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Nabil M. Kaylani

THE RISE OF THE SYRIAN BA'ṬH, 1940-1958: POLITICAL SUCCESS, PARTY FAILURE

There is much controversy among Ba'ṭhists as to whether Zaki al-Arsûzi or Michel 'Aflaq and Salâh al-Dîn al-Bitâr were the real founders of the Ba'ṭh.¹ The answer to this question is academic because the Ba'ṭh was an idea representing national aspirations long before it took the shape of a political party. Its origins go back to the Arab revolt of 1916 and Faysal's ill-fated attempt to unite greater Syria under the Hashemite crown. When the French forcibly expelled Faysal from Damascus, they also frustrated a generation of Syrian nationalist youth who for a fleeting moment stood up for liberation and unification. During the interwar period, pan-Arab patriots agonized over their plight under the Mandate and nourished visions of 'resurrecting' the ancient glories of the Umayyads.²

In a more immediate sense the Ba'ṭh party can be considered as a successor to the League of National Action (*'Usbat al-'Amal al-Qawmi*) which was organized in 1932 to spearhead the struggle against the French, and remained politically active until 1940. The League provided a relatively cohesive organizational framework, which the nationalist movement lacked at the time. Its membership swelled, and it briefly co-operated with the National Bloc (*al-Kutla al-Wataniya*) until the crises over the 1936 Syrian-French treaty and the *sanjaq* of Alexandretta tore them apart. Decline came to the League with the death of its first secretary, 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Dandashi, and the expulsion of its second secretary Sabri al-'Asali because of his agreement to serve in parliament before the termination of the Mandate. After the withdrawal of Zaki al-Arsûzi from active membership in 1939, the League was gravely weakened and shortly after its activities were suspended because of the outbreak of World War II.³

For the Syrian nationalists the war years were trying, filled with soul-searching and sporadic attempts to escape from political emptiness. In 1939 an Arab national party was apparently founded by al-Arsûzi and a handful of followers,

¹ Sâmî al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṭh* (Beirut, 1969), p. 19. Zaki al-Arsûzi was originally the head of the Arab resistance in the *sanjaq* of Alexandretta, where he captured the admiration of the Syrian nationalist youth and became a veritable national symbol to them. After the loss of the *sanjaq*, he moved to Damascus, but remained politically active. The victorious radical Ba'ṭhists of the 23 February 1966 *coup* have acknowledged al-Arsûzi instead of Michel 'Aflaq as the 'spiritual father' of the Ba'ṭh.

² Ibrahîm Salâma, *Al-Ba'ṭh min al-Madâris ila al-Thakanât* (Beirut, 1969), p. 5.

³ Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṭh*, pp. 19-20. The League attempted a comeback in 1954, but without success.

but it lasted for only a few months. At the end of November 1940 al-Arsûzi, with only five of his disciples, organized another party, *al-Ba'th al-'Arabi* (the Arab Resurrection). Sâmî al-Jundi, a founding member of that diminutive group, records how he and al-Arsûzi incidentally learned of the existence of another, very similar, party which called itself *al-Ihyâ' al-'Arabi* and alternatively *al-Ba'th al-'Arabi*. Its leaders were Michel 'Aflaq and Salâh al-Dîn al-Bîtâr, and all the members of the two Ba'ths, with one or two exceptions, were their students at the *Tajhûz Dimashq* high school. Al-Arsûzi's Ba'th eventually disbanded, and its members joined *al-Ihyâ' al-'Arabi*, which became a vocal protagonist of Arab unity and socialism in the country.¹

Graduates of *Tajhûz Dimashq* themselves, 'Aflaq and Bîtâr belonged to that disillusioned generation which had witnessed the fateful post-World War I events and shared the dream of a united Arab nation. As students they participated in the 1925 Syrian uprising against the French. In 1928 they went to the Sorbonne in Paris, 'Aflaq to major in history and Bîtâr in mathematics and physics. Now the two Syrian youths were fully exposed to the main currents of European thought. With other Arab students such as the Moroccan 'Alâl al-Fâsi they organized an Arab educational society which endeavoured to enlighten Arabs and Europeans alike about the uniqueness of Arab nationalism and its rich heritage.²

Returning to Damascus with their Sorbonne degrees in 1932, 'Aflaq and Bîtâr joined the faculty of *Tajhûz Dimashq*. But they were far too involved emotionally and intellectually with the nationalist movement to disengage themselves from politics. Their meetings with students and colleagues included frequent discourses on nationalism and socialism, and on the imperative of a mass awakening in the Arab world. In 1934 they joined the Syrian communists and other Marxists to publish the *al-Talî'a* journal,³ but this co-operative effort was short-lived. When the communists followed Shukri al-Quwatli's National Bloc in endorsing the still-born Syrian-French treaty of 1936, 'Aflaq and Bîtâr suspended their participation in *al-Talî'a* and took a position of uncompromising hostility to the treaty. Thereafter the rift between the communists and *al-Ihyâ' al-'Arabi* widened. This was brought into focus in the wake of Rashîd 'Âli al-Kaylânî's uprising in 1941 against the British in Iraq. *Al-Ihyâ'* supported his movement with unmeasured enthusiasm. Aside from sending volunteers across the border to aid the revolt, the party organized student committees in Damascus

¹ *Ibid.* pp. 20–32.

² Salâma, *Al-Ba'th*, pp. 5–6.

³ 'Aflaq's flirtation with communism in this formative period has been viewed differently. Some maintain that he became a Marxist while in Paris. (See Kemal H. Karpat, ed., *Political and Social Thought in the Contemporary Middle East* (New York, 1968), p. 185.) Others assert that he remained a full-fledged communist until 1943. (See Walter Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East* (New York, 1956), ch. 12, p. 330, fn. 15; and Gordon H. Torrey, *Syrian Politics and the Military 1945–1958* (Columbus, Ohio, 1964), p. 117, fn. 68.)

to work for 'nasrat al-'Irâq'.¹ In contrast, the communists condemned Kaylâni's rebellion for its alleged Nazi character.² Active co-operation between Ba'thism and communism was resumed only in the 1950s, and then for very different reasons and under vastly changed circumstances. In the meantime the leading members of *al-Ihyâ' al-'Arabi* polished their political doctrines, but in a casual manner. Not until 1946 at a meeting in the Lona Park café did they officially agree to establish the Arab Resurrection Party (*Hizb al-Ba'th al-'Arabi*) with its own daily, *al-Ba'th*.³ A year later a Ba'th congress assembled in Damascus; internal organization for the party was blueprinted, and a somewhat detailed constitution adopted.⁴

I. THE PURPOSE OF THE BA'TH

It is not fundamental to the purpose of this essay to dwell on the ideology of the Ba'th,⁵ but there is need to emphasize the party's *raison d'être*. From its obscure beginnings, the movement was above everything else dedicated to the overriding objective of effecting a structural transformation, or *Inqilâb*, in the spirit and thinking of the Arab people which would revolutionize their society. This was to be achieved through relentless struggle against reactionary elements with vested interests in the anachronisms of the *status quo*, and other political groupings who were considered to only feign nationalism while being in reality opposed to the national welfare. 'Aflaq laid down three essential conditions for the *Inqilâb*:

(1) Awareness of the historical and contemporary realities which called for drastic transformation; (2) a feeling of responsibility rooted in a strong moral base; and (3) a genuine belief in the feasibility, at the existing stage of Arab history, of the proposed *Inqilâb*.⁶ These conditions were to be fulfilled by *al-Talî'a* (the vanguard) who constituted the membership of the Ba'th. 'The struggle which I designated as the practical expression of the *Inqilâb*', wrote 'Aflaq, 'creates its own crusaders. The *Inqilâb* becomes a living thing in their souls, minds and manners or it becomes life itself'.⁷ Once achieved, the *Inqilâb* would presumably usher in the Ba'thist trinity—unity, freedom, and socialism.

¹ Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: a Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945-1958* (London, 1965), p. 10.

² Salâma, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 6.

³ Kamil Abu Jaber, on the other hand, mentions that the Ba'th party was established in 1943. See *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party History, Ideology and Organization* (Syracuse, 1966), p. 23.

⁴ However, the present internal organization of the party was not instituted until 1957. Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 33. A good discussion of the party's organization and structure appears in Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th*, pp. 139-45.

⁵ Aside from 'Aflaq's works and the constitution of the Ba'th, translated from Arabic in 1957 by the department of PSPA, American University of Beirut, the party's ideology is canvassed in Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th*, pp. 97-138. See also Gordon H. Torrey, 'The Ba'th—ideology and practice', *Middle East Journal*, vol. XXIII (1969), pp. 445-54.

⁶ Michel 'Aflaq, *Fî Sabîl al-Ba'th* (Beirut, 1963), p. 181.

⁷ *Ibid.* p. 163.

Conversely, the trinity are indispensable ingredients for the success of the *Inqiláb*, since the ideals of unity, freedom and socialism are considered fundamental and inseparable objectives of equal importance.¹

Central to 'Aflaq's thinking is the quest for freedom, conceived not merely as emancipation from political tyranny and oppressive poverty, but the liberation of the Arab people, unified in mind and spirit, joined together in social brotherhood. Freedom should, therefore, emanate from the very soul of the Arab and be cherished as an indivisible part of his cultural heritage. Here again the path to freedom is that of struggle strewn with sacrifice.² Since such a generic conception of freedom could not be achieved or even promoted without state action, especially in the education of the masses, the political machinery of the state had to be freed from the grip of the privileged classes, considered to be custodians of the feudal past, and intrinsically opposed to the idea of the *Inqiláb*. For that purpose 'Aflaq and his supporters advocated the prompt implementation of a radical program of socialism designed to eradicate the economic power, and hence political domination, of the big landowners, business and commercial magnates, and give the people a stronger sense of belonging to society through direct ownership of land and plant.³

Every action based on principle was to be geared, in the final analysis, towards unification of the Arab world—the paramount objective of the Ba'th. Without unity the Arabs could not possibly recapture their former glory and become once again creative agents in human civilization. Ba'thism, however, disparages any unity that is achieved by military force or through agreement among political leaders regardless of their intentions. True unity can only be 'the result of a spiritual *Inqiláb* in Arab society and . . . is a factor in the *Inqiláb*'.⁴ Only then would the Arab people in separate political regions realize that they constitute one nation.

II. INTELLECTUAL ORIENTATION AND LEADERSHIP: MICHEL 'AFLAQ

Most of the ideas enunciated by the Ba'th were neither new nor exclusive. The need for a metamorphic change in Arab society had long been propounded by intellectuals and reformers. Principles of social justice (*al-'Adála al-ijtimá'yya*), if not socialism, were already a popular theme in the Arab world after 1945 owing to the enhanced stature of the Soviet Union, the triumph of the British Labour Party, and the espousal of welfare economics in the United States.⁵ And the Ba'th could hardly be considered the inventor of Arab unity. But the dynamic presentation of unity, and the addition of freedom and socialism as an organic concept based on the theory of the *Inqiláb*, was excitingly new and

¹ Michel 'Aflaq, *M'arakat al-Mas'ir al-Wáhid* (Beirut, 1963), p. 18.

² 'Aflaq, *Sabíl al-Ba'th*, p. 332.

³ *Ibid.* p. 214. The economic policy of the party is loosely outlined in its constitution, articles 26–37.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 229.

⁵ Hazem Zaki Nuseibeh, *The Ideas of Arab Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1959), pp. 165–6.

very relevant to the Syria of the 1940s. Here at long last was a genuine pan-Arab party endowed with a sound ideology and efficient organization responding to, and representing, the visionary dreams of nationalist youth.¹ It was the timeliness of the Ba'th perhaps more than its ideology and structure that gave it potential for success. If it failed to make political headway immediately after its formation, it was because the party had its fair share of intellectualism and pseudo-intellectualism, but virtually none of the required political realism. Originating from and built around, the high school and the university, the teacher and the student, the Ba'th was at first far removed from the people it sought to enlighten and liberate. Its ideology was too sophisticated for the peasants and the workers; its leadership was separated from the masses by the painful reality of class differences.² This was especially true because the Ba'th to a large measure bore the impress of its founder-philosopher, Michel 'Aflaq.

Sensitive and austere, 'Aflaq is more of a talented intellectual than a political leader. A poor public speaker, he is at his best amidst a small circle of followers discussing ideology. There is much of the suspicious, nervous artist in his conduct. Credulous and even vain, he is vulnerable to praise and duplicity. When ill-advised he makes grave mistakes, for he has 'the innocence of childhood and the caution of old age'. His is a personality of contradiction complicated by a strange mixture of weakness and strength. His stubbornness is normally unyielding except where one finds access to his heart. Hateful when insulted, 'Aflaq's demeanor gives an impression of laziness though he has had a full active life. In a very real sense 'the party was an expression of his humanity and reflected from its early days his talents and his weaknesses'.³

'Aflaq took the idea of the Ba'th and fashioned a political philosophy out of it. But he was temperamentally reluctant or unwilling to enter politics. 'Our task', he wrote in 1943, 'is to open the road for the new generation, not to pave it; to raise thorns, not to plant roses; to sow the eternal seeds, not to reap the ripe fruits. Because of this we will not partake in government, and shall remain in the path of struggle for a long time.'⁴ This view was widely accepted by the rank and file of the party for a long time. Some prominent members even thought that political activity would only contaminate the Ba'th. It was not until the party began its close association with Akram al-Haurâni that this outlook was discarded. Haurâni ultimately performed on the Ba'th what Lenin performed on Marxism: he changed it into a strategy of political action.

III. PRAGMATIC POLITICAL ORIENTATION AND LEADERSHIP: AKRAM AL-HAURÂNI

A restless and pertinacious activist, Akram al-Haurâni was born in Hama, before 1958 a traditional city controlled by powerful landowning families,

¹ Muhammad 'Amrân, *Tajribatî Fî al-Thawra*, vol. I (Beirut, 1970), p. 8.

² *Ibid.* p. 151.

³ Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 34.

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 45.

notably the 'Azms, Kaylânîs and Barâzis. From youth he shared with the Ba'ṯhists that forceful nationalism mixed with genuine concern for the plight of the masses, especially the peasants, which made him an unregenerate foe of the landowners. After acquiring his law degree from the Syrian university, Haurâni plunged headlong into a desperate struggle to emancipate the peasants in the *muhâfaza* of Hama from the shackles of feudal control. From the very beginning his career was marked by a type of personal courage which reflected an indomitable will. But he was undisciplined, concerned more with power and success, less with principle.¹ As a result, he often unwittingly sacrificed the latter for the former. In 1936 Haurâni joined the militant Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP), only to withdraw from it disenchanted two years later.² It was a brief association, though probably more significant than has thus far been realized. The SSNP was the first political organization that made a conscious effort to infiltrate the army by wooing sympathetic officers and sending full-fledged members to the military academy in Homs.³ To what extent Haurâni was privy to, and benefited from, the SSNP's links in the army cannot be ascertained. But the experience was no doubt of value. In the years to follow, Haurâni was never too far afield whenever military officers played politics.

In Hama, Haurâni was first a member and eventually leader of *al-Shabâb* party,⁴ a small grouping of youth which served as a springboard for his meteoric career.⁵ The articles which Haurâni contributed to the party's weekly, *al-Yaqṯha*, demonstrate an aptitude for writing that is a perfect complement to his brilliant oratory. Members of *al-Shabâb* looked up to him as an intellectual leader,⁶ a fact obscured by his well-known propensity for action. When Raṣḥîd 'Âli al-Kaylânî raised the banner of revolt in Iraq, Haurâni was the first among a group of enthusiastic volunteers to rush to his aid.⁷ On the way back to Syria, Haurâni and company were momentarily detained in Deir al-Zûr by the French. Among the detainees were Jamâl al-Atâsi, 'Afif al-Bizri⁸ and perhaps 'Adnân al-Mâlki,⁹ all of whom were friends of the Ba'ṯh and destined to play important rôles in the subsequent military and political affairs of the country. The whole episode enhanced Haurâni's influence with the army officers and foreshadowed his partnership with the Ba'ṯh.

¹ Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'ṯh*, p. 33.

² Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 62.

³ *Ibid.* p. 49.

⁴ It was originally established in 1938 by one of Akram's relatives, 'Uṯmân al-Haurâni.

⁵ Patrick Seale maintains that Haurâni used the Arab Socialist party (the changed name of *al-Shabâb* as of 1950) 'as a screen' for his SSNP allegiance (*Struggle for Syria*, pp. 87 and 38), whereas Al-Jundi mentions that Haurâni withdrew from the SSNP as early as 1938 (*Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 62).

⁶ Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 63.

⁷ Salâma, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 6.

⁸ Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 10, fn. 6.

⁹ 'Adnân al-Mâlki went with Haurâni to Iraq, but it is not clear whether he was one of the detainees.

During the 1943 elections Haurâni had no compunction against working with traditional elements¹ to win the parliamentary seat he was to retain until 1958. As an ambitious representative of the young generation in Hama, he soon earned a reputation for aggressiveness which made him a striking exception in a chamber otherwise known for its subservience to president Quwatli and his National Bloc.² His views and speeches in parliament echoed the ideas expounded by *al-Ihyâ' al-'Arabi*. When Salâh al-Bîtâr was arrested, Haurâni was the only deputy found willing to defend him and ask for his release.³ This sort of spirited and largely spontaneous co-operation between Haurâni, 'Aflaq and Bîtâr⁴ was accompanied by a growing rapprochement between their respective followers, who discovered that their goals were similar if not identical.⁵ The nexus thus formed between the two leftist factions was further cemented during the armed struggle against the French in 1945. In Damascus, *al-Ihyâ'* organized its members into units called *Firâq al-ġihâd al-Watani* (units of national struggle),⁶ and enjoined patriotic officers to rebel against the French-led *Troupes Spéciales*.⁷ In Hama, Haurâni, along with a number of zealous young officers, took part in a guerrilla movement, and managed to chase the French garrison from its stronghold in the city's citadel.⁸ The fighting did not subside until the British Eighth Army intervened, and the bitter struggle against the hated Mandate finally came to an end when the French, however grudgingly, evacuated the country.

IV. SYRIAN PRAETORIANISM AND THE RISE OF ARSP

Syria after independence was a good example of a praetorian society in an oligarchic phase.⁹ The traditionalist leaders presided over groupings rather than political parties. Such were the National Bloc of Shukri al-Quwatli, the National party (*al-Hizb al-Watani*) of Sabri al-'Asali, and the larger People's party (*Hizb al-Sha'b*) of Rushdi al-Kikhya and Nâzim al-Qudsi—agglomerations of prominent individuals who had fought the French with tenacity and commendable

¹ Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 40. His co-operation in 1943 with affiliates of the National Bloc was probably unavoidable if he was to succeed. Elections to the Syrian parliament at the time entailed certain steps: each 100 voters chose a representative, and the chosen representatives elected delegates to parliament. It was thus relatively easy for landowners and traditionalist forces to influence voters and manipulate the polls. Besides, the power and popularity of the National Bloc was such that hardly anyone could hope to win the elections without its support or tacit approval. Not until 1947, and owing to public demonstrations instigated in part by the Ba'ṯh, were direct one-step election procedures instituted. Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 44.

² Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 44.

³ Salâma, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 6.

⁴ Haurâni frequented the headquarters of *al-Ihyâ' al-'Arabi*.

⁵ Meetings between members of *al-Shabâb* and *al-Ihyâ'* are known to have been held in the *Moulin Rouge* café in Damascus.

⁶ Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 41.

⁷ Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 41.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 38.

⁹ For a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of praetorianism see Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, 1968), pp. 197–283.

endurance, but emerged after independence largely shapeless and disorganized, squabbling for the fruits of office instead of grappling with the forces of backwardness manifest in the seemingly eternal curses of disease, ignorance and poverty. But they were solidly entrenched, controlling the country economically and dominating it politically. Their failure to measure up to the task of national reconstruction made 'Aflaq's proposed *Inqilâb* all the more urgent; their power prevented it. It was precisely this kind of paradoxical impasse that hastened the politicization of Syria by driving the frustrated intellectuals and educated youth to seek solutions to a post-independence condition which to them appeared stagnant or even atrophied.

A grass-root change in the political complexion of the country was in the long run unavoidable. That the process started so soon after independence and took a turbulent, extra-legal form was one of the more crucial by-products of the first Arab-Israeli war. Before 1948 the traditionalists, despite their omissions and commissions, wielded supremacy and enjoyed considerable popularity. After 1948 they suddenly found themselves face to face with something tantamount to political bankruptcy.¹ In Syria, more than any other country in the Arab Middle East, 1948 marked a watershed; it disgraced the pro-western liberal-conservatives, and activated a leftist movement as a feasible alternative.²

Of the leftist forces, the Ba'th of 'Aflaq and Bitâr, and *al-Shabâb* of Haurâni were the most ideally suited, by virtue of their intense nationalism, to spearhead an attack against the traditionalists. The Communist Party was superbly organized and very ably led by *Khâlid Bakdâsh*, but until 1954 it was illegal³ and its popular appeal was severely circumscribed by its slavish adherence to Marxist-Leninist dogma. To the Syrian communists the issue of Arab nationalism was not considered ' . . . as a desirable end in itself, but merely as aid toward creating the necessary conditions for the successful application of socialism'.⁴ To the Ba'thists as well as to Haurâni, on the other hand, the application of socialism was requisite for the emancipation of the people from the economic-political hegemony of the traditionalists and a precondition for the regeneration of the entire Arab nation. Socialism was embraced as the only reliable vehicle for 'Aflaq's *Inqilâb*.

From the outset Haurâni was the outstanding political figure of the radical left. His leading rôle derived from two separate, albeit related, spheres: his immense popularity among the peasants in the *muhâfaza* of Hama and his extensive influence over youthful nationalistic officers in the army.

The relentless efforts of *al-Shabâb* on behalf of the peasant accompanied by an assault on the power and prestige of the leading landowning families gave Haurâni an unshakable political base in the rural district, but not as much in

¹ 'Amrân, *Tajribatî*, vol. 1, p. 152.

² Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th*, p. 29.

³ Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism*, p. 154.

⁴ Nuseibeh, *Ideas of Arab Nationalism*, pp. 176-7.

the city proper, of Hama.¹ So great was his success in the area that the peasants there were known to be loyal to him *per se* and not to any program of socialism or land distribution. Indeed, it was only after his prestige soared among the Hama peasantry in the 1950s that the communists, drawn by the example, moved to capture the allegiance of all the Syrian peasants² though with much less impressive results.

Awakening the Hama peasantry and starting a veritable class struggle in the region, however, was scarcely sufficient to impair the power of the traditionalists over the country at large. In a centralized state such as Syria, what matters in the final analysis is control at the top, the seat of government in Damascus. But to socio-political rebels such as the Ba'ṯhists and members of *al-Shabāb* were in 1948, this was constitutionally unobtainable. The traditionalists had originally gained power on the strength of their social status and economic wealth. Once firmly established, they harnessed the machinery of the state to preserve and augment their vested interests. Legalism and élitism in effect merged to perpetuate traditional control. If such a vicious circle were to be broken, extra-legal action was imperative. Against this background, Haurāni's links with the army assumed crucial significance. Throughout the forties, the young leader from Hama had been silently establishing contacts with admiring army officers. When the Palestinian war erupted in 1948, he fought side by side with military and civilian irregulars under the general command of Fawzi al-Qāwījī.³ At the close of hostilities, Haurāni emerged as the acknowledged parliamentary spokesman of the army.⁴

The Quwatli régime, having agreed to armistice negotiations, was feeling the tremors of the defeat in Palestine. There were demonstrations in Latakia,⁵ and the army was in a sullen and rebellious mood. Instead of treading warily, the government further embroiled the situation by injudiciously announcing a cut in the defence budget—a none too subtle move to let the army shoulder the responsibility for the Palestinian fiasco.⁶ The response of the military was prompt and conclusive. On 30 March 1949, Colonel Husni al-Za'īm, in a swift and bloodless *coup d'état*, seized power and toppled Quwatli. Za'īm's action was neither inspired by a conflict in ideology nor actuated by any kind of class struggle. The military reformers were interested simply in a house-cleaning operation that would strengthen the Syrian state and put an end to the corruption of the ousted régime.⁷ But for the future political development of Syria, the event had far-

¹ A brief, but the best and most accurate, description of Haurāni's aims and tactics in the rural areas around Hama appears in Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp. 39-40, 177 and 183.

² Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p. 61; and Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism*, p. 159.

³ Among the officers who fought with Haurāni was Adīb al-Shīshakli, who subsequently became the strongman of Syria.

⁴ Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p. 156.

⁵ 'Developments of the Quarter', *Middle East Journal*, vol. III (1949), p. 327.

⁶ Majid Khaddouri, 'Constitutional developments in Syria', *Middle East Journal*, vol. V (1951), p. 149.

⁷ Amos Perlmutter, 'The Arab Military Elite', *World Politics*, vol. XXII (1970), p. 298.

reaching connotations. It dealt a major blow to the constitutional legitimacy of traditionalist control; it awakened the emerging leftist forces to the decisiveness of the army as an instrument of politics; and, equally important, it unmistakably revealed the disorganization and frailty of the traditionalists. As a result, the *coup* of 1949, instead of marking the beginning of construction and reform, heralded a chain of *coup d'états* in rapid succession. Participation in politics was no longer limited to the élite groups, but expanded to include elements from the amorphous Syrian bourgeoisie.¹ Syrian praetorianism was passing from an oligarchical to a middle class-radical phase. In such a polity, social solidarity is extremely weak and political strife much more intense.²

Haurâni and his officer clique along with other Ba'thists played a conspicuous rôle in preparing and staging the March *coup*.³ Their intrigue was the product of sheer expediency, since the principal objective was the overthrow of Quwatli rather than the support of Za'im. When the latter's increasing despotism and erratic policies proved equally injurious to them as to their adversaries, they turned against him and joined Colonel Sâmî al-Hinnâwi in engineering yet another *coup* on 14 August 1949. Za'im and his prime minister Muhsin al-Barâzi were summarily executed and the venerable Hâshim al-Atâsi became president of the republic. Khâlid al-'Azm was re-appointed prime minister, and a mixed cabinet including Haurâni and Rushdi al-Kîkhya, leader of the People's party, was formed.⁴ A semblance of normalcy was presumably restored.

But appearances were deceptive. In the context of Arab politics, there was a veritable race between the Saudi monarchy and the Hashemites of Iraq for the control of Syria. The traditionalist People's party was the main proponent of a Syrian-Iraqi union and the eventual formation of a Fertile Crescent Arab state. Strangely enough, 'Aflaq's party was initially inclined to support such a move.⁵ But Haurâni had very different ideas. So long as the royal house of Hâshim endured, Syria could not join Iraq in any union without forfeiting her republican character, a prospect which the Syrian military and Haurâni found intolerable. So when the elections of 1949 gave an impressive return to the People's party, Haurâni not only pressured the Ba'thists to retract their endorsement of the suggested Syro-Iraqi union—an indication that he was already gaining ascendancy over them—but simultaneously turned to scheming with his old associate, Colonel Adîb al-Shishakli,⁶ who managed to dislodge Hinnâwi in the third *coup*

¹ Huntington, *Political Order*, p. 202.

² *Ibid.* pp. 198–208.

³ Ahmad I. al-Fil, *Sûriyyâ al-Jadîda Fî al-Înqilâbain al-Awwal wa al-Thâni* (Damascus, 1949), p. 33.

⁴ *Syria and Lebanon. Royal Institute of International Affairs*, 2nd ed. (New York, 1954), p. 475.

⁵ 'Amrân, *Tajribatî*, vol. I, p. 163.

⁶ *Ibid.* A native of Hama, Shishakli's association with Haurâni went back to the early forties. When Haurâni rallied to Za'im, Shishakli was given command of the armored column which overthrew Quwatli. When Haurâni turned against Za'im, Shishakli was summarily dismissed from the army. When Hinnâwi with Haurâni's aid toppled Za'im,

d'état during 1949.¹ Hinnâwi's ouster naturally turned the tables against the People's party and its pro-Iraqi sympathies.²

Shishakli was not, as many had mistakenly assumed, a mere follower of Haurâni, but a man of strong character and very definite ambitions. At first he preferred to work from behind the scenes through Haurâni. The latter became minister of defence and head of a parliamentary republican bloc which he pieced together as a counter-weight to the People's party.³ But in December 1952 Shishakli felt strong enough to dissolve parliament and assume dictatorial powers.⁴ He then openly turned against his erstwhile leftist allies by ordering the suppression of all political parties and organizing his own Arab Liberation Movement (*Harakat al-Tahrîr al-'Arabi*).⁵ The communists responded by accusing Shishakli's 'accursed fascist military dictatorship' of collaboration with imperialism.⁶ Haurâni's opposition⁷ characteristically took the form of a *coup* attempted unsuccessfully by his friends 'Abd al-Ghani Qannût and 'Adnân al-Mâlki.⁸ The conspirators were jailed;⁹ and Haurâni along with 'Aflaq and Bîtâr, after a brief detention, made good their flight across the mountains to Beirut, and later to Rome.

The most significant outcome of the entire episode was the official merger of 'Aflaq's Ba'th with Haurâni's Arab Socialist party¹⁰ to form the Arab Resurrection Socialist Party (ARSP).¹¹ Influential members from both parties had been

Shishakli was not only restored to full rank, but given command of the important First Brigade at Dar'a. Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp. 86-7.

¹ George Lenczowski, *The Middle East in World Affairs* (Ithaca, 1962), p. 349. After his ouster, Hinnâwi took political refuge in Lebanon where he was assassinated by Hirsho al-Barâzi in revenge for the execution of Muhsin al-Barâzi.

² The Syrian constitution of 1950, warmly pan-Arab in tone, made no reference whatsoever to the proposed Syro-Iraqi union. Concerning the ill-feeling between the army and the People's party see Hasan al-Hakîm, *Muthakarâtî Safahât Min Tarîkh Suriyyâ al-Hadîth* 1920-1958, vol. II (Beirut, 1966), p. 55. Al-Hakîm became Prime Minister of Syria in 1951 because the People's party was vetoed out of office by the army. His memoirs include a useful listing of all the Syrian cabinets between 1918 and 1958.

³ Lenczowski, *Middle East*, p. 349.

⁴ Joseph S. Roucek, 'Syria: a lesson in geopolitics', *Current History*, vol. XXII (1952), p. 221.

⁵ Shishakli also suspended the 1950 constitution and promulgated a new constitution in 1953. He also took care, for the sake of legitimacy, to have himself elected as president.

⁶ George Kirk, 'The revolutionary current in Arab Asia' in Peter Calvocoressi, *Survey of International Affairs* (London, 1955), p. 196.

⁷ Quite apart from an obvious clash between two domineering personalities, the falling out between Haurâni and Shishakli was precipitated by the former's insistence on land distribution, an issue which Shishakli never took seriously.

⁸ Salâma, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 7.

⁹ An unknown number of high-ranking officers were also dismissed from the army (Lenczowski, *Middle East*, p. 353). On his arrival in Lebanon, Haurâni accused Shishakli of arresting seventy-six officers and 'selling-out' to western imperialism (Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p. 218).

¹⁰ The old name *al-Shabâb* was discarded in 1950.

¹¹ The merger presumably took place in January 1953 (Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p. 218; and Salâma, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 7).

advocating such a merger and co-ordination of political strategies, but 'Aflaq's reluctance had always been a stumbling-block.¹ Under the shadow of Shishakli's dictatorship, however, the advantage of forming a united front against a hostile régime and traditionalist opponents, especially the People's party,² was too alluring even for the cautious 'Aflaq. The union, therefore, was essentially a marriage of convenience consummated under the pressure of unusual events. Since the Ba'th had a relatively robust structure,³ and a ready-made ideology applicable to the aspirations of both parties, there was no real need to change much of anything save for the name.

A general amnesty granted by Shishakli in October 1953 allowed the exiled Ba'thist leaders a safe return to Syria. But no sooner did they arrive in Damascus than Haurâni resumed his clandestine activities to overthrow Shishakli. Tactically, he employed the Arab proverb 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'. It was Haurâni who played a central rôle in bringing together such strange bed-fellows as the ARSP, the People's party, and the National party to form the Homs pact which was designed to rid the country of Shishakli.⁴ Among students and workers, Ba'thist agitation was such that an article concerning a play performed in the American Aleppo college triggered serious demonstrations in Aleppo and Damascus.⁵ Anti-Shishakli leaflets were distributed by the Ba'th in the restive Jabal al-Drûz region and touched off a chain of action-reaction events which ended in bloodshed.⁶ All these developments kept Shishakli preoccupied and off balance while silent conspiracies were being hatched inside the army for his ouster. The People's party was intriguing with sympathetic officers such as Faysal at-Atâsi and 'Umar Khân to secure a *coup d'état* and unite Syria with Iraq. But the ARSP was a few steps ahead of them. During the night of 27-28 February, Mustafa Hamdûn, one of Haurâni's most intimate friends, supported by his aide Muhammad 'Amrân, rebelled with the Aleppo garrison. In response, Ba'thist officers in Dar'a and Jabal al-Drûz arrested their superiors and threatened to march on Damascus unless Shishakli left the country.⁷ Faced with imminent civil war, Shishakli found prudence the better part of valor, and fled to exile.

V. BA'THIST ASCENDENCY

The ARSP was obviously the major beneficiary of Shishakli's downfall. Its

¹ Salâma, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 7.

² 'Aflaq later indicated that he and Haurâni decided to join forces in order to effectively meet the threat of the People's party.

³ On the difference in organization between the Ba'th and Haurâni's Arab Socialist party see Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'th*, p. 34.

⁴ The Communist party did not participate in the Homs pact. (Salâma, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 7. But see Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, p. 134.)

⁵ It is generally acknowledged that these demonstrations were perpetrated principally by Haurâni. See also Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p. 233.

⁶ A detailed account is given by Seale, *Struggle for Syria*, pp. 134-45.

⁷ Salâma, *Al-Ba'th*, p. 9.

officers were highly influential in the army,¹ and its politicians could now marshal official support to boost their popularity with the electorate. In the crucial elections of 1954, 90 per cent of ARSP candidates were elected, a total of sixteen seats in a parliament of mixed composition:

Independents	55 seats
People's party	32 seats
National party	25 seats
ARSP	16 seats
Tribal deputies	9 seats
Syrian National party	2 seats
Co-operative Socialists	2 seats
Communists	1 seat
Total	142 seats ²

The results of these elections suggest several important points. First, the party system governed the elections.³ Secondly, although the majority of eligible voters cast their ballots according to party affiliations, the number of elected independents remained surprisingly high, a clear indication that the Syrian electorate was still responsive to the socially prominent personality. Thirdly, the rising tide of the leftist forces, evidenced by the substantial growth of ARSP and the election of the first communist (Khâlid Bakdâsh) to an Arab parliament, had eroded the political influence of the traditionalists more than their popular base. The People's party and the National party, together with traditional independents, still held a majority of seats. But Syria, traditional at heart, was being radicalized by a determined leftist minority.

In 1954 an incident occurred which reflected a qualified change in Haurâni's political strategy. When the People's party manoeuvred to weaken the ARSP by arranging the transfer of Mustafa Hamdûn to Egypt, his fellow Ba'ṯhist officers momentarily met in the home of 'Abd al-Ghani Qannût and decided on a *coup d'état* to topple the régime. But Haurâni overruled their impulsiveness, and Hamdûn carried out his orders and joined the military academy in Cairo.⁴ Evidently, the ARSP's bitter experience with Za'îm, Hinnâwi and Shishakli had

¹ Ousted Ba'ṯhist officers such as al-Mâlki and Qannût were immediately reinstated and given sensitive commands, and a partial purge of anti-ARSP officers was carried out. Salâma, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 9.

² *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 7 October 1954. Out of the sixteen ARSP seats, five were carried by Haurâni's list in the *muhâfaza* of Hama, where the entire list of traditionalist 'Abd al-Raḥmân al-'Azm was defeated. In contrast, Bitâr, in spite of Haurâni's support, was barely elected in Damascus. Apart from their success in converting students, the Ba'ṯhists failed to acquire a mass following in Damascus, where a substantial bourgeois class with a predominantly traditional outlook remained unaffected by Ba'ṯhist propaganda. For a revealing analysis of Damascus, its society and the failure of ARSP in understanding it, see Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, pp. 38–39.

³ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 6 October 1954.

⁴ Salâma, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 10.

served as an object lesson on the dangerous unreliability of the soldier turned politician. Thereafter, Haurâni used his power with the army to harry political opponents, but discouraged the Ba'ḥist military from acting openly against the established government. In a way, there was no other alternative. Although the party was strong enough to flout the constitutional process by coercion, it was still too weak to overthrow it. Haurâni thus vetoed direct military action. He then turned his considerable talents to the arduous task of controlling the parliamentary apparatus of the Syrian state.

Existing political conditions and the nature of the new chamber played into Haurâni's hands. On 15 October, Nâzim al-Qudsi, deputy leader of the People's party, was elected speaker of the chamber. But efforts to formulate a national government foundered amidst general disagreement:

(1) Although the ARSP had no desire to enter the cabinet, it agreed to support an independent for the premiership (pointing to Khâlid al-'Azam), provided his cabinet was in harmony with 'national interests'.

(2) The People's party, while opposing any cabinet composed purely of independents, endorsed any other ministry which could command a parliamentary majority.

(3) The National party came against any coalition government that did not include the ARSP (an attempt to saddle the Ba'ḥists with governmental responsibility).

(4) The independents were divided, though they insisted on the premiership going to one from their ranks.¹

This sort of bickering frequently resulted in crisis-ridden situations which put an added strain on Syria's fledgling democracy. ARSP tactics did not create such divisiveness; they merely aggravated and used it. It was the inability of the traditionalists to close ranks and concert their efforts that made them so vulnerable to the unsavory methods employed by Haurâni in his drive for the political mastery of the country.

After three successive *coup d'états*, the demonstrated power of the ARSP with the military was always on the minds of the intimidated traditional politicians. They had little doubt that Haurâni would use this power. In the unlikely event that the officer cliques of the Ba'ḥ were neutralized by traditionalist officers or by unforeseen developments in the army, the ARSP could fall back on its ability to stage strikes and demonstrations whenever party interests called for such actions. This ability stemmed from the remarkable success of the Ba'ḥist leaders in winning wide support among notoriously volatile students and workers.² The repercussions of Ba'ḥist-instigated street and civil disturbances on the govern-

¹ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 19 October 1954.

² When a *rapprochement* between the People's party and National party made possible, in the teeth of ARSP opposition, the formation of a cabinet headed by the independent Faris al-Khûry, about 200 persons (mostly Ba'ḥists) demonstrated outside the parliament building shouting against the new government and accusing Premier al-Khûry and Minister of Interior Ahmad Qanbar of treason. *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 4 November 1954.

ment were not inconsiderable. In a way, this was a form of political arm-twisting that was utilized on numerous occasions to keep the government as well as the ARSP antagonists harassed and demoralized. There was also a very effective propaganda campaign calculated to indoctrinate the masses with the Ba'ṯhist ideology and prepare them for the ultimate *Inqilāb*. Aside from writing books and pamphlets and delivering public speeches, Ba'ṯhist leaders prepared and circulated hundreds of publications to party members and sympathisers. In addition, there was the official daily of the party, *al-Ba'ṯh*, which, despite its irregular appearance, acted as a sounding voice of the ARSP and kept supporters informed of the party's standing with regard to each specific political issue. All these activities helped widen the popular base of the Ba'ṯh by extending its appeal and communicating its principles to interested literate Arabs.

The ARSP was not long in demonstrating its power. On 22 April 1955 Colonel 'Adnān al-Mālki,¹ deputy to the chief of staff, was assassinated in the Damascus municipal stadium by Yūnis 'Abd al-Rahīm,² a member of the Syrian Socialist National party.³ The Ba'ṯhists reacted by launching an intensive hate-campaign which reached hysterical proportions. SSNP leaders were hunted down by the authorities. Several demonstrations swept Damascus, and an angry mob sacked and burned the victimized party's official paper, *al-Binā'*. There followed a series of treason trials in which the SSNP was dissolved and most of its leaders given stiff prison sentences.⁴ For all practical purposes, the SSNP was liquidated as a political force in Syria. In the process, the Ba'ṯh lost an important military figure, but pulverized a potentially dangerous enemy.

In parliament Haurāni was working to discredit the traditional parties and push through the ARSP's program of land reform. His actions had a schematic pattern which was largely opportunistic, occasionally demagogic, but always characterized by deftness and political acumen. To strengthen the leftist forces *vis-à-vis* the traditionalists, he entered a working alliance with the communists, who had emerged after 1954 as the best-organized political party in the country.⁵ When traditionalist deputies defeated his proposal for land distribution, Haurāni resorted to pressure and intimidation. In June, the sixteen Ba'ṯhist deputies threatened to resign and 'return to the ranks of the people in order to work for emancipation from feudalism and the liberation of state property'.⁶ The threat was not carried out, but thirteen Ba'ṯhists asked the speaker of the chamber to investigate a charge of bribery levelled against several traditionalist deputies.

¹ His brother Riyād al-Mālki was a prominent Ba'ṯhist leader.

² He was a sergeant in the Syrian army. After assassinating al-Mālki he committed suicide on the spot.

³ *Al-Hayāt* (Beirut), 23 April 1955.

⁴ In all, there were eight death sentences and eighteen prison terms ranging from 12 to 25 years. See Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: an Ideological Analysis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), p. 70; and Lenczowski, *Middle East*, pp. 360-61.

⁵ Laqueur, *Communism and Nationalism*, p. 161.

⁶ *Al-Hayāt* (Beirut), 9 June 1955.

Haurâni himself took the stand to accuse certain M.P.s of accepting bribery as a reward for defeating land reform.¹ These manoeuvres were not always successful, but they kept the traditionalists on the defensive and popularized the Ba'ṯh as the aggressive champion of the toiling masses. In addition, traditionalist deputies co-operated negatively in resisting land reform, since they were unable to work together effectively in containing the ARSP and its allies.

Party strife became so severe that a national pact endorsed by all factions loomed as the only sensible remedy. On 17 February 1956, representatives from all parties met to formulate a program acceptable to a majority in parliament. On the same morning the ARSP issued a declaration which stressed the urgent need for a new powerful government that could extend the dual pact with Egypt to encompass political, economic and military relations.² The following day Haurâni publicly announced that his party had long been insisting on a national pact which would make possible the formation of a cabinet capable of marshalling 'the material and spiritual forces of the country'.³ The purpose of these pronouncements was twofold: to bring down the traditional government of Sa'îd al-Ghazzi,⁴ and undermine the pro-Iraqi People's party by tying Syria ever more closely to Egypt. The degree of Haurâni's success was clearly indicated by the similarity between the national pact, completed on 8 March⁵ and the ARSP program.

The national pact notwithstanding, attempts to form a new government snarled. The ARSP was apparently willing to join a cabinet headed by a populist, and including representatives of all major parties.⁶ The People and National parties, on the other hand, wanted to exclude the ARSP from any government.⁷ The outcome was a dangerous deadlock which even the intervention of president Quwatli could not resolve.⁸ Legitimate parliamentary bargaining having failed,

¹ *Ibid.*

² *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 17 February 1956. The declaration came also in response to intensified fighting along the smoldering front with Israel.

³ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 18 February 1956.

⁴ For the composition of al-Ghazzi's government see Al-Hakîm, *Muthakarâtî*, vol. II, pp. 226-7.

⁵ The full text of the national pact appeared in *Al-Jarîda* (Beirut), 8 March 1956. Its major stipulations were the following: 1. Non-recognition of the forceful occupation of Palestine. 2. Opposition to all foreign military alliances in the Arab world. 3. Adoption of a policy of positive neutralism. 4. Strengthening the Arab Jordanian army through financial aid. 5. Support of the Arab *Maghreb* in its struggle against imperialism. 6. Betterment of relations with Islamic nations. 7. Industrialization. 8. Fortification of the villages adjoining the border with Israel. 9. Provision for an extraordinary tax and the reconsideration of the entire tax system. 10. Completion of the armament project. Thus the pact was not only strictly nationalistic, anti-Israeli, anti-western, but manifestly pro-Egyptian as well.

⁶ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 5 April 1956; and *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 21 April 1956. The party was at the same time pressing for immediate unification with Egypt, especially after President Jamâl 'Abd al-Nâsir signified his willingness to effect such a unity. *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 17 April 1956.

⁷ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 21 April 1956.

⁸ *Ibid.*

Haurâni invoked the power of the mob to browbeat his adversaries. On 3 June, a violent Ba'thist demonstration broke into the ministry of defence and practically forced the resignation of al-Ghazzi's government.¹ The traditionalist parties tried once again to bypass the ARSP and form a semi-national cabinet under the premiership of Lutfi al-Haffâr, but stern opposition from the leftist elements in parliament barred their way. Al-Haffâr stepped down, and president Quwatli entrusted Sabri al-'Asali with the task of forming a 'national unity' coalition. Significantly, al-'Asali succeeded in his consultations only after he allocated two sensitive portfolios to the Ba'th: Salah al-Bîtâr became foreign minister, and Khalîl Kallâs went to the department of national economy.² The new cabinet adopted the national pact as a political platform, and won an overwhelming vote of confidence from parliament.³ Flushed with its victory, the ARSP pressured al-'Asali to open formal negotiations with Egypt and lay down a blueprint for an eventual federation of the two countries.⁴ A three-man delegation consisting of al-'Asali himself (National party), Ahmad Qanbar (People's party) and Bîtâr (ARSP) was actually selected⁵ to negotiate with Egyptian officials, but Gamâl 'Abd al-Nâsir's nationalization of the Suez Canal and the resultant international crisis caused the entire scheme to be laid aside.

The Suez war and its immediate aftermath, while postponing unity between Syria and Egypt, sealed the fate of the traditional pro-Iraqi People's party, the largest and most formidable opponent of ARSP. 'Abd al-Nâsir's popularity among the Arabs was rising at a phenomenal rate, whereas the Hashemites of Iraq, especially their perennial prime minister, Nûri al-Sa'îd, were generally looked upon as western lackeys working to frustrate Arab nationalism. It was even rumored that camouflaged British planes had attacked Egypt from the Habbâniyyah base near Baghdad. The People's party, already suffering from the onus of supporting feudalism, now was suspected of treasonous collaboration with Iraq. Once again the stage was set for another ARSP spectacular. Late in 1956, Iraq was openly accused of plotting with reactionary elements against the national interests of Syria. The ARSP swiftly mustered the support of Khâlîd al-'Azm with a battery of independents and moved to implicate many influential populists and conservatives who were quickly brought to trial and convicted.⁶

¹ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 3 June 1956.

² Lenczowski, *Middle East*, pp. 364-5.

³ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 9 and 15 June 1956.

⁴ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 6 July 1956.

⁵ *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 7 July 1956.

⁶ *Al-Farîda* (Beirut), 6 January 1957. More often called the red millionaire, Khâlîd al-'Azm, who supported the ARSP and the Communists, presents a baffling case. Although he came from a prominent traditionalist family and owned large tracts of land and many buildings, al-'Azm did not hesitate in siding with the leftist forces against fellow traditionalists. His ultimate purpose was presumably the presidency, which he was known to covet very strongly. Since any opposition to the rising tide of leftist nationalist sentiment would have been fatal to his political career, he apparently elected to ride the crest of the wave instead of being swamped by it. Al-'Azm's career is a tragic testimony to the disunity and failure of the Syrian traditionalists.

Prime minister al-‘Asali was prevailed upon to form a new cabinet which completely excluded the People’s party.¹ Parliament now was virtually dominated by the triumphant ARSP and its allies. It was not inappropriate, therefore, that Akram al-Haurâni was elected speaker of the chamber in 1957.

After the removal of the populists from the center of power, a triumvirate consisting of Haurâni, Khâlid al-‘Azm and ‘Abd al-Hamîd al-Sarrâj, chief of the powerful *Deuxième Bureau* (Intelligence Bureau), in effect ruled Syria. Apart from his fragile ‘progressive bloc’ in parliament, al-‘Azm had no real power. Al-Sarrâj, on the other hand, emerged as the acknowledged leader of an increasingly influential clique of pro-Nâsir officers in the army. He supported ARSP so long as it championed the causes of unity with Egypt and socialism at home. But over such vital matters as control of the military, al-Sarrâj and the ARSP parted ways. When Colonel Tawfiq Nizâm al-Dîn, chief of staff of the army, a conservative and a well-known opponent of ARSP, attempted a reshuffling of army officers in order to weaken the leftist military and possibly relieve Sarrâj of his sensitive command, the Ba‘thists, communists and Nâsirites joined hands in opposing him. At the behest of Haurâni, the leftist officers in the huge army base at Qatana started an insurrectionary movement, otherwise known as ‘*Isyân Qatana* (the Qatana mutiny), which threatened a major uprising in the army.² At the same time, in the cabinet, Haurâni not only blocked Nizâm al-Dîn’s move, but induced al-‘Azm and Fâkhir al-Kayyâlî to advance a counter referendum asking for his removal. Demurring at first, president Quwatli finally had to yield. Nizâm al-Dîn was dismissed along with nine other traditionalist colonels.³ But the issue of appointing a successor to Nizâm al-Dîn nearly brought the ARSP and Sarrâj into conflict. Since both coveted the post, but neither had the power to override the other, they compromised by allowing ‘Afif al-Bizri to become Syria’s first communist chief of staff.⁴

The victory of the left in a milieu of internal political turmoil was accompanied by a visible drift towards the Soviet Union. In 1957, Czechoslovakia won the contract to build the Homs oil refinery, and a technical-financial aid agreement was signed with Moscow.⁵ The Syrian army was also supplied with a massive arms shipment rumored to total \$240,000,000.⁶ All this was accomplished in the wake of an increasingly virulent anti-western campaign. In August, Damascus radio suddenly announced the unearthing of an ‘American plot’ to overthrow the Syrian government and replace it by a pro-western régime, subsidized by the United States, and amenable to peace with Israel.⁷ Friction soon developed

¹ *Al-Jarîda* (Beirut), 4 January 1957.

² ‘Amrân, *Tajribatî*, vol. I, p. 13.

³ *Al-Jarîda* (Beirut), 21 March 1957.

⁴ ‘Afif al-Bizri presided over the military court which tried and convicted the traditional figures implicated in the ‘Iraqi plot’. See George Kirk, ‘The Syrian crisis of 1957’, *International Affairs*, vol. xxxviii (1960), p. 59.

⁵ *Al-Jarîda* (Beirut), 29 October 1957.

⁶ *Al-Jarîda* (Beirut), 9 October 1957.

⁷ Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p. 360.

between Syria and NATO-member Turkey. Ankara massed troops along her southern border; Damascus accused Turkey of harboring malignant intentions and advanced a complaint to the United Nations. Egypt, in an unusual gesture of solidarity with Syria, dispatched 3000 troops to Latakia. The symbolic Egyptian force was presumably moved to the Turkish border, and its arrival was hailed by Haurâni as a historical event.¹

In the end, nothing came from the Syrian–Turkish hostility. But a month later, an Egyptian parliamentary delegation (40 members), sitting in joint session with the Syrian parliament, voted with the majority of Syrian deputies for a federal union between Syria and Egypt.² On 1 February 1958 the United Arab Republic was proclaimed after a ceremonial meeting of Egyptian and Syrian officials at the Qubba palace in Cairo. On 5 February, the proclamation was ratified by the Egyptian and Syrian parliaments, the sole dissenting vote being that of the communist leader, Khâlid Bakdâsh.

From the Ba'thist point of view, the union with Egypt represented the fulfilment of an ideal and a solution to a very dangerous situation. By the fall of 1957, the tactical alliance between the communists and ARSP had crumbled. From the very beginning 'Aflaq was vehemently opposed to any form of co-operation with communism,³ while Haurâni enlisted Bakdâsh's support against the traditionalists. When the People's party was publicly discredited and politically disarmed, the common threat that had brought the leftist partners together no longer existed. Recrimination, leading to open rivalry, inexorably followed. The organs of Ba'thist propaganda inveighed against the communists;⁴ Bîtâr and Haurâni labeled them 'alien' and 'insignificant'.⁵ The Ba'thist diatribe, however, was insufficient to damage the Communist Party, astutely led by Bakdâsh and enjoying unqualified support from Moscow. Since the outcome of a showdown with the communists was uncertain, and the possibility of a communist *coup d'état* not altogether ruled out, the ARSP opted for security in immediate unification with Egypt. Of equal significance was the soaring popularity of Nâsir and the rising cult of his charismatic leadership. If Haurâni and 'Aflaq could not implement the party program, Nâsir certainly possessed the stature, magnetism and, seemingly, the drive and determination to do so. Unity with Egypt was thus envisaged as a ceremony of marriage between Ba'thist ideology and Nâsir's dynamic leadership, which would inevitably put the Arab nation in the path of unity, freedom and socialism.

¹ *Al-Nahâr* (Beirut), 15 October 1957.

² *Al-Nahâr* (Beirut), 19 October 1957.

³ The fundamental differences between the ARSP and the communists and the reasons for their collaboration were explained by 'Aflaq in *Al-Hayât* (Beirut), 24 May 1956.

⁴ Torrey, *Syrian Politics*, p. 378.

⁵ Torrey, 'The Ba'th—ideology and practice', p. 456.

VI. PRAETORIANISM VERSUS *INQILĀB*

In 1952 the membership of the Ba'ṯh party did not exceed 500. By 1954 the number had swelled to over 2500¹—still far too small to carry much political weight or prepare the people for the *Inqilāb*. Yet scarcely three years later the ARSP managed to unite Syria with Egypt. It was a tremendous achievement worthy of a party that had arrogated to itself the rôle of ideological leadership of the entire Arab world. But the amalgamated nature of the ARSP, the ruthlessness with which it gained power, and the fundamental differences, often antagonisms, which plagued its leadership, all militated to disrupt the party despite its success.

The Ba'ṯhist dogma is extremely vague. It preaches rebellion against socio-political decadence, but does not analyse the nature of the rejected decadent society. It advocates socialism without setting up a real program of social action. It promises a kind of freedom that is elevating to the spirit, but fanciful beyond attainment. And the unity it calls for is wrapped in a thick mantle of romanticism. Ba'ṯhism, therefore, is readily susceptible to individual interpretations. Its emphasis is on revolution, not political construction.

When 'Aflaq, Bîtâr, and Haurâni joined together in adversity to form ARSP, they gave little thought to the long-range implications of their action. If the goals were the same, the means employed for their achievement could be regulated, or so, one might infer, was the assumption. The merger of the two parties was more in the nature of a federal, rather than an organic, union. Each leader retained his separate following and own conception of what the party was or ought to be, and what should be done to further its aims.² 'Aflaq's fervid pan-Arabism led him to concentrate on spreading the Ba'ṯhist gospel in other Arab states such as Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon. Haurâni rarely worked outside the borders of Syria. 'Aflaq found the alliance with the communists repugnant, and wanted to keep the party limited to a dedicated corps of *al-Talî'a* fighters. But Haurâni saw power and expediency in temporarily working with the communists, and insisted on enlarging the membership of the party to make it a genuine mass movement. On matters of doctrinal interpretation, the two leaders were equally separated. For example, 'Aflaq looked upon private property as a 'sacred right', whereas Haurâni took the utilitarian view that it is nothing more than a 'social function that should be adapted for the public good.³ There seldom have been two party leaders with such completely opposite personalities and antithetical conceptions of political strategy.

This sort of divided leadership acted disastrously on a party with such a strong paternalistic tradition. 'Aflaq, Bîtâr and Haurâni were affectionately and respectfully referred to by party members as the 'three professors'. They not only

¹ Al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 36.

² Although more pragmatic and precise than 'Aflaq, Bîtâr nevertheless was in relative agreement with his life-long friend, and together they constituted a separate wing in the Ba'ṯhist leadership that was quite distinct from that of Haurâni.

³ Salâma, *Al-Ba'ṯh*, p. 7.

mapped party strategy, but also 'instructed' their followers. So when the leaders fell to haggling with each other, they created bewilderment and confusion within the party. Central direction quickly was abandoned, and factions clustered around individual personalities.¹ Fundamental disagreements were ultimately settled, not by democratic consensus or arbitration, but by the degree of power a leader could muster. Since Haurâni predominated over the Ba'thist military, he normally held the upper hand, and remained unquestionably the strongman of the ARSP to 1958. 'Aflaq and Bitâr wavered between objection and passive opposition, but they never dared to challenge Haurâni openly.²

Haurâni's *de facto* predominance over the party was a negation of the Ba'thist principle of collective leadership supported by the masses. More serious still was the impact of his machinations on the largely undefined, though critical, relationship between the civilian and military branches of the party. Civilian control was never openly challenged or contested, yet was fatally weakened by divisiveness. Faced with the 'Aflaq-Haurâni struggle, the Ba'thist officers were initially driven to take sides, and eventually ended by taking over. Haurâni therefore was, perhaps inadvertently, fostering praetorianism instead of working for the *Inqilâb*. In the 1950s he was able to continue to keep the military in line by sheer force of character, but by 1957 his leadership was already being questioned. After the Qatana mutiny a series of confrontations occurred between the Ba'th civilian and military leaders which revealed increasingly profound personal and ideological differences.³

An inevitable concomitant of all this was the progressive internal atomization of the party accompanied by an erosion of its moral and ideological discipline. The Ba'thist *raison d'être* was gradually but irretrievably lost and radical praetorianism was ushered in. These were the seeds that were sown in the 1950s, germinated in the 1960s and left in full bloom today.

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¹ Abu Jaber attributes this outcome to 'Aflaq's inability or unwillingness to assume responsibility. (*The Arab Ba'th*, p. 14. But see 'Amrân, *Tajribatî*, vol. I, p. 14.)

² This was clearly demonstrated by the crisis inside the party in July 1957 over the issue of the Communist alliance.

³ 'Amarân, *Tajribatî*, vol. I, pp. 12-13.