmatic layer was activated a number of times through sending of messages via conduits accepted by bothsides, such as King Hussein of Jordan and U.S. diplomats.
- The national interest layer: The ideology noted above has a clear instrumental benefit for Syria. By preventing independent policies on the part of the Palestinians, Syria wishes to preclude a separate Israeli–Palestinian peace which would leave it alone with the issue of the Golan Heights.
- The regional layer: Maintaining the conflict with Israel serves Syria's regional status. The conflict with Israel was also a key element in Hafez al-Asad's bid for regional leadership: for the Syrians and many Arabs, he had not "capitulated," as did Sadat, Hussein, and Arafat. The taunt that seemed most offensive to Asad's self-image was that heard in Lebanon: "*Asad fi lubnan—Arnab fil-Joulan* (A lion (Asad) in Lebanon—a bunny rabbit in the Golan).
- The domestic layer: The ongoing conflict with Israel is cited by the regime as justification for emergency laws and violations of human rights. Nevertheless, the conflict with Israel is almost imperceptible in the internal Syrian political debate. While there seems to be a consensus in Syria regarding the country's "national right" to the Golan Heights, there is little appetite for open conflict with Israel or acceptance of the regime's use of the conflict as legitimization for the sorry state of domestic affairs.

In past years, it was conventional wisdom in the Middle East that there could be no Israeli–Arab war without Egypt and no Israeli–Arab peace without Syria.[127] This assumption cracked in the wake of the Israeli–Egyptian peace (1979) and was modified. It remained true, though, that Syria alone could not pose a credible military threat to Israel. For some time, it maintained its ability to prevent a stable and comprehensive peace with additional Arab parties—mainly Jordan, the Palestinians, and Lebanon. Syria's power to prevent such progress was tested and proven after Damascus succeeded in foiling the Israeli–Lebanese peace treaty of 1983, in modifying the Saudi peace plan which became the Arab Peace plan (Fez, 1983) to conform with its goals, and in restraining various Jordanian peace overtures during the 1980s.

The assumption that there could be no comprehensive Israeli–Arab peace without Syria's acquiescence was sorely challenged again following the Oslo Accords, and by the subsequent Israeli–Jordanian peace treaty and development of relations between Israel and many Arab countries. The death of Yasser Arafat (2004), the prospects for a renewed Israeli–Palestinian negotiation process, and the further decline of the Arab collective all reduced Syria's influence over the peace process. The Syrian presence in Lebanon and total control over the foreign policy of the government in Beirut nevertheless guaranteed that the Syrian–Lebanese track in the peace process would remain combined and that Syria maintained the capability to escalate tensions and hinder the Israeli–Palestinian track. The loss of Lebanon (2005) reduced Syria's control over the Lebanese "card." Without Syrian backing, Hezbollah has been compelled to address internal Lebanese demands for demilitarization of the organization, and in any case will find it more difficult to maintain a policy of controlled tension with Israel.

Bashar is well aware that willingness to re-engage in the peace process with Israel is potentially his most favorable card. According to senior Israeli and American officials who were involved in previous Israeli–Syrian negotiations, Bashar is indeed willing to work "from the point at which they stopped, according to the Madrid Conference framework and according to the Security Council resolutions."[128] The debate remains over his ability to compromise on the main bones of contention: the international versus the 1967 borders[129] and the extent of "normal" relations between the two countries.[130] All the present signs indicate that Bashar is not willing or able to be flexible on the former issue, on which he is totally committed to the legacy of his father. Asad held a "deposit" that he extracted from Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin regarding total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan in return for comprehensive peace. This position was also the basis for the Syrian negotiations with Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and later with his successor, Ehud Barak.[131] It appears that this is Bashar's true position and not, as is frequently claimed, because the old guard will not countenance any concessions in this regard. As pointed out above, this old guard has faded away since Bashar came to power.

Lebanon. Lebanon is arguably the most important single strategic issue on the Syrian agenda. Syria's basic interests in Lebanon include:

- Ideological factors. Syrian Ba'th doctrine views Lebanon as a part of Syria that was artificially torn away from it by Western colonialism. Consequently, Syria never recognized Lebanon as a legitimate sovereign state and never held an embassy in Beirut.
- Military interests. These include: (1) preventing Lebanon from being used as a platform for (Israeli) military intervention in Syria (by avoiding the Golan Heights and invading Syria via the Baqa'a valley); (2) preventing Lebanon from concluding a separate peace treaty with Israel, which would leave Syria alone without any real levers to induce Israel to enter negotiations with it; (3) using Lebanon as a haven for terrorist organizations that Syria would have found inconvenient to host in her own territory (Japanese Red Army, PKK, and ANO in the past; the Islamic Jihad apparatus of Hezbollah (Imad Moghniyya) and Islamist elements linked to al Qaeda today); (4) using Hezbollah to threaten and annoy Israel.
  - Economic interests. Both Syria as a state and various branches of the nomenklatura profited from the Syrian control over Lebanon. One estimate is that Syria siphoned off at least ten billion dollars (US) a year from Lebanon,[132] equivalent to 47 percent of Syria's gross domestic product. Even more significant is the lucrative drug trade, in which the Syrian army was deeply involved; the Bekaa valley is reputed to be the source of more than half of all marijuana and hashish seized in Western Europe, and the heroin trade reportedly is worth around US$1.4 billion per annum. It is estimated that much of this was funneled to "bosses" in the Syrian forces in Lebanon. Even assuming that this sum is grossly exaggerated, there is no doubt that Lebanon has enormous economic importance for Syria. Lebanon is also a source of employment for over a million Syrian manual laborers who send their remittances home to Syria. The loss of this option would have devastating effects on Syrian employment levels.
  - Regional interests The Arab world's acceptance of Syria's special status in Lebanon (the Taif Accord) was one of Syria's greatest strategic achievements.
  - Domestic considerations. The Lebanese political arena has served in many ways as a proxy theater for Syrian policy. This was self-evident in the case of Syria's

conflict with Israel. It was also a theatre for airing internal Syrian power struggles and for various individuals within the regime to strengthen their own status. The strategic importance of Lebanon, in a way, "rubbed off" on those senior Syrians whose task it was to maintain it. Thus, disputes between Ghazi Kana'an and Mustafa Tlas first were aired in the Lebanese arena.

- Personal prestige. Bashar presided over the "Lebanese File" and was personally involved in the election of Lahoud as President of Lebanon. Syrian domination over Lebanon—and the Arab legitimation of that domination—arguably was among Hafez al-Asad's major strategic achievements. To lose that asset would be a blow to Bashar's prestige.

The Syrian domination of Lebanon was based on a number of instruments:

- Diplomatic agreements. These included the Treaty of Brotherhood, Cooperation, and Coordination between Lebanon and Syria (May 20, 1991) in which the two agreed "to achieve the highest level of cooperation and coordination in all political, economic, security . . . as an affirmation of the brotherly relations and guarantee of their common destiny." This treaty was augmented by the Lebanon-Syria Defense and Security Agreement (September 1 1991), which formalized the domination of Syria's military and security services in Lebanon. Two years later, an Agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation and Coordination outlined a program of economic integration which, in practice, made Lebanon an outlet for Syrian goods and labor.
- Military occupation. This effectively was terminated in the wake of the "Cedar Revolution" of Spring 2005.
- Security involvement. According to current information, Syria still maintains an intelligence presence in Lebanon under the guise of the Lebanese security services, which are still loyal to Damascus.
- Economic domination. This is partially formal, a result of the Agreement for Economic and Social Cooperation and Coordination, and partially due to the economic involvement of senior Syrian figures (including Maher al-Asad, Ghazi Kana'an, Rustum Ghazaleh, and Rami Makhluf).
- Political engineering. In the wake of defeats of pro-Syrian candidates in municipal elections in 1998, a new electoral law was promulgated which gerrymandered Lebanon in a manner that neutralized most of the anti-Syrian elements.[133] Syria also pressured the Lebanese Parliament into extending the six-year term of President Lahoud by three years (3 Septemeber 2004), a step that precipitated UNSC resolution 1559, which called for a Syrian exit from Lebanon.

The Syrian vision for future relations with Lebanon clearly was a continuation of the Syrian domination of the country at minimum, and possibly a closer formal relationship. The Syrian slogan of "one people in two states" is reminiscent of the Chinese proposals for Hong Kong and Taiwan (one country, two systems). The rise of Bashar, who was perceived as less capable of holding on to Syria's strategic assets in Lebanon and elsewhere, galvanized Syria's traditional opponents in the country. The feeling that Syria had made Shi'ite Hezbollah its main ally in the country (after Lahoud)[134] created a coalition of Sunnis and Christians (who had lost their former predominance), and Druze (whose leader, Walid Joumblat, has a blood account with the Asads because of the assassination of his father at Syria's hands). This coalition found a formidable leader in Rafiq al-Hariri who had his close links to France and Saudi Arabia. In the wake of the American invasion of Iraq, international circumstances favored change and allowed for UNSC 1559.

Bashar did not read these signals of change and continued to try to manipulate the Lebanese theater as Syria had done for over two decades (see discussion below on the decision-making process in Bashar's regime). According to numerous accounts, Bashar was also slow to read the portents of the Lebanese "Cedar Revolution" that broke out in the wake of the assassination of al-Hariri. The Syrian response to these new currents in Lebanon was to activate its proxies in the Lebanese theater in order to thwart calls for a Syrian withdrawal and silence those who dared to incriminate Syria in the assassination. This was done through a series of murders (or attempted murders) of critics of Syria[135] and pro-Syrian demonstrations, mainly organized by Hezbollah. These acts were, however, counterproductive, as they generated more anti-Syrian sentiment and an escalation of the demand for an immediate Syrian withdrawal from the country. The failure of these attempts and the declared willingness of the main Syrian proxy in Lebanon, Hezbollah, to negotiate disarming itself were indications of the decline of the Syrian influence in this arena.

Another salient case in point can be found in the volatile arena of Syria's policy regarding Lebanon. The jury is still out as to whether Bashar himself was involved in ordering the murder of al-Hariri, or in the subsequent murders of prominent Lebanese dissidents Samir Kassir and George Hawi in June 2005. Bashar's dislike of al-Hariri was no secret to his inner circle—or to the general public. As the situation in Lebanon became more and more hostile to Syrian interests and this trend was linked in the eyes of the Syrian regime to the political mechanizations of al-Hariri, it became clear to the inner circles of the regime that the al-Hariri "problem" had to be dealt with. It is also not disputed that the escalation of the Syrian conflict with al-Hariri did not escape the eyes of other international and regional actors, and France and Saudi Arabia even cautioned Bashar not to harm al-Hariri. Under these circumstances, the Syrian leadership could have assumed that France, Saudi Arabia, and the United States would not take an assassination kindly. Under the regime of Hafez al-Asad, the impossibility of plausible deniability would have precluded any senior official taking it upon himself to eliminate a prominent Lebanese politician with close ties to the United States, Saudi Arabia, and France.

The various scenarios offered for the development of the al-Hariri affair are distinguished in their depictions of the degree of control held by Bashar. These scenarios include:

- Over delegation of authority: The Bashar regime had lost its presidential "safety latch" and had not replaced it with an alternative set of checks and balances. Consequently, according to this scenario, senior figures in the regime (those alluded to in the Mehlis report are Asef Shawkat and Maher al-Asad), acted upon their own authority and understanding of Syrian interests and did not feel the need for explicit order.
- "Peer pressure": According to this version, Bashar held consultations with his security advisors, who opted for elimination of al-Hariri. Bashar, as a "democratic leader," accepted the verdict. Many Lebanese even claim to "know" that Bashar was personally involved in giving the order, while others claim that he and Ghazi Kana'an opposed the assassination, while Maher al-Asad and Asaf Shawkat were in favor of it. Obviously, no one can provide proof for these claims.
- The decline of the old guard: The experienced and cautious old guard had lost most of its clout within the regime and the assassination was the result of the rise of young officers in the intelligence community and neophytes surrounding Bashar, who lack the discretion of their predecessors.
- Loss of control: This explanation is based on the fact that Bashar already had deposed many of the old guard and many of them continued to maintain their links

in their former apparatuses, using those links to plan and execute the assassination. This explanation has two alternative possibilities for a motive. The first is that the former officials saw al-Hariri as a threat to their own personal influence and business in Lebanon, as well as to Syrian dominance. The second possibility is that they saw Bashar loosing his grip on Lebanon, and therefore wanted to create a situation that would force him to revise what they saw as his inept policy. The flaw in this explanation is that most of the "old guard" with influence in Lebanon (such as the late Ghazi Kana'an) are aware of the dynamics of the Lebanese arena and tend to be cautious in the use of force that may incriminate Syria. The continued attempts to assassinate lower-level critics of Syria after the murder of al-Hariri also raise the question of why, if the cause is "loss of control," the regime had not taken any visible steps to reign in its "loose cannons."

There is no doubt that there was deep Syrian involvement in the assassinations. The question is the extent of Bashar's involvement in the affair, and what can be learned from it regarding his leadership style. Bashar's personality and the decision-making process under him does not support the account of his personal involvement in ordering the assassination. Rather, his aversion to political risk on one hand, and tendency to delegate authority on the other, tends to support the first explanation of "overdelegation of authority."

If this is true and senior intelligence officials set in motion one of the most disastrous blunders in the history of Syrian intelligence operations, the circumstances of the affair would have warranted, in such an autocratic regime, either a genuine purge of the apparatus or apparatuses that acted against the policy of the president, or, at least, a bid to disengage the president himself from responsibility by claiming that the Syrian involvement was the personal initiative of a mid-ranking official who has been duly punished. This latter was the image that Hafez al-Asad tried to project after the Hindawi affair of 1986, when he (temporarily, at least) moved aside those who were known to have been involved in the operations attempts. However, the only senior figure to have been moved aside after the assassination was Bahjat Suleiman, and there is no evidence to date—and certainly no official declaration—that his dismissal was linked to the assassination.

The development of the Lebanese situation offers additional insight into Bashar's decision making. The Lebanese case is particularly instructive, as Bashar had received his "apprenticeship" in politics in this theater. From the mid-1990s Bashar appeared to be informally responsible for the "Lebanese file" as Vice President Khaddam became more and more marginalized. He developed close ties with various members of the Lebanese elite (he was said to be close to Suleiman Tony Franjiya, the grandson of former pro-Syrian Lebanese President Suleiman Franjiyeh) and was deeply involved in Syrian manipulation of the Lebanese political scene, including the replacement of Prime Minister al-Hariri, who was associated with Khaddam, and the Syrian Chief of Staff, Hikmat Shihabi by Salim al-Huss.[136] Pressure on Syria to withdraw from Lebanon began after the Israeli withdrawal in May 2000. Syria's initial response to this pressure was in line with its traditional *modus operandi* in that country: it supported Hezbollah's claim that the Sheba farm area (occupied by Israel with the Golan Heights in June 1967) was part of Lebanon, and therefore Israel had not implemented a total withdrawal and the *raison d'être* for Hezbollah's resistance remained in force.

As pressure mounted on Syria to withdraw, the conventional wisdom, grounded in the strategic significance of Lebanon for Syria (see above) and the behavior of Hafez al-Asad, assumed that Bashar's Syria would first procrastinate and buy time, then create a crisis that would put the call for an early Syrian withdrawal on the back burner, and, finally, perform a

token withdrawal while maintaining its intelligence presence in Beirut and its actual military presence in the Bek'aa valley. The crisis, however, played out differently: Bashar caved in to international pressure in a manner that, in the eyes of many Syrians of the old guard, did not become the son of his father. Furthermore, he did not make a serious attempt through negotiations with the West to extract a reward for his compliance with its demands. His decision making seemed focused totally on the current stage of the crisis without an attempt to draw up a long-range strategy.

Bashar's behavior in the unfolding of the Lebanese crisis can be partially explained by the decline of the influence of the old guard on Bashar's policy. Had they maintained vestiges of influence, it stands to reason that the habits of thirty years of control over Lebanon would have died much more slowly. The importance of the Lebanese arena for Syria was ingrained in that generation and it seems doubtful that they would have acquiesced to what was, in their eyes, a policy that endangered Syria's vital interests. This impression is borne out by the unusual openness of senior Syrian officials when speaking about the circumstances surrounding the "suicide" of Ghazi Kana'an. He and other officers who had been intimately involved in Syria's Lebanon policymaking over the years are said to have been deeply distressed by the withdrawal and the abandonment of Syrian interests in the neighboring country and to have voiced that distress in elite circles.

The suicide (or murder) of Ghazi Kana'an was clearly linked to the al-Hariri affair. According to what seems to be a reliable account, the day before his "suicide" he showed no sign of personal distress that could bring him to such an act. He was, however, deeply concerned about the management of the Lebanese crisis and the willingness of the regime to abandon the officers who had been involved in the Lebanese arena. The various versions circulating since the incident are: (1) Kana'an knew that he was to be named by the Mehlis report and "saved" the regime by taking his own life, nobly providing the regime with a scapegoat; (2) Kana'an knew that he was to be named and that the president intended to abandon him, and saw no resort besides suicide that would prevent him from being handed over to international justice; or (3) Kana'an had opposed the assassination of al-Hariri, with whom he had business connections, and was liable to have incriminated senior members of the regime (Asaf Shawkat or Bahjat Suleiman). In order to prevent such a development he was murdered and the murder was presented as a suicide.

The al-Hariri assassination and its fallout was a watershed for Syria's involvement in Lebanon—and potentially for the survival of the Syrian regime. Even if the regime weathers the current crisis, it will have to face a new paradigm for relations with Lebanon—relations with a sovereign, not a vassal, state, which enjoys guarantees from a coalition of Western countries. Ironically, Syria's weakened position in Lebanon has left it more dependent on, and hence more constrained to support and less able to control, its Lebanese proxies, who find themselves "upgraded" now to allies. This was well demonstrated during the Israeli–Hezbollah hostilities of summer 2006. Under these circumstances, the possibility still exists that Hezbollah, for its own reasons or because of prodding by Iran, may perform acts of provocation against Israel that ultimately would drag Syria into the conflict.

Iraq

The Ba'th party of Iraq had been the nemesis of the Asad regime for decades. The animosity between the two regimes had been a significant factor in Syria's support for Iran during the Iraq–Iran war of the 1980s and its support for the Coalition in the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. Bashar al-Asad reversed his father's policy soon after he came to power and began a policy of rapprochement with Baghdad.

Bashar's support of Iraq included: pro-Iraqi rhetoric such as his referral to Iraq as Syria's "strategic depth"; political support for Iraq in the United Nations Security Council (Syrian support for UNSC resolution 1441 of November 2002 notwithstanding, as it was viewed by Damascus as a means to tie the hands of the U.S.); economic support through illicit trade, and opening of the oil pipeline;[137] and military support through smuggling of military components from Syria to Iraq. The regime, and Bashar himself, did not stop at pro-Iraqi statements, but escalated into direct anti-American rhetoric as well. Bashar accused the U.S. of a policy directed toward "gaining control over Iraqi oil and redrawing the map of the region in keeping with its worldview," and warned the Arabs that the American threat was greater than the Sykes-Picot agreement, the Balfour declaration, and the establishment of the State of Israel, and that U.S. friendship is "more fatal than its hostility."[138] Later, during the American offensive, senior spokesmen for the Syrian regime declared Syria's total support for Iraq and even went as far as to compare George W. Bush to Adolf Hitler.[139]

Developments in Iraq in the wake of the fall of the Saddam regime have presented Bashar with a number of strategic challenges:

- First and foremost, the fall of the Iraqi Ba'th regime and the potential for democratization is seen from Damascus as clarifying U.S. intentions towards the Syrian Ba'th regime. Moreover, the American occupation of Iraq has made the U.S. Syria's "neighbor."
- The economic consequences of the halt of smuggled Iraqi oil to Syria and sanction-violating trade between the two countries have undermined the Syrian economy. The immediate damage to the Syrian economy is assessed at billions of dollars a year (oil smuggling and illicit trade alone was assessed in 2002 as amounting to about $3 billion).
- Syrian support, either active or tacit, for insurgent elements in Iraq has alienated the U.S. without delivering any real advantages to Syria.
- While Syria is attempting to reach out to the Shi'ite-Kurdish regime, it fears that the success of the Kurds in Iraq may incite irredentism by Syrian Kurds.

Bashar's relations with the Saddam regime at a time that the Iraqi regime was under siege and anticipating an American attack have been attributed to Bashar's political naiveté, inability to read the strategic map, and adulation of self-confident leaders. For comparison, one may look at the pragmatic decision of the elder Asad during the first Gulf War (1991) to support the Coalition and even send forces. This was due to his animosity toward the Iraqi regime his realistic analysis that the U.S.-led coalition would succeed in ousting Iraq from Kuwait, and his expectation that collaboration would bestow Syria with U.S. support both in Lebanon and in the Israeli–Syrian peace process. At the same time, while Saddam's popularity was at its peak during the first Gulf War (much more than in the second round), Hafez al-Asad remained oblivious to populist considerations, knowing that public opinion was fickle and that boosting the popularity of Saddam in Syria would limit his political room for maneuver. The elder Asad had always remained prudent in his relations with the United States and rarely permitted the heights of anti-Americanism that Bashar allowed.

Presumably, most of the considerations that brought Hafez al-Asad to cooperate with the Coalition in the first Iraqi war should have been valid for Bashar. This is particularly true in the light of the fact that many of the factors that played a role in Hafez al-Asad's decision have since become more prominent, the status of the U.S. as the world's sole superpower had been enhanced, the events of 9/11 and the American invasion of Afghanistan had shown the extent of the resolve of the present U.S. President, and Saddam's Arab and international

legitimacy had eroded. Nevertheless, Bashar's policy invited a direct confrontation with the United States in a manner his father would never have risked.

Bashar's behavior, however, reflected elements of his own personality and the changes in the decision-making process that his regime had produced. These include:

- Admiration of strong and popular leaders and a desire for popularity. Bashar clearly admired Sadam's self-confidence and defiance of the U.S. and envied his popularity with the Arab (including Syrian) "man in the street." His attraction to Saddam is likened by observers to his attitude toward the leader of Hezbollah, Sheikh Hasan Nassrallah.[140] In both cases, Bashar is drawn to back charismatic leaders whose trademark is defiance of foreign powers (Israel in the case of Hezbollah, the U.S. in the case of Iraq). He is also affected by the popularity of those leaders, perhaps hoping that he can cash in on that popularity if he supports them.
- Bashar's "populist" tendency. Bashar's staunch support for Iraq was apparently assessed by him as being a popular position. Indeed, during the war it enhanced his image in Syrian and inter-Arab public opinion.
- Underestimate of the U.S. resolve and overestimate of Saddam's strength. There is no doubt that Bashar did not believe either that the U.S. would carry out its threat of attacking the Iraqi regime, nor did he foresee the almost instantaneous collapse of that regime.
- Genuine fear that Syria would be next. Bashar saw Iraq as a first step in a wider American strategy to clear the Middle East of all regimes considered hostile to the U.S. Therefore, blocking the plan by delaying or disrupting U.S. plans vis-à-vis Iraq was a clear Syrian interest.
- The decline of the prudent old guard. By and large, the old guard subscribed to the doctrine of Hafez al-Asad as described above. There is strong evidence to support the argument that contrary to the claims that Bashar's "hard-line" political behavior is the result of the influence of the old guard over him, these "uncles" of Bashar, as they are sometimes called, have all but lost their influence and Bashar is advised by younger and more militant advisors. In some cases the old-guard leadership wielded a moderating influence by warning Bashar of possible ramifications of giving Hezballah a free hand in South Lebanon. [141]
- The dynamics of a new decision making elite: Members and potential members of the policy elite are still vying for their places near the leader. This system differs radically from the limited competition which characterized the Hafez al-Asad regime, and it lends itself to "one-upmanship" by those surrounding the President.

Whatever the reasons behind Syrian support for the Saddam regime, its downfall should have provoked a strategic reassessment in Damascus of its Iraqi policy. There are no signs that such a reassessment took place or that lessons were learned. This is natural in the absence of an institutionalized mechanism for strategic assessment; lessons that are not deduced by the president himself do no become part of the strategic picture. The immediate reaction in Damascus to the fall of the Iraqi regime was deep concern that Syria would be the next target. Initially, this concern convinced Bashar to take a conciliatory position toward the new Iraqi regime and toward American policy in Iraq. The deterioration of the Syrian policy regarding the Iraqi situation, and Syrian support for the Iraqi insurgency, provide some insight into the decision-making process in the regime. Though it is not clear what the strategic logic was (if indeed there was a clearly formulated strategy) behind Syrian behavior, it seems that several factors influenced Bashar in this regard:

- Syria's close relations with Iran clearly influenced the Syrian assessment. The Iranian regime regarded a stabilized oil-rich pro-American Iraq as a clear and imminent threat to its own existence. Like Syria, it assessed that it would be next on the American agenda if Iraq were to be stabilized. Immediately after the first stage of "Iraqi Freedom," there ensued a flurry of high-level consultations between Syria and Iran. Bashar was clearly receptive to the Iranian arguments that Syria and Iran should cooperate to avert the danger.
- The domestic consideration that allowing radical Islamists to act against the American presence in Iraq would shift the focus of local Islamists away from acting against the regime.
- The logic of the Hafez al-Asad regime in providing safe haven to terrorist organizations acting against neighboring countries (PKK and ASALA against Turkey, the Japanese Red Army, and various Palestinian organizations) and allowing them to operate from Syrian soil was adopted by Bashar. According to this logic, such support served as a valuable bargaining chip for future negotiations with the challenged country.

Iran

Relations between Damascus and Teheran have grown since the Islamic revolution into a strategic relationship. For Iran, the Syrian regime is unique in the Arab world, in that it is ruled by Alawites (who are considered by many Iranian Shi'ites to be a sect of Shi'ite Islam). Politically, Syria arguably is Iran's major ally in the Arab world, having supported Iran both politically and militarily during the Iraq–Iran War despite the pro-Iraqi solidarity of most of the Arab world. Iran returned the favor by writing off Syrian oil debts incurred during that period. The two countries have collaborated intimately on development of surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs), and Iran's influence in Lebanon—one of the greatest achievements of the Islamic Republic's foreign and "export of Revolution" policies—is due to Syrian acquiescence and support. These relations have held fast despite incidents such as the Syrian suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood rebellion in 1982 and unauthorized Iranian activity in Lebanon and Syria.

Iran's position with the Syrian leadership seems to have even strengthened since Bashar came to power, and further still since the fall of the Iraqi regime and the hostilities between Israel and Lebanon in summer 2006. This has manifested itself both directly and through the relationship between Bashar and the leader of Hezbollah, Sheikh Hasan Nassrallah. One version presents Syria's present relationship with Iran as deriving from the same factors that prompted it to support Iraq: a belief that such a country could serve as a strategic support ("a strategic rear"), admiration for a self-confident and proud leadership and for leaders who "stand up" to the U.S., a sense of "common fate" (fear that if the U.S. succeeds in toppling that regime, it will surely come after the Ba'th regime in Syria). In the Iranian case, this is augmented by the traditionally close relations between the two countries.

These close relations notwithstanding, Syria under Hafez al-Asad knew to control Iran's involvement in areas crucial to Syria's strategic interests. Thus, Syria reduced the IRGC (Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps) contingent in Lebanon and occasionally put pressure on Hezbollah when the organization's terrorist activities contradicted Syrian interests.

Saudi Arabia

In the Hafez al-Asad era, the Syrian relationship with Saudi Arabia was a major support for the regime and for Syria's regional role. This relationship has been seriously damaged

in the wake of the al-Hariri affair. It is claimed that the Saudis received information about a possible threat to al-Hariri's life, and sent a special emissary who warned Bashar not to harm al-Hariri. The Saudis therefore have no doubts regarding Syrian responsibility for the assassination.

This is not to say that Saudi Arabia will take active steps to topple the regime in Damascus or replace Bashar. Saudi policy is first and foremost one of stability and continuity. It will, however, not go out of its way to save Bashar if the threat to his regime comes from inside Syria.

Jordan

Jordan's relations with Syria were strained for most of the last decade of Hafez al-Asad's rule. The animosity between the two countries goes back to the Syrian invasion of Jordan during the "Black September" events of 1971, attempts by Syria to assassinate senior Jordanian politicians (including former Prime Minister Mudar Badran), and other Syrian subversion in Jordan. The Syrians, for their part, accused Jordan of actively aiding and abetting the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood during the uprising of the early 1980s and, of course, betraying the Arab and Palestinian cause by signing a peace treaty with Israel.

One of Bashar's first overtures as president towards his neighbors was to "depoliticize" the relations with Amman. Soon after he had inaugurated diplomatic relations between the two countries (23 December 2000), and economic relations received a boost.

The conventional wisdom in the early days of Bashar's rule tied him together with King Abdallah II of Jordan and King Mohammad VI of Morocco as the "internet generation" of Arab rulers. However, strong relations between Bashar and Abdallah did not develop. The latter had taken a firm position alongside the U.S. War on Terrorism (including reducing the activities of Palestinian Hamas, which is supported by Damascus), was increasingly uncomfortable with Syrian heavy-handedness in Lebanon and its support of the Iraqi insurgency, and refused to downgrade its relationship with Israel. Nevertheless, Jordan is acutely aware of possible fallout resulting from instability in its northern neighbor and would prefer the status quo over any upheaval in Damascus.

Egypt

Relations between Syria and Egypt have historically reflected the fluctuations in Syria's regional status. After the Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty of 1979 Syria gained preeminence as the leading Arab state in the anti–Camp David bloc and led the campaign for suspension of Egypt's membership in the Arab League and its affiliate associations. Later, after the 1982 war in Lebanon, Syria began to improve relations with Cairo. Over the years relations were marked by continual consultations between the aging Hafez al-Asad and Husni Mubarak.

This relationship—like many in the Arab world—was primarily a personal one, and changed with the death of Hafez al-Asad. There are clear signs that Mubarak has been exasperated by the Syrian President's hard-line rhetoric and has given many indications that he views him as a "childish" individual.[142] This is in line with Mubarak's status (along with Muammar Qaddafi) as a virtual "elder statesman" of the Arab world since the deaths of Kings Hasan of Morocco and Hussein of Jordan, President Hafez al-Asad, and Yasser Arafat.[143] It is, however, Syria's declining international status that provides Egypt with an opportunity to play a more pivotal role both in restraining Bashar and staving off more intense American pressure.

Not only Husni Mubarak but senior Egyptian policymakers as well have tended to view their Syrian counterparts as politically immature and unsophisticated. This feeling has grown since Bashar came to power. Relations between the two countries have been strained on the Syrian side due to Egypt's perceived support of the United States and of pressures on Syria regarding Lebanon. On the Egyptian side, pan-Arab/anti-U.S. policy statements made by Bashar Assad, particularly at Arab summits have embarrassed the Egyptian leadership, and demonstrations initiated by the Syrian regime prior to the war on Iraq included attacks on the Egyptian embassy in Damascus.

Turkey

Syrian–Turkish relations have always been problematic. For Syria, Turkey was: (1) pro-American (and a member state of NATO) in the period of the Cold War; (2) a Middle Eastern state with relations (and, during the last decade of Hafez al-Asad's life, even strong strategic relations) with Israel; (3) the source country of one of Syria's main sources of water, the Euphrates, a cause of constant tension due to Syria's contention that Turkish dams in southeast Anatolia were starving it of water; (4) a country with which Syria has a historic territorial dispute over the province of Alexendretta (Hatay);[144] and (5) a neighboring country with a formidable military capability and a willingness to use it to threaten Syria (as it did in October 1998 when it threatened military intervention if Syria did not expel the PKK's leader, Abdallah Ocalan, who enjoyed sanctuary there).

Relations between Syria and Turkey began to improve in the last years of Hafez al-Asad. Bashar's period as president has witnessed further improvement of relations with Turkey. This was exemplified in Bashar's visit to Ankara in January 2004 and a visit by Turkish Prime Minister Ragib Tayip Erdogan to Damascus in December 2004. During this period, Syria attempted to reach an understanding with Turkey on the issue of Northern Iraq (rejecting the establishment of an independent Kurdish state, which would be an irredentist magnet to the Kurds in both countries). Syrian expectations from this honeymoon with Ankara were expressed by the regime newspaper *al-Ba'th*: "the growing role of Turkey at regional and international levels that could make Turkey a vast gate to Syria towards the world plus a strategic friend . . . (by virtue of) its confidence in dealing with domestic and foreign affairs, its relations with USA, (the talks for) . . . admission to the EU and its status as an Islamic state."[145]

The sticky issue of the Syrian claim on Alexendretta (Hatay), and Syrian support of the PKK, were also settled in an elegant manner. Syria did not formally renounce its rights over Alexendretta but agreed not to continue with administrative steps that highlighted its claim to that area.[146] Nevertheless, Syrian school books and tourist sites continue to show the area as part of Syria. Here, too, Bashar gave in to pressure of a stronger neighbor while refraining from any step that would be perceived as a strategic concession on a matter of ideological principle.

Europe (EU) and Russia

The European Union, and France in particular, has been seen historically by Damascus as a counterbalance to U.S. hostility. When Bashar came to power, French President Jacques Chirac took him under his wing and defended Syrian behavior. The French position on Lebanon therefore was a substantial blow to Bashar.

It was Russia, however, that has been in Syrian eyes the most important counterbalance to the U.S. Whereas in the past relations with Russia/USSR were necessary in order to balance Israel's relations with Washington, today the U.S. is seen not merely as a superpower supporting Syria's regional archenemy, but as an enemy of Syria in its own right. Therefore, the Syrian need for a strong relationship with Russia has only increased. In January 2005, Bashar al-Asad visited Moscow, finally settling the issue of Syria's $12 billion debt to the former Soviet Union and holding talks on the possibility of the sale of advanced Russian weaponry to Syria. Russian spokesmen lauded Syria's regional role and the special relationship between the two countries. It is clear to Bashar, however, that he cannot expect help from Russia against U.S. and French plans in the UN, or if the U.S. makes a decision to topple the Syrian regime by force.

The United States

The United States has always been viewed from Damascus both as an adversary, given its role as Israel's most important strategic ally, and as a necessary interlocutor. Therefore, even in times of high tension with the United States, Syria under Hafez al-Asad did not give up on dialogue with Washington, and channels of communication remained open. The fact that President Bush's "Axis of Evil" did not include Syria was seen as evidence that the Syrian regime, unlike those of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea, essentially remained legitimate in eyes of the U.S. administration.

This sense of assurance has eroded since the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime. Syria now sees Washington as moving inexorably toward delegitimization of the Syrian Ba'th regime as well.[147] This analysis is based on the following:

- The U.S. position on democratization as a major balm for the plague of terrorism places change of nondemocratic regimes—particularly those which are traditionally hostile to the US and supporters of terrorism—high on the American political agenda. The identification of the Syrian regime as "Ba'thist," like the former Iraqi regime, only exacerbates this feeling.
- Developments in Lebanon make Syria "low-hanging fruit" in regard to regime change. Positive regime change in Damascus can be used by the administration to show an achievement and to balance the lack of success in the Iraqi theater.
- The desertion of France, which had been a traditional friend of Syria and supported Bashar in his first days as president, leaves Syria without support from a strong European ally.
- Syria fears that American delegitimization of the Syrian regime will harden Israeli stance toward it and give it free run to react to Hezbollah attacks and terrorist attacks in Israel perpetrated by Syrian-based organizations. Under these circumstances, Syria believes that Israel will not enter into negotiations with Syria on the Golan. Negotiatons with Israel or even willingness to hold them has always been a significant lever for Syria to achieve international acceptance, in spite of its support of terrorism, lack of democracy, etc.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Bashar would like to reach out to the U.S. He is eager for any contact with the administration with which he can mitigate the American hostility toward him. Recognizing the priority of the war on terror for the U.S. Bashar hoped immediately after 9/11 to acquire the good will of the administration through cooperation on intelligence on al Qaeda. However, his perception that the administration is intent on toppling his regime limits his ability to enter into any real "give and take" dialogue over the few

strategic cards that he retains: (1) support of the Iraqi insurgency; (2) support of Hezbollah; (3) hosting of Palestinian terrorist organizations; (4) opposition to Abu Mazen and to the Israeli—Palestinian peace process; and (5) willingness to revive the peace negotiations with Israel without reference to the "deposit" or to taking up the negotiations at the point where they ended.

For the time being, Bashar is aware of the paucity of the cards in his hand and of the fact that none of the cards alone are appealing enough to the U.S., particularly when it seems to believe that it can effect a positive regime change that would give it all the cards at once. Consequently, Bashar's policy priority vis-à-vis the US is to convince it that: the Syrian regime is still strong and resilient, hence the U.S. cannot count on its falling; the consequences of toppling the regime would be catastrophic as they would bring about a disintegration of the country into rival communities similar to Iraq, and may even bring the Jihadi movement and the Muslim Brotherhood to power; and that Syria will continue to be a nuisance to American interests in the region as long as its own interests are not addressed.

The fact that many of Bashar's close advisors were educated in the U.S. or the U.K., and that Bashar himself speaks fair English (though he is not completely fluent), does not have much effect on the Syrian discourse with Washington. Bashar has even failed to make the most of media opportunities (such as an interview with Christianne Amanpour on CNN in which he lapsed into Arabic and offered lame logical proofs for Syria's innocence in the assassination of al-Hariri).[148]

Bashar's failure to convince the U.S. of the resilience of his regime and of the inadvisability of toppling it leaves him only one option, namely, trying to prove that Syria's nuisance value warrants changing policy towards it. As Bashar's hopes for a substantial dialogue with the U.S. diminishes, he may be tempted to step up his "nuisance value" by threatening U.S. interests in various ways (such as escalating terrorism and support of the Iraqi insurgency).

A Look Ahead

From the forst days of Syrian independence until Hafez al-Asad's rise to power in 1970, Syria went through twenty military coups. A decade into the Asad era, Syria went through a period of terrorism against the regime launched by the Muslim Brotherhood. Experience with the supposed "stability" of authoritarian countries such as Russia and Yugoslavia, which turned out to be chimerical once the feared regime collapsed, raises the question of whether the basic elements of instability continue to fester under the surface and may erupt if and when the regime falls (or merely is thought to have lost its grip on power). To a certain extent, it may be said that deterrence by the regime of political unrest has been reduced; the willingness of members of civil society to protest and criticize the regime implies as much. Syria's own past and the specter of communal fragmentation and "Lebanonization," along with the trauma of the breakup of erstwhile ostensibly stable countries in Eastern Europe, is exploited by the regime to deter both political opposition and potential schemes for regime change entertained in Western capitals.

Today the regime is on the defensive. The history of Bashar al-Asad's decision making does not portend measured and rational responses to this challenge. Some possible scenarios include:

- Bashar could embark on a movement to change the system from the top. He would put the blame for the mistakes of the past five years on some of his associates and retire them, release political prisoners, and announce real parliamentary elections in a year

or so, with competitive presidential elections to follow. At the same time, he would decide that it is more important, from the perspective of Syrian national interest, to prevent civil war in Iraq than to gain the satisfaction of seeing the Americans fail.[149]

- Bashar could remain on course in the domestic arena and attempt to initiate a dialogue with the U.S. and Europe on new grounds. This may include willingness to strike a "deal" absolving Syria for its involvement in Lebanon (this could take the shape of "findings" by the Syrian investigatory committee that would supply scapegoats and leave the leadership untouched). This could come in return for Syrian good behavior in Iraq and/or proposals to re-engage in the peace process with Israel, including willingness to restrain the terrorist organizations under Syrian command.

- In the wake of the findings of an "independent" Syrian investigation, Bashar may determine that his brother Maher or his brother-in-law indeed were involved in the assassination and demand their resignation from the military. In such a showdown (reminiscent of Hafez al-Asad's showdown with his own brother Rifa't) he could count on the Republican Guard contingents under Manaf Tlas. This scenario, though, seems quite unrealistic.

- Bashar may purge the elite and clamp down on all opposition to preclude the emergence of any credible potential substitute for Bashar. According to one version, the "suicide" of Ghazi Kana'an was a first step in this direction. This would have the effect of sending a message to both what would be left of the elite and to Washington and Europe that that there is no alternative to his rule; they must either accommodate themselves to his rule or risk the collapse of Syria into chaos such as that in Iraq or Lebanon.

For Bashar all these options are a choice between Scylla and Charibides. (1) To give in to the American demands regarding Iraq, a complete cessation of passage for Islamist combatants, would leave Syria without any leverage over the U.S. and reduce the prospects that the administration might pressure Israel to negotiate over the Golan or exempt the Syrian regime from demands for democratization. It would also increase Syria's regional marginalization. Domestically, it would contribute to antiregime activity by the Islamists, both because they would be denied the outlet of fighting a jihad in Iraq, and because the regime would be presented as a collaborator with the United States against the Muslims. Arguably, such a situation would not sit well with the Syrian elite, old and young guard alike, and weaken Bashar's own standing within the leadership. (2) To cooperate with the international investigation over the al-Hariri assassination would also have devastating repercussions. No matter how incriminating the findings are at the present, authorized Syrian information incriminating key figures in the regime would undermine what is left of the regime's international legitimacy by leaving it without any deniability. Offering scapegoats would irreparably undermine the internal cohesion of the regime and open the door for individuals to act to save themselves by divulging the roles of other members of the regime. (3) Attempts to appease the West by steps towards democratization would be widely viewed in the leadership as counterproductive, as they would open the gates for increasing demands on the regime, and ultimately for regime change.

On the other hand, if the regime does not deliver on any of these issues, international pressure will increase and the prospects for regime change will grow. The solution for Damascus is to attempt to structure a "grand deal" that would satisfy the U.S. but leave the regime with guarantees for its survival. Such a deal may include: (1) absolving Syria of its iniquities in Lebanon in return for complete cooperation over Iraq (closing the borders against the insurgents and making a "clean breast" regarding past and present relations

with the Iraqi Ba'th); (2) reducing its cooperation with Iran; (3) cooperation with the U.S. regarding concerns about Syria's WMD program; (4) cutting off aid to radical Palestinian organizations and Hezbollah; (5) commitment to future nonintervention in Lebanon; and (6) a commitment to refrain from attempting to weaken Abu Mazen or to disrupt the peace process.

At the same time, internal developments may accelerate unexpectedly. Some possibilities include:

- A military coup by a prominent figure from the top brass of the army or security forces. This figure, however, also would have to be an Alawite, and be able to gather support among the main pillars of the regime as a viable alternative to Bashar.[150] One such figure (given the death of Ghazi Kana'an) may be Asef Shawkat, who conceivably could also represent the interests of the Asad family.
- Continued disintegration of the regime and signs of lawlessness starting in the periphery of the country. This is a scenario which is already developing, though it is not yet clear how it may proceed.
- Islamist violence instigated by radical Wahhabis which have infiltrated the country may ignite conflict between the regime and those elements. This also would have the potential of drawing in elements of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Notes

1.   One Syrian oppositionist has likened the state of the regime to the story of King Solomon, who, according to Muslim tradition, died standing up and the Jinn continued to obey him as they did not realize that he had died. Only when earthworms had eaten through his staff did his body fall and they realized that he was dead. The analogy is obvious. Amarji blog, 9 June 2005.

2.   The expression was originally coined in Egypt because of the possibility that Hosni Mubarak might make his son Gamal Mubarak as an heir.

3.   These are just a sampling of the appellatives of the leader. For a comprehensive discussion of the use of the media to legitimize the regime in Syria, see: Mordechai Kedar, *Asad in Search of Legitimacy—Message and Rhetoric in the Syrian Press under Hafez and Bashar* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2002), pp. 61–77.

4.   Picture provided by Dr. Mordechai Kedar from the Syrian newspaper al-Ba'th depicting the commemoration of "forty days" of al-Asad's death.

5.   Oral communication from senior Israelis who had negotiated with Syria.

6.   The "Front" was formed by Hafez al-Asad in 1972. It includes the Ba'th party and six other legal parties: The Arab Socialist Union Party, The Arab Socialist Party, The Syrian Communist Party (Yusuf Faisal group), The Syrian Communist Party (Khalid Bakdash group); The Union Socialist Party, and The Union Socialist Democratic Party. The Ba'th holds half of the seats plus one in the Executive Committee of the Front. A number of seats in Parliament are reserved for the non-Ba'th parties.

7.   Private communication from a Syrian dissident.

8.   These included: the Foreign Minister, who became Deputy President, Abd al-Halim Khaddam (his wife was a Matawirah Alawi); Prime Minister Mahmoud az Zu'bi; Ba'th Party Assistant Secretary General Abdallah al Ahmar; Minister of Defense Mustafa Tlas (though his mother was Alawite); and Armed Forces Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi. All of these had similar backgrounds: they were born and raised in rural villages, and were never members of the old Sunni elite. Consequently, they shared a sense of community with the Alawite officers.

9.   The career of Prime Minister Abd ar-Rauf al-Qassim was a prime example of this catering to the Damascene elite.

10.   According to the well-known aphorism: "We—I and my brother—against our cousin, We—I, my brother and my cousin—against the rest of the village—the village against the neighboring village . . . "

11.   This is a percentage comparable only to 23 percent in Rumania before the fall, whereas in other Communist countries the proportion of party members to the population was: 9.7 percent in the USSR, 3 percent in Vietnam and 5 percent in the PRC. Due to the extended families of Syrian society, the number of individuals who enjoy access to the perks of party affiliation may reach half of the population.

12.   This has been a recurring motif in talks with Syrian non-Sunnis.

13.   Confessional communities are communities based on religious affiliation. In the social and ethnic milieu of Syria and Lebanon, the ostensibly religious affiliation holds much greater weight; an individual's affiliation to a religious community is in essence his main identity.

14.   For detailed works on the history of the Ba'th, see: Itamar or Rabinovich, *Syria under the Ba'th* 1963–66: The Army–Party Symbiosis (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972); Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution from Above* (London & NY: Routledge, 2001).

15.   The Comintern (from Russian (Kommunisticheskiy Internatsional—Communist International), also known as the Third International, was an "independent" international Communist organization founded in March 1919 by Vladmir Lenin, Leon Trotsky and the Russian Communist Party (bolshevik), which intended to fight "by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State." The Comintern held seven World Congresses, the first in March 1919 and the last in 1935, until it was "officially" dissolved in 1943.

16.   The split occurred in February 1966 when the Syrian Ba'th headed by Hafez al-Asad and Salah Jadid took over the Syrian party and deposed the founders of the party—Michel 'Aflaq and Salah al–Din Bitar—forming a new "National Command." The original "National Command" was forced to leave Syria and moved to Iraq where it served as the "National Command" of the Iraqi Ba'th when it came to power in July 1968. Meanwhile the Syrian faction formed a new "National Command" of its own based on its own loyalists.

17.   The "Pan-Arab" leadership of the party, a now all but defunct body. See below.

18.   The Ba'th Constitution. English version, see: www.baath–party.org/eng/constitution.htm

19.   Michel Aflaq, *Ba'adh al-Muntalaqat al-Nadhriya* (Some Theoretical Points of Departure), 1963.

20.   *Dustour Hizb al–Ba'th al–'Arabi al-Ishtiraki* (Constitution of the Ba'th Arab Socialist Party). http://www.baath-party.org/constitution_11_n_11_1.htm.

21.   J. G. Herder, The Philosophy of the History of Mankind.

22.   J. C. Fichte, Addresses to the German Nation.

23.   Ernest Renan (February 28, 1823–October 12, 1892) was a French philosopher and writer. Renan refers to solidarity as a sense of commonality and empathy along with a sense of obligation to support another individual or group of individuals with whom one senses solidarity when necessary. The sacrifices are either individual or collective. Renan basically tries to define nationalism by the feelings that are symptomatic of the national feeling.

24.   Zaki al-Arsuzi (Alawite born in Lattakia, June 1899–July 1968) was a Syrian political activist and writer, and one of the founders of the Ba'th Party. He was as a proponent of the "linguistic image of Arab nationalism," and in 1942 published one of his most important works, *Abqariyyat al-'arabiyya fi Lisaniha* (The Genius of Arabic in its Tongue). Arsuzi formed a precursor to the Ba'th party founded by Michel Aflaq and much of his ideas were later incorporated in those of Aflaq.

25.   Saleh Omar, "Philosophical Origins of the Arab Ba'th Party: The worlds of Zaki al-Arsuzi," *Asian Studies Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2 (Spring 1996): 23–27).

26.   This distinction was made in response to Gamal 'Abd al-Nasser's distinction between "the unity of the goal" as opposed to "the unity of ranks." Though the expressions suggest the opposite, the former, according to 'Abd al-Nasser, allows for cooperation between regimes of different types (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Jordan etc.) in the Arab collective; the latter is the unity between countries with

the same type of regime. The Syrian Ba'th ultimately accepted the idea of "unity of goals" and made it into a primary political lever for enhancing Syrian influence in the Arab world.

27. Michel 'Aflaq, *Fi Sabil al–Ba'th* (In the Path of the Ba'th), Beirut, 1978, p. 207.

28. Ibrahim Khalas, *Al-Tariq Likhalaq al-Isan al-'Arabi al-Jadid* (The Path to Creation of the New Arab Man), *Jaish al-Sha'ab*, no. 749, April 25, 1967.

29. An ideology developed by Kim Il-Song, the "Great Leader" of North Korea, that dictates independent political, economic, social, and military policies as much as possible, compelling North Korea to be one of the most closed societies in the world.

30. Auto-emancipation—a concept coined in the late nineteenth century to express the need for a discriminated community (e.g. the Jews of Europe) not to wait for the majority society or the state to declare their emancipation and equality but to liberate themselves by expressing their own national identity.

31. Like many "ideological" regimes, the ideology of the Ba'th stands in sharp contrast with most of its actual practices. Its social ideals include support of gender equality but in practice, its leading bodies are almost totally male. It is ostensibly secular but does not eschew the use of Islam as an instrument of legitimization. Despite its ostensibly "Socialist" character, the nomenklatura manages an extensive "grey economy" which is not state controlled in the traditional meaning.

32. In contrast, Sadam Hussein's cynical use of Islamist rhetoric and adding the slogan "Allahu Akbar" to the Iraqi flag.

33. The pinnacle of these efforts was the 1973 confirmation by the Lebanese Shiite leader, the Imam Musa Sadr, that the Alawites are Shiite Muslims.

34. Isqandar Luqa, *Hafez al-Asad, Mu'ajim fi al-Fikr al-Siyasi wa-al-Ijtima'i* (Hafiz al-Asad – A Collection of political and social thought) (Damascus: the General Association of Workers, 1995) pp. 105–107.

35. See *al-Thawra*, February 10, 1995: "Worshipping Allah is to be in a state of communication (*tawassul*) with the Creator though the means of may differ, the ends are one: quietude of the soul and confidence in the future days." The use of the term *tawassul* is pregnant with Islamic connotations and aims at a Sufi interpretation of communication of the individual Muslim with Allah through the intercession of the Prophet without the need to rely on living *'ulama* or Sheikhs.

36. See Itzchak Weismann, Modern Sufi Attitudes toward the West: Four Naqshbandi Cases, Unpublished monograph.

37. For an extensive discussion on the terminology of Islam, see Mordechai Kedar, *Asad in Search of Legitimacy: Message and Rhetoric in the Syrian Press under Hafiz and Bashar* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2002) pp. 78–115.

38. Diplomats who have served in Damascus have noted that Hafez al-Asad, despite his purported provincialism (speaking only Arabic with foreign dignitaries and lecturing them on the history of the region according to the Ba'thist narrative), received a European education during the French mandate in Syria, and had a wealth of political interaction—including on the personal level—with a wide variety of foreign leaders. See Bassam Haddad, Syria's Curious Dillema, *Middle East Report*, 236 (Fall, 2005).

39. Bashar did not even reach this position by dint of his personal interest but inherited it from his brother, Basil.

40. Al-Thawra, June 15, 2000, p. 9.

41. See Mordechai Kedar, Asad in Search of Legitimacy, pp. 229–244.

42. This succinct statement of the main source of Bashar's legitimacy was pointed out to me by Prof. Eyal Zisser from University of Tel Aviv.

43. According to Sa'ad al-Hariri's account, Bashar had told his father: "This is what I want. If you think that President Chirac and you are going to run Lebanon, you are mistaken. It is not going to happen. President Lahoud is me. Whatever I tell him, he follows suit. This extension is to happen or else I will break Lebanon over your head and Walid Jumblat's . . . So, you either do as you are told or we will get you and your family wherever you are," http://forum.shrc.org/english/bb/Forum3/HTML/001207.html. The episode is quoted in the Mehlis report. http://forum.shrc.org/english/bb/Forum3/HTML/001205.html

44.   See Flynt Everett, *Inheriting Syria, Bashar's Trial by Fire*, p. 68

45.   Since his election, Bashar has raised the salaries of the civil service by tens of percents at least four times (August 2000, October 2002, May, 2004; November 2004).

46.   The post of Minister of Defense was held by Mustafa Tlas (b. 1932) for thirty-two years (1972–2004), when he was replaced by the former Chief of Staff, Hasan Turkemani, only three years his junior (b. 1935); the post of chief of staff went from Ali Aslan (b. 1932), who held it between 1998–2002 to Turkemani (b. 1935) between 2002–2004 and then to Ali Habib (b. 1939). The post therefore remained in the hands of "old guard" officers over the age of 65. On the other hand, the post of director of military intelligence went from Ali Duba (b. 1935) who held the position between 1973–2000, to Hasan Khalil (b. 1937, held the postion between 2000–2005) and in 2005 devolved to the younger generation with the appointment of Bashar's brother-in-law, Asaf Shawkat (b. 1950). The appointment of Shawkat fits the model of the appointments of the civilian intelligence apparatuses. The General Intelligence was headed during this period by Ali Hamoud (b. 1944, served in the position during 2001), Hisham Ikhtiyar (b. 1941, served between 2001–2005) and finally Ali Mamlouk (b. 1954?). The head of Political Security, Fouad Kheir-Bek, who replaced Bahjat Suleiman (b. 1944, in the position from 1999) in 2005 is also relatively young (b. 1954?). None of these, however, are from Bashar's own generation.

47.   Bashar al-Asad to *Der Spiegel*, 29 August 2005.

48.   This was adeptly done while in Beirut to former Chief of Staff of the Syrian Army Hikmat Shihabi who in the last days of Hafez al-Asad learned from the Lebanese newspaper *al-Hayyat*, of an investigation against him on charges of corruption. One version attributed this to Bahjat Sulieman and linked it to Shihabi's close relationship with the Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq al-Hariri (later assassinated). In any case, Shihabi boarded a plane to California and returned later after arranging reconciliation with Bashar, including apparently a guarantee not to oppose him.

49.   Former Prime Minister Mahmoud Zu'bi was indicted for corruption and committed suicide in jail. The Head of Feneral Intelligence, Bashir Najar also was sentenced to a long sentence for "corruption."

50.   Bashar Asad's speech to the 10th Ba'th Party Conference, 6 June 2005, http://www.sana.org/News/conference/6.6.2005/Word.htm

51.   Bashar himself made this point in an interview with Christianne Amanpour on CNN, saying: "I have my authority by the constitution, by the Syrian constitution. But at the same time, it's not enough to have the authority. It's very important to make dialogue with the widest circle of people you can to take your decision. And this is the way I work," http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/10/12/alAssad.transcript/index.html

52.   As Joshua Landis aptly put it: "there are no strategists or foreign policy thinkers in this regime," www.syriacomment.com from 29 October 2005.

53.   Mehlis report (published October 2005) was a result of UN's investigation into the assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri (February 2005). The report found that high ranking members of Syrian and Lebanese governments were involved in the assassination.

54.   An area that Hezbollah and Lebanon claim is part of Lebanon, though it was occupied from Syria in the 1967 war, and therefore it provides the legitimacy for Hezbollah to continue its "armed struggle" for liberation of Lebanese lands.

55.   http://europa.eu.int/comm/external__11_relations/syria/intro/

56.   Anthony Shadid, "Assad Says Accused Syrians May Face Trial Letter Is First Substantive Response to U.N. Report Implicating Officials in Hariri Killing," *Washington Post Foreign Service*, Wednesday, October 26, 2005: A10

57.   See entire text of the letter: http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Joshua.M.Landis-1/syriablog/

58.   Maher opposed the marriage of his sister to Asef, who comes from a lower-class Alawite family. It is rumored that during a quarrel between them Maher pulled a gun and shot Asef.

59.   She graduated in 1996 with a BS first-class honors degree in computer science and a diploma in French literature. In 1997, she started work at Deutsche Morgan Grenfell in London (now known as Deutsche Bank) as an analyst in the Hedge Fund Management section of Sales and Trading. She

covered clients in the Far East and Europe. In 1998, she joined the investment banking division of JP Morgan, London. She specialized in mergers and acquisitions for biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies. During the three years she spent at JP Morgan, she was sent to their Paris office for nine months and to the New York office for 18 months, where she advised and executed four large merger transactions for both European and American clients. Asma speaks English, Arabic, French and Spanish. http://www.syrianembassy.us/first_lady_of_syria.htm

60.   These include: rural development (establishment of the Fund for Integrated Rural Development of Syria—FIRDOS); promoting women in the Arab world (the "Women and Education Forum" the "Syrian Business Women's Committee," the "Women in Business Conference"); children's charities (National Children's Book Fair; various charities for disadvantaged children); and IT (founding of the Mobile Information Center, a mobile computer classroom that travels through Syria's remote villages to conduct IT literacy programs).

61.   Eyad Akhras completed a MSc in history of international relations at LSE with a thesis on the British reaction to the July 1958 Iraqi revolution. He has worked since 2004 at Bell Pottinger Public Relations, London, and before that at FIRDOS (the Syrian NGO founded by Asma) and at the Arab Finance Corporation (AFC) in Beirut. http://www.learn4good.com/jobs/language/english/search_resumes/consultancy/uk_england/cv/11817/

62.   These include: Mohammad Nassif Kheir Bek, head of internal security at GID, retired 1999, later advisor to President Hafez al-Asad; his brother Issam Nassif (former aid to Mustafa Tlas), Mu'ein Nassif Kheir Bek (linked to Rifa'at al–Asad), Fouad Kheir Bek (formerly the chief of the technical branch in Military Intelligence and now Head of Internal Security in the GID, 'Ali Kheir Bek, (former head of external security); Younes Suleiman Nassif, MP; Maj. Gen. Sakhr Kheir Bek, Deputy Minister of Interior. Salim Kheir Bek (Vice President of the Syrian Human Rights Association and a major opposition figure, was imprisoned for 13 years.

63.   "Nahhas Enterprises Group" is involved in: travel & tourism; representations of cars trademarks and spare parts agencies; engineering and contracting; computers (hardware and software); duty free zone operations and ventures; trading and machinery; transportation and Rent-a-car; industry (agroindustry, pharmaceuticals, chemicals and foodstuff); general tenders and projects in the fields of power, oil and gas, water treatment, and others; hotels and hotel projects, and joint ventures in general.

64.   Those who were honorably discharged in the period leading up to Bashar's appointment and since then include: Hafez al-Asad's closest comrades, 'Abd al-Halim Khadam and Mustafa Tlas, former Chief of Staff 'Ali Aslan and his deputies 'Abd al-Rahman al-Sayyad, Faruq Ibrahim 'Isa, Shafiq Fayyad and Ahmad 'Abd al-Nabi, the head of the political security branch of General Security 'Adnan Badr Hasan, former head of military intelligence Hasan al-Khalil, and former Head of DGI Hisham Ikhtiyar and former head of political security Bahjat Suleiman. In the category of those who were disgraced one may include Mohammad Khouli (Air Force intelligence), Ali Duba, 'Adnan Makhlouf, former Chief of Staff Hikmat Shihabi and former prime minister Zu'bi, who later "committed suicide" after he was accused of corruption.

65.   Asef Shawkat is said to have been at odds with Bahjat Suleiman and Ghazi Kana'an on almost every issue.

66.   According to one Syrian source, he is dubbed "*la vache qui rit*" (the laughing cow—the name of a French cheese).

67.   See his interview to the TV station al-'Arabiya: http://www.alarabiya.net/Articles/2005/12/31/19936.htm. Syrian bloggers claim that he purchased a house that belonged to Onassis (on Blvd. General Fauche) and that the purchases were organized by Sa'ad al-Hariri, the son of the murdered Lebanese Prime Minister.

68.   Such as the current Commander of the Republican Guard 'Ali Hassan, the Chief of Staff 'Ali Habib and the heads of Intelligence, 'Ali Mamluk, Fouad Nassif Kheir-Bek, and Mohammad Mansoura.

69.   These include people like Iyad Ghazal (former aid in the Presidential Palace who became close to Bashar), Haytham Satayhi (senior aid in the Presidential Palace), Buthayna Sha'aban (former interpreter to Hafez al-Asad and Minister of Expatriate affairs), Ayman 'Abd al-Nur (published an

internet news site, all4syria.org), and the new members of the Ba'th Central Committee, Majid Shadoud, Ghiyab Barakat, and Walid al-Bouz.

70.   Representatives of this group include: Imad Zuhayr Mustafa (Ambassador in Washington), Iyad Ghazal (Director of the Syrian Railway Authority), Sa'adallah Aghaa al-Qala (Minister of Tourism), Maher al-Mujtahid (Secretary General of the office of the Prime Minister), Hasan Risha, Mohammad Bashir al-Munajid, Abdallah al-Dardari (Deputy Prime Minister), Dr. Ghassan al-Lahham (Governor of Damascus Area, Minister of Presidency Affairs), Nabil 'Amran (Governor of Deraa), Ghiyath Barakat (member of CC), and Nabil Sukkar (economist, head of the Syrian Consulting Bureau for Development & Investment-SCB).

71.   For example: Ayman 'abd al-Nur, Mahdi Dakhlallah, and Billal Hasan Turkemani.

72.   Oral communication from a source with intimate ties to the Syrian Ba'th.

73.   All4syria newsletter. See also http://forum.shrc.org/english/bb/Forum3/HTML/001098.html

74.   This is the impression received from all Syrian sources and those with access.

75.   Oral communication with a source close to the Syrian Ba'th.

76.   Jabour attacked the elections on the website all4Syria (May 2, 2005), saying that even if there were democracy within the party it would probably not deliver the results that the reformers hope for, as the officials are opportunists and corrupt, and would bring about the collapse of the party, since they will not allow it to provide answers for Syrian youth, who are the majority of the country.

77.   In an article entitled "The Experience of the Ba'th Party Elections: Between the Permissible and the Pillage," he complains about the absence of any oversight in the elections and points out that without "democracy" in the party, it would not be able to lead the country.

78.   Editor of *Tishreen*, Dr. Khalaf Al-Jarrad, *Tishreen* (Syria), April 25, 2005; see also the editor of the al-Ba'th, Elias Murad, *al-Ba'th* (Syria), April 7, 2005.

79.   See Ba'th Member of Parliament Ahmad Haj Suleiman in *Tishreen*: (the goals of the Congress should be) "improving the standard of living in [the country]; waging war on corruption and demanding accountability from the corrupt; respecting the principle of sovereignty of law and carrying out reforms in the judicial system; starting the process of development and of encouraging investment; respecting freedoms and different views; honesty [towards the public]; creating a responsible media; building institutions; strengthening social thought; maintaining a fruitful political dialogue with all political forces; basing national unity and strengthening ties and factors of unity amongst the sons of the nation . . . " *Tishreen* (Syria), May 24, 2005.

80.   www.syria-news.com/readnews.php?sy_11_seq=6859

81.   Article 8 of the Syrian constitution states: "The leading party in the society and the state is the Socialist Arab Ba'th Party. It leads a patriotic and progressive front seeking to unify the resources of the people's masses and place them at the service of the Arab nation's goals."

82.   Ba'th Kurds, see below.

83.   Particularly people linked to the Syrian Computer Society, who tended to be "reformist" and were perceived as close to Bashar.

84.   These included Vice Presidents 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam and Mohammad Zuhayr Masharqa, former Defense Minister Mustafa Tlas, Assistant Secretary General of the Baath Party 'Abdallah al-Ahmar, Assistant Regional Secretary of the Ba'th Party Sulayman Qaddah, former Speaker of Parliament 'Abd al-Qadir Qaddoura, and former Prime Minister Mohammad Mustafa Miro. Even members who joined during the Ninth Regional Command Congress in 2000—nominally, Bashar loyalists—were removed, reflecting the drop in membership from 21 to 14. However, "young guard" Bashar loyalists were not among the members of the new "Command" and they had to suffice with positions in the Central Committee (such as Majid Shadoud, Ghiyath Barakat, and Walid al-Bouz). "Old Guarders" who remained include former Head of the National Security Bureau Mohammad Said Bakhtayan, who is now deputy secretary-general of the party, and former head of General Security Hisham Ikhtiyar, who is now head of the National Security Bureau.

85.   IRNA, 12 August, 2005, www.irna.ir

86.   For an in-depth study of the Syrian intelligence, see Andrew Rathmell, "Syria's Intelligence Services: Origins and Development," *Conflict Studies Journal*, Fall 1996.

87.   In the March 2000 cabinet, Zu'bi was replaced by Mustafa Miro, who had served as governor of the provinces of Dar'a, Hasakah, and Aleppo for over twenty years. 'Isam al-Za'im (b. 1940), of Aleppo, an advocate of economic reforms, was appointed as Minister of Planning. The portfolios of finance and economics, though, remained in the hands of "old-timers" Mohammad al-'Imadi and Mohammad Khaled al-Mahyani, respectively.

88.   'Ali Hamud (b. 1944), former head of the General Security, was appointed Minister of Interior; Mohammad al-Atrash (b. 1934), who held a doctorate in economics from the University of London and had served in the past as an advisor to the World Bank, was appointed as Minister of Finance and Ghassan al-Rifa'i (b. 1942), PhD from the University of Sussex), and formerly Deputy to the Director-General of Economic Policy at the World Bank, was appointed Minister of Economics and Foreign Trade; 'Isam al-Za'im was promoted from Minister of Planning to Minister of industry. Three "colleagues" of Bashar from the Syrian Computer Society also were nominated as ministers: Sa'adallah Awa al-Kalah (b. 1950, PhD in computer science from the University of Paris) as Minister of Tourism; Hasan Risha (b. 1945, PhD in engineering from the Leningrad Polytechnic) as Minister for Higher Education; and Mohammad Bashir al-Munjayad (1947, PhD in electronics from the University of Paris) of Damascus, who had served as Bashar's deputy in the Computer Society. Two more members of the Computer Society, 'Imad Zuhayr Mustafa and Sami al-Khiami, were appointed as ambassadors to Washington and London respectively.

89.   Al–'Atari was born in 1944 in Aleppo. 'Atari was a Ba'th activist who has a BA in construction engineering from the University of Aleppo and an MA in urban planning from a Dutch university. He served as the mayor of Aleppo, the head of the engineering union in that city, and later in Syria. He then became the governor of Hums.

90.   The number of ministers was decreased from 35 to 30. These included the Minister of Information, former Ambassador to Tehran, Ahmad al-Hasan, who replaced the veteran Information Minister 'Adnan' Unmran; Minister for Expatriate Affairs, the spokesperson of the foreign minister and personal translator of Hafez al-Asad Butahyna Sh'uban (b. 1953, PhD in English literature from York university who served as lecturer for poetry and comparative literature at the Department of English Language and Literature in the University of Damascus); Minister for Higher Education Hani Murtada, the President of Damascus University; and Minister for Education, 'Adnan 'Ali Sa'd, who had been Dean of the Faculty of Education at Damascus University.

91.   An anecdotal example is that of a Syrian who decided to park illegally near the Republican Palace. When challenged by the guards, he found himself daring to argue with them—something he knew he would never have done in the days of Hafez al-Asad.

92.   Data according to *IMF Country Report No. 05/356: Syrian Arab Republic: 2005 Article IV Consultation—Staff Report; and Public Information Notice on the Executive Board Discussion*, October 2005.

93.   About two million Syrians receive direct state salaries (1.2 million employees, 400,000 military, and 400,000 retirees). That is around half of the work force, which is estimated at 5 million (out of a working age population of 10 million).

94.   Alfred B. Prados and Jeremy M. Sharp, *Syria: Political Conditions and Relations with the United States after the Iraq War*, CRS Report for Congress, January 10, 2005. Data based on IMF and World Bank reports.

95.   Oil production declined from 590 thousand b/d in 1996 to 485 thousand b/d in 2004 as a result of the exhaustion of many major oil fields, coupled with an increase in domestic oil consumption, which reduces Syrian oil export potential.

96.   Bassam Fattouh, "Syria's Confused Oil Future," *Al-Hayat*, 14 October 2005.

97.   Matti Moosa, *Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988), pp. 287–288.

98.   These include: al-Khayatin, al-Hadadayn, al-Mutawirah/Numilatiyya, al-Kalabiyya (of the Asad family), and the minor tribes of al-Haydariya and al-Qaratlah. See Ahmad Khatib, *al-Khibr al-Akid*, pp. 431–436.

99.   For example, Generals Ali Haydar and Ibrahim Safi of the Khayatin tribe.

100.   As one Sunni Syrian from the north stated: "It is quite possible that one of Asad's grand-mothers served as a domestic in my grandmother's house . . . "

101.   These tenets (like those of the Druze) are not public and are known in detail only to the clergy of the sect. The Alawite (or Nusseiri) religion is syncretist and combines elements of ancient Mesopotamian and Syrian pagan cults, Persian, Gnostic Christian, and Shiite Muslim beliefs. In general terms, they include: a belief in the divinity of the Imam Ali, who manifests himself in different cycles of human history; a trinity of 'Ali (the supreme and concealed aspect of the divinity), Mohammad, and Salman (the founder of the sect), who represent the "meaning" (*ma'ana*), the "name" (*ism*), and the "door" (*bab*), lower divinities (five *yatim* and two *wali*) and a corresponding set of counter-divinities in the realm of Evil. In the eyes of orthodox Muslims—Sunni and even many Shiites—the deification of Ali contradicts the principle of the uniqueness of Allah, which is a precondition for belonging to Islam. See Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nusayri-Alawi Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy*, (Brill: Leiden, 2002).

102.   See Ahmad Hasan, *Khatib al-Khibr al-Akid 'an al-'Alawiin Ahil al-Tawhid, Ajar, Golan, matba'at al-Balad*-Samir Abu Rahmoun, Jadida January 2004; Andre Chouet, "l'espace Tribal des Alouites a l'epreuve du Pouvoir: La Disintegration par le Politique," *Maghreb-Machrek*, no. 147. (Andre Chouet served as a senior official in the French intelligence dealing with the Middle East. The article was, in fact, a revision of his previous work on the subject.

103.   Such a *fatwa* was issued by the Lebanese Shiite leader Mussa Sader in 1976.

104.   This included a highly publicized performance of the Islamic duty of participation in the 'Omra to Mecca, broadcasting of him praying in Sunni mosques (though it was never claimed that the Alawites belong to the Sunni branch of Islam).

105.   Mosques are not common in the Alawite tradition, as the religion itself is secret and not revealed to the uninitiated Alawite.

106.   The Alawite Mountain (*al-jabal al-'Alawi*) is referred to in the Syrian state-controlled media as "the "Arab Mountain" (*al-Jabal al-Arabi*) (Kedar).

107.   His activities are said to work through three front companies: Drex Technology, Siloserv Offshore and STS Offshore.

108.   http://forum.shrc.org/english/bb/Forum3/HTML/001078.html

109.   See Gary C. Gambill, Lebanon's Cell Phone Scandals, *MEIB*, vol. 5, No.1, January, 2003.

110.   These meetings were held from November 2003 at the Sham Hotel in Damascus. The initiation of this activity was in a delegation to Syria of Iraqi Sunnis, "The Central Council of the Sheikhs of Iraqi and Arab clans."

111.   UPI, 28 October 2005.

112.   Signatories to the Declaration (27 October 2005) included: Democratic National Grouping in Syria; Kurdish Democratic Alliance in Syria; Committees for the Revival of Civil Society; Kurdish Democratic Front in Syria; Future Party (Shaykh Nawwaf al-Bashir); and individuals including Riyad Sayf, Jawdat Sa'id, Dr Abd-al-Razzaq, Samir al-Nashar, Dr. Fida Akram al-Hurani, Dr. Adil Zakkar, Abd-al-Karim al-Dahhak, Haytham al-Malih, and Nayif Qaysiyah. See: http://faculty-staff.ou.edu/L/Joshua.M.Landis-1/syriablog/

113.   Bassam Haddad, "Business as Usual in Syria," *MERIP Report*, 03/05/2005.

114.   See petition published in *al-Hayyat*, 23 April, 2003.

115.   A very strong rumor claims that Maher shot at Asef in a rage when Asef tried to interfere in family matters. Asef was not well-received by the family when Bushra eloped with him and only later did Hafez al-Asad reconcile himself to his new son-in-law and start grooming him for the tasks of a family member.

116.   See above.

117.   After the death of the Muslim Brotherhood leader Sa'id Hawa in the late 1970s, Sheikh Issam al-'Attar headed the Fighting Vanguards (*al-Tali'a al-Muqatila*) and finally settled in Germany, where he heads a loose and not exclusively Syrian Islamic organization. Adnan Saad al-Din, also in Germany, left the Muslim Brotherhood in 1986 and formed a breakaway faction, which rejoined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1991, although he himself did not rejoin.

118.   The Political Program speaks of the model of the "Medina Constitution" that was implemented by the Prophet in his Medina period, which enfranchised all residents of Medina not only Muslims. Radical Muslims tend to dismiss this paradigm as one that derived from the period of weakness of the Muslims and being superseded by the exclusivity of the Muslim Ummah. The document also refrains from the anti-Jewish rhetoric that characterizes Jordanian and Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. See *al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun, al-Mashrou' al-siyasi li-Suriya Mustaqila—Rawiyat Jam'at al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin fi-Suriya* (The Political, Program for an Independent Syria—Position of the Association of the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria). The program received the backing of a number of Salafi scholars, including Sheikh Yousuf al-Qaradawi. In a recent interview, Bayanouni is cautious on all these issues. He distances his movement from the Salafis, skirts the issue of the Alawites by saying that "as they say they are Muslims, we do not contest that" (alluding to a tradition that if someone greets you as a Muslim, do not say that he is not one) and restricting his reference to Israel to a statement that "Israel is occupying Palestinian and Syrian lands and these should be returned. It would be preferable to secure their return through peaceful and political means," leaving open the question of whether the occupied "Palestinian lands" are the West Bank and Gaza or the whole of Palestine. Mahan Abedin, "The Battle within Syria: An Interview with Muslim Brotherhood Leader Ali Bayanouni," *Terrorism Monitor*, vol. 3, issue 16 (August 11, 2005).

119.   One of the main figures in this movement is Mustafa Setmariam Nasar (Abu Mus'ab al-Suri). He was originally a follower of Adnan Oqla of the Marwan Hadeed's Fighting Vanguard, left that organization in 1981, went to fight in Afghanistan, then lived in Spain and the UK. His group is credited with a series of terrorist attacks inside Syria and with aiding the mujahidin in Iraq in their cross-border operations.

120.   Amir Kulick, "*Tefisat Hamaazan Haestrategi—Hashpaatam shel Tahalichei Shinui Historiim Al 'Itsuv Tfisat Habitahon Hasuri*" ("The Strategic Parity Concept—The Influence of Historical Processes on the Formation of the Syrian Security Perception"), MA thesis submitted to Tel Aviv University, October 2002.

121.   Some examples are: (1) Bashar's blatantly anti-Semitic statement during the visit of the Pope (June 5, 2001) that the Jews continue to threaten the world as they crucified Jesus. While his father made similar anti-Semitic statements in earlier years, he had learned to respect the fact that they were counter productive to his relations with the U.S. and the West; (2) his reaction to the al-Hariri assassination.

122.   For example: "We hear how they [the Israelis] kill the principle of equality even as they speak of Allah's having separated them from the other nations of the world. We see them damaging the Christian and Muslim holy places in Palestine. They desecrate the mosque of Al-Aqsa, the Church of the Sepulchre [Jerusalem] and the Church of the Nativity [Bethlehem]. They attempt to destroy all the principles of the monotheistic religions for the same reasons they betrayed and tortured Jesus, and for the same reasons they tried to kill the prophet Mohammad" (Bashar Asad to the Pope on May 5, 2001, reported by Radio Damascus). Other examples include Bashar's speech at the Arab summit: "Israeli society . . . is a racist society. More racist than the Nazis" (*Tishrin* (Syria), March 28, 2001, translated in *MEMRI* Special Dispatche Series, no. 202), and reiteration of the veracity of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

123.   See Bashar's speech before the Arab summit conference in Amman (27 March 2001): "There are three things that Israel fears: . . . the close past in which they have been implementing a policy of oppression even before 1948 . . . the past in general, history, they have no history, we have history and they know that . . . And the land . . . every Israeli know that the land is not his but belongs to the Arabs."

124.   As long as Israel exists, the threat exists . . . none of the Arabs trust Israel. It is natural that we should always expect an Israeli attack, even when it does not threaten. It should be known that Israel is based on treachery . . . We are dealing with treachery and threats, which accompanied the establishment of Israel. Since its very inception, Israel has been a threat. It is the Israeli nature, and for that Israel was established . . . Israel does not care about the international public opinion. The U.S. is unable to reign it in; to the contrary, the Israelis are the ones who control [the U.S.] now through their lobby." Bashar to *al-Safir*, 27 March 2003. *MEMRI* Special Dispatch Series, no. 488.

125.   Radio Damascus, 21 October 2000.

126.   *Al-Wasat*, 13 May 1994.

127.   See above.

128.   This is the classic Syrian position as expressed in various utterances by senior Syrians.

129.   Syria demands Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders, which would give it territory that it took between 1948 and 1967. Israel insists on the principle—as in the Egyptian, Lebanese and Jordanian cases- of the international borders that were in existence between the British Mandate of Palestine and the French Mandate of Syria.

130.   Syria is particularly opposed to an agreement that would preclude a breach of diplomatic relations in case of a crisis.

131.   This assessment is supported by interviews with individuals who were involved in the negotiations between Israel and Syria.

132.   "One of Hariri's Legacies—A Massive Debt for Lebanon," Inter Press Service, March 10, 2005.

133.   The new law subdivided northern Lebanon into two electoral districts, combining the Maronite Christian town of Becharre with Muslim towns to which it was not contiguous, making victory by an independent Christian candidate impossible, dividing Beirut into three districts calculated to reduce al-Hariri's power, and increasing the number of seats in parliament from 108 to 128. The changes amplified the power of pro-Syrian elements because in the Lebanese system the voters cast ballots for multisectarian slates of candidates with seats reserved for each community (Christians of all sects, 64; Sunnis, 27, Shiites, 27, Druze, 8, Alawites, 2). By combining Christian communities with more populous muslim districts, Muslim voters could determine which slates—and therefore which Christian representatives—entered parliament. As a result, only 15 MPs out of 64 "representatives" of the Christians were really elected by the Christians. The rest were elected by Muslims. Since the system required voters to cast their ballots in their ancestral homes, Shiites who moved to Beirut from south Lebanon effectively were disenfranchised, leaving the Shiite slate in south Lebanon to Hezbollah.

134.   Bashar said to Joumblat (according to the latter) that Lahoud's Presidency in office will be extended "because I am Lahoud." Some Syrian's claim that this too was symptomatic of Bashar's lack of political flexibility; faced with the need to shore up Syria's status in Lebanon, he could only resort to the existing proxies that he had inherited from his father. His father had extended former President Elias Hiwari's term, but did so in collaboration with the US and France. Had Bashar read the signs of opposition to Lahoud as a blatant symbol of Syrian domination, he could have replaced him with an alternative proxy without having to force a constitutional change.

135.   After al-Hariri, the anti-Syrian journalist Smair Qasir was murdered, May Chidicac was severely wounded in a bombing; formerly pro-Syrian Elias Mour, who had quarrelled with the Syrian General Rustum Ghazaleh and Marwan Hamadeh, anti-Syrian Druze, were also victims of assassination attempts.

136.   Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, p. 161.

137.   In the autumn of 2000, Syria allowed Iraq to begin pumping oil through an old pipeline to Syria. The economic logic of this was obvious, though it violated the sanction regime. In response to an American demarche, the Syrians claimed (at the level of Bashar himself to Colin Powell and in communication with President Bush) that the flow of oil was no more than a temporary technical examination of the pipeline, which had been idle for almost two decades. One would imagine that Bashar was aware of the scope of the pumping (not only a test) and of the capability of the U.S. to collect precise information through SATINT. His denial therefore was not plausible. If he had hoped to negotiate American acceptance of his special relationship with Iraq (similar to the tolerance of Jordanian and Turkish violations of the sanctions), he did not offer anything in return.

138.   *As-Safir* (Beirut), Mar. 27, 2003; Asad's speech at the Arab summit, Sharm al-Sheikh, Syrian television, Mar. 1, 2003; Radio Damascus, Mar. 10, 2003; *al-Hayat*, Mar. 10, 2003.

139.   Farouq a-Shara' to *Ar-Ra'y al-'Amm* (Kuwait), Apr. 13, 2003; Reuters, Apr. 12, 2003.

140.   Nasrallah himself admitted at one time that he had never had a personal, face-to-face meeting with Hafez Al-Asad. al-Manar TV, June 10, 2001.

141.   Reports in Israel claimed that Ghazi Kana'an objected to Bashar's policy of escalation of Hezbollah activity against Israel in early 2002. See *Ha'aretz*, 27 November 2001, 14 April 2002; *Yedi'ot Aharonot*, 15 September 2002.

142.   In response to Bashar's taunts against the Arab countries that refuse to sever ties with Israel, the Egyptian press launched a government-inspired campaign against "the young President of a neighboring country, who is inexperienced, and like his predecessors, is interested in dragging Egypt into a war in which it will pay the full price, while his country will remain, as usual, a spectator on the side." *Al-Jumhuriyya* (Cairo), April 6 2002. Even more critical articles described Bashar as young, superficial, witless and an opportunist to boot" *Akhbar al-Yawm*, 6 April, 2002.

143.   A joke circulating in Cairo relates that in an Arab summit in Sharm al-Sheikh an informal meeting took place between President Mubarak, King Mohammed VI of Morocco, King Abdallah II of Jordan, and President Bashar al-Asad on a terrace overlooking the Red Sea. When a waiter approached, Mubarak placed the order: "I'll have a coffee, and bring some ice cream for the kids . . . "

144.   The province of Alexandretta (5,545 sq km) includes the cities of Antioch (now Antakya) and Alexandretta (now Iskenderun). The population is predominantly Arab but includes many Christians. The province of Alexandretta was awarded to Syria in 1920 and in 1936 became the subject of a complaint to the League of Nations by Turkey, which claimed that the privileges of the Turkish minority in the province were being infringed. The province was given autonomous status in 1937 by an agreement, arranged by the League, between France (then mandatory power in Syria) and Turkey. In 1939, France transferred the province to Turkey and it became Hatay province. Syria never recognized this transfer and the claim has been a constant irritant in Syrian-Turkish relations.

145.   On the occasion of the visit of Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Abdalla Dardari to Turkey see, http://www.champress.net/english/index.php?page=show_11_det&id=492

146.   One of the three bilateral agreements signed by Bashar and his Turkish counterpart Necdet Sezer dealt with preventing double taxation. This was interpreted by the Turkish Foreign Ministry as an indirect sign that Damascus finally recognizes Hatay as a province belonging to Turkey, since under the new agreement Syria recognizes investments made in Hatay as taking place in Turkish territory. http://www.byegm.gov.tr/YAYINLARIMIZ/CHR/ING2004/01/04x01x07.HTM

147.   See Bashar's remarks: "They [the Americans] removed their masks and said that they wanted oil and that they wanted to re-draw the map of the region in accordance with the Israeli interests." the American occupation of Iraq was compared by Bashar to the Mongol occupation and sacking of Baghdad in 1258.

148.   Bashar's explanations included responses to the interviewer, such as, "This is against our principle. And I would never do such a thing in my life. What do we achieve? . . . I think what happened targeted Syria. That would affect our relation with the Lebanese people and with most of the country. So we wouldn't do it because it's against our interest, and it's against my principle. I would never do it. It's impossible."

149.   This is a scenario suggested by the Director of IISS in Berlin, Dr. Volker Perthes, though he accords it a low probability. See http://www.iht.com/articles/2005/10/04/opinion/edperthes.php

150.   Volker Perthes refers to this option as "a Syrian Musharaf."

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Tishreen
UPI
Yedi'ot Aharonot

Appendix

Bureau	Bureau Head
Bureaus of Ba'th Party Regional Command	
Bureau of the Secretariat (*maktab al-imana*)	Mohammad Sa'id Bakhtayan
National Security Bureau	Hisham al-Ikhtiyar
Organization Bureau	Sa'id Daoud Eliya
Preparation Bureau	Haytham Satayhi
Military Committee	Mustafa Tlas
Bureau of Education and Scouts	Yasir Tawfiq Hourieh
Bureau of Peasants	Osama bin Hamed 'Adi
Finance Bureau	Mohammad Sa'id Bakhtayan
Legal Bureau	Bassam Janbieh
National Economy Bureau	Mohammad al-Hussein
Bureau of Students	Yasir Tewfiq Hourieh
Bureau of Youth and Sport	Shahinaz Fakoush
Bureau of High Education and Scientific Research	Yasir Tewfiq Hourieh
Bureau of Professional Associations	Bassam Janbieh
Bureau of Workers	Osama bin Hamed 'Adi
Central Committee Bureaus/Committees	
Party Committee for Supervision and Control	Dr. Daass Izzedine (secretary of Damascus Countryside Branch)[†]
	Fawzi al-Jawdah
	Izzat Arabi Katbi
	Mrs. Sulafa Deeb
	Rajab Qanshosh

[†]Member of Central Committee.

Bureaus of Ba'ath Regional Command

Members of the Regional Command, 1985–2005

1985 (8th Congress)	2000 (9th Congress)	2005 (10th Congress)
1. Hafez al-Asad (deceased) A M	Bashar al-Asad A	Bashar al-Asad A
2. 'Abdallah al-Ahmar S	'Abdallah al-Ahmar S	Mahmud al-Abrash
3. Zuhair Mushariqa S	Zuhair Mushariqa S	Mohammad Naji al-Otari S
4. 'Abd al-Halim Khaddam S	'Abd al-Halim Khaddam S	Farouk al-Shara' S
5. Rif'at al-Asad A M	Dr. Suleiman Qaddah S	Mohammad al-Hussein S
6. Mahmoud al–Zu'bi (deceased) S	'Abd al-Qadir Qaddura S	Hassan Ali Turkmani S M
7. 'Abd al-Rauf al-Qasem S	Fa'iz al-Nasir (deceased) S	Hisham al-Ikhtiar M
8. Mustafa Tlas S M	Dr. Ahmad Dargham A	Osama bin Hamed 'Adi
9. 'Izzuddin Nasir A	Mustafa Tlas S M	Yasser Tawfiq Hourieh
10. Tawfik Salha D	Walid Hamdoun S	Bassam Janbieh
11. Sa'd Hamadeh S	Mohammad Mustafa Miro S	Said Daoud Eliya
12. Dr. Suleiman Qaddah S	Mohammad Naji al-Otari S	Mohammad Sa'id Bakhtayantian S M
13. Walid Hamdoun C	Farouk al-Shara' S	Haitham Satayhi
14. Wahib Tannous S	Salam al-Yasin S	Shahinaz Fakoush
15. 'Abd al-Qadir Qadoura S	Ibrahim Huneidi S	
16. Hikmat al-Shihabi S M	Farouk Abu al-Shamat S	
17. Ahmad Qabalan S	Ghiath Barakat S	
18. 'Abd al-Razzaq Ayyoub S	Majid Shadoud S	
19. Dr. Ahmad Dargham A	Dr. Walid al-Bouz C	
20. Fa'iz al-Nasir (deceased) S	Mohammad Sa'id Bakhtayan S M	
21. Rashid Akhtarini S	Dr. Mohammad al-Hussein S	

M–Military, S–Sunni, A–Alawi, Number ()–age when elected, OG–Old Guard.
New Member.

Main Figures in the Syrian Ba'th Party

	Name	Age	Role in Ba'th	Background	Community	Remarks
Regional Command; Central Committee	Bashar al-Asad	39	Regional Secretary of the Ba'th Party; Secretary General of the CC	MD (Damascus) Ophthalmology UK	Alawite	Commander of the Army; President of the NPF.
Regional Command; Central Committee	Mahmoud al-Abrash	61	RC CC	Ph.D. Engineering (U. of Paris)	Sunni (Damascus)	President of the People Assembly
Regional Command; Central Committee	Mohammad Naji al-Otari	61	RC CC	Diploma in Urban Studies (Holland)	Sunni (Aleppo)	Former Mayor of Aleppo and its Governor; PM from 2003; member in the RC since 2000
Regional Command; Central Committee	Farouk al-Shara'	67	RC CC	International Law (University of London, UK)	Sunni (Deraa)	Minister of Foreign Affairs; a member in the RC since 2000
Regional Command; Central Committee	Mohammad al-Hussein	46	RC Head of National Economy Bureau; CC	Ph.D. in Economics (Rumania)	Sunni (Deir Elzor)	Minister of Finance; a member in the RC since 2000
Regional Command; Central Committee	Hassan Ali Turkmani	70	RC CC	Military career, "old guard"	Sunni Turkman (Aleppo)	Minister of Defense; deputy commander in chief of the Armed Forces; a member in the CC since 2000
Regional Command; Central Committee	Hisham al-Ikhtiar	64	RC Head of the National Security Bureau; CC	Military career, "old guard"	Alawite	Former Head of General Intelligence, known for his expertise in dealing with the Muslim Brotherhood

Position	Name	Age	Role	Education	Sect (Origin)	Notes
Regional Command; Central Committee	Osama bin Hamed 'Adi	58	RC Head of the Peasants Bureau & Workers Bureau; CC	Law from the University of Damascus	Sunni (Qusseir, Ham'ah)	Former Governor of Aleppo
Regional Command; Central Committee	Yasser Tawfiq Hourieh	57	RC Head of High Education and Scientific Research Bureau; Students, Education and Scouts Bureau; CC	PhD Chemistry Polytechnic Bucharest (Romania)	Sunni (Homs)	President of al-Ba'th University; a member of the Council of High Education
Regional Command; Central Committee	Bassam Janbieh	49	RC Head of Legal Bureau & Professional Organizations Bureau; CC; Head of Sweida Section	Dentist from the University of Damascus	Sunni (Sweida)	
Regional Command; Central Committee	Said Daoud Eliya	52	RC Head of Organization Bureau; CC	Law (Syria)	Sunni (Jadida, Hasakah)	Former Governor of Idleb; former Secretary of Hassakeh Branch in the Ba'th Party
Regional Command; Central Committee	Mohammad Sa'id Bakhtayan	50s	RC Head of Finance Bureau; Assistant Regional Secretary of the Ba'th Party; CC	(—)	Sunni	A member of the Central Command of the NPF; former Governor of Ham'ah; former Head of the National Security Bureau; a member in the RC since 2000
Regional Command; Central Committee	Haitham Satayhi	47	RC Head of Party Preparation Bureau; CC	Ph.D. in Political Sciences (France); served in Embassy in Germany	Sunni (Tartous)	Political Advisor to the President; former Head of the Ba'th Party's branch in the University of Damascus

Main Figures in the Syrian Ba'th Party (Continued)

	Name	Age	Role in Ba'th	Background	Community	Remarks
Regional Command; Central Comittee	Mrs. Shahinaz Fakoush	50s	RC Head of Youth and Sport Bureau; CC	Bs Literature from the University of Damascus	Sunni (Deir Elzor)	Former member in the Party's branch in Deir Elzor; a member in the CC since 2000
Central Committee	Habib 'Abbas					
Central Committee	Bassam Abu 'Assali				Sunni	
Central Committee	Governor Dr. Walid al-Bouz				Maronite	Former Governor of Quneitra; a member in the RC until 2005
Central Committee	Governor Engineer Hussein 'Ali al-Haddar				Sunni	Former Governor of Idleb
Central Committee	Malek 'Ali					
Central Committee	Ali 'Akleh 'Arsan					President of the Arab Writers Association
Central Committee	Ghassan As'ad				Alawite(?)	
Central Committee; Security/ Intelligence; Family	Colonel Maher Hafez al-Asad	37	Commander of the Republican Guard; younger brother of Bashar	Business Management from the University of Damascus	Alawite	A member in the CC since 2000; considered one of the closest figures to Bashar
Central Committee	Mrs. Helane 'Atallah				Sunni	
Central Committee	Ghiath Barakat			A former lecturer in the University of Aleppo	Sunni (Aleppo)	A member in the RC until 2005; a member of the Board of Trustees of the Syrian Computer Society
Central Committee	Mrs. Harbiyya al-Bayda					A member in the CC since 2000; Director for Nursing and Kindergartens in the General Union for Women
Central Committee	Ahmad Dasho					A member in the CC since 2000
Central Committee	Antoine Dayoub					
Central Committee	Ghassan Fares					

	Name	Age	Education	Sect	Notes
Central Committee	As'ad Fedda				An actor
Central Committee	Mrs. Maha Ghannam				
Central Committee	Ahmad Habo				
Central Committee	Hayel Khourieh				
Central Committee	Ahmad Idris				
Central Committee	Jabr al-'Issa				
Central Committee	'Abd al- Razzaq Jassem				
Central Committee	Ahmad al-Joujou				
Central Committee	Bashar Juneid				
Central Committee	Mrs. Nahida Qassas				A member in the CC since 2000
Central Committee	Hazem al-Khadra				
Central Committee	Minister Mohammad Nabil al-Khatib	57	Ls Law from the University of Damascus; International Law Institute in Paris	Sunni (Damascus)	Former Minister of Justice (until 2003); a member in the CC since 2000
Central Committee	'Abd al- Qader al- Masri			Sunni	
Central Committee	'Abd-al Mo'ti Meshleb			Sunni	
Central Committee	Mrs. Mayssoun Musselmani			Sunni	
Central Committee	Mrs. Julia Mikha'il			Christian	A member in the CC since 2000
Central Committee	Khalaf al-Moftah				
Central Committee	Mohammad Rushdi Mukhtar				
Central Committee	Ibrahim Mousalli				
Central Committee	Gerges Nakhle				
Central Committee	Mrs. Hala al-Nasser				

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Main Figures in the Syrian Ba'th Party (*Continued*)

	Name	Age	Role in Ba'th	Background	Community	Remarks
Central Committee	Mohammad Riyad 'Ujaili					
Central Committee	Mrs. Maha al-'Umar					
Central Committee	Mrs. Afaf al-Ra'ad					
Central Committee	Mrs. Fatima al-Ra'ad					
Central Committee	Daoud Rajha					
Central Committee	Mrs. Joumana Ramadan					
Central Committee	Hammudeh al-Sabbagh					
Central Committee	Mrs. 'Umeima Sa'id					
Central Committee	Mustafa 'Abd al-Kader Saleh				Sunni	
Central Committee	Salam Sankar					
Central Committee	Mohammad al-Sattam				Sunni	
Central Committee	'Abd al- Nasser Shafi'i				Sunni	
Central Committee	Sami Tarsha					
Central Committee	Mrs. Yusra al-Tawwil					A member in the CC since 2000
Central Committee	Colonel Manaf Mustafa Tlas				Sunni	A member in the CC since 2000; son of former Minister of Defense Mostafa Tlas. Close to Bashar
Central Committee	Mohammad Yasin Damara					
Central Committee	Deputy Mahmoud Hassan Za'atariya				Sunni	Until 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & farmers sector, Damascus
Central Committee	Dr. Jamal 'Abbasi		Secretary Party Branch of U. of Damascus			
Central Committee	Governor Dr. Engineer Mohammad Sa'id 'Aqil				Sunni	Governor of Damascus Countryside; former Governor of Hama (until 2005)

Body	Name	Position	Age	Education	Sect (origin)	Notes
Central Committee	Dr. Wa'il al-Halqi	Secretary of the Party Branch in Deraa				
Central Committee	Dr. Tamer al-Hojja		46	Ph.D. in Civil Engineering (Germany)	Sunni (Homs)	Governor of Aleppo; former Secretary of the Ba'th Party Branch in Homs (until 2004)
Central Committee	Deputy 'Aboud 'Allawi al-Saleh		50		Sunni (Mayadine)	Since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & farmers sector, Deir Elzor
Central Committee	Mohammad Ibrahim al-'Ali					A member in the CC since 2000; General Manager of the Central Bureau of Statistics
Central Committee	Deputy Mrs. Su'ad Saleem al-Sheikh Bakour		57	Degree in Geography (Syria)	Sunni (Zor Sheikh Bakour, Ham'ah)	A member in the CC since 2000; President of the General Union for Women; since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & farmers sector, Hama
Central Committee	Governor Nabil 'Amran					A member in the CC since 2000; Governor of Deraa; a founding member of the Syrian Computer Society
Central Committee	Deputy Mohammad Sha'aban 'Abd al-Kader 'Azouz		52		Sunni (Nadenjek, Aleppo)	President of the General Organization for Workers' Union; since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Aleppo

Main Figures in the Syrian Ba'th Party (*Continued*)

	Name	Age	Role in Ba'th	Background	Community	Remarks
Central Committee	Deputy Mohammad Anwar Mohammad Deeb 'Obeid				Sunni	Since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Damascus Countryside
Central Committee	Deputy Saber Salem Falhout					Since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Sweida; President of the Press Union
Central Committee	General Ali Mohammad Habib Mahmoud	66			Alawite (Tartous)	Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces sine 2004
Central Committee	Dr. Yehia Hajj 'Awwad		Secretary of the Ba'th Party Branch in Idleb		Sunni	
Central Committee	Deputy Ahmad Na'if Hajj Suleiman	40		Degree in Law (Syria)	Sunni (Zamar, Aleppo)	Since 2003 MP on behalf of other people's category, Aleppo
Central Committee	Riad Hijab		Secretary of the Party Branch in Deir Elzor		Sunni (Deir Elzor)	
Central Committee	Dr. Nabih 'Isma'il		Secretary of the Party Branch in Lathaqiya		Alawite (Lathaqiya)	
Central Committee; Party Supervision and Inspection Committee	Dr. Da'as 'Izzedine		Secretary of the Party Branch in the Damascus Countryside. Head of Party Supervision and Inspection Committee		Sunni	
Central Committee	Deputy 'Umeima Suleiman Khadour	45			Sunni (Mokharam Qanuni, Homs)	Since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Homs

	Name	Age	Party Position	Sect	Education	Notes
Central Committee	'Izzat Kinj			Alawite		Vice President of the General Organization for Workers' Union
Central Committee	Deputy Dr. Faisal Ahmad Kulthoum	57		Sunni (Al-Misilmiya, Ham'ah)	Ph.D. in Law (Syria)	Since 2003 MP on behalf of other people's category, Hama
Central Committee	Dr. Khalil Mashhadiyya		Secretary of the Party Branch in Damascus	Sunni		
Central Committee	'Abd al-Karim Mustafa		Secretary of the Party Branch in Tartous	Sunni		A member in the CC since 2000
Central Committee	Deputy Ihsan Mohammad Muhsen	45		Sunni (Moartoasrine, Idleb)		Since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Idleb
Central Committee	Dr. Ramadan Ramadan			Sunni		Head of the Medicines' Syndicate
Central Committee	Minister Ali Sa'ad	52		Sunni (Banaamo, Tartous)	Ph.D. in Psychology (Bucharest, Rumania)	Minister of Education
Central Committee	Deputy Mohammad 'Ammar Mohammad Nozad Sa'ati			Sunni		President of the National Union of Syrian Students; since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Damascus
Central Committee	Dr. 'Adel Ahmad Safar	52		Sunni (Damascus Countryside)	PhD from the Ecole Nationale de l'Agriculture & des Industries Alimentaires Nancy (France)	Minister of Agriculture; former Secretary of the Ba'th Party's Branch in the University of Damascus
Central Committee	Deputy Ibrahim Ahmad Shamiyeh	62		Sunni (Zakiah)		President of the Syrian Union of Peasants; since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Damascus Countryside

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Main Figures in the Syrian Ba'th Party (*Continued*)

	Name	Age	Role in Ba'th	Background	Community	Remarks
Central Committee	Deputy Mrs. Kulthum Muhi al-Din Wardeh	59		Degree in Literature (Syria)	Sunni (Salmiya, Ham'ah)	Since 2003 MP on behalf of the workers & peasants sector, Ham'ah
Central Committee	Ghazi Zu'eib		Secretary of the Party Branch in Ham'ah		Sunni	
Central Committee; Young Guard	Buthayna Sha'aban	52	CC Minister of Emigrates Affairs; Director of the Department of Foreign Information in the Foreign Ministry	Master & PhD in English Literature from Warwick University (UK)	Sunni (Mass'oudia village, Homs)	Former Official Translator of the Presidency (in Hafiz al-Assad's days and in the beginning of Bashar's term); a rival of Farouk al-Shara'; according to rumors, she is supposed to replace him as Foreign Minister
Security/Intelligence (Family)	Gen. Asef Shawkat	55	Head of Military Intelligence	Ph.D. in History from the University of Damascus	Alawite (Tartous)	Considered Syria's "strong man"; Maher al-Asad's rival; Bashar's brother-in-law, married to Bushra, Bashar's elder sister
Military Old Guard	Gen. Ali Mohammad Habib Mahmoud	66	Chief of Staff	Military academy	Alawite (Tartous)	Member of the Baath; "old guard"
Old Guard Security	Gen. Bahjat Suleiman	61	Director in General Intelligence	Ph.D. from Rumania (former Head of State Security Services and former Head of Military Intelligence)	Alawi	Demoted; was one of the strongest, most powerful and most intimidating personas in the regime. A rival of Asef Shawkat.

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Category	Name	Age	Position	Education	Religion	Notes
Young Guard SCS Academics	Ghassan al-Lahham	67	Minister of Presidency Affairs	PhD in Oriental Studies from the Karachi University (Pakistan)	Sunni	Chairman of the Board of Directors of Syrian Computer Society; Founding Member of Syrian Computer Society; Member of the Ba'th Party and former Governor of Damascus
Young Guard Academics	Ayman Abd al-Nour	?	Independent economic advisor (former advisor to Bashar)	Private sector engineer	Christian Orthodox	Was a member of Bashar's milieu; established the all4syria website—highly critical of the regime; the website was censored by the government later on; has not been bothered by the intelligence due to his supposedly close relations to Bashar;
	Rateb Shalah	?	Head of Syrian Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry			Rumored to be close to Bashar and possible candidate for PM.
Supervision and Control Committee	Dr. Daass Izzedine (secretary of Damascus Countryside Branch)	?				Head of Supervision and Control Committee
Supervision and Control Committee	Fawzi al-Jawdah	?				
Supervision and Control Committee	'Izzat Arabi Katbi	?				
Supervision and Control Committee	Mrs. Sulafa Deeb	?				
Supervision and Control Committee	Rajab Qanshoush	?				