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AN ANALYSIS OF THE 1949 COUPS D'ETAT IN SYRIA
IN THE LIGHT OF FERTILE CRESCENT UNITY

by

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1949 COUPS D'ETAT IN SYRIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to analyze the coups d'etat which occurred in Syria during 1949 in order to facilitate an understanding of their root causes, details of execution and consequences. Although there are some readily apparent similarities between those rebellions and the upheavals which have occurred with startling regularity in other newly independent states, the limited scope of this paper does not permit an analysis of that subject.

The causes of the coups were analyzed according to their connection with both domestic Syrian affairs and that country's relations with other nations, Arab and otherwise. In order to place the domestic causes in their proper perspective, the nature of Syrian politics is explored in some detail. When western political terms are applied to Syrian political events without accompanying clarification, the reader who is acquainted only with western political practices will most certainly be misled. As for the causes stemming from Syria's international relations, they are closely connected with the efforts of the Arab states to unite after gaining their independence from mandatory rule. The plans for the unification of the countries of Greater Syria and the Fertile Crescent were the focal points for the inter-Arab rivalries which swirled through Syrian political

scenes during the period studied. In addition, rivalries between non-Arab countries have had a significant effect on political developments in Syria. In order to understand how those rivalries contributed to the collapse of the Syrian governmental system which was established after the end of the French mandate, it is necessary to trace the growth of those unity plans and the Great Power rivalries bearing on them. One chapter, therefore, has been devoted to a summary of the Great Power interests in the Middle East and the evolution of the pertinent unity plans prior to the coups d'etat.

Apart from the conclusions, the remainder of the paper is devoted to a detailed study of the period from just prior to the first coup d'etat to the execution of the third and last one to occur during 1949. That, of course, is not the end of the story by any means. The "nature of the beast," however, is quite clearly established during the period covered.

It must be emphasized that this study is not intended to "condemn" any person or group or to praise others for events studied. Although some value judgment is impossible to avoid and is in order, an effort is made to avoid an excess. It was kept in mind throughout that there is some controversy over almost all questions of a political nature, and to each controversy there are not just two, but several different points of view—most of them with some merit.

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CHAPTER I

NATURE OF SYRIAN POLITICS

Despite the intermingling of races which continued throughout the centuries, the predominate racial strain in Syria remained semitic—the influence of the Phoenicians, Canaanites, Aramaeans and Arabs. The racial influence of the Indo-Europeans—Hittites, Persians, Greeks, Romans and Crusaders—as well as that of the Turkic elements was limited.¹ Racial minorities of Kurds, Assyrians, Circassians, Armenians and others exist, however, and their affect on political developments merits their mention.

The great massacres in Turkey which virtually exterminated the Armenians in Asia Minor drove many thousands of them into Syria and Lebanon. The majority consider themselves exiles from their rightful place in the Caucasus and desire to return there and rebuild their national home. They are divided, however, on when they should return. Some wish to return immediately, as others have previously, to the Armenian area of the Soviet Union which existed briefly as the Armenian Republic after the First World War before it was absorbed in the U.S.S.R. Others, strongly opposed

1. Ziadeh, Nicola A., Syria and Lebanon. London, Ernest Benn Ltd. 1957. pp. 24-25.

to Communism, do not desire to return to Armenia until it again becomes an independent state. While awaiting the return, some advocate that the Armenians in Syria and Lebanon live apart from the other inhabitants and preserve their national traditions. Others call for limited assimilation with their hosts.² The Armenians are an important factor in Aleppo, where they number more than 60,000, and in the Jazira (that portion of Syria east of the Euphrates River) where there are about 10,000. They are Christians, and their movement into Syria was deeply resented by the Arab nationalists who considered them a complication to an already vexing political and economic situation.³

The largest racial minority in Syria is the Kurdish one. They are an important element of the population in Damascus, the Jazira and in the area north of Aleppo. The nationalist ambitions of some of the Kurdish leaders have been hampered by the repression of such movements in the countries of their residence, and by the favoring by some of tribal loyalties to a larger Kurdish nationalism. Although mostly Sunni Muslims, like the majority of Arabs in

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2. Hourani, A. H., Minorities in the Arab World. London, Oxford University Press. 1947. pp. 36-37, 83-84.
 3. op. cit., pp. 83-84.

the country, they favor administrative and cultural autonomy in Syria or, better yet, the establishment of an independent Kurdish state. The territory which the Kurds wish to include in such a state overlaps that aspired to by the Armenians.⁴

The other racial minorities, Circassians, Turkomen, Daghestanis, etc., with the possible exception of the Circassians, who have been extensively used by the central government of the Ottoman Empire and the French mandate as soldiers to hold the populace under control, have little or no political significance.

Religious diversities with the resulting sectarian political leanings which affect the internal and external affairs of the country are more important than the racial differences. They do not, however, constitute the problem in Syria which they do in neighboring Lebanon and Iraq where no one sect can claim a large majority compared to the others.

The Arab Sunni Muslims are the predominant religious group in all parts of Syria with the exception of Jebel ad-Duruz, Latakia and the Jazira. In Jebel ad-Duruz and Latakia, the Druzes and Alawis,

4. op. cit., pp. 38, 85.

respectively, are the majority. The Jazira contains a mixture of Kurdish and Arab Muslims, and Christians of various sects and races.⁵ At the beginning of the French mandate, a fourth area, the Sanjak of Alexandretta, was a part of Syria and did not contain a predominance of Arab Sunnis, the combined number of Turks, Kurds and Christians being larger. That province was ceded to Turkey in 1939 and became the Turkish Sanjak of Hatay.

Jebel ad-Duruz was settled during the nineteenth century by Druzes coming from Lebanon to escape the encroachments on their liberty by Turkish government activity, foreign intervention and Christian rivalry. Before the First World War, the Druzes in their mountain stronghold realized their ambition to avoid interference in their affairs by the central government, all attempts by the Turkish Government to bring them under its control being unsuccessful.⁶ Under the leadership of the Atrash family, they lived an obscure, feudalistic life, resenting any sort of "meddling" in their affairs and were suspicious of all outsiders. The revolt against French mandatory

5. Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World, pp. 16-22.

6. Op. cit., pp. 77-78.

rule in 1925 began with a revolt in Jebel ad-Duruz and then spread to some other parts of the country.

The religious practices of both the Druzes and the Alawis are regarded as deriving from Islam, but they contain many non-Islamic practices as well. They probably grew as a result of their adherents' desire in the past to maintain their own way of life, and at the same time to outwardly share the religion of their rulers in order to avoid persecution.⁷

The Alawis occupy the Syrian coast and Jebel Ansariyah which stands behind it. Although sixty per cent of the population are Alawis, they are more backward than the Sunni Muslims and Christians who constitute the minorities. Much of the land is owned by the Sunnis, who are the majority in the city of Latakia and its environs. Like the Druzes, the Alawis are characterized by a tough, isolated, backward, individualistic peasantry ruled by feudal lords. However, there is no powerful ruling family among the Alawis such as the Druze Atrash family⁸ which could mobilize and mold their political activity into an effective force.

Before the First World War, the Jazira was empty except for some Kurdish villages and Bedouin tribes.

7. Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World, pp. 7-9.

8. op. cit., pp. 79-80.

Although the land was fertile, it was not widely or intensively cultivated, the standard of living was low, and government with its enforcement of law and order scarcely existed from the outside. The public security afforded by the French after their occupation of Syria attracted settlers to the area. The mandatory authorities also encouraged members of Christian and Kurdish minorities fleeing from Turkish vengeance to settle there, causing the present mixture of Bedouin, Kurds and Christians.

Arab and Kurdish tribes in the Jazira fall into one of three main categories according to their way of life. Some are fully nomadic camel breeders, others semi-nomadic sheep raisers and farmers, and the remainder are wholly sedentary farmers. The Kurds who have been settled in the area for a long time are largely Arabized in language and customs, while those who came in since the First World War preserve their Kurdish language and customs to a great extent.

Christian immigrants are divided into a number of sects: Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic and Orthodox, Syrian Catholic and Orthodox, Assyrians, and Chaldaeans. Some of them do not habitually speak Arabic.

The mixture of these sects and peoples lends an element of political instability to the area. The

tension and animosities which arise between Kurd and Arab, Christian and Muslim, Bedouin and settled folk; and the frequent interference of the clergy in political affairs has further complicated matters.⁹

Infrequent persecutions of minorities in the past have left their imprint on the minds of the religious and racial groups. On the other hand, the more rapid westernization of the Christians, and the favoring of them by France to increase her control of Syria has planted antagonisms and mistrust toward them in the minds of the Arab Sunni Muslims. During thirteen centuries of living in a theocratic state under Sunni Muslim rule, the Christians and Jews were tolerated people who were allowed their own personal religious practices, but were regarded with the contemptuous air of superiority which members of a more powerful group tend to feel for those of a weaker.¹⁰ It is axiomatic in such a system of government that the religious leaders are also political leaders. This was institutionalized

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9. Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World, pp. 80-81.
10. Hourani, A. H. Syria and Lebanon. London, Oxford University Press. 1946. p. 62. It is worthy of mention here that it is a principle of his faith that a Muslim may not willingly acquiesce to rule by a non-Muslim government.

in the Ottoman Empire in the Millet system for the semi-autonomous governing of the non-Muslim religious communities by the head of the community who was assisted in this task by a council of religious and lay members.¹¹ Each sect formed a separate Millet, and a subject's Millet carried the same connotation in the Ottoman Empire as a citizen's nationality in Europe.¹²

Since the government was usually concerned primarily with the collection of taxes from its subjects, law and order was often not effectively enforced, especially insofar as the protection of minorities was concerned. The racial as well as religious minorities, therefore, tended to settle in the less accessible and more easily defended localities so that they could practice their own way of life free from encroachment by the central government and other communities. Under the Ottoman Empire, local rule was exercised by dynastic or self-made rulers, heads of families, tribes or clans; and the leaders of the religious communities.¹³ Their settling in compact groups and conducting their own affairs perpetuated their individual peculiarities, and

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11. Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World, pp. 20-21.
 12. Zeine, Zeine N. Arab-Turkish Relations and the Emergence of Arab Nationalism. Beirut, Khayat's. 1958. pp. 28-29.
 13. Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World, pp. 16-22.

cultivated a feeling of regionalism which is an unfortunate political development in a country so small as Syria. The Arab Sunni majority was compartmentalized, also, by the periodic breakdowns of law and order with the resulting indrawing of primary groups—family, clan, village or tribe—for survival during the corresponding economic decline. Under such conditions, nepotism, favoritism and dishonesty in government was widely practiced and considered a necessity for survival.¹⁴

14. Crow, Ralph. A Study of the Political Forces in Syria Based on a Survey of the 1954 Elections. Unpublished Manuscript. 1955. pp. 1-3. The basic data for that manuscript was collected by twenty Syrian students at the American University in Beirut during an on-the-spot survey of the subject elections under the supervision of Professor Crow. So far as I know, that is the only study of its kind which has been made of the electoral procedure in Syria. Generalized statements asserting that the French mandatory authorities and Syrian politicians conducted dishonest elections are readily found (See, e.g., Al-Kayyali, Abdur Rahman. Al-Marahil fil Intidab al-Fransi wa fi Nidhalina al-Watani min Am 1926 hatta Nihayat Am 1939, vol. 1. Aleppo, Matba'at adh-Dhad. 1958. pp. 85, 120, 122, 123 regarding charges against the French authorities). The detailed relationship of the electoral procedure to the Syrian society, however, has not previously been clarified by an objective observer. I am, therefore,

Despite the institutional resemblance of the government in Syria during and after the mandate to the form of government used in some western countries, political loyalties and the chain of political power were based on the old patterns. The basis for an individual voter's loyalty was ordinarily one or a combination of the following factors: Membership in the enlarged family, clan, tribe or minority group; residence in a village or region; landlord-peasant relationship; employer-employee relationship in industry; and the personal following attracted by the traditional national leaders of the period of struggle for liberation from French mandatory rule.¹⁵

deeply indebted to Professor Crow for having kindly consented to let me use his manuscript which has greatly increased my own practical understanding of Syrian political forces, and aided in the preparation of this study. Although the basic material was gathered during the 1954 elections, the information is related to previous elections and is directly pertinent to this study. Less obviously, the political developments in Syria after the coups d'etat which will be mentioned in this paper enable us to place the events directly connected with the coups into their proper perspective.

15. Crow, op. cit., pp 4.

In the Bedouin tribes, there was no question of elections in the modern sense. The Sheikh, or chief, was the sole source of government in the tribe and represented the other members in dealing with the outside world. He was the only candidate for a seat in parliament, and automatically elected. The tribal pattern, however, did not have a significant effect on political matters.¹⁶

The village or rural pattern is the one which is the most characteristic of Syria.¹⁷ The greater part of the cultivated land is owned by landlords who live in the city and take little interest in the cultivation of the land except to supply the seed and take their share, usually exorbitant, of the crop. A large percentage of the people who have moved to the urban areas retain their official residence in their home village and return there to vote. This tends to perpetuate the rural influence despite increasing industrialization and a shift of population to the urban centers.

16. op. cit., pp. 5-6.

17. op. cit., pp. 9-11. See also Warriner, Doreen. Land and Poverty in the Middle East, London, 1947; and Fisher, W. B. The Middle East, 3rd ed., 1956, pp. 180-184.

In the area of fertile plains in the central and north-eastern sections of the country, the land tenure is marked by large landholdings where the landowner provides the seed and takes twenty-five to fifty percent of the crop, depending on the productivity of the land. In most cases, he provides no other direction or assistance. Since there are no contracts between peasant and landlord, the former may be evicted from the land at any time and for any reason. Despite the surplus of land in Syria, local ties—particularly the minority factors—prevent great mobility of the peasants. The peasants, therefore, are at the mercy of the landlords and must comply with his wishes, including the casting of their ballot.

Although the hilly and mountainous regions of the west and south contain more individual plots of land, leadership is still on a feudal basis because of the minority factor.

The other Syrian agricultural area is the Ghuta, the fertile land watered by the Barada River and surrounding Damascus. Here, the land is mostly in large or medium holdings, and is cultivated intensively in gardens and orchards. The manpower is furnished by day laborers rather than by share-croppers, but the landlords politically dominate them just as effectively as the landlords or notables control the peasants of the other areas.

In the large cities, a pattern somewhat different from that of the rural areas is evident.¹⁸ The two major Syrian cities, Damascus and Aleppo, have a population of about 300,000 each and are genuinely urban. Homs, Hama and Latakia with about 100,000 inhabitants each are less typically urban. In the case of Damascus, the political situation is characterized by the absence of the domination of any particular party, family or group. There have been strong nationalistic feelings there rather than the localism which is so evident elsewhere in the country. As a result, considerable independence of opinion exists. Although efforts are made by candidates to solicit votes through family and religious connections, the effectiveness of their campaign and their reputation gained from former political activities are more important factors.

Aleppo has been the economic link between the desert and the towns, and therefore has a much closer relationship with the rural areas surrounding it. As a result, it has been largely dominated by the large landowning families of the surrounding agricultural lands.

The other fairly large cities, Homs, Hama and Latakia, are also dominated by the economic/dominant

18. Crow, op. cit., pp. 6, 8-9.

class. In Homs and Hama, they are the large landowners who own entire villages surrounding the towns. In Latakia, they are the men who control the shipping and port facilities.

Most of the dominant political personalities in Syria have been, therefore, the traditionalists, coming from the landowners, large commercial interests, tribal and minority leaders, and the larger and more powerful families. The struggle for political power has usually been between the representatives of those powerful families, or branches of the same family when it becomes divided because of some controversy such as the inheritance of land under Islamic law. The citizen of Syria, instead of being a member of several overlapping interest groups as is common in western countries, is a member of only one, thanks to the feudalistic structure of society. This has delayed political unification of the country because of the large number of interest groups with very little overlapping of membership and no concensus. "These highly local loyalties have meant a state . . . bitterly divided against itself."¹⁹

The situation just described is not conducive to the growth of political parties in the western sense.

19. Crow, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

Numerous so-called parties came into existence during the mandatory period, but none of the organizations which played an important role in the government could properly be termed parties as they are known in the West. That situation continued to exist until the twilight of the republic when Akram al-Hourani's Baathists gained considerable strength. Generally speaking, the dominant political blocs had no party organization, common ideology, or detailed program for the accomplishment of their goals. They were centered around persons rather than ideas. The members of the largest single group of deputies in each of the Syrian parliaments were listed as "Independents" and were the traditionalists in their purest form. When historians speak of the National Bloc or some other party gaining an overwhelming majority of the votes in Syrian elections either during or after the mandate, that simply means that the winning party was able to influence, by fair means or foul, a significant number of those Independents to vote as the leaders of the dominant party dictated. The table below shows the relative strength of the Independents, including tribal deputies, in the last four Syrian parliaments.²⁰

20. Crow, op. cit., p. 35.

	1947	1949	1953	1954
Independents:	69	50	28	66
Total deputies in parliament:	136	114	82*	142

*Fifty-three of these were officially members of the Arab Liberation Party but prior to that election most of them had no political affiliation or were declared independents.

The National Bloc, the dominant political organization during the mandatory period and immediately thereafter, was a grouping of personalized cliches of traditional leaders who had joined forces for the purpose of struggling for independence. But "even when they declared 'independence' as their goal they did not plan the means of achieving it, nor the ways of organizing it when it came."²¹ With the gaining of independence and the loss of its main reason for existence, the loose organization of the National Bloc collapsed and it lost much of its earlier support. The National Party and the People's Party which were established in 1947 and 1948, respectively, were the heirs of the Bloc and contained many of its leaders.

The lack of a detailed platform, common in Syrian politics, is demonstrated by the program of the National Party during the 1954 elections. It was still

21. Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 196.

couched in vague generalities such as the following:²²

- Article 12: Bring about a national renaissance.
- Article 15: Improve the condition of peasants and labor.
- Article 16: Create a plan of economic development.
- Article 17: Improve village life.
- Article 37: Improve the tax structure.
- Article 41: Encourage order, discipline and cooperation.
- Article 43: Decrease disease.
- Article 46: Improve the status of women.
- Article 50: Improve educational facilities.

In the conclusion to the written party program, it was mentioned that future congresses of the party would meet to draw up specific plans to carry out those measures. Needless to say, such was not done once the election was over.

The traditional leaders maintained themselves in power by unabashed manipulation of the electoral machinery.²³ The extreme centralization of the state administration permitted the government in power to manipulate an election through the Ministry of the Interior with its control of the local officials, gendarmerie, and, at times, the army. The registration of voters, adjudicating on the eligibility of candidates, and the mechanics of voting were in the hands of local officials of that ministry. Their influence extended also into the day-to-day activities of the citizen. An act of administrative

22. Crow, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

23. Crow, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

justice performed by a public official for a citizen was viewed more as an act of charity by both participants. It paid, then, to be on the "right side" of the local officials of the government if one was concerned with obtaining a loan from the government agricultural bank, a commercial license, a certificate of birth or marriage—or any other administrative justice.

The gendarmes, especially, were used by the vested interests to maintain themselves in power. They were the instrument of forceful coercion in some cases, and in others merely abstained from interfering with the use of force by the hirelings of the powerful family in the area. The gendarmes were generally not well paid and were poorly educated, and were therefore susceptible to being bought by the vested interests. They received gifts from the landlords at harvest time, were invited to dinner at their homes occasionally, and were made to understand that it would be to their benefit not to interfere with the "natural forces" at work in the community. If they did not comply with the wishes—either stated or implied—of the officials of the Ministry of the Interior, they could be transferred to undesirable posts. As a result, the gendarmes became a part of the oligarchical rule of big families and government officials who were usually in collusion with them.

The electoral laws and practices before the elections of 1954, that is before and during the period of military rule, were openly designed to enable the vested interests to maintain their position.²⁴ There was no secret ballot, enabling the government in power to ensure election results suitable to them.

Buying of votes seems almost inevitable when the masses of people live on a subsistence level, and extremely wealthy candidates who have no popular appeal or party organization compete for parliamentary seats. In the decadent period of the Ottoman government, offices were sold to the highest bidder who paid willingly, knowing that he would be able to recoup his investment and much more from his office. He would be expected to do so by his superiors and subjects alike, who believed that authority conferred privileges and that certain permissible extortions or recognized abuses would be counterbalanced by other qualities, such as liberality, accessibility and generosity.

Techniques used to purchase votes were geared to social conditions. At the beginning of a campaign, a candidate let it be known that he was willing to

24. Crow, op. cit., pp. 17-22.

spend a specified amount of money in order to win his seat. His agents then contacted the heads of the various families in each village, and made an offer for all the votes of the family. Once the terms were agreed upon, the usual practice was for the head of the family to turn over the identity cards of the eligible voters in his family to the candidate's agent. The identity cards were returned to the individual voters at the polling place with the proper ballot and agreed amount of money tucked inside. The voter, upon receiving his card, stepped up to the voting box, verified his identity and then deposited the ballot which had been provided him.

The candidate or his agents usually kept a close watch on the voters' actions to make sure that they fulfilled their part of the bargain, but that was not necessary in most cases. In Latakia during the 1954 elections, for example, the wealthy traditional boss of the port, Abu Hani, was buying votes for a hundred pounds (about thirty dollars) each. One of his faithful adherents told him that he was "for him," money or no money, and did not expect to be paid. Abu Hani reportedly replied, "Take the money. I don't want it said of me that anyone who voted for me didn't receive just payment." Abu Hani and his running mate were later indicted for bribery and their election invalidated. When new elections were

held, they were allowed by law to run again and both were re-elected fairly. The local people resented the interference on the part of the central government in their affairs, and insisted on carrying out the bargain.

Without the secret ballot, gross abuses took place at the polling places. On election day, the candidates and their representatives gathered at the place specified for the casting of ballots, usually a mosque or school. The ballot box was placed on a table in open view. Each voter was supposed to prepare his own ballot before entering and drop it into the box without disclosing who he had voted for. That was not the way the system worked in practice, however. Most of the peasants were illiterate, and hence needed help in the preparation of the ballot. That help was generally given by the candidate or his agent for whom the voter wished to vote. The ballots were furnished by the candidates or the voter, and each candidate printed his ballots on paper of unique size, color or texture so that they could be easily recognized on sight. If the voter should dare to bring his own ballot or to have it written for him by someone other than the representative of the candidate for whom he was supposed to vote, he would automatically be suspect in the eyes

of those who owned the land he worked, employed him, or who would be his representative in the future and therefore be in a position to help him should he need assistance in dealings with the government.

Given the conditions which existed, the opportunities for exerting pressure at the polls were endless. A few examples will serve to illustrate the firm control of the ruling class. Most small villages did not have a polling place, and the residents had to be transported on election day to the nearest village or town which did have one—usually miles away. Trucks and automobiles were provided by the candidates for that purpose. When the voters arrived at the polling place, they were assembled by village groups; and their names were checked from the voting register by the head of the electoral commission. When the voter's name was called, a ballot was either thrust into his hand by the representative of the strongest candidate in the area (who was backed by a gang of strong-armed supporters, sometimes armed) or, as he entered the booth, an agent of the candidate took him in hand. Assuming that the voter could not write, whether that was true or not, the agent might greet him with something like: "Say, Mr. X, you're voting for so and so, aren't you?" So saying, he would write the name of the candidate on a ballot and give it

to the voter for depositing in the ballot box; or, in some cases, he deposited the ballot himself. The peasant, awed by the officials, the representatives of the "big men," and the display of force, usually said nothing. If he dared to speak, it was to enthusiastically approve of the procedure.

If an individual dared to seek martyrdom by being against the vested interest candidate, he probably never reached the polls. He might find that there was no place on the truck coming from his village; or he might be roughly handled outside the polls and made to understand that, if he voted, it would be at considerable physical risk. Early on election day, some opposition voter might be publicly beaten in order to intimidate others. If a large group of opposition appeared which was openly hostile and could not be intimidated on an individual basis, the candidate's strong-armed group would start a fight with them outside the polls for the purpose of either driving them away or to give the gendarmes an excuse to arrest the entire group for disorderly behavior at the polls, preventing the opposition from voting or protecting other voters from intimidation. In other cases, the gendarmes themselves were the agents of the vested interests and did the dirty work.

If, despite all those tactics, the result was still not "right," the attention would shift to the counting of the votes. One of the stooges of the strong candidate might, for example, start a fight with the opposition representative, causing them both to be ejected and leaving no opposition watcher to check the counting of the votes.

It can be seen, then, that democratic government did not really exist in Syria before the coups d'etat of 1949. Ideological parties existed, but could not hope to gain power through means specified in the constitution for that purpose since the constitution was flouted in the practical government of the country. Their only possible recourse was the use of "illegal" means to gain power. The obvious way to do that was to gain adherents among key army officers and induce them to carry out a coup d'etat against the traditional elements, thereby taking the first step toward the gaining of authority for themselves.

The part which some of the leaders of the ideological parties played in the Syrian coups d'etat of 1949 will be discussed in later chapters. In order to help set the stage for the narrative of the coups, however, the nature of the ideological parties which existed should be briefly summarized. They were

strongly influenced by the sometimes violent contact between the Ottoman Empire and the West during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

For centuries Islam provided for the believers a way of life, the validity and perfection of which no pious Muslim ever questioned. As a divine system, Islam set up the principle that authority belongs to God; but the Caliph, though enthroned by the people to enforce God's law, was not constitutionally responsible to the electorate. However, the Caliph and his subjects were both bound by divine law, the violation of which would make them equally liable for punishment. Such a theory of the state, placing ultimate responsibility in God, is not inherently democratic. However, since Islam is regarded as the embodiment of God's will and justice, its believers derive satisfaction from the moral conviction that their political system, though authoritarian in nature, could not possibly be matched by any other system. Further, Islam is regarded as immune from foreign encroachment or attack, for, as the power of Islam is God's power, no other community could successfully launch an attack on it; failure would certainly be on the side of the infidels, since success could not be divorced from Islam.²⁵

Not only were the western nations seen to be unbelievably powerful by the subjects of the Ottoman Muslim Empire, but to make matters worse for pious Muslims, they were Christian nations whose representatives often showed their contempt for the people who dressed and thought so differently from them, possessed a different standard of values; and who were so backward

25. Khadduri, Majid. "The Role of the Military in Middle East Politics," The American Political Science Review, XLVII (2 June 1953). p. 512.

in the material arts. That contempt was no less wounding when disguised as romantic admiration for the primitive or exotic.²⁶

The reaction of the Middle Eastern people, Muslim and non-Muslim, was their resolve to equal the West in those things valued by westerners, and to be accepted by the West as their equals. This meant that the Arabs must also be independent, prosperous, powerful, and with a modern social organization.²⁷ The challenge of westernization, however, has been responded to differently by various shades of opinion. The Ulema, supported by the older generation, objected to the introduction of Western institutions after the First World War because of their incompatibility with Islamic institutions and practices. Further, to the old school, democracy has failed to command the respect and allegiance of the people in the same way as God's law did in the past. The activist character of democratic politics with the complicated procedural problems of electioneering and parliamentary debates and the endless quarrels which developed between rival politicians and political groups appeared too vulgar and worldly to the pious Muslim who revered the

26. Hourani, Syria and Lebanon, p. 100.

27. ibid.

awe-inspiring traditional institutions. Apart from a call to return to the true teachings of Islam, though, they have had little to offer in the way of concrete programs of reform which would remedy the existing social and economic ills. On the other hand, many members of the largely agnostic generations which have grown up since World War I and have been educated in the modern western fashion, advocate a complete break with the past system of theocratic rule and the adoption of a secular government on western standards.²⁸

There has been no class affiliation to correspond with those two schools of thought. The division was generally between generations or orthodox and non-orthodox Muslims. This is apart from the competition between the leaders of the struggle for independence and the rising generations of politicians who were not willing to accept the claim of the former to continuing power on the basis of their past exploits.

In addition to the traditional beliefs and practices which have grown up during the past centuries and defy rapid change in Syria as elsewhere, especially where there is a largely illiterate citizenry, there

28. Khadduri, "The Role of the Military in Middle East Politics," pp. 512-513.

are inherent weaknesses which frustrate attempts to bring about the swift progress desired by the ambitious young-men-in-a-hurry and encourages them to turn to radical political ideas of reform. Among the more obvious causes for continuing underdevelopment are: A shortage of natural resources required to support heavy industry, widespread disease, feudalistic land tenure systems, a tradition of venality of public officials, and the lack of experienced personnel needed to administer an intricate modern government.²⁹ The more important of the ideological parties, consequently, advocated a complete reorganization of the economy, and the instilling of their ideas of nationalism in the entire populace—rebuilding the national attitudes in their image.

During the 1930's, the first stirrings of political activity by ideological parties and youth organizations appeared. The younger generation which had been educated abroad, particularly in France, Germany, Britain and the United States had acquired a new set of values which made them discontent with the efforts of the traditional leaders. The organizations which they formed at that time were largely influenced

29. Hourani, Syria and Lebanon, pp. 66-67, Chapter V.

in form and spirit by similar organizations in Germany and Italy. Paramilitary organizations of youth drilled, saluted and brawled like the Nazi and Fascist groups. The youth of the National Bloc were organized into the Steel Shirts. The White Shirts was the paramilitary organization of the anti-nationalist North Syrian Christians' "White Badge" movement. There were additional organizations which clashed with those and among themselves. To mention some of them: The orthodox Boy Scouts, paramilitary units of the League of National Action, local National Guard companies, the Educated Youth, the Brotherhood of Hananu (both of the latter were from Aleppo), and the local troops of boys which came into existence under the auspices of the various communities, such as the Druzes and Alawis.³⁰

One of the more significant ideological organizations to appear during that period was the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (Hizb as-Suri al-Kawmi al-Itima'i) the members of which played an important part in the coups d'etat of 1949 in Syria. From 1932 to 1935, it was a secret society, but after that emerged into the open as a widespread organization with branches in Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. It was founded

30. Longrigg, Stephen H. Syria and Lebanon Under French Mandate. London, Oxford University Press. 1958. pp. 225-230.

by Anton Saadeh, a Lebanese Christian who had been brought up in Brazil and educated in Germany. Saadeh was appointed the leader of the party for life. His decisions were to be accepted and complied with without question by the members. The method of greeting used by party members was the Nazi salute. The leader demanded strict discipline and unswerving adherence to the principles of the party. Its brown shirted members were often seen in evidence on the streets—usually well behaved.³¹ The party became known by the initials of its name translated into English, SSNP or SNSP, and more widely by the initials of its name in French, PPS, standing for Partie Populaire Syrienne.

The PPS stood for the historic reality and unity of geographical Syria, including the Sinai Peninsula. Syria was later extended to include Iraq and Cyprus. The PPS, in contrast to the other political parties, does not advocate the union of all Arabic-speaking countries in the near future, maintaining that Greater Syria is a distinct entity which should retain its unique character and national life. It is the aim of the party to reform society in Syria in order to instill

31. Longrigg, op. cit., pp. 225-226;
Ziadeh, op. cit., pp. 197-198.

a strong nationalist spirit toward the party's concept of Syria.³²

The French mandatory government tried to suppress the party when it was discovered in 1935. Those efforts were intensified when Saadeh petitioned the High Commissioner in March 1936 for union of Syria and Lebanon. The subsequent imprisoning of Saadeh and some of the other leaders, plus renewed persecution of the party, met with violent opposition by the membership which included Muslims as well as Christians. Saadeh was frequently imprisoned thereafter. The secession of some prominent members in 1937 and 1938, Saadeh's absence from the country during the Second World War, and the arresting of the leaders as pro-German at the outbreak of the war caused some weakening of the party.³³ It re-emerged, however, after the gaining of independence.

Students and educated young men who had studied abroad and were able to understand the ideology of the party were particularly attracted to the PPS as were many Syrian and Lebanese army officers. It could not hope, though, to command mass support in the face of the traditional biases and loyalties which existed in the Middle East. It has appeared that the party can

32. Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 197.

33. Longrigg, op. cit., pp. 226-227.

only gain power by a forceful seizure of the reins of government. For that reason, the governments of Syria and Lebanon have been extremely suspicious of its activities. In 1949, the Lebanese Government made an attempt to arrest the leaders of the party and liquidate it. Saadeh fled to Syria and attempted to organize an invasion of Lebanon. When the attempt failed, Saadeh was handed over to the Lebanese authorities by Husni az-Zaim and hurriedly executed, thereby contributing to the overthrow of Zaim. After the death of Saadeh, the party has largely abandoned the leader principle and has gained some acceptance as a normal political party, but still does not attract significant support at the polls on the basis of its political ideas.³⁴

The Arab Socialist Resurrection (Baath) Party which was instrumental in bringing about the union between Syria and Egypt in 1958 was of no significance as a party before the 1954 elections. Brief mention of its activities is decidedly pertinent to this study, however, for two reasons: Akram al-Hourani, the dynamic leader of the Baath, was active in the coups d'etat of 1949 and laid the groundwork for his future power by those activities. Secondly, the support which the Baath received from the people in the 1954 campaign

34. Crow, op. cit., pp. 29-31.

displayed that the apparently apathetic masses could be stirred against their traditional masters when given reasonable hope for success.

Akram al-Hourani was originally a member of the PPS, but saw the improbability of success in normal elections for that party. He recognized, however, the potential mass support which a socialist party could command among a people who were mostly peasants. It was equally obvious, though, that a change would have to be made in the electoral system so that the peasants could freely register their support, and Hourani was instrumental in bringing about the change in the electoral laws which governed the elections of 1954 and introduced the secret ballot. He launched a massive campaign to arouse the workers and peasants against the traditional bosses during the six months preceding the elections of September 1954. Dramatic steps were taken to show the peasants that their political rights were equal to those of the privileged classes. The party provided legal counsel to prosecute law suits against landlords who had mistreated their peasants. Hourani encouraged the formation of labor unions and organized strikes to symbolize the strength of the lower classes. Perhaps the most significant maneuver of the party during the campaign was the use of force to gain entry to

villages for its campaigners from which the vested interests tried to ban them. That show of force induced many of the peasants to throw their support to the Baath and, in some cases, it even became dangerous for the landlord to enter his own village for fear of suffering bodily harm from the aroused inhabitants. In one instance, a village school which had been built by the landlord was destroyed because it represented his dominance there.³⁵ That and similar occurrences during that campaign marked the first significant stirring of the people to assert their political rights in the face of the pressure which the vested interests were able to exert on them.

Both among the traditional elements and ideological parties, a thread of antagonism toward the great powers has run through the public utterances of the politicians. More will be said in succeeding chapters regarding the background of Syria's relations with the great powers and the ostensible causes of that antagonism, but it is wise to consider here the circumstances under which the pattern of reaction was originally established—during the French mandate.

Although the aspirations of the nationalist leaders during the mandatory period were evidently

35. Crow, op. cit., pp. 27-28.

credible, their instability, tone of irresponsibility and ready recourse to violence indicated an immaturity which, rightly or wrongly, justified the reluctance of France to grant independence in the eyes of many people in both Syria and Europe.³⁶ Despite the improvement of material conditions of the population under French rule, especially during the initial period, militant and loudly articulate nationalists continued to berate the mandatory administration. They insisted that the improvement would have come anyway due to the changing times and that, if anything, the French administration slowed progress. The press helped to maintain the emotionally unstable atmosphere with its frequent preference of political diatribes over any semblance of a news service. The criticism voiced by the press often amounted to crude incitement to violence. Frequent demonstrations were organized from the city mobs or students and those noisy and easily aroused demonstrators were sometimes involved in bloody clashes with the police and army; and were known to attack and murder supposedly pro-French officials, i.e., those who did not share their uncompromising attitude.³⁷

36. Longrigg, op. cit., p. 107.

37. Longrigg, op. cit., pp. 143-147.

As the most dynamic political force in Syria, the nationalists were able to set the pattern for most political activity. A politician who did not adopt their attitude could be branded a traitor to the country and Islam. Consequently, it became a form of political insurance to blame all shortcomings of government, self or society on the "imperialists." This persisted after the end of the mandate because it proved to be such a handy halo for a politician and because the government in power could, by diverting the attention of the people to international events, keep them from concentrating too fully on their internal difficulties.

As to whether the antagonism toward the West is justified or, if justified, whether the reactions with which it was manifested were justified is a complex question which requires much more than the—in many cases—shallow and biased explorations of the past and certainly requires more exposition than is possible in this paper.

If we are to maintain a proper perspective, however, we must keep in mind that, even apart from the important consideration of religious conflict, it is easy to see that a proud people, although recognizing the need for social and economic progress in their country, would see all the difference in the world in whether that progress was brought about by tutorial

rule of a foreign power or by an independent local government. Syrians could reasonably be expected to resent the implication that they were incapable of reforming their government, especially when it is considered that the countries who proposed to bring about that reform for them were suffering from widespread political corruption less than a century ago and have not by any means completely eradicated that cancer from their governmental systems even today. The imperfections which exist in the study of political science even in the West is also quite well known, and that knowledge makes it unlikely that the people of the Middle East will be eager to blindly accept one of the schools of thought of the West. Admitting that colonial rule has usually brought material improvement to living conditions in the administered lands, still colonial governments are not well known for having favored the growth and protection of industry in countries under their rule when that industry might compete with their own for markets; and it is quite obvious that a rapidly increasing population cannot be indefinitely supported on agrarian produce alone. Finally, the Syrians had the example of French colonialization of Arab North Africa when they resisted the imposition of the French mandate. It is not surprising, then, that the leaders of the Middle Eastern countries demanded the right to

seek their own way to salvation when they awoke to find themselves bypassed and left far behind the West in modern industrial progress.

Despite the deficit position from which improvement had to start, the people of Syria are blessed with a high level of intelligence, and a number of intelligent, far-sighted men both among the nationalists and other elements have always existed. Some of those leaders had an unselfish desire to better conditions of their country and people; but they have not generally been the ones to dominate the struggle for independent progress. The unstable predominate elements have created an atmosphere in Syrian politics which encourages the dwelling on past wrongs, real or imagined, to the detriment of the solution of current problems; and by their indoctrination of new generations have helped to distort the viewpoint of many rising leaders, thus perpetuating instability.

CHAPTER II

FERTILE CRESCENT UNITY

Unity of the Fertile Crescent, that is geographical or Greater Syria (Syria, Jordan, Palestine and Lebanon) and Iraq, has been one of the central themes of Middle Eastern politics since the First World War. As will be shown in later chapters, efforts to prevent or bring about that unity provided the catalysis for the last two coups d'etat in Syria during 1949. It is still the main basis for rivalry between the Arab countries, and promises to remain so for some time to come.

Positions taken by governments toward issues of foreign policy are deeply rooted in history, as well as the embellishments of historical fact which inevitably creep into written history and build the attitudes of future governmental representatives during their formulative years. No matter what sort of government is in power at any given time or who the governmental representatives are, it seems that there are some basic policies which are dictated by precedent and cannot be suddenly reversed or drastically changed. In order to understand and interpret past and current actions of representatives of Middle Eastern and foreign governments regarding Fertile Crescent unity, then, we must consider the familiar background of historical events along with more recent developments.

The importance of the Middle East to foreign powers was due primarily to its position astride the land bridge joining the Eurasian and African continents and its occupation of the shortest routes connecting the oceans which border the two great population centers of Southeast Asia and Northwest Europe. The exploitation of the area's oil resources and the attempt of the Soviet Union to gather it into its empire has involved the Middle East in the cold war and increased its importance to the West.

The trade which inevitably developed between the two population centers mentioned above followed two main arteries across the Middle East. They have been important for centuries, enriching the middlemen of the area and leading to a strong rivalry among the European powers for control of them. One runs the length of the Persian Gulf to the ports of Iraq at its northern end, and then crosses Syria to ports on the Mediterranean Sea. The other is through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

As commercial stations were established to facilitate the movement of trade, the citizens of the European countries went abroad to manage them. Their diplomats and armed forces soon followed to protect them from their European competitors and the local rulers who sometimes resented their presence or tried

to rob them of their goods. In the absence of an effective system of peaceful enforcement of international law, arguments between nations were adjudicated by force, the stronger contestant dictating the decision. This led in turn to the control of the government of many of the areas by the Europeans by direct or indirect means in order to gain a monopoly of the trade for the nationals of the power concerned or to provide the security necessary for stimulation of trade.

In the scramble for empire and control of lines of communication, Great Britain emerged supreme, but was still rivaled by France, Germany and Russia for control of the Middle East. The rivalry most pertinent to this study is that between France and Britain; but it must be remembered while considering their rivalry that those two countries have been historic allies, and have with few exceptions tried to resolve their differences peaceably. Furthermore, they have usually stood together to prevent the extension of the influence of a third party into the area. Still, examples of their rivalry in the Middle East abound: Commercial and political capitulations in the Ottoman Empire which were granted to France by Sultan Sulayman in 1535 were soon extended to Britain at her insistence and then to the other powers. Napoleon believed that England, impregnable to invasion across the English Channel, could

be defeated by the seizure of the Middle Eastern lines of communication with her Far Eastern empire, and later the empire itself, by French armies. He led an expedition to Egypt and then to Syria with that purpose in mind at the close of the eighteenth century. Later, the efforts of Muhammad Ali to seize the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire were blocked by Britain who preferred that the route to India be occupied by the Ottomans under the joint protection of the European powers rather than by an Arab empire under the rule of the Albanian adventurer and friend of France who had seized power in Egypt. Likewise, after the First World War, France was reluctant to allow the Hashimites to control a United Fertile Crescent because of their friendship with Britain.

The great powers, although sincerely motivated by humanitarian instincts also, used the need for the protection of the Christians and other minorities as an excuse for intervention in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire and the furthering of their national interests. France acquired squatter's rights in that respect with the Crusades, which were mainly conducted by Frenchmen. She became the recognized protector of Christians of the Latin rite in the Ottoman Empire for historical reasons and because of her position as the major Catholic power. Her protection was extended to

include all Christians in the Asian provinces of the Ottoman Empire in 1639; and ten years later, King Louis XIV "adopted" the Maronite community of the Lebanon. Russia later became the self-appointed protector of the Orthodox Christians. Britain, being a protestant country, found herself for a time with no religious minority to protect, the number of protestants in the Middle East being insignificant. She subsequently decided to become the champion of the Arab Muslims, particularly the Druzes, in addition to the small protestant and Jewish minorities. Not to be outdone, Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany attempted to assume the position of friend and protector of Muslims all over the world just before the First World War. The great majority of Muslims, of course, lived in the French or British empires.

The Suez Canal has been the most important single part of the Middle East because of its being the key to rapid ocean communications between Europe and the Far East. Since the need to safeguard the Canal prompted the occupation of Egypt by Britain and her long involvement there and in the Sudan, thoughts of the Canal have been in the minds of British planners throughout the Middle East and have affected her policy elsewhere. Acquisition of Cyprus and efforts to gain control of potential naval bases along the Mediterranean

coast were calculated to protect the canal. Britain was sensitive to efforts by her rivals to establish ~~themselves~~^{he} in Palestine from where a land based assault could be launched on the Canal, and because of the contemplated plan for digging a competitive canal across southern Palestine between the Red Sea at Aqaba and the Mediterranean Sea at Gaza.³⁸ Dealings with the rulers of the other Middle Eastern countries have also been affected by the paramount requirement of safeguarding the Canal; and British treaties with the rulers of the principalities of the western Arabian Peninsula aimed at protecting the ocean traffic which passed through Suez.

In Mesopotamia (Iraq) British entrepreneurs started numerous economic enterprises and Britain strengthened her control of that terminus of the trans-Middle East trade routes by agreements with the rulers of the Persian Gulf sheikhdoms ensuring the freedom of passage of goods. In the early years of the twentieth century, the Anglo-Persian Oil Company had begun to exploit the oil resources of southern Persia and had built a refinery at Abadan. With the solidifying of British influence in Persia, Russian attempts to

38. Frishwasser-Ra'anan, H. F. The Frontiers of a Nation. London, The Batchworth Press. 1955. p. 38.

expand southward to the Persian Gulf had been effectively blocked for the time being.

By the beginning of World War I, Germany was building the Berlin to Baghdad Railway and had extended her influence southward to northern Syria and central Iraq. Britain, Germany and France had plans for the building of railways to connect the Suez-Mediterranean area with the Persian Gulf. In addition, Britain was planning the construction of pipelines to carry oil from the fields which were already being developed in southern Persia, and those to be developed later in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, to the Mediterranean ports.³⁹

French interests focused on Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. In addition to the historic connection, already mentioned, of France with the area, many other interests had accumulated during the centuries of activity of her nationals there. Those "rights" were summed up by the French Foreign Minister, M. Pichon, at the peace conference after World War I:⁴⁰

France, he pointed out, had a great number of

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39. Frischwasser-Ra'anan, op. cit., pp. 27, 30, 33-34, 38-42, 44-57.
40. Hurewitz, J. C. Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, Vol. II. Princeton, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. 1956. p. 52.

hospitals in Syria. There were a great number of schools in many villages, and some 50,000 children were educated in French primary schools. There were also a number of secondary schools and one great university in Beyrouth. Moreover, the railway system of Syria was French, and included the Beyrouth to Damascus line, and the Tripoli-Homs line, which latter it was proposed to prolong to the Euphrates and to unite with the Baghdad system. Altogether it was contemplated to have a system of 1,233 kilometres, of which 683 kilometres had already been constructed. Beyrouth was entirely a French port. The gas and electricity works were French, and the same applied to the lighting along the coast. This was not the limit of French enterprise, for France had perfected the agriculture and the viticulture of Syria and had established many factories. No other country had anything like so complete a development in these regions. Hence, France could not abandon her rights.

In Palestine, British and French aspirations overlapped even before the war. France demanded the extending of her influence at least as far south as Jaffa and Jerusalem; while British plans required control of the area from the Egyptian frontier at least as far north as the Haifa-Hauran railway.⁴¹

On the eve of the First World War, the interests of the European powers were well defined and widely known in diplomatic circles. If Germany should win the war, she would be in a position to expel the other countries from the entire area and reign supreme relative to the other European powers. If the Allies should win, Britain, Russia and France would be left among the major European powers to divide the Arab

41. Frischwasser-Ra'anan, op. cit.,
p. 57

provinces of the Turkish Empire. After Turkey's entry into the War on the side of the Central Powers, the Allies entered into negotiations in order to regulate their claims. Russia withdrew her claims to an area of influence in the Arab provinces when the other two powers agreed to concede to her a free hand in other parts of the Ottoman Empire in exchange. Even those claims were to be forfeited by the Bolsheviks who seized power in 1917 and temporarily renounced the expansionist ambitions of Imperial Russia.

In addition to Britain and France, there were several potential Arab heirs to the rule of the Arab provinces; and the Zionists had long coveted a part of the Middle East for their national home. As early as 1902, the Zionist Organization had proposed to the British authorities the creation of a Jewish buffer state between the Suez Canal and the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. In that case, the Jewish state was to be not in Palestine, but on the Sinai Peninsula which was under the control of the British administration in Egypt. That plan was vetoed by Lord Cromer who was then High Commissioner in Egypt⁴² and the attention of the Zionists turned to Palestine where they

42. Frischwasser-Ra'anan, op. cit., pp. 36-38.

envisioned a Jewish state occupying the territory both east and west of the Jordan River.

Among the Arabs, the Hashemites—Sharif Hussein ibn Ali ibn Muhammad, descendent of the Prophet and custodian of the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, with his sons, Ali, Abdullah, Faisal and Zaid—were the most promising heirs to the rule of the northern provinces. In the correspondence which was exchanged between Sharif Hussein and Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt at the time, Hussein demanded the independence of the Arab provinces south of the Taurus Mountains including the area around the Bay of Alexandretta, but excluding the British Crown Colony of Aden and the Sinai Peninsula.⁴³ The Arab territorial demands were drawn on the basis of the "Damascus Protocol" which was drafted by the leaders of the Arab secret societies, al-Ahd and al-Fatat, in consultation with Faisal. In reply, Britain demanded the exception of the areas of primary British and French interests from the area of complete Arab independence.

The correspondence ended with neither side conceding fully the demands of the other, but the Arabs

43. The English texts are found in Antonius, George. The Arab Awakening. Beirut, Khayat's. 1938. Appendix A, pp. 413-427.

were to later attack British intentions in the Middle East on the basis of the last British offer. The Hussein-McMahon correspondence has been aptly described as "a monument to ambiguity."⁴⁴ It was not clear whether Palestine was included in the "excepted" area on the eastern Mediterranean coast which the British correspondence described as "the districts of Mersin and Alexandretta, and portions of Syria lying to the west of the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo." The Arabs were to claim thereafter that Palestine was not excluded, while Britain was to claim that it was. It is not within the scope of this paper to explore that correspondence in detail, but it must be mentioned in passing that previous consideration in published material has been shallow and incomplete.

Concurrently with the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, Britain was negotiating with her allies over the division of the Ottoman Empire and, through the Viceroy of India, was concluding a treaty with Abdul Aziz ibn Sa'ud in the Arabian Peninsula. The latter was the leader of the militant, puritanical Wahhabi Islamic religious movement and was succeeding in extending his control over much of the peninsula, thereby

44. Bullard, Sir Reader. Britain and the Middle East. London, Hutchinson's. 1951. p. 69.

making it necessary for Britain to come to terms with him in order to safeguard the lines of communication. Abdul Aziz had clashed with Hussein as early as 1912 when they both were trying to subdue the Ataiba tribe located about three hundred miles to the northeast of Mecca. During that struggle, the Hashemites were able to capture the favorite brother of ibn Sa'ud and hold him as ransom to force the Wahhabi chief to comply with Hussein's demands.⁴⁵ That incident and their conflicting ambitions initiated the bitter feud between the two houses which has caused much of the frustration to plans of political unity of the Arab countries.

The contract which has become known as the Sykes-Picot Agreement was the result of diplomatic exchanges between France, Great Britain and Russia which were initiated in October, 1915, after France was informed of the progress of the negotiations between Hussein and McMahon, and entered into formal negotiations with Britain on the delimiting of the spheres of influence of each country in the Middle East in order to protect her interests there.⁴⁶ The significance of the negotiations which Britain was carrying on with Hussein could not have been lost on the French officials,

45. Lord Birdwood. Nuri as-Said. London, Cassel. 1959. p.28.

46. See Frishwasser-Ra'anani, op. cit., pp. 65-73.

and they were suspicious of British propoganda activities in the Hijaz, Iraq and Syria, believing that Britain would use an Anglo-Arab alliance to jockey France out of the area altogether. In that analysis of British intentions, they were not alone. "As early as 1890 the German diplomat Muenster had forecast that Britain would try to see to it that the Khalifate passed from the [Ottoman] Sultan into the hands of an Arab, chosen by the Sharifs of Mecca and residing in an Arabian town which would be kept under British control and isolated from rival influences.⁴⁷

According to the final agreement which was signed in the spring of 1916 and amended after the cessation of hostilities, geographical Syria and Iraq were to be divided into zones of direct authority for each power, an international control for Palestine was planned and "an independent Arab State or a Confederation of Arab States" encompassing the arid land between the Mediterranean coastal strip and the British area of full authority in central and southern Iraq. France was to receive full authority in Cilicia and the coastal strip as far south as Tyre. In addition, she was to "have a right of priority in enterprises and local loans," and would "alone supply foreign

47. Op. cit., p. 44.

advisers on the request of the Arab State or the Confederation of States" in "Zone A" on the map which accompanied the agreement. Britain was to have the same privileges in "Zone B" which included Transjordan, the Negev Desert south of a line from Gaza to the northern end of the Dead Sea, and a strip of desert along the southwest side of the area of direct British control. The province of Mosul was included in the British zone by an amendment to the agreement. Those divisions provided the basis for the mandates which were to emerge from the peace conference, except that Palestine was put under British mandate.

At the conclusion of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence, the Arabs declared their revolt against Ottoman rule, and Hussein declared himself "King of the Arabs." That title naturally was not acceptable to ibn Sa'ud or some of the other Arab leaders who were not prepared to acknowledge Hussein as their suzerain; and he was recognized by the embarrassed British and French as King of the Hijaz only. Arab troops under the command of Emir Faisal fought with British troops to drive the Turkish armies from the Arab provinces; and on 1 October 1918 Arab troops under the command of Brigadier Nuri as-Said, later to become the Prime Minister and power behind the throne of Iraq, entered Damascus as the vanguard of the Anglo-Arab force. Two

days later, the Emir Faisal, "attended by 1,200 retainers, was making his entry on horseback at full gallop into the former capital of the Arab Empire."⁴⁸

Only a small French detachment accompanied the Anglo-Arab force which occupied the Arab provinces, and the initial governmental apparatus was established by the British commander. Whether it was deliberately so planned or not, the system of Occupied Enemy Territory Administrations (O.E.T.A.s) which were set up was bound to influence the peace settlement to the benefit of the British interests.⁴⁹ The Sykes-Picot Agreement was not very closely adhered to. The area of full French control was reduced to the very minimum. The Mosul area, which was then still part of the zone of French influence under the terms of the agreement, was placed under direct British administration. Faisal, under the overall control of Allenby as British Commander-in-Chief, was placed in charge of the O.E.T.A. which covered the remainder of Zones A and B, with the addition of the Bekaa Valley of Lebanon which was supposed to be part of the area of direct French control. The international area of Palestine, with the addition of the southern edge of the zone earmarked for direct

48. Antonius, op. cit., p. 238.

49. Frischwasser-Ra'anan, op. cit., p. 95-96.

French administration, was placed under direct British control. French administration was instituted in what was left of the Sykes-Picot area of direct French control, but British troops occupied it pending the arrival of French troops from Europe. Thus, the entire Middle East was, at least temporarily, in the firm control of Britain or the anti-French and pro-British leaders of the Arab revolution. The passage of time could only strengthen that control.

Seemingly with a great deal of justification, then, the French Government regarded the installation of the Arab government in Damascus as a British move designed to deprive France of all control over the interests which she had built up during centuries of effort.⁵⁰

To complicate the game for France, President Wilson proposed the principle of self-determination for the deciding upon post war boundaries and governments by the people concerned, and it was to become the guiding principle—at least ostensibly—for the peace settlement. The noble theory of self-determination as visualized by its architect was an entirely alien principle to the people of Syria or any other part of the Ottoman Empire, and its pragmatic

50. Bullard, op. cit., p. 90.

application was even more impossible there than in more politically sophisticated cultures. The hold of the Ulema and notables over the people was complete and in close conformance to tradition. Furthermore, it would require the utmost naivete to suppose that the British officers who had served with the Arab forces had not, either intentionally or unintentionally, influenced their Arab comrades to adopt their anti-French attitudes. For example, one of the more famous of the British officers, T. E. Lawrence, was described as "a consistent disparager of the French and at times capable of naively imperialistic views."⁵¹ Since armchair and amateur diplomats are probably easier to find than armchair strategists, it is reasonable to suppose that Lawrence was not the only one among the British officers to act so. It was clear, then, that the monopoly of anti-French propaganda in the area would insure that only France's traditional friends who depended on her for protection of their rights would choose a French mandate.

When President Wilson proposed that a mixed commission be sent to the provinces of the Ottoman Empire to determine the wishes of the people concerned, Clemenceau could only stall for time and threaten Britain

51. Longrigg, op. cit., p. 72f.

with the trouble which such an inquiry was likely to stir up in Egypt, hoping that the whole idea could be tactfully discarded. He succeeded in gaining British support, and the efforts of the two governments were reinforced by those of the Zionists who feared that a decision would be taken to restrict Jewish immigration to Palestine. After the withdrawal of the British, French and Italian governments from the program, the Americans persisted in sending their own representatives—the King-Grane Commission. The result of the inquiry, of course, was easily predictable. The Muslims were bitterly opposed to a French mandate and did not desire a mandate at all if it could be avoided. If the League of Nations found it necessary to install a mandatory power in geographical Syria, the Muslims and some Christians insisted that it must be American or British. The Maronites and Greek Catholics were in favor of a French mandate. The Greek Orthodox community was divided. The commission recommended that Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan be united into a geographical Syrian state under Faisal as constitutional monarch, and with an American or British mandate for a limited time. Mount Lebanon should retain an autonomous status. They warned that a French mandate over more than the small portion of Lebanon which they occupied at the

time could only be imposed at the price of hostilities between the Arabs and France.⁵²

It is interesting to note that the members of the commission were not unanimous in their views toward Syrian nationalism. Captain William Yale felt that "by clever, well organized and thorough propaganda the Moslems of Palestine and Syria have been united on a program which superficially has every sign of being Syrian nationalism, but which is basically Islamic." The masses, he thought, did not understand the concept of western nationalism and only "supported the program because they were ordered to." "The effendi class in the cities supported it because they believed it would maintain their position as land owners and over-lords and their position of superiority to the Christians. The program pleased the Moslem clergy and fanatic because they saw Moslem supremacy and independence in it." The few younger men with nationalist sentiments were the exception. "Some older Moslems felt that they were being driven on towards a catastrophe." Christians in Palestine, in the opinion of Captain Yale, joined the Muslim crusade because of their fear of the Zionist aims, and as a show of solidarity with the Muslims.

52. Longrigg, op. cit., pp. 90-92.

Doctor Montgomery, another member of the commission, largely shared the views of Captain Yale.⁵³

In the meantime, Faisal had gone to the Peace Conference claiming to speak for the Arabs. He found his presence resented and opposed by the French, who considered him "practically a soldier of England,"⁵⁴ but managed to secure two seats at the conference for his delegation as officially representing the Hijaz after help was given by the British Foreign Office.⁵⁵ In January 1919, Faisal submitted a memorandum⁵⁶ to the Supreme Council in which he presented his argument for the disposition of the Arab provinces. The Hashimite family, he said, was the greatest Arab family. They believed in the ultimate attainment of Arab unity. The economic and social difference between the various provinces, however, made it impossible to put them all under one frame of government for the time being. Geographical Syria, he said, was sufficiently advanced to manage her own internal affairs with the aid of foreign technical advice—for which the Arabs would pay in cash. Iraq and the Jazira were described as

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53. Howard, Harry N. An American Experiment in Peace-Making: The King-Crane Commission. Unpublished Manuscript. Chapter V, pp. 8-10.
54. Hurewitz, op. cit., p. 58.
55. Antonius, op. cit., pp. 278-286.
56. Hurewitz, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

"two huge provinces, made up of three civilized towns, divided by large wastes thinly peopled by semi-nomadic tribes" whose development would require the aid of a foreign power. The government of those lands must be Arab, however, "in principle and spirit." As for the Hijaz, Faisal said that, due to its being mainly a tribal area, the government would continue to be patriarchal in nature, and must be independent since the Arabs understood that sort of government better than the Europeans.

In closing his memorandum, he stated: "In our opinion, if our independence be conceded and our local competence established, the natural influences of race, language, and interest will soon draw us together into one people; but for this the Great Powers will have to ensure us open internal frontiers, common railways and telegraphs, and uniform systems of education. To achieve this they must lay aside the thought of individual profits, and of their old jealousies. In a word, we ask you not to force your whole civilization upon us, but to help us to pick out what serves us from your experience. In return we can offer you little but gratitude."

In an appearance before the Supreme Council on 6 February, Faisal amplified the contents of the memorandum and pleaded for acceptance of the Arab requests

for independence in accordance with the principle of self-determination.⁵⁷ He returned to Syria soon after.

To welcome the King-Crane Commission in Damascus, a General Syrian Congress, composed of hastily elected delegates from all parts of geographical Syria, was convened for the purpose of presenting their position by means of an ostensibly democratic procedure. The resolution of the Congress was unanimously adopted on 2 July 1919 and presented to the American delegation. It included the following:⁵⁸

1. A demand for complete independence for geographical Syria.
2. A declaration that the government of the independent state was to be a constitutional monarchy with Emir Faisal as king.
3. A protest against the requirement for a mandate for Syria as stated in Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations.
4. If a mandate was found necessary despite the wishes of the people, a request was made that the mandatory power be the United States, provided that the mandatory period not exceed twenty years.

57. Antonius, op. cit., pp. 286-287.

58. Hurewitz, op. cit., pp. 62-64.

5. If American¹ refused the mandate, the second choice was Britain.

6. Emphatic refusal to acknowledge any right claimed by the French Government in Syria or to accept any French interference whatever.

7. Opposition to the "pretensions of the Zionists to create a Jewish commonwealth in the southern part of Syria, known as Palestine, and . . . Zionist migration" to any part of Syria.

8. A demand that Lebanon and Palestine not be separated from geographical Syria.

9. A demand for the complete independence of Mesopotamia and the absence of economical barriers between the two countries.

10. A protest against the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration.

Faisal returned to Europe in September 1919 to find that the ambitions of the British and French Governments precluded the formation of the independent Arab state which the Arab leaders wanted. He settled for an agreement with Clemenceau whereby the French mandate was accepted in Lebanon while the French Government recognized an independent Arab state in the interior. The Arab state was to seek all necessary aid from France, and French was to be the first foreign language taught in its schools. Faisal's followers

refused to accept those terms, and the Syrian Congress resolved on 7 March 1920 that the united geographical Syrian state was free, and proclaimed Faisal king.⁵⁹

France and Britain refused to accept the resolution, and the mandate for Syria and Lebanon was given to France by decision of the San Remo Council in April 1920. In July, the French forces used the pretext of the numerous raids which had been conducted from Syria against settlements and French installations in Lebanon for its occupation. A band of Syrian irregular forces which attempted to block the advance of the French Army was easily defeated at Maisaloun pass. Faisal was forced to leave the country by the French authorities,⁶⁰ and subsequently ascended the throne of Iraq. Abdullah led an expedition northward to drive the French from Syria and regain the throne for his brother; but he was persuaded to stop in Transjordan by Winston Churchill who was then British Colonial Secretary. He became Amir of Transjordan and was supported by a British subsidy.

Between the two world wars, the division of the Fertile Crescent countries: Iraq, Transjordan, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine was frozen by the system of British and French mandates which had been established

59. Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 49.

60. ibid.

in those countries. The governments of the Hashimite rulers, however, did not abandon their dreams of re-establishing the kingdom which Faisal had ruled briefly at the end of the First World War, and adding to it the coastlands of the Levant. It is logical to assume that this dream was shared by Great Britain who would like to see a friendly Arab power under her protective wing occupying all of her lines of communications to India as well as the oil resources and pipelines of the Middle East. Britain was prevented from openly aiding the Hashimites in the accomplishment of this end, however, because of her relations with Egypt, France, and the Zionists. With the growth of the Nazi menace in Europe, the doubtful reliability of France, and increasing Russian imperialistic designs on the Middle East, Britain was forced to take purposeful steps. Her first open move toward encouraging united Arab action was taken early in 1939 when she called a conference of the representatives of the Arab states to be held in London to discuss the Palestine problem. In response to the Arab proposals, Britain issued the well-known White Paper shortly after that conference which severely restricted Jewish immigration into Palestine. Due to the anti-Jewish policy of the Nazis, the Zionists had no choice but to support the democracies and could do

little but protest that decision.⁶¹

Britain was given more freedom of action to push her plans for Arab unity after the early defeat of France, the signing of a separate peace by the Vichy Government, and the occupation of Syria and Lebanon by British and Free French forces after the Vichy French in Syria had adventitiously aided the pro-Axis revolt in Iraq in 1941. A significant statement was made by British Foreign Secretary Eden just before the invasion of Syria and Lebanon. He said:

The Arab World has made great strides since the settlement reached at the end of the last war, and many Arab thinkers desire for the Arab peoples a greater degree of unity than they now enjoy. In reaching out toward this unity, they hope for support. No such appeal from our friends should go unanswered. It seems to be both natural and right that the cultural and economic ties, too, should be strengthened. His Majesty's Government for their part will give their full support to any scheme that commands general approval.⁶²

From the Arab side, proposals for Fertile Crescent unity were presented by the governments of Transjordan and Iraq, and offered different approaches to the same end. Initiative was taken by Amir Abdullah in July 1940 when he sent two notes to the British Government, soliciting support for the unification of

61. Lenczowski, George. The Middle East in World Affairs, 2nd ed. Ithaca, Cornell University Press. 1956. p. 502.

62. op. cit., p. 503.

Greater Syria under his rule. He actually prepared two separate plans. The first called for the establishment of a unified geographical (Greater) Syrian state comprising Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan under a constitutional monarch. After that state was established, steps would be taken to form a federal union with Iraq. The two states comprising the federal union would coordinate their policies of defense, education, economics and politics. Other Arab states would be invited to join. The second plan provided for the formation of a federal state including the countries of Greater Syria, and their inclusion afterwards in an Arab federation with all countries who wished to join.⁶³

Abdullah proposed the establishment of special administrations in Palestine and Lebanon for the safeguarding of the rights of the Jewish and Christian minorities. In his second note, he proposed that, in case Lebanon declined to join the Arab federation, then those mostly Muslim territories which had been added to the traditional Lebanon against the will of the inhabitants in order to make up the republic created by the

63. Faris, Nabih A. and Husayn, Mohammed T. The Crescent in Crisis. Lawrence, University of Kansas Press. 1955. p. 78.

French should be allowed to revert to Syria by free plebiscite.⁶⁴

Abdullah claimed the right to rule the state which would be established in Greater Syria because of the following considerations:⁶⁵

1. His established legal rights in the principality of Transjordan, which is an important part of Greater Syria.

2. His past and present effective aid to the Allied cause, which in the present (Second World) war included action in the Syrian theatre.

3. His being the foremost heir of his father, King Husayn, in guarding Arab rights in general and Syrian rights in particular.

4. The British government's promise to him, in 1921, through its (present) Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, to head the Syrian state, and the disappearance, through the fall of France and the loss of its legal representation of the League of Nations, of the obstacles which have hitherto stood in the way of the fulfillment of that promise, particularly that Britain has now gained freedom of action throughout all Syrian territories.

5. Syrian preference and desire for a constitutional monarchy, in the event the country is either unified or federated.

64. Abdullah, King. Memoirs of King Abdullah of Transjordan. ed. by Philip P. Graves. London, Jonathan Cape. 1950. p. 265.

65. Faris and Husayn, op. cit., p. 79. For texts of these and other documents on the Greater Syria unification endeavors, see: Government of Transjordan. Al-Kitab al-Urdani al-'Abyadh: al-Watha'iq al-Qawmiyah fi al-Wahdah as-Suriyah at-Tabi'iyah (The Jordan White Book: National Documents in the Unification of Natural Syria.) Amman, National Press. 1947.

Coinciding with the occupation of Syria and Lebanon, the Transjordan Legislative Council which was filled with nominees of Abdullah passed a resolution in July 1941 calling for the unification of Greater Syria. Some of the solidly monarchist tribal chiefs sent telegrams to the British and Free French authorities declaring that the national aim of Transjordan was the achieving of Arab unity.⁶⁶

In the same month, Oliver Lyttelton, the British Minister of State for the Near East, was invited to visit Amman to discuss the unification with Abdullah. The visit took place in September.

The official British reply to the appeals for support was that the question of Greater Syrian unity was purely an Arab matter, but they indicated that they considered Abdullah's activities to be premature under the circumstances resulting from the war effort in the Middle East and the agitation of the pro-Axis advocates of pan-Arab unity. Abdullah was given assurances, however, that his personal efforts would not

66. Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA), "Cross-Currents Within The Arab League; The Greater Syria Plan." World Today, January 1948. pp. 18-19.

be obstructed.⁶⁷

Abdullah then centered his attention on leading Syrian politicians in an effort to obtain their cooperation. He wrote a personal letter to Faris al-Kh^curi, a respected notable Greek Orthodox Syrian nationalist leader who was later to become Prime Minister of Syria from 1944 to 1945. Abdullah pointed out that his primary aim was the unity of Greater Syria, and that the choice of government, be it monarchical or republican, would be left entirely to the Syrian people. Faris Bey contacted a number of politicians and, on the basis of his discussions with them, replied favorably to Abdullah's letter; but pointed out that constitutional government would have to be restored prior to taking practical steps to achieve unity. The Syrian politicians, he said, were in favor of a monarchical form of government. The republican system was adopted because France forced it upon the country.⁶⁸

Unwilling to sit idly by until the end of the war and the realization of Syrian independence,

67. Khadduri, Majid. "The Scheme of Fertile Crescent Unity: A Study in Inter-Arab Relations." The Near East and the Great Powers, ed. by Richard N. Frye. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. 1951. pp. 141-142.

68. op. cit., p. 142.

Abdullah sent his agents to Syria to stump for his plans.⁶⁹ When the French finally allowed elections to take place in Syria during the spring of 1943, Abdullah addressed a manifesto to the people of Greater Syria, reminding them that the opportunity had been presented by the Atlantic Charter for the realization of the national claims of 1920 under Hashimite leadership. He concluded by calling on the leaders of the countries comprising Greater Syria to meet in Amman to discuss union or federation.⁷⁰

In Iraq, the open moves to bring about the unity of the Fertile Crescent were made by Nuri as-Sa'id. He gave a hint of his thought on the subject in a statement during a luncheon given in Cairo for the members of the Arab delegations who were on their way to the 1939 London Conference: "I hope," he said, "this historic meeting will prove to be the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of an International League of Arab and Oriental countries represented here."⁷¹ In 1943, Nuri Pasha submitted a plan of union of the Fertile Crescent to Richard G. Casey, the British Minister of State Resident in the Middle East. It called for the following:⁷²

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69. Lenczowski, op. cit., pp. 507-508.
70. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p. 19.
71. Lord Birdwood, op. cit., p. 167.
72. Hurewitz, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 236-237. See Appendix A to this paper.

1. Reunification of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Transjordan into one state, the form of government to be chosen by the people.

2. The creation of an Arab League to which Iraq and Greater Syria would adhere at once and which could be joined later by the other Arab states at will.

3. A permanent council for the Arab League whose members would be nominated by the member states and which would be presided over by one of the rulers of the member states "chosen in a manner acceptable to the states concerned."

4. The Arab League Council would be responsible for common matters of defense, foreign affairs, currency, communications, customs and the protection of minority rights.

5. "The Jews in Palestine shall be given semi-autonomy. They shall have the right to their own rural and urban district administration including schools, health institutes, and police subject to general supervision by the Syrian State."

6. Free access to Jerusalem for the members of all religions. A special commission composed of the representatives of the three religions would be formed to supervise this.

7. The Maronites of Lebanon, if they so demanded, would be granted local autonomy under international

guarantee.

The natural supporters of the Iraqi and Transjordanian plans in Syria were the traditional elements, the Ulema and smaller landowners.⁷³ Some of the men who had been army comrades of Nuri as-Sa'id and Abdullah during the Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire were powerful in Syrian politics, and could be expected to support the plan. Members of some of the leading Syrian families, such as former Prime Minister Husni al-Barazi, made more or less ~~surreptitious~~^{surreptitious} visits to Amman; and observers in Damascus estimated that monarchists probably exceeded republicans in number.⁷⁴ In the critical years following the Second World War, however, the younger nationalists were more and more becoming the dynamic political force. They had no use for Abdullah, whom they considered to be a creature of the British. Some of those men were among the students of the University of Damascus who demonstrated in 1939 for the proclamation of Ghazi of Iraq as King of Syria when the French Government abandoned the treaty of 1936. Ghazi, rather than Abdullah, was their choice because he was of their generation and supposedly shared their uncompromising nationalism.⁷⁵

73. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p.18.

74. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p.23.

75. op. cit., p. 18.

To further complicate matters, the traditional leaders of the National Bloc changed their minds about accepting Abdullah's rule once they had gained control of the independent Syrian state. A subordination of Syria to Hashimite rule would have meant the diminution of their positions of power and prestige. Therefore, the ruling oligarchy enthusiastically paid lip service to the republican principle of government, and indicated their desire to absorb the prevailing Muslim districts of Lebanon, if not all of Greater Syria. This, they thought, was their just reward for the torture, imprisonment and exile which they had suffered at the hands of the Turks and French.⁷⁶

The Lebanese Christians, needless to say, were ever ready to side with any opponent of the unity plans because they considered them threats to their national existence. In addition, the Lebanese Muslims who had gained positions of power and prestige in the independent Lebanese Republic had a vested interest in the perpetuation of that independence.⁷⁷

Anton Sa-Adeh's Syrian Social Nationalist Party (PPS) and the People's Party in Syria supported plans of Fertile Crescent unity, but they did not specifically back Abdullah as the ruler of the prospective state.⁷⁸

76. op. cit., pp. 17-18.

77. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p.18.

78. Lenczowski, op. cit., pp. 292-293.

It was (and is) widely believed in the Middle East that the British Government was behind the Hashimite schemes,⁷⁹ and they were anathematized by their opponents on that account. It was whispered in Syria that the hated French were backing Abdullah. This must have pleased France since it could not help but be of benefit to her. Abdullah's activities annoyed their archenemies, the Syrian nationalists, and if the rumor of French help discredited Abdullah, that was equally good since he was considered by the French as a British stooge being used to drive French influence from the Levant.⁸⁰

The decisive opposition to the unity schemes came from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The Saudi Arabian opposition stemmed from the feud between the houses of Hashim and Sa'ud. That struggle had been intensified by Hussein's declaration of himself as "King of the Arabs" in 1916 and as Caliph in March 1924. The Saudis expelled the Hashimites from the Hijaz in 1925 and gained control of the peninsula.⁸¹ Some of Abdullah's territory was coveted by ibn Sa'ud. The Hashimites in Iraq and Jordan were not likely to forget that the family of the prophet had been expelled from the holy cities and humiliated before the world.⁸² A growth in

79. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p.24.

80. Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 146.

81. Faris and Husayn, op. cit., pp. 65-69

82. op. cit., pp. 72-73.

their power constituted a deadly threat to the Saudis, and it became a cardinal principle of the latter's foreign policy to prevent Hasimite expansion or accumulation of strength.

As for Egypt, she opposed the Hashimite plans because they would have meant the emergence of an Arab state which could challenge the leadership of the Arab world which she was in a position to claim in view of her greater wealth, cultural progress⁸³ and central location. The assets to be so gained in political power and resources were obvious to the Egyptian leaders. With the announcement of Nuri Pasha's plan, the battle was joined.

On 25 February 1943, Eden reiterated Britain's support for Arab unity, but added that "the initiative in any scheme would have to come from the Arabs themselves" and that, as far as he knew, "no such scheme which commands general approval has yet been worked out."⁸⁴ The initiative was soon taken by Mustafa Pasha an-Nahhas, then Prime Minister of Egypt. On 30 May 1943, he addressed the Egyptian parliament as follows:⁸⁵

83. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 417.

84. op. cit., p. 504.

85. Ireland, Philip W. "The Pact of the League of Arab States," American Journal of International Law, Vol. 38, October 1945. p. 798.

Since Mr. Eden made his statement I have been carefully studying the question and have found that the best means to attain a satisfactory result would be for the Arab governments to deal with the question themselves. I have therefore come to the conclusion that the Egyptian Government should take up the matter officially and should discover the opinion of the various Arab governments and at what they aim. Having done this the Egyptian Government should proceed to reconcile the different contradictory views as far as possible, then hold a friendly meeting in Egypt so that we may work for the Arab Union with a united spirit.

If Nahhas Pasha had not taken that step or a similar one, he would have been forced to accede to the increase of rival Hashimite strength or else to take the unpopular course of openly opposing Arab unity. Either alternative would have been detrimental to Egypt's national aspirations. There is reason to believe, moreover, that the Egyptian Government was encouraged by the British representatives in Cairo.⁸⁶ It was in the British interest, and not contrary to her normal diplomatic pattern to have a representative on each of two opposing sides. Then no matter which side won, Britain would have an official connection with the winner. It would stretch the imagination too far to suppose that Richard Casey in Cairo and his subordinate, Clayton, in Baghdad were innocently supporting

86. Khadduri, Majid. "The Arab League as a Regional Arrangement," American Journal of International Law, October 1946, Vol. 40. p. 763.

conflicting plans with no coordination or supervision being exercised.

During the eighteen months following his declaration of policy, Nahhas contacted the representatives of the other Arab governments to determine their viewpoints. Nuri as-Sa'id went to Egypt to discuss (perhaps it would be more accurate to say "bicker over") the prospects of Arab unity with Nahhas Pasha from 31 July to 5 August 1943.⁸⁷

When the high-level representatives of the seven Arab states met in Alexandria on 25 September 1944 to constitute the preliminary committee to discuss the formation of an Arab League, the Iraqi and Transjordanian delegates presented their plans for the achieving of Greater Syria and Fertile Crescent unity within the framework of the League. It was evident from the outset, however, that those plans would not command acceptance by the other states; nor would full Arab union under the control of a central executive authority be possible. Only Syria was prepared, at least ostensibly, to renounce her sovereignty in favor of a full union.⁸⁸ Jamil Mardam Bey, the Syrian representative, though declaring his approval in

87. Khadduri, "The Arab League as a Regional Arrangement," pp. 762-763.

88. ibid., pp. 763-764.

principle to Syrian unity, showed dissatisfaction with the Transjordanian approach to the matter. When the Saudi Arabian representative inquired about the future form of government in a united Greater Syria, Mardam Bey replied that Syria "was always in favor of a republican system." "Therefore," he said, "Greater Syria could be achieved by the annexation of Transjordan to Syria as it had been a southern Syrian province under the Arab regime of Faisal." In addition it was stated that a solution of the Palestine problem was still pending and Lebanon was opposed to joining. The plan was finally dismissed as premature.⁸⁹

The protocol of the Arab League which was signed on 7 October rejected proposals for a full union, providing instead for an association of sovereign states and stressing Arab unity in terms calculated to evoke popular approval. Lebanese apprehensions were assuaged by a specific declaration guaranteeing her national sovereignty. A provision forbidding member states to conduct policies detrimental to the League was interpreted as ensuring the gradual ouster of France from the Levant since Syria and Lebanon were prevented thereby from concluding special treaties with her. An attempt was made to put an end to the

89. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," p. 143.

Hashimite Fertile Crescent unity schemes by a provision which forbade members of the League to intervene in the domestic affairs of other members. Azzam Pasha, an Egyptian and future secretary of the League, confirmed the viewpoint of his government by declaring soon afterward that the latter provision had effectively shelved the Greater Syria plan.⁹⁰ Neither the Egyptian nor Hashimite blocs in the Arab League renounced their objectives, however, and the Transjordanian propaganda continued.

In 1944, Abdullah publicized his views on Greater Syria unity with the publication of the Hashimi Book in which his fundamental ideas were declared. That publication was favorably received by a number of Syrian politicians, but stirred a storm of protest in Lebanon where the Maronite Patriarch demanded that France, Great Britain, the United States and Russia jointly guarantee Lebanese independence.⁹¹

After a discreet silence caused by the opposition his efforts met, Abdullah again launched active propaganda for his plan when the Arab League was formally set up in 1945.⁹² During the latter part of

90. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 505.

91. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," p. 143.

92. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," p. 144.

1945 and early 1946, though, he was concerned with securing independence from Britain and the strengthening of his relations with Iraq.⁹³ Shortly after the declaration of Transjordanian independence in March 1946, Abdullah was proclaimed King of the Hashimite Kingdom of Transjordan and resumed his endeavors to fulfill his dreams of a Greater Syria. He sought the support of sympathetic Syrian nationalists to influence the group in power to accept his project, and actively solicited the backing of influential newspapers.⁹⁴

Another tempest was stirred by King Abdullah's speech from the throne on 11 November 1946 in which he again declared that his primary interest was in the unity of Greater Syria rather than personal ambition. His parliament approved his policy as being that of the country. Syrian and Lebanese politicians angrily denounced the statement.⁹⁵ On 20 November, the Transjordanian Foreign Minister told the Assembly that the Syrian people would remove the opponents of Greater Syria if they could freely express their wishes.⁹⁶

On 23 November 1946, the deputies of the Syrian Parliament repudiated Transjordan's claims during a

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93. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p.19.
94. Khadduri, op. cit., pp. 144-145.
95. ibid., p. 145. Ziadeh, op. cit., pp. 95-96.
96. RIIA, op. cit., p. 19.

formal discussion of the subject. The main objections raised against the schemes have been summarized as follows:⁹⁷

1. The Anglo-Transjordan Treaty of 22 March 1946 subjected Transjordan to continuing British influence.
2. The Constitution of Transjordan which created a despotic government left little freedom, if any, to the people.
3. The Greater Syria scheme might be used as a means to increase the influence of the Zionists.
4. The aspiration of Syria is to realize the larger scheme of Arab unity rather than the limited unity of geographical Syria.

The Council of the Arab League discussed these developments with the usual lack of agreement. Immediately after the foreign ministers of the Arab states concluded their meeting, the Transjordan Foreign Minister re-asserted his country's position in a note to the Secretary-General of the League:⁹⁸

The Government of Transjordan maintains that the calling for any unity or national union, through the proper political channels, without encroaching upon any rights of others, should not be regarded a matter for disagreement. Since it is admitted that the objective of any Arab country is towards its geographical or national unity, it is, therefore, in the interests of any Arab country, whenever the circumstances for its unity have become favorable, and without encroaching on any public or private rights, to put an end to that dismemberment, as it is inconsistent with the welfare and national aspirations of its people. In the opinion of the Government of Transjordan such an action will not be inconsistent with the independence of the States which are members of the Arab

97. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," p. 147.

98. op. cit., p. 149.

League, or with their existing forms of government, since the achievement of any union or unity would be decided by the people concerned, where ultimate authority resides, in conformity with international obligations and the general Arab national consciousness.

While we appreciate the concern of the Committee of the Arab Foreign Ministers in putting an end to the mischievous propaganda regarding the Greater Syria scheme, as stated in their public statement; the Government of Transjordan, however, wants to reserve its points of view because it is regarded as a national principle, based on our own local interests and national program.

The controversy continued throughout the remainder of 1946 with bitter exchanges occurring between Syrian and Transjordanian politicians.⁹⁹ In the meantime, the efforts to bring about a union of Iraq and Transjordan were thwarted by some of the Iraqi politicians. The only outcome was a "Treaty of Alliance and Brotherhood" which was signed in April 1947 and became effective on 10 June.¹⁰⁰

At the beginning of 1947, King Abdullah paid an official visit to Turkey. He was immediately accused by the opponents of the Greater Syria plan of being prepared to abandon Syrian claims to the province of Hatay (Alexandretta) in order to gain Turkish and British support for his plan.¹⁰¹ Tension was increased with the concluding of treaties between Transjordan and

99. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," pp. 149-50.

100. op. cit., pp. 151-152.

101. RIIZ, "The Greater Syria Plan," p. 20.

Turkey in January and between Iraq and Turkey in April.¹⁰²

On 2 February 1947, the Cairo newspaper, Akhbar al-Yom published a report that Transjordanian troops were deployed along the Syrian border awaiting a pretext to attack. The communist press throughout the world then entered the picture by taking up the cry against King Abdullah. Abdullah felt it necessary to send a reassuring message to the Syrian president in an attempt to calm the nervous excitement in Syria and Lebanon—especially in Beirut. The Iraqi Legation reasserted the official position of its country by stating that the Greater Syria plan had Iraq's support only with the consent of the people concerned. In March, a Beirut weekly claimed that Abdullah had said that the Arab Legion was ready to occupy Syria; and the Egyptian delegate to the Asian Conference being held in India reportedly told a reporter for the Indian Muslim League newspaper Dawn that the British were building large airfields in Transjordan, from which the invasion of the Arab countries could be launched within a few hours. In May, the Government of Transjordan published the White Book which recapitulated the documents of the First World War period and contained letters of sympathy with Abdullah from Arab notables. In June, the

102. Ziadeh, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

Arab Legion carried out maneuvers provocatively near the Syrian frontier.¹⁰³

These developments preceded the elections which were held in Syria at the end of July 1947. The government remained in power, but there were indications of a swing toward the conservative elements which might support King Abdullah. Accordingly, Abdullah issued a proclamation on 14 August which called for the calling of a national conference of "the regional Government of all Syria" for the following purposes:¹⁰⁴

1. To draw up a plan for unity or federation of geographical Syria within the limits of international treaties, national aspirations and regional interests.

2. To consider the issue of unity or federation as concerning the states and people of geographical Syria alone. (Egypt and Saudi Arabia, that is, should keep hands off.)

3. To define the position of Palestine in relation to a united or federated geographical Syria in such a manner as to put a final end to the Zionist danger.

The reaction to the manifesto in Egypt and Saudi Arabia was a storm of protest. In Egypt, it was

103. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan,"
p. 20.

104. op. cit., p. 21.

denounced as a "British-Zionist scheme" and an "imperialist plot," and there were those who suggested the expulsion of Transjordan from the Arab League.¹⁰⁵

On 31 August 1947, the following statement was issued by the Saudi Arabian Government:¹⁰⁶

A statement, attributed to his Majesty, King Abdullah ibn-al-Husayn, and dated Amman, Ramadan 17, 1366, has come to the attention of the Saudi Arabian government. In it he called upon the Syrians, in unmistakable terms, to convene a meeting for changing the Syrian Constitution. He further stated that he intended to see to it that the change was made. He followed that (threat) with a letter which he addressed on Ramadan 28, to the President of the Syrian Republic.

While regretting the fissure thus caused in the ranks of the Arab states, the Saudi Arabian government considers this action of King Abdullah to be contrary to all international laws, as it is also contrary to the Covenant of the United Nations Organization. The Saudi Arabian government also considers that action in clear contradiction of the letter, spirit, purpose, and aims of the Covenant of the League of Arab States, violating its Eighth Article in a most flagrant manner.

The Saudi Arabian government regrets the existence of any disagreement in the ranks of the Arab States, particularly at this very critical period through which many of the Arab countries are going.

(These countries) had hoped that all the resources of the Arab States should have been devoted to the salvation of the Arab fatherland rather than for the shattering of its unity and agreement.

While declaring its regret for the appearance of this new fissure, it declares, in no mistaken terms, that it considers this action (of King Abdullah) a brazen attack upon Syria and upon its republican

105. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p. 21.

106. Faris and Husayn, op. cit., pp. 80-81.

constitution, which was adopted and approved by the nation and recognized by the other governments of the world, thus giving Syria the international position worthy of it.

At the time King Abdullah advocates the destruction of this youthful Arab state, the Saudi Arabian government, while condemning this attack, declares its support to Syrian independence and hopes that the other members of the League of Arab States will abide with (the terms of) the treaties and agreements which they have entered.

In Syria, the re-elected President of the Republic, Shukri al-Quwatli, denounced the Greater Syria plan in September. He accused King Abdullah of attempting to further his personal ambition and said: "If Transjordan really wants unity, let her people join the mother country [Syria] as a free republic." It was afterwards hinted in Syrian political circles that if unity between Syria and one of the neighboring countries was to be effected, it should be made first with Iraq rather than Transjordan.¹⁰⁷ The National Bloc power holders stamped hard and fast on any talk of Greater Syria. Two former deputies of the Syrian Parliament were arrested on a charge of being agents of Transjordan; and the Reuter correspondent in Damascus, George Faris, received a sentence of 18 months' imprisonment in August 1947 for "publishing lying news

107. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," pp. 150-151.

calculated to disturb public order and security." He had dared to report the existence of sentiment in favor of a "monarchy under a descendent of the prophet," and that its supporters were persecuted for subversive activities.¹⁰⁸

With Syria under the tight control of the antagonistic National Bloc, Abdullah shifted his attention to Palestine where the British mandate was about to draw to a close. If he could secure control of Palestine, he would be taking the first step toward unifying Greater Syria, and at the same time would enlarge his stature from that of the king of insignificant Transjordan and become a more acceptable ruler of Greater Syria. The Arab Legion was already partly deployed in Palestine during the last phases of the British mandatory period, and Abdullah could count on the support of Musa Alami, representative of the Palestinian Arabs in the Arab League.¹⁰⁹

Egypt, however, was prepared to block union of Transjordan and Palestine at all costs. The solution which came to mind was the encouraging of the creation of a separate Arab state in Palestine, and this idea received enthusiastic support from Saudi

108. RIIA, "The Greater Syria Plan," p. 23.

109. Lenczowski, *op. cit.*, p. 508.

Arabia, Syria and Lebanon. The obvious person to support for the leadership of the Palestinian state was Haj Amin al-Husseini, Mufti of Jerusalem and a bitter foe of Abdullah's unification plans. The latter had spent the war years in Germany and Italy, and became listed by Tito's Yugoslavia as a war criminal because of the aid which he gave the Nazis in creating the Bosnian Muslim S.S. units. At the end of the war, he was captured by the French and put under house arrest in a villa near Paris. With the aid of the Syrian Consul in Paris, Ma'ruf ad-Dawalibi, he escaped and flew to Egypt in a Dutch plane to be welcomed by King Farouq. He was liberally supplied with arms and money and then reintroduced into Palestine affairs to balance the forces struggling for the spoils of that Arab land.¹¹⁰

Despite the shows of solidarity which the Hashimi and Saudi-Egyptian blocs showed in the face of developments in the Palestine problem, their rivalry continued to adversely affect the position of the Arabs in Palestine. Iraqi officers in charge of the Damascus guerrilla training center were reluctant to issue arms to Palestinian guerrilla leaders whom they believed to be henchmen of Haj Amin. Egypt and the mufti, on the other hand, supplied arms only to guerrilla leaders who

110. op. cit., pp. 508-509.

were known to be anti-Hashimites. "As a result, the Arab population of Palestine was seriously short of weapons, and some of the larger centers such as Jaffa or Tiberias remained practically defenseless in the face of the total Jewish mobilization."¹¹¹

During the actual hostilities, the rivalry had a disastrous affect on the Arab conduct of the military campaign. Abdullah suspected that his opponents wanted to let his Arab Legion take the brunt of the battle in order to exhaust it and allow them to then grab Palestine with their fresh and fully supplied troops. He therefore relied only on his own strength and refused to overextend his lines of communications by an advance to the sea. Egypt, in an effort to grab as much land as possible, divided her forces into two groups which could not give one another mutual support, and they were defeated piecemeal. The force advancing toward Jerusalem was badly beaten by the Israelis, and the force advancing toward Tel-Aviv bogged down in the Gaza Strip.¹¹²

On the eve of the overthrow of the National Party government in Syria, then, the gulf between the Hashimites and their Saudi-Egyptian opponents had never

111. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 509.

112. ibid.

been wider. As will be seen in subsequent chapters, the leitmotiv of the Greater Syria plan was heard in Syria with increasing frequency during the dramatic events of 1949.

CHAPTER III

30 MARCH 1949

The politicians who took over the control of the Syrian Government after its full independence was gained found themselves to be increasingly unpopular. In addition to the widespread corruption which obviously existed in the government, there were other reasons for that unpopularity. They had failed to retrieve the lost province of Alexandretta which had been ceded to Turkey in 1939, to relieve the inflation of prices of basic commodities which World War II had produced, to take a leading part in bringing about the Arab unity which was so dear to the hearts of many Syrians, or to establish a basis for a sound currency. Allegations of the use of public office by the politicians for their own enrichment were widely accepted.¹¹³

As their record of failures and corruption increased, the popularity of the majority National Party steadily declined until they lost control of the Parliament to the People's Party and its supporters

113. A responsible and well informed observer who was on the scene told me, for example, that it was well known that the President used his office to secure a monopoly of the agencies for the sale of imported goods for himself and a few close associates.

among the Independents in the elections of July 1947. This did not change the nature of composition of the parliamentary membership, however. The traditionalists were still elected, since the members of the People's Party also belonged to the solidly established traditional ruling classes. There was no change in the oligarchic nature of the government, and Shukri al-Quwatli retained the office of President of the Republic despite the fact that he now belonged to the second most powerful party.

The absence of an effective parliamentary opposition in the western sense, and the ability of the government to freely manipulate elections in order to maintain itself in power prevented change of the government by constitutional means. The oppressive measures taken against opposition drove criticism underground.

That situation might have continued for a much longer period had it not been for the war in Palestine. From the beginning of the conflict, the people of Syria, as well as those of the other Arab countries, had been fed a steady diet of news of Arab victories, only to find, suddenly, that they had suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Zionists. Old and new opposition to the government then began to freely express their disapproval. Discontent grew until it was manifested by widespread riots in December 1948, forcing

the cabinet of Prime Minister Jamil Mardam Bey to resign. A new cabinet was formed under the leadership of Khalid al-Azm who took immediate steps to replenish the depleted treasury and provide backing for the shaky Syrian pound. He reopened negotiations with the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (Tapline) and Iraqi Petroleum Companies for the construction of oil pipelines across Syria. The previous government had suspended those negotiations because of the support given to Israel by the western governments. He also made the unfortunate decision to cut army expenditures at a time when it was felt that the army should be strengthened in order to cope with the threat from Israel.¹¹⁴ That move aggravated the already rife discontent in the army caused by the bungling of the war by the politicians, reduction of allowances, the insufficiency and irregularity of pay, the corruption involved in army procurement and supply which led to the placing of defective and insufficient arms and equipment in the hands of the frontline troops, the attacks on the ability of the army by deputies on the floor of Parliament, and the arrest of innocent officers in order to use them as scapegoats for the guilty politicians.¹¹⁵

114. Ziadeh, op. cit., pp. 100-101.

115. Al-Fil, Ahmad Isa. Suriyah al-Jadidah fil Inqilabayn al-Awwal wa ath-Thani. Damascus, Matba'at ibn Zaydoun. 1949. p. 31.

In the face of those conditions, the Army Chief of Staff, Colonel Husni az-Zaim, began making plans for a coup d'etat. Zaim had toured the country during the December riots and in his capacity of military governor had saved Syria from disintegration by the skillful use of persuasion backed by the coercive force of the army.¹¹⁶ During that period, he probably talked with many of the politicians and was able to ascertain what support he could get from them in the event that he executed a coup, and, being satisfied that he would receive sufficient support, started making his detailed plans at his headquarters in Qunaytra, a village about sixty miles south of Damascus.¹¹⁷

116. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 293.

117. Al-Fil, op. cit., p. 30. Although somewhat oversimplified, an interesting account of the developments preceding the coup was given by Lieutenant Colonel Bahij Kallas and published in the Damascus newspaper, Alif Ba', on 27 June 1949: "The coup was contemplated on the day when Faisal al-'Asali, the deputy from Zabadani and head of the so-called Socialist Cooperative Party, attacked the army in Parliament. The Commander of the Army gathered around him the senior army officers at his headquarters in Qunaytra and talked to them of the seriousness of the situation— never in the history of the country had a member of Parliament attacked the army in this painful manner. Zaim was furious and the army was excited. The conversation centered

around the coup which, in fact, dominated their minds.

"The faithfulness of Zaim and his devotion to his homeland made him relax the atmosphere and contemplate the submission of a 'note of protest' to the President of the Republic. The note was then drafted and the Colonel, whom I accompanied, took it on the second day to the President. Zaim handed him the note and emphatically expressed to the President the deep impression which the onslaught had made on the officers and men of the army.

"We expected the reaction to this note to be concern on the part of the President. Instead, he said: 'Is this what has happened to the army? Have the officers begun preparing petitions like the Mukhtars . . .?' This was sufficient proof of their indifference and unconcern, although the note actually contained 'a final warning.' Had they studied it, they would have realized the insinuation included in it. Rumors were spread the same day to the effect that once the truce was concluded, those officers who signed the note would 'be dealt with.'

"Realizing the extent of the disgust and discontent among the officers and men of the army, Doctor Izzat Tabba called on the President of the Republic and expressed to him, as a devoted officer in the army, the hurt feelings dominating army personnel and urged that he make every effort to give his attention to the army commander and his courageous officers.

"The President then ordered my presence. I went to the residence late at night and talked to him in the presence of Doctor (Major) Tabba and advised him to give consideration to the army's note of protest. The conversation lasted until 1:00 a.m. . . .

The infantry and armored units which were to occupy the capital were moved under various pretexts to Qatana, a village located about twenty miles southwest of Damascus. It had been chosen for the marshalling area for those troops because of its proximity to the objective and its facilities for handling troops and equipment. Lieutenant Colonel Bahij Kallas became Zaim's second-in-command and primary assistant. Major Adib ash-Shishakli was appointed Commander of Troops and established his headquarters in Qatana.¹¹⁸

"The situation worsened when food arrived very late to the units at the front, and when Major Bustani and his colleagues, Fuad Kurabi and Hasan Ghanim were arrested. Officers refused to take responsible positions, preferring penalties for insubordination to the prison fate of their friends. Army activities were consequently interrupted. The graduates of the Military Academy were neglected for four months, during which time they remained warrant officers instead of being promoted to second lieutenant."

This statement gives the impression that the idea of carrying out a coup d'etat first occurred to Colonel Zaim in 1948 or early 1949. Actually, the present writer was told by a trustworthy source who was acquainted with Colonel Zaim in 1946 that he talked then of carrying out a coup d'etat.

118. Abu Mansour, Fadhlallah. A'asir Dimashq. Beirut, anonymous publisher. 1959. p. 47.

In order to provide against external interference, strong detachments of troops supported by tanks, armored cars, heavy artillery and combat engineers were placed on the Syrian borders. The Commander of the Air Force and Navy, Salah ad-Din Khankan, sent reconnaissance aircraft across the borders to locate any troop movements in the neighboring countries which might menace the coup d'etat.¹¹⁹

At 10:00 a.m., 29 March 1949, Colonel Zaim went to his headquarters in Qunaytra to make last minute preparations for the coup d'etat. Anyone who inquired for him in Damascus was told that he was inspecting the troops on the front lines. By three o'clock in the afternoon, all telephone and wireless communications connecting Damascus with the outside world had been severed, apparently without arousing any suspicions. At 11:30 p.m., Colonel Zaim left Qunaytra for Damascus accompanied by his senior officers, having issued the final orders for the execution of the coup d'etat.¹²⁰

Orders to march were given to the troops in Qatana at 2:30 on the morning of 30 March, and the coup was completed in less than one hour. One detachment

119. Al-Fil, op. cit., pp. 28-30.

120. Al-Fil, op. cit., pp. 32-33,
Alif Ba', Damascus, 27 June 1949.

of troops occupied the home of the President and arrested him. A second detachment occupied the home of the Prime Minister and placed him under arrest. A third took over police headquarters, a fourth occupied the headquarters of the Gendarmerie; and other detachments arrested the Director of Police, Commandant of the Gendarmerie, and some of the members of Parliament.¹²¹

The inhabitants of Damascus awoke to find the streets guarded by troops and armored vehicles. Syria's frontiers were sealed, and scheduled talks with United Nations officials, Brigadier General William E. Riley and Henri Vigier regarding the terms of the truce with Israel were postponed.¹²²

Although the coup seemed to be ignored by the great majority of the people, it was greeted with enthusiasm by most of the politically conscious. Telegrams of support were received by Zaim from politicians, commanders of the army and student organizations. Many undoubtedly approved of it simply because it was a dramatic and successful display of strength, but the enthusiasm appeared for the most part to be genuine.¹²³

121. Al-Fil, op. cit., p. 33.

122. Middle East Journal, Vol. 3, 1949.
p. 327.

123. Carleton, Alford. "The Syrian Coups d'etat of 1949," Middle East Journal, Vol. 4, 1950. p. 4.

A significant indicator of the identity of Zaim's close collaborators among the politicians was the fact that Akram al-Hourani and Khalil Kallas were present at the colonel's temporary headquarters in the Directorate of Police immediately after the coup. Although it is not known exactly what part they played in the coup, their early presence in Zaim's headquarters, and the fact that Akram al-Hourani was the person who prepared the communiques which were issued by the revolutionary group¹²⁴ definitely shows that he had taken a hand in the planning and preparation of the coup. Hourani, who, unlike other politicians had enlisted in the army during the Palestine war and had been wounded in action, was appointed a special counselor without pay for the various problems which might be encountered during the early part of the coup, and established his office in the Ministry of National Defense.¹²⁵

There was no shortage of those with the "inside story" following the coup. Some saw it as a move by ousted Prime Minister Jamil Mardam Bey, who had been friendly with a number of army officers, to regain power. Some Beirut newspapers claimed that there was a link with King Abdullah and the Greater Syria Plan.

124. Al-Fil, op. cit., p. 33, Alif Ba', 27 June 1949.

125. Ash-Sha'h, Damascus, 5 April 1949.

In Jordan, on the other hand, the instigation of France was suspected.¹²⁶ There is no denying that the agents of other countries were active in Syria, but it is doubtful that they contributed more than moral support. The coup would have occurred without them.

The early communiques¹²⁷ stated that the revolutionary groups had taken over the government to save the country from the "corruption and oppression" of the previous regime, that the leaders of the coup d'etat did not seek power, and that the new government would respect all of Syria's international obligations. During a press conference which he held on the day of the coup, Zaim stated:¹²⁸

The movement is purely internal and has no connection with any other state, Arab or otherwise. We are Arab nationals. Any attempt, regardless of its nature, by any foreign authority to attack our independence and sovereignty will be checked.

Zaim indicated on the day of the coup that he was negotiating with Faris al-Khoury, the Speaker of the Parliament, in order to form a civilian cabinet.¹²⁹ On 31 March, Parliament was called into session at the Orient Palace Hotel, since the parliament building had been sealed by the army.¹³⁰ That meeting being

126. Carleton, op. cit., p. 4.

127. See Appendix B, pp. 180-192.

128. Appendix B, pp. 183-184.

129. ibid.

130. Al-Fil, op. cit., p. 49, An-Nasr, Damascus, 1 April 1949.

unsuccessful in forming a new cabinet, Zaim announced the next day that, should his efforts fail, he would proclaim military rule. He dissolved Parliament and formed a provisional government with himself at its head.¹³¹

On 2 April, Zaim announced the formation of a commission to draft a new constitution which would guarantee the aspirations of the people and restore their rights.¹³² Next day, he acted to implement control of the press by assuming personal responsibility for revoking "the license of any newspaper or other periodical considered inimical to the national interest or security, or menacing to Syria's foreign relations." At the same time, he sent a note to the Lebanese Government protesting against the attitude of the newspapers in that country toward his regime.¹³³

Zaim then took definite steps to legitimize his position as head of the Syrian "Republic." On 7 April, he announced the resignations of President Shukri al-Quwatli and Prime Minister Khalid al-Azm.¹³⁴ On 16 April, a provisional cabinet was formed with Zaim

131. Middle East Journal, Vol. 3, 1949, p. 327. See Decree No. 2 and Legislative Decree No. 1, Appendix B. pp. 185, 186-187.

132. Middle East Journal, ibid.

133. ibid.

134. ibid.

as Prime Minister.¹³⁵ On 4 June, it was announced that a referendum for the election of a President of the Republic of Syria would soon take place. It was carried out on 25 June with only one candidate running for the post—Husni az-Zaim. A new cabinet was formed with Muhsin al-Barazi as Prime Minister,¹³⁶ and the framework of a typical neo-presidential regime was established.

135. Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 102.

136. Ziadeh, op. cit., pp. 102-103.

Although a great deal of thought could have been expended in forming an opinion of the questions of the referendum, there was really no reason for the voter to take the trouble to read or understand the questions. The "right" vote in each case was affirmative. It would have required a great deal of courage, indeed, to vote otherwise. An-Nasr reported on 27 June 1949 that the Council of Ministers met on 26 June and announced the following results of the referendum:

Number of eligible voters in Syria:
816,321; number of participating
voters: 730,731; number of voters
who voted for Zaim: 726,116

There were 728,720 affirmative votes announced to the first question which read: "Do you agree to the direct election by the people, and by secret ballot, of the President of the Republic for the first time from among Syrians who enjoy their civil rights and are at least forty years of age when presenting their candidacy; that his election be declared by the Council of Ministers, and that the period of office of the President be fixed by the Constitution?"

Zaim did not wait for his "election" to the presidency to inaugurate his program of reform. He outlined that program in an address broadcast from the Damascus Radio Station on Thursday, 7 April 1949:¹³⁷

1. A new electoral law would be promulgated which would decrease the number of deputies in parliament, raise the standards of the deputies, and give educated Syrian women the right to vote.
 2. The administrative machinery would be purged of superfluous, inefficient and dishonest officials.
-

There were 727,482 affirmative votes announced to the second question which read: "Do you agree to the vesting of the power in the President to prepare the new Constitution on the basis of a legislative decree adopted by the Council of Ministers within a period not exceeding four months subsequent to his election, provided that the new Constitution be ratified by the people in a referendum or by Parliament?"

There were 727,435 affirmative votes announced to the third question which read: "Do you agree that the President of the Republic be empowered, pending the preparation and ratification of the Constitution, to issue legislative decrees, including those of constitutional character, which are adopted by the Council of Ministers?"

There were 727,552 affirmative votes announced to the fourth question which read: "Do you agree that the prerogative granted to the President of the Republic specified in question three will have retroactive effect on all legislative decrees issued since 30 March 1949?"

137. Appendix B, pp. 190-192.

The pay of those remaining would be raised to increase their efficiency and eliminate graft.

3. The standard of living would be raised by fixing prices on basic items, preventing hoarding or usury, taking measures to reduce unemployment, distributing abandoned state lands and by the limitation of large land holdings.

4. "Pernicious" creeds such as Communism would be combatted by force and by raising the standard of living.

5. The Syrian government would continue to be republican, linked with the other Arab states in the Arab League. Every union would be welcomed, but "I want everyone to understand," he said, "that I do not mean to imply by this that I support any one project of the many projects repeatedly mentioned by [political] circles and the press."

6. The army would be strengthened and supplied with modern weapons and equipment.

The intention of the new regime to work at those reforms with vigor was dramatized by the appointment of new provincial governors with both civil and military authority. "Those men were sent to their posts in army planes, welcomed with parades, and escorted about their duties by squads of military police on motorcycles.

In all these changes the public took pride, as evidence of a decisive new start in national life . . ."138

Numerous public works were begun during Zaim's brief reign, and important steps taken to improve economic conditions in the country. On 20 April, a monetary agreement with France was concluded which liquidated or regulated outstanding financial issues between the two countries. Numerous roads, schools, and hospitals were built, the Euphrates River Project which was to supply Aleppo with badly needed water was started, work was begun on construction of a harbor in Latakia, and plans were made for building a railway across the Syrian desert. The most significant step taken to relieve the pressing economic conditions, however, was the ratification of the agreements with Tapline and the Middle East Pipeline Company. In spite of the obvious economic profitability of those agreements, the propaganda against "surrendering to the concession-hunting imperialists" had prevented previous governments from taking that step. In the first rush of changes by Zaim, though, the agreements were regarded with satisfaction by almost all the people save the communist minority.¹³⁹

138. Carleton, op. cit., p. 5.

139. Carleton, op. cit., pp. 6-7,
Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 106.

Perhaps Zaim's most lasting contribution to Syria's future was the beginning which he made in separating church and state. The private Waqf (charitable religious endowments) was abolished by a law of 16 May. On 18 May, a new civil code, based on that of Egypt, was approved. The substitution of the civil code for Muslim religious law made the office of Qadi, or religious judge, mostly ornamental, since many of their functions would be taken over by persons trained in western law. On 22 May, a new commercial law and penal code was promulgated. The promise to give women suffrage was carried out. The Syrian University was reorganized on more western lines.¹⁴⁰

To fill Zaim's cup to overflowing, he came to power in a relatively prosperous year for crops. The resulting drop in the price of bread convinced the common man as nothing else could of the worthiness of the new regime.¹⁴¹ Things were certainly off to a good start.

The downfall of the Quwatli regime which had been hostile to the Greater Syria and Fertile Crescent unity schemes presented a new opportunity to realize those ambitions. Husni az-Zaim recognized the necessity

140. ibid.

141. Carleton, op. cit., p. 5.

of joint military activity with Iraq should hostilities with Israel be resumed;¹⁴² and closer ties with Jordan and Iraq, who jointly bought over 60 percent of Syria's exports, was regarded as desirable in order to expand that trade with its concomitant boost to Syria's economy. Zaim accordingly entered into negotiations with the Hashimite states soon after he assumed power.¹⁴³

The reaction of the other Arab states to the coup d'etat was one of anxiety. Numerous visitors from the Egyptian, Transjordanian, Iraqi and Saudi Arabian Governments called on Zaim during the first few days following the seizure of power, eliciting repeated statements from him that the coup was purely an internal affair.¹⁴⁴ Although Lebanon and Egypt at first expressed their dissatisfaction with the movement, they later expressed a desire that a new government be formed immediately.¹⁴⁵ The presence of a legal government would prevent rapid unity movements, and the path which a new regime might take could be more easily foreseen once its composition was known.

On 1 April, Nuri as-Said sent Jamal Baban, the new minister to Lebanon, to confer with the Syrian leaders to determine their real intentions. First

142. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 294.
143. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 294.
144. Ash-Sha'b, 1, 5 April 1949.
145. Ash-Sha'b, 1 April 1949.

Baban contacted Zaim and offered Iraq's assistance and friendship to the new regime. Although Zaim expressed his appreciation for that friendly gesture, he refused to commit himself as to whether he intended to establish a republican or monarchical form of government. In the afternoon, Baban delivered a letter from Nuri as-Said to Faris al-Khourri and held a conversation with him. Faris Bey refused to take part in action to bring about union with Iraq, but advised that the army officers were "friendly" toward Iraq, and that it would be wise to cooperate with the new regime.¹⁴⁶

Two days later, the Iraqi minister in Damascus was informed by Zaim's political aide, Amir Adil Arslan, that Syria desired unity with Iraq on the basis of full autonomy for each country. The Iraqi Government replied on 5 April that it would accept that plan in principle, pending official consideration of the Syrian proposals on the basis of communications through proper legal channels. In order to give the coming merger an air of complete legality and of being in response to the genuine wishes of the people concerned, Iraq continued to move cautiously. Egypt was warned, however, not to interfere in the negotiations.¹⁴⁷

146. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," pp. 156-157.

147. op. cit., pp. 157-158.

The alarmed Saudi Arabian and Egyptian Governments promised formal recognition of the new government and immediate financial support if Zaim would agree to maintain a republican (i.e., independent from Iraq) regime.¹⁴⁸

Zaim thus found himself courted by both parties to the inter-Arab feud. Despite his desire for closer relations with Iraq and Jordan, his immediate concern was for formal diplomatic recognition, financial aid to bolster the sick Syrian economy, and military assistance to enable him to withstand future Israeli attacks. Union or federation with Iraq would provide the military security, but the immediate financial gain would be limited. Furthermore, a move in that direction would with all certainty incur the wrath of the Saudi-Egyptian bloc, including their withholding of diplomatic recognition. On the other hand, simple abstention from closer relations with the Hashimites would bring the diplomatic, financial and military support of the Saudi-Egyptian bloc; and, if Zaim yielded to the pressure of the latter, Iraq and Jordan could hardly find a plausible reason for not recognizing the new government after the other Arab countries had done so.

148. ibid., Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 102.

Among the western powers, Britain would welcome a unity of the Fertile Crescent, but she could not forsake the friendship of the Saudi-Egyptian bloc to openly support it. Officially, she had to remain neutral. France, with her distrust of British policy, would welcome the frustration of the Hashimite unity ambitions which she considered to be a British plot directed against her interests in the Middle East. She was in a position to offer important financial aid to Zaim who had served under the French mandatory authorities and could be expected to be friendly to France.

Although the American legation in Damascus maintained strict neutrality toward internal Syrian affairs, it was well known that the United States placed a high priority on friendly relations with Saudi Arabia because of the American oil interests there, and would not protest against an alignment of the new government in Syria with that of Saudi Arabia. Zaim's energetic pronouncements of anti-Communist sentiment and his evident ability and resolve to lead a genuine reformist movement in Syria gave him good reason to believe that American support would be forthcoming regardless of the side which he favored in the inter-Arab feud.¹⁴⁹

149. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 295.

Regardless of those considerations, however, Zaim was reluctant to join either of the two blocs. During a press interview on 6 April with correspondents of the New York Times and the Herald Tribune, he stated:¹⁵⁰

I welcome all that may bring the Arab states closer together, strengthen their union and coordinate their relations. I look forward to the conclusion of military and cultural agreements and economic customs unions between the Arab states. While I welcome an Arab federation, I do not seek to implement any one of the existing schemes such as the Fertile Crescent Project.

On the same day, Zaim's aide-de-camp, Captain Kaylani, and secretary, Nazir Fanasah, departed on a mission to Cairo and Saudi Arabia "to give necessary clarification of the coup preparatory to the restoration of brotherly relations between Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria."¹⁵¹ That mission was followed on 12 and 13 April by another which was ordered to discuss in detail the Egyptian and Saudi Arabian offers of aid.¹⁵²

On 14 April, Nuri as-Said demanded that Syria commit herself to a foreign policy consistent with that of Iraq. He made the observation that Syria had no consistent policy aligning her with either East or West. "We," he said, "have a definite foreign policy, and we are in treaty relations with Great Britain" while Syria

150. Ash-Sha'b, 7 April 1949

151. ibid.

152. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," pp. 157-158., Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 102.

has been "going with all and often against all." As for the Zionist threat, he stated that Iraq would immediately come to the aid of Syria in case she were attacked without the need of a formal military agreement.¹⁵³

The delegations which had been sent to Cairo and Riyadh returned with definite assurances of diplomatic and financial support,¹⁵⁴ indicating that Zaim had shown his willingness to draw further away from Iraq. A now apprehensive Nuri as-Said decided to take personal action to bring the two countries closer together before the enemies of the Hashimites could further damage the negotiations. On 16 April, he arrived in Damascus to confer with Husni az-Zaim. He offered Syria immediate military aid for her defenses, but Zaim replied that he now found no need for an immediate military agreement, since Syria had recently received some arms and more were on the way. He stated, however, that he would instruct Amir Adil Arslan to "study the subject of future cooperation with Iraq."¹⁵⁵ To ensure that the cold shoulder remained turned toward Iraq, Azzam Pasha, the Egyptian Secretary-General of the Arab League,

153. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," p. 158.

154. op. cit., pp. 157-158.

155. op. cit., pp. 158-159.

visited Damascus on 18 April; and, three days later, Zaim accepted an invitation from King Farouq to visit him in Egypt.¹⁵⁶

The nature of the conversations which took place between Zaim and the Egyptian authorities is not known, but it can be reasonably assumed that the forthcoming financial and military aid was emphasized, that the Hashimite relations with Britain were placed in the worst possible light, and that Zaim's personal ambitions were flattered. At any rate, the rift with Iraq was rapidly growing wider. Egypt, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia recognized the new regime on 23 April.¹⁵⁷

A statement by King Abdullah again advocating the Greater Syria Plan created a new furor. In retaliation Zaim closed the borders with Jordan on 26 April; and, although the borders were reopened the next day, troops remained in positions on each side of the border.¹⁵⁸ On the same day in which the borders were closed, significant statements were made by some of the principal sources. Zaim said in a press conference:¹⁵⁹

It seems that my visit to Egypt and my interview with King Farouq has been a surprise to some of those who do not like to see the Arabs united. I have discovered that the reaction to this visit was totally unexpected from an Arab brother state which should have

156. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," pp. 158-159.

157. Middle East Journal, Vol. 3, 1949, p. 328.

158. ibid.

159. Alif Ba', 27 April 1949.

put the interests of Arab ideology and nationalism at the forefront.

I assure you that Syria is determined to preserve its liberty, independence and honor, and that it is ready to sacrifice freely when the necessity arises.

We have effected this coup d'etat with noble and lofty aims in mind, not for creating a new throne in Syria. Some have been deluded into believing that we have launched our movement in order to realize ambitions prejudicial to Syria or to bind ourselves with foreign chains. We repeat our determination to safeguard our liberty and independence with all our might.

Faris al-Khourri, the long-standing friend of Fertile Crescent unity, was forced to speak against that unity, but with wisdom and moderation. He stated that the age was not one of thrones, but one of popular socialism. Realization of the Greater Syria and Fertile Crescent unity projects, he said, was impossible; and warned that discussion of them at that time would only weaken the Arab League in the face of future emergencies.¹⁶⁰

An Iraqi Foreign Ministry spokesman reiterated the position which Iraq had officially adopted toward the unity projects, realizing that a frontal attack could only do damage. "There is in existence no project which Iraq intends to impose upon any state," he said. "Iraq wants for itself what it hopes is the aspirations of other Arab states."¹⁶¹

160. Al-Manar, Damascus, 27 April 1949.

161. Alif Ba', 27 April 1949.

Despite the frustration of its unity schemes, the Iraqi Government recognized Zaim's government on 30 April; and Amir Adel Arslan and Sabri al-Asali, two leaders of the National Party, carried Syria's greetings to the young King Faisal on his birthday.¹⁶²

The Syrian press, however, kept up a barrage of criticism of King Abdullah and his Greater Syria Plan. Sometimes those attacks were quite vicious and in poor taste.¹⁶³

Iraq was handicapped by the need to create an atmosphere of complete legality and observance of the

162. Saqqal, F. M. Min Thikriyat Hukumat az-Zaim Husni az-Zaim. Damascus, Dar al-Ma'arif bi Masr. 1952. p. 47.

163. For example, a story appeared in al-Manar on 5 May, attributed to Doctor ibn Sina, which read: "I believe that all readers are well acquainted with the story of the cat and the file . . . It is the story of every madman who either tries to eat himself or drink his own blood, believing that he has found food.

"But the difference between the cat and his Jordanian-Hashimite Majesty . . . is that the first realized in spite of its bestiality that it was trying to lick the file in vain . . . while the second is still licking "Greater Syria" without realizing that he is touching cold iron which might injure his tongue.

"This is my opinion of His Jordanian-Hashimite Majesty. I may be wrong. The truth is that His Majesty

will of the people to accompany a union with Syria in order to build a stable unified state and to gain the

has read the story of the cat and the file in school books. But his desire to eat his own body and drink his own blood incites him to lick and chew more nervously; and his desire increases with the increase in the flow of blood.

"This is a psychological effect common to every person who is surrounded by persons whom he hates. His Majesty is undoubtedly the Imam or King of the haters, and I personally think that that crown is fitting. He hates the English for imprisoning his father, the late King Hussayn, for their negligence in setting up Arab kingdoms following the First World War, and for their preference for his brother, King Faisal I.

"He hates the Iraqi population for siding with his brother, and hates the Saudi King for depriving him of the Hashimite Kingdom of Hijaz and Najd. He hates Yemen for its alliance with the Saudi monarch.

"He hates the Syrians for expressing discontent whenever the Greater Syria Plan is mentioned.

"It is natural that Doctor Abu Ghanimah, who is the King's competitor is not spared from this hatred.

"We summarize the subject in the following two questions: Shall we remind the cat that what he does to himself is what an enemy does not do to his enemy? Or shall we neglect the cat and let him settle his question by himself by allowing him to shed his blood until he is satisfied and content?

"The one simple solution to the question is to shout 'PSSST' at the cat, and it will raise its tail and flee."

acceptance of as much of world opinion as possible for the merger, especially as far as the other Arab countries were concerned. Britain probably encouraged the adoption of that attitude, also, in order not to jeopardize her interests in the countries of the Saudi-Egyptian bloc where the close friendship of Britain and Iraq was sometimes greatly exaggerated.

On 1 June, during an address which he delivered to the Iraqi Senate, Prime Minister Nuri Pasha as-Said denied the existence of any misunderstanding between Egypt and Iraq or between Iraq and the Secretary General of the Arab League. But he added: "In 1920 and 1921, we opposed the partition of the Arab countries . . . considering it to be an imperialistic project. It is therefore surprising that the idea of unification of those countries is today described as an imperialistic scheme. We have always encountered obstacles and we are confident that justice will prevail and unification will be realized. Iraq believes that the unification of the Arab countries is inevitable and will eventually be attained."¹⁶⁴

Relations between the Iraqi and Syrian Governments then became more strained. On 22 June, Zaim stated that he did not approve of Nuri as-Said's

164. An-Nasr, 2 June 1949.

attitude, and made clear his stand in the inter-Arab feud, saying:¹⁶⁵

For how could a dependent state (Iraq) interfere in the affairs of a totally independent state. In doing so, Nuri as-Said made us lose the opportunity we were seeking for strengthening relations and cementing ties of amity with Iraq. However, I want to make it clear that the Greater Syria project has become out of date for two reasons: First, the rapid progress and the industrial and agricultural improvement which Syria will enjoy shortly will open a deep gap between Syria and the Hashimite governments. Secondly, I have decided to join the Saudi-Egyptian camp because those two kingdoms have demonstrated extreme friendship, assistance, and nobility toward new Syria. It is my opinion that this strong unity between Syria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia will be a strong front against the Greater Syria project. I can assert that good understanding between the Arab states and their cooperation and collaboration continue to be the fond dream of all the peoples of these states.

The Iraqi Regent, Abdul Ilah, was not included in the press criticism of Nuri as-Said and the Fertile Crescent Project until 5 July. On that date, three Damascus newspapers, an-Nasr, Alif Ba', and al-Ingilab, opened a campaign against him. Since it was known that Zaim controlled the Syrian press, especially in regard to editorials on foreign policy, that simultaneous attack by three newspapers indicated that he either

165. An-Nasr, 23 June 1949. In the same interview, Zaim stated that Syria was firmly in "the Anglo-Saxon camp" and especially with Britain. He pointed out that Britain and Syria had many interests in common, and expressed the hope that relations between the two countries would flourish.

instigated or sanctioned it. To say the least, that was not likely to endear him to the Iraqi authorities who would consider it an unwarranted personal attack on their regent and a rubbing of salt into the wounds caused by the frustration of the unity plans.

Despite the increasing opposition, Iraqi spokesmen continued to advocate the unity of Syria and Iraq. On 10 July, Doctor Fadil al-Jamali, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, was reported to have said that the frontiers between Syria and Iraq were unnatural and artificial. "Nature," he said, "seems to have taken great pains to unite Syria and Iraq. The two countries form one single unit, are watered by the same rivers, and are bounded by common frontiers. Their people are linked together by interwoven and inseparable interests. Consequently, the artificial frontier lines separating Syria from Iraq have no justification whatsoever. They have been demarcated by the hand of dissension and foreign domination. They should now be erased by the hand of unity and independence. Sooner or later, those frontier lines are bound to disappear."¹⁶⁶ The Syrian press stated that such an occurrence would only serve to add one more colony to the British Empire.

166. An-Nasr, 11 July 1949.

The Egyptian newspapers kept adding fuel to the flames by publishing unfounded claims of King Abdullah's ambitions and the means by which he was prepared to realize them.¹⁶⁷ Syrian spokesmen repeatedly declared that the unity plans were definitely regarded as scrapped.

Zaim's inter-Arab foreign policy alienated the pro-unionist elements who had initially supported him, but gained him the backing of the National Party politicians who were opposed to the unity plans.¹⁶⁸

Soon, however, the enthusiasm with which Zaim's coup had been greeted at first had begun to fade for reasons apart from his handling of the question of unity with Iraq. Criticism was directed at his favoring of the Circassian and Kurdish minorities in the army over the Arab troops, and his apparent admiration for France. His Circassian and Daghestani ancestry, and the use of Circassian and Kurdish units to occupy the major cities during the coup d'etat while the Arab troops were busy at the Palestine front made it easy to draw the inference that he mistrusted the Arab troops and preferred to rely on the Muslim minorities for support. After the coup, Kurds and Circassians were given a greater share of the responsible government positions,

167. See, for example, Alif Ba', 4 and 5 August 1949.

168. Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 296.

thus strengthening the impression that he favored the minority groups.¹⁶⁹

Far greater uneasiness was created by suspicion of Zaim's close relations with the Egyptian and French legations. People also began to remember something that had been overlooked in the heat of the war—Chief of Staff az-Zaim had ordered that French be used in the transmission of army commands.¹⁷⁰ That was a perfectly logical thing to do, since the French Army had trained the Troupes du Levant which formed the cadre of the Syrian Army. The medium of instruction during that training had been the French language, field manuals were printed in French, and the officers were accustomed to communicating plans and orders in French—thinking in French, that is, in the performance of their military duties. In addition, some of the officers had not received extensive instruction in reading and writing of Arabic, having received their formal education in French schools. (The difference between spoken and written Arabic and widespread lack of proficiency in the latter

169. Carleton, op. cit., pp. 7-8. Zaim's biography which was published by Alif Ba' on 27 June 1949 also points out Kurdish ancestry: "His (maternal) grandmother belonged to the well known Kurdish family 'al-Buzo.'"

170. ibid.

disqualified it as an effective means of communicating military orders requiring precise understanding.) Nevertheless, "it was not long until there was a carefully suppressed but constant rumor of closer and closer linking of his fortunes to those of France—the one foreign power to which one could not show partiality without wakening the nationalist fervor of a quarter century of struggle against the mandatory power."¹⁷¹

Zaim also displayed some amazing flaws in his understanding of administration and leadership. He began to mistrust the abilities of his close subordinates and to take more and more of the work load on his own shoulders. As a consequence, those subordinates began to lose their loyalty to him, and impossible demands were placed on his own energy and ability. His projects began to remain unrealized and his promises unfulfilled.¹⁷²

The development—or flaw—which finally drove his closest supporters away from him was Zaim's egoistic behavior which developed with insane rapidity after he had been in power for a short time. "His obvious intention of being president at any price, the assumption of the title of Marshal—together with a \$5,000

171. Carleton, op. cit., pp. 7-8.

172. op. cit., pp. 8-9.

baton to dignify his office—the costly honors bestowed upon King Farouq, the expensive parties, the magnificent residence prepared for Marshal Zaim at government expense, and the increasing number of personal luxuries and indulgences were all noted by a watchful public.”¹⁷³

His alleged betrayal of Anton Saadeh, the leader of the PPS, who had a number of followers and admirers among the army officers and public, was an important contributing factor to Zaim's downfall. The Lebanese Government attempted to suppress the PPS after it had clashed with the Phalangist Party on 9 June. Saadeh evaded the police and fled to Syria where he was cordially received by Zaim as a political refugee and honored guest. On 4 July, Saadeh called upon his followers to revolt and overthrow the Lebanese Government. The revolt was suppressed after a few attacks on gendarmerie posts, and the Lebanese Government demanded

173. Carleton, op. cit., p. 9. One of Zaim's close friends before the coup told me that, after the development of his egoistic attitude, men who had been his intimate friends were degraded by his superior manner toward them. He gave them to understand that they must rise to their feet when he approached them and address him as "your excellency" instead of "Husni" which had been used before. A foreign diplomatic representative was hastily recalled

that Saadeh be surrendered for trial. After at first refusing, that was done on 8 July. The PPS founder and leader was summarily tried and executed the following day.¹⁷⁴ Even among those who had no use for Saadeh, Zaim was considered to have violated the traditions of Arab hospitality by betraying his guest who had sought the safety of his house—something not taken lightly by a people who are immensely proud of their record in that respect.¹⁷⁵

The factor which finally decided his downfall, however, was his alienation of the army officers who might have supported him in a counteraction against an attempted coup, as well as those who actually performed the takeover. Several specific reasons in

to Damascus while on a trip several hours driving time from the capital to give his opinion as to whether Zaim did not resemble a famous German field marshal in his new uniform which had been made by France's best-known tailor.

174. Ziadeh, op. cit., pp. 108-109. The government press office issued a statement on 11 July which was printed in all newspapers and stated that Saadeh was not surrendered by the government, but was arrested by the Lebanese authorities while circulating along the border between the two countries, and was apprehended in Lebanese territory. That statement was not widely accepted.

175. Carleton, op. cit., p. 10.

addition to Zaim's handling of the Saadeh affair and his personality defects can be pointed out to account for that disaffection.

In an attempt to secure recommendations for the strengthening of the army, Zaim called for a military mission from Turkey to inspect the Syrian Army. In addition to the fact that this indicated close relations with another of Syria's old enemies, it was due to have other repercussions. One of the mission's recommendations was that the command of key units should be placed in the hands of Sunni Muslims rather than members of the Christian and Muslim minorities who then held most of those positions.¹⁷⁶ That, of course, was a large order. The French mandatory authorities had favored the minorities as a dependable source of recruits for the Troupes du Levant, and the bulk of the better trained officers and noncoms were from those groups. That recommendation is probably one of the things which Zaim had in mind, however, when he promoted some officers before others who were more senior. In that way, he could advance qualified Sunni Muslims over a period of time so that they would eventually have a more equitable representation in the upper ranks. That move also had the advantage of more rapid advancement of those officers who were loyal to Zaim personally, but it was a departure

176. Abu Mansour, op. cit., pp. 49-50

from regulations and previous practice.¹⁷⁷ Considering the aura of suspicion which dominated Syria, it could not help but arouse resentment among those who had been passed over for promotion and those who feared that the same thing would happen to them in the future.

Another source of resentment to the Syrian soldiers and officers was the formation of a special unit into which no one was enlisted except those who swore personal loyalty to Husni az-Zaim.¹⁷⁸ That unit was probably intended to be a combination honor guard and counter-revolutionary force. It was alleged that Zaim intended to include foreigners—German, Yugoslav, and Algerian refugees—in it.¹⁷⁹ That was another indication that Zaim did not really esteem or trust the regular units of the Syrian Army.

A number of dangerous enemies were made by Zaim's policy of discharging and transferring personnel in order to tighten his control of the army, and at the same time lighten the financial burden of military expenditures. Officers who were of doubtful reliability were placed in the less sensitive positions or discharged, along with a number of enlisted men. It was reported and widely believed in the army that those who were

177. Abu Mansour, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

178. *op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

179. Al-Avyam, Damascus, 23 August 1949.

discharged were not given previous notice of their impending discharge, were not paid any sort of severance pay, and were not allowed to take their uniforms with them. The hardships which those men endured as a result aroused the sympathy and resentment of their comrades. It was said that "they returned to their villages and homes in the city without clothing, money or jobs. Some were forced to beg in the streets, barefooted, bareheaded, wearing a suit of sacking, and with their medals pinned to that miserable cloth."¹⁸⁰

180. Abu Mansour, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

CHAPTER IV
FULL CIRCLE

As his transgressions accumulated and he alienated more and more people, the tide began to turn against Zaim and the stage was set for his overthrow. There are few among those well acquainted with the events surrounding the second coup d'etat, however, who do not believe that its leaders were selected and financed by Iraqi agents in an effort to ensure that the impending revolt against Zaim would produce a government in Syria which would be more amenable to union or federation with Iraq. That has been alleged¹⁸¹ and hinted,¹⁸² but conclusive documentary evidence will probably not be forthcoming for some time to come.

The main core of conspirators consisted of Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi, Commander of the First Brigade; Lieutenant Colonel Bahij Kallas, Zaim's close collaborator during his coup who had been alienated by Zaim's subsequent treatment of him; Lieutenant Colonel Alam ad-Din Qawas, al-Hinnawi's second-in-command in the First Brigade; Captain Khalid Jada, Hinnawi's aide and bodyguard; Captain Isam Mraywad, an Iraqi who had become a pilot in the Syrian Air Force; Captain Muhammad Ma'ruf;

181. e.g., Abu Mansour, op. cit., p. 83.

182. e.g., Lenczowski, op. cit., p. 511.

Captain Muhammad Diyab; and As'ad Talas,¹⁸³ Hinnawi's brother-in-law and the liaison between the army officers and politicians during the preparation and execution of the coup.¹⁸⁴

The First Brigade which was to furnish the troops to be used in the coup was occupying positions along the Syrian-Israeli truce line. It was the logical force to be used because it was the best equipped and trained unit in the Syrian Army. In addition, it was in position near the capital so that it could be quickly marshalled and put into operation against the government without attracting too much attention. At the same time, its use in the coup would eliminate the only likely unit to be used to suppress such a movement.

Of particular importance was the armored battalion of that brigade. Armored units were the key to the success or failure of any coup d'etat in Syria. Their mobility, firepower, invulnerability to small arms, and the psychological impact of armor on more lightly armed groups, gave them the ability to make or

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183. Abu Mansour, op. cit., p. 82. cf. Communiqués 2 and 3, Appendix C, pp. 194-195. One is tempted to speculate on Captain Mraywad's motives for entering the Syrian Armed Forces in the first place; and the full details of the role which he played in the second coup.
184. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," p. 161.

break any attempt at an overthrow. Use of armor by the revolutionary forces would enable them to perform their missions with lightning^g swiftness before loyalist units could be mobilized to oppose them; and would enable them to cow any incipient opposition into submission or smash those who tried to actively oppose them. Conversely, their use by the loyalist forces could defeat an attempted revolt and restore the authority of the existing regime. If the government wished to safeguard against its downfall, therefore, it was necessary that it have firm control of the First Armored Battalion.

The commander of that battalion was Major Amin Abu Assaf, a Druze. Another Druze, First Lieutenant Fadhlallah Abu Mansour, who was also an active member of the PPS, commanded its armored car company. Angry at the betrayal of Saadeh, and believing that he and Amin Abu Assaf were on the list for dismissal from the army, Abu Mansour decided to assassinate Husni az-Zaim.¹⁸⁵

185. Abu Mansour, op. cit., pp. 53-55. Unless otherwise indicated, the following narrative of the planning and execution of the coup is based on Abu Mansour's memoirs. What he wrote has been interpreted in the light of information gained from interviews with other observers or participants in the coups who were kind enough to discuss events with me only on the condition that they remain anonymous. Events are recorded in some detail with the hope

The occasion which he selected was a tour of the front by the President of the Republic with some guests.¹⁸⁶ Abu Mansour placed his weapon, ammunition, and several days' supply of fuel and provisions into his jeep, and followed Zaim's party from Ayn Ziwan, where they had reviewed the army, to Jisr Banat Yakoub, where al-Hinnawi's command post was located.

When Zaim went forward to inspect the front line positions, Abu Mansour stopped his jeep by the side of the road and waited for Zaim's return to the command post where he could kill him and have a good chance of escaping afterwards. Alam ad-Din Qawwas, al-Hinnawi's second-in-command, spotted the lurking officer, however, and realized what he intended to do. Feigning welcome to a visiting friend, he invited Abu Mansour into his office for coffee. After the two officers were seated in the office, Qawwas excused himself on a pretext,

that many an insight into the actualities of the second and third coups will be given thereby which could not be provided by any amount of detached, generalized statements.

186. Abu Mansour does not give the date of that visit, and mentions that the guests were Tunisian. It is probable, however, that it was on 23 July, and that the visitors were United Nations observers and American military attache personnel. (An-Nasr, 25 July 1949)

stepped out of the office and locked the door from the outside. Abu Mansour's pounding on the door and shouting was in vain, and he was forced to resign himself to his temporary detention. After some fifteen minutes, Qawwas returned and informed him that Zaim had departed for Damascus with his guests.

By his action, Abu Mansour had revealed to the leading conspirators against the Zaim regime that he was prepared to personally end the life of the President of the Republic. That may help explain why he was later chosen for the task of arresting and executing Husni az-Zaim. He had proved that he could be counted on not to lose his nerve at the last moment. At the time, however, he was scolded by Qawwas: "What's the meaning of this, Abu Mansour? Do you want to ruin me? . . . If you had killed him here, the responsibility would have been on my shoulders. Don't forget that personal action harms our movement . . . It is necessary that the atmosphere be prepared [before we act]." ¹⁸⁷

Shortly after the abortive attempt on Zaim's life, the First Armored Battalion was ordered to move to Suwayda, capital city of Jebel ad-Duruz. Amin Abu Assaf and Fadhlallah Abu Mansour construed this to be the first step in their liquidation. They believed

187. Abu Mansour, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

that Major Husni Jarras, the commanding officer of the Jebel ad-Duruz military area and a loyal supporter of Zaim, would take command of the battalion from them once they reached the mountain; and that they would then be issued orders to report to Damascus. They would thus be relieved of their commands and separated from their soldiers who were loyal to them personally and would probably do whatever they ordered. Consequently, they could be dismissed from the service, imprisoned with impunity, and their unit would be in position to suppress any protest from the Druzes regarding the treatment of two important officers of their group.¹⁸⁸

Nevertheless, they started the movement toward the mountain. When the battalion reached Sheikh Miskin, Abu Mansour halted the armored car company which was the leading unit and ordered it to take a rest period. During the break, Abu Assaf and Abu Mansour huddled to discuss their predicament. Now fully involved in the conspiracy to overthrow Zaim, they decided to delay their march until they could determine conditions in the capital and then execute the coup d'etat immediately if they could see reasonable hope for success.

Sami al-Hinnawi and his supporters reasoned that the coup must occur when Zaim was at home. If

188. op. cit., pp. 55-56.

he were free to mobilize his loyal forces, the rebellion could be suppressed. If he were in his residence, he could be quickly located and taken into custody before loyalists could be called. Then the other units of the army would be more likely to accept the fait accompli and not make any trouble. For this reason, Captain Muhammad Diyab, one of the charter members of the opposition group and a member of the G-3 Section of the General Staff, was charged with keeping Hinnawi informed of Zaim's whereabouts. Captain Diyab was to call Hinnawi's headquarters every night. If Zaim was not at home that night, Diyab was to report that his son was recovering his health.

Colonel al-Hinnawi visited the armored battalion at midnight to inform the two Druze officers that Diyab had reported his son to be in wonderful health. The coup would have to wait.

In order to further delay the movement of the armored unit to Jebel ad-Duruz and its subsequent loss to the plotters, Hinnawi issued orders for it to move to Qatana under the pretext that access could be gained there to workshops where repairs to the vehicles which had just been withdrawn from the front could be facilitated. Pursuant to those orders, the move was made the following day, placing the battalion in the same town

which had served as the staging area and headquarters for the coup d'etat against the government of Shukri al-Quwatli.

A week later, at 11 o'clock at night on 13 August, final orders were issued to Hinnawi's officers in Qatana. The following officers were present: Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi; Captain Isam Mraywad; Lieutenant Colonel Alam ud-Din Qawwas; Major Amin Abu Assaf; Captain Muhammad Diyab; Captain Farid Sayyid Darwish; Captain Yakoub Mbayyadh; Captain Muhammad Ma'ruf; Captain Mahmud Rafai; the Brigade Surgeon, an officer with the rank of captain; First Lieutenant Fadhlallah Abu Mansour; First Lieutenant Anton Khouri; First Lieutenant Husayn al-Hakim; First Lieutenant Mustafa Malaki; Second Lieutenant Abdul Ghani Dahman; Second Lieutenant Mustafa Dawalibi; Second Lieutenant Hassan Hideh; Second Lieutenant Nur ud-Din Kanj; Second Lieutenant Ghalib Shakfeh; and Second Lieutenant Bakri az-Zubari.¹⁸⁹

After some discussion and the drinking of several glasses of whisky, those officers decided on the final details of the coup d'etat which had been set for that very night.¹⁹⁰ Specific missions were assigned at one o'clock in the morning. Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi assumed

189. op. cit., pp. 63-64.

190. op. cit., pp. 64-66.

the position of Commanding Officer of the coup and Lieutenant Colonel Alam ad-Din Qawwas his Executive Officer, or Second-in-Command. Major Amin Abu Assaf became Commander of Troops.

The key mission, that of the arrest of the President of the Republic, Husni az-Zaim, was entrusted to his would-be assassin of a short time before, Lieutenant Fadhlallah Abu Mansour. For the accomplishment of his task, he was given the command of a force of six armored cars and sixty truck-mounted infantry.

Captain Isam Mraywad, Lieutenant Husayn al-Hakim and Lieutenant Abdul Ghani Dahman were to take a force of three armored cars and thirty men and arrest the Prime Minister, Muhsin al-Barazi.

Captain Muhammad Diyab and Lieutenant Nur ad-Din Kanj were to occupy the Damascus police headquarters with a force of three armored cars and thirty men.

Captain Mahmud Rafai and Lieutenant Bakri az-Zubari were detailed with a force of three armored cars and thirty men to arrest Major Ibrahim al-Husayni, Commander of the Military Police.

Captain Farid Sayyid Darwishi and Lieutenant Mustafa ad-Dawalibi were to occupy the bank and guard it with a force of three armored cars and thirty men.

Lieutenant Husayn Hideh was given the mission of seizing the gendarmerie barracks with a force of three armored cars and thirty men.

Captain Muhammad Ma'ruf was to take a small force and arrest some of the officers and political personalities who were believed to be stubbornly loyal to Husni az-Zaim.

The remainder of the force, consisting of six armored cars, a battalion of infantry and the staff, was to seize army headquarters and set up operations in it.

Collaborators among the officers of the Damascus garrison were to watch developments in the capital and warn the rebel forces of any premature opposition. Among those officers was Captain Ziyad al-Atasi, son of former Prime Minister Hashim al-Atasi.

Groups of armed civilians were to await the advance of the forces from Qatana and facilitate their occupation of Damascus, participating with them in battle should it become necessary.

In case the coup failed, an alternate plan was made for the force to retreat to Jebel ad-Duruz, set up defensive positions there and continue the struggle. Hinnawi had personally contacted Sultan Hassan al-Atrash and arranged the defense plan with him.

It may seem surprising that the key mission was given to a lieutenant while the other missions were in general carried out by higher ranking officers. It is not so strange, however, when we look a little further into the actual plans which had been made by the ring-leaders. Instead of carrying out their missions at the same time that Abu Mansour performed his, the other task forces were held back until it was seen whether Abu Mansour succeeded. Further, should the coup fail, Hinnawi and his confidants, Qawwas, Jada and Mraywad, had made provisions to flee to Iraq instead of retreating with the rebel forces to Jebel ad-Duruz as planned. An aircraft had been readied at Mezzeh airport for that purpose. (Mraywad was the pilot.) Abu Mansour, then, had been induced to assault the hornets' nest while the others watched from a safe distance.

The column reached the outskirts of Damascus at 0145 hours on the morning of 14 August when it stopped for last minute coordination. Sami al-Hinnawi gave Abu Mansour his final pep talk and informed him that the headquarters would wait there until his mission was completed and the remainder of the operation was thus assured success.

Abu Mansour led his force through the streets of Damascus until he reached Abu Rammaneh Street, in

which Zaim's residence was located. In order to not alert the guards, the march was then slowed and noise was reduced to a minimum. Near the palace, four motorcycles ridden by military policemen who were performing a guard tour around the residence appeared. After arresting and disarming those interlopers, the march continued slowly toward the house through the quiet, clear night. Except for the muffled sounds of movement of the army vehicles, only the fluttering of bats' wings in the obscure darkness and the honking of an automobile horn in the distance disturbed the stillness of the night.

When the palace was reached, the soldiers and armored cars were deployed so as to enable them to fire into the doors, windows and balconies of the building should they be so ordered. An armored car was placed in front of each of the two entrances and the remaining four were positioned around the palace wall. The infantrymen were divided into two groups, each group being posted inside the garden opposite an entrance. During the deployment of the troops, a state security agent, who usually stood at the main entrance with the guard, emerged and was arrested.

In return for a fat bribe, the commander of the guard was intentionally absent from his post that night, thereby facilitating Abu Mansour's task. The thirty

members of the palace guard were all Circassians. A Circassian in the attacking force was ordered to address them in their own language, warning them that the coup d'etat was an accomplished fact, and that resistance was useless. They all surrendered without offering resistance.

Abu Mansour pounded on the door of the palace. No response. He pounded again and again until lights finally appeared in the second floor living quarters of Husni az-Zaim, and the President appeared on his balcony. "What is this?" he screamed. "What is this?" "Who's there?" "What's going on?"

"Surrender immediately," Abu Mansour ordered him, "or I'll destroy this castle on your head!"

Zaim retreated into the palace, hastened by a burst from Abu Mansour's submachine gun.

With the firing of the weapon, the neighboring houses suddenly became alive. Windows could be heard opening and doors being barred. Excited whispering and startled questioning could be heard through the quarter as neighbors asked one another the cause of the commotion.

Abu Mansour then demolished the lock of the door with another burst from his submachine gun and entered the palace. Zaim was descending the stairs. He had had time only to pull on the trousers of his marshal's uniform over his pajamas and put on shoes. From the

floor he had just left, his wife called after him:

"Husni, Husni, where are you going, Husni?"

Before he could answer his wife's question, Abu Mansour approached him and slapped him viciously, causing the sound of the blow to echo through the palace. "Don't hit me, mister," protested Zaim. "It's not proper. Have some respect for my military dignity!"

Abu Mansour answered him rudely, his trembling voice betraying the nervousness which had prompted the blow: "I am the first to respect military dignity. I believe in it, sanctify it and will spill my blood for its sake; but there is no dignity nor honor to one such as you. Didn't you swear an oath of loyalty to the Leader Saadeh, present your pistol to him as a pledge of your loyalty and then betray him, sending him to his death in violation of your oath?"

"I tell you I'm innocent, son. I was accused of that, but I'm innocent."

"Come on, let's go. There's no time for a lot of talk."

Not recognizing his captor because of his newly grown and disheveled beard, Zaim started to address him in Turkish. He was ordered to silence and shoved into one of the armored cars.

Less than fifteen minutes had been required to surround the presidential palace and arrest Zaim.

Lacking radio communications and desiring to notify Hinnawi as soon as possible of the success of his adventure, Abu Mansour decided to leave the bulk of his unit to guard the palace, and take his prisoner to the rendezvous point in one of the armored cars escorted by an armed jeep and a motorcycle.

As the armored car raced toward the place where Hinnawi was supposedly waiting, Zaim was at first silent and preoccupied, desperately searching for an escape from the predicament in which he found himself. Then he raised his head, looked more closely at the face of his captor, recognized him, and allowed relief to show in his face. "Fadhlallah," he said, "I'm in your hands. I have 80,000 Syrian pounds. Take 60,000 of them for yourself, distribute the other 20,000 among your soldiers, and let me go. Let me get out of the country."

"From where did you get all this wealth," asked Abu Mansour. "Didn't you say that you entered the government poor and would leave it poor?¹⁹¹ How did your poverty turn into wealth?"

191. Referring to a remark which Zaim made during an address before a group of officers at the Damascus officers club where a party was given to celebrate Evacuation Day (April 17, marking the evacuation of Syria by the French Army). He said: "I am a son of the people."

"I tell you, son," said Zaim, "that I'm innocent. This is a British plot against me and aims at the undermining of the independence of the country."

"Don't worry about the independence of the country," he was told. "We covet it eagerly and know how to preserve it from any harm."

Turning his attention to the four soldiers who were in the armored car in an attempt to enlist their aid, Zaim said: "I swear that I'm innocent. I love you all. I'm a soldier like you!"

He was answered by Sergeant Faiz Udwan: "If you loved us, why did you order our discharge without cause while we were at the front fighting the enemy of the country? You don't fear God or love anyone."

"I swear, my brothers, that I'm being abused. The one who discharged you was Abdullah Atfeh, Chief of the General Staff. I issued orders that you be given employment with Tapline."

Abu Mansour ordered him to keep quiet, and a heavy silence fell over the armored car. Zaim looked at Abu Mansour's pistol with its muzzle pointed at his

I was born poor, grew up poor, and now I assume the administration while I am poor. I promise to leave it, also, while I am poor . . ." (An-Nasr, 18 April 1949.)

face, then at the submachine guns in the hands of the soldiers, and fear glistened in his eyes.

When they arrived at the rendezvous point with their prisoner, they found the area deserted. The headquarters group had mistaken the firing of Abu Mansour's weapon for resistance on the part of the palace defenders or an ambushing force. That impression was fortified when they saw only a small portion of Abu Mansour's force returning hastily to the rendezvous point after a time which seemed insufficient for the successful completion of the mission. It appeared that the armored car, jeep and motorcycle were all that was able to escape from the ambush which had been set for them. At the urging of Qawwas, the ringleaders had decided to execute their escape plan, and had set out toward Mezzeh airport.

When he did not find the headquarters group to be where he expected, Abu Mansour sent the motorcycle rider to find Hinnawi and ask him what he wanted done with the prisoner. In order to be less conspicuous, the remainder of the group was moved down the road toward Mezzeh a short distance, and pulled off the road near a French cemetery. After thirty minutes of nervous waiting, the messenger returned carrying orders for the group to remain where it was and await further orders.

Over an hour later, Captain Mraywad and two other officers arrived in an armored car, followed by a large car filled with soldiers. The new arrivals brought two additional prisoners with them: Prime Minister Muhsin al-Barazi and his son.

The son stayed in the armored car while Muhsin al-Barazi, dressed in pajamas and shivering from fear and the early morning chill, was led forward. In a trembling voice, he pleaded for his life: "Have mercy on me! I didn't have anything to do with what went on! Have mercy on me! Have mercy on my child! I throw myself on your mercy!"

Captain Mraywad delivered his orders to Abu Mansour: "The High Command sentenced Husni az-Zaim and Muhsin al-Barazi to death. You must execute the sentence immediately. That is the order of the Council of War!"

Abu Mansour seized Husni az-Zaim with his left hand, Muhsin al-Barazi with his right, and led them to the low area occupied by the cemetery. He stood them side by side, facing toward the east, and placed the soldiers who had accompanied him in the armored car in position to act as a firing squad. Then he stepped back out of the line of fire.

A desperate Muhsin al-Barazi suddenly screamed: "I beg of you . . . Have mercy on me . . . my child . . .

I am innocent!" In an attempt to bolster his companion's courage, Husni az-Zaim addressed him in French: "Don't be afraid, they won't kill us. It's impossible!" The roaring chatter of the submachine guns sending their bullets into the two condemned men shattered the stillness of the night and provided a sickening but timely punctuation to that brave speech.

The officers and soldiers who had brought Muhsin al-Barazi to his rendezvous with death had disappeared. As the first light of the new day appeared in the arch of the sky, only the firing squad remained in the company of the two bullet-riddled and blood-soaked corpses. 192

Abu Mansour ordered the corpses loaded into the armored car and took them to the military hospital where

192. op. cit., pp. 67-77. The official version of those events was somewhat different, of course. As published in an-Nasr on 15 August, it stated that Sami al-Hinnawi was in the occupied Ministry of Defense Building when Abu Mansour reported to him with his prisoner. Then, the report stated, Hinnawi and his group proceeded to Mezzeh with the two prisoners, tried them by court martial, sentenced them to death, and executed them on the spot (see communique number 2, p.). That account also mentioned that Zaim lost his nerve when the sentence of death was read to him, and that the two were blindfolded before they were shot. That, of course, could be partially attributed to the debunking campaign which the new conspirators had initiated against Zaim.

they were turned over to a thunderstruck officer of the day. After the bodies were placed in the morgue, Abu Mansour locked the door and pocketed the key.

Husni az-Zaim's brother, Bashir, was in the hospital awaiting an operation. He had been appointed a captain of police, and might prove to be dangerous when he heard the news of his brother's fate. His weapon was taken from him, and he was escorted to the prison in Mezzeh where he was detained. The PPS members who had been imprisoned there following the revolt of the previous June were released later during that morning.

After sealing the presidential palace with the customary red wax, the unit which had arrested Zaim was ordered to make a tour of Damascus to maintain law and order. Abu Mansour reported that:¹⁹³ "The city of Damascus was calm. The inhabitants left for work naturally, as if the coup d'etat meant nothing to them. My tour was a snap."

The news of the coup was announced to the public at 7:00 on the morning of its execution, that is, 14 August 1949. General Atfeh took over the immediate administration of the country, and ordered that all decrees promulgated by the previous regime were to be suspended, and that secretaries-general of the

193. op. cit., p. 79.

ministries would carry on with the business of their offices in the absence of the ministers. The newly appointed Director of Police, Major Ahmad al-Azm, forbade all demonstrations and ordered a curfew beginning at 10:00 p.m.¹⁹⁴

At 10:00 a.m., Hinnawi called a number of politicians to a conference. By name, he called immediately for the following: Faris al-Khourī; Hasan al-Hakim, former prime minister; Sami Kabbara, former deputy from Damascus and owner of the newspaper, an-Nidhal, which had been suppressed by Zaim for printing news unfavorable to his regime; Zaki al-Khatib, former deputy; Shakir al-'Ass, editor of the newspaper, ash-Sha'b; Michel Aflaq and Salah ad-Din Bitar, leaders of the Resurrection (Baath) Party;¹⁹⁵ Munir Ajlani, former Minister of Education and deputy; Amin Ja'afari, Secretary General of the Interior. At 7:00 p.m., a meeting was held at the Ministry of Defense with Sami al-Hinnawi presiding. About fifty persons were present. Among other things, it was agreed that a committee of political leaders would be formed to arrange for the new cabinet.¹⁹⁶ The members of that committee were the following: Rushdi Kikhya (People's Party), Faïdi

194. an-Nasr, 15 August 1949.

195. Also translated "Renaissance."

196. an-Nasr, 15 August 1949.

Atasi (People's Party), Nazim Kudsi (People's Party), Amin al-Atrash (Druze), and two independents: Sami Kabbara, and the omnipresent Akram al-Hourani.¹⁹⁷

Despite the fact that Colonel Hinnawi assured the nation that he was not seeking power and handed the government over to the politicians, the fact could not be ignored that the army now had assumed the position of a watchdog which controlled its master. It could intervene at any time should the policy of the government run counter to the wishes of the officers who controlled the army. For the time being, ambitious and sincere politicians were obliged to accept that reality and conduct themselves accordingly.

On the day following the coup, Hinnawi formally turned over authority to Hashim al-Atasi, and steps were taken to form an interim cabinet which could assume the powers of the President of the Republic pending the election of a Constituent Assembly. On 17 August, the names of the cabinet members were announced: Hashim al-Atasi—Prime Minister, Khalid al-Azm—Minister of Finance, Rushdi Kikhya—Minister of the Interior, Nazim al-Qudsi—Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abdullah Atfeh—Minister of National Defense, Adil al-Azmah—Minister of State without portfolio,

197. Middle East Journal, Vol. 3, 1949, p. 454.

Faidi al-Atasi—Minister of the National Economy,
Fathullah Asiyun—Minister of State without portfolio,
Majid ad-Din al-Jabari—Minister of Public Works, Sami
Kabbara—Minister of Justice and Health, Michel Aflaq—
Minister of Education, and Akram al-Hourani—Minister
of Agriculture.¹⁹⁸

Although there was no explosive reaction from
the people toward the coup, a few expressed regret that
the regime was overthrown in such a violent way, saying
that it "smelled too much like the janissaries," or
contrasting Zaim's fate with the more generous treat-
ment which he had accorded President Shukri al-Quwatli.¹⁹⁹
As was to be expected, the listing of Zaim's shortcomings
in the communiques issued by the group²⁰⁰ and a few days
open discussion about the shortcomings of Husni az-Zaim
reconciled the public to the change of government, and
the actions of the new power holders were given general
acceptance by the public.²⁰¹

The "tyranny" and "treason" of Husni az-Zaim
and Muhsin al-Barazi was given as reasons for their
execution. One observer reported:²⁰²

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198. Middle East Journal, Vol. 3, 1949,
p. 454.
199. Carleton, op. cit., p. 10
200. See communique number 5, Appendix C,
pp. 195-198,
201. Carleton, op. cit., p. 10.
202. ibid.

There was considerable surprise at first, that Prime Minister Muhsin Barazi had been included in the violent end of the Zaim regime. As people felt more and more free to talk about it, however, the facts slowly came to light. Barazi was suspected of having played a double part in the original coup d'etat. He was "the evil genius" of the Zaim regime, having been a close partner in the more personal dealings whereby the Leader was enriched at the expense of the state. In addition, he was considered to be the only one who might, perhaps for the above reasons, try to lead a violent opposition to the decision to end the Zaim regime.

It is more likely, however, that the two were killed in order to avenge the fate of Anton Saadeh, or for personal reasons.

Although individual members of the People's Party may have been involved in the planning and execution of the coup d'etat, the party as an organization was not involved.²⁰³ Since the leaders of the revolt were predisposed to a union with Iraq, however, it was inevitable that the members of that party, which stood in favor of such a union, would be selected to fill important posts in the new government. Most politicians who were in favor of pan-Arab unity could also be trusted to at least acquiesce to the union, since they considered it a logical first step toward bringing about the larger unity which they desired.²⁰⁴

An Iraqi minister plenipotentiary arrived in Damascus on 16 August²⁰⁵ to open the official negotiations

203. op. cit., p. 11.

204. Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 107.

205. An-Nasr, 17 August 1949.

which were conducted in secrecy. The progress of the negotiations have been summed up as follows:²⁰⁶

While private conversations between the Iraqi representatives and the Syrian leaders were all friendly and indicated agreement on the basic issues, no official commitment was made by the Syrian Cabinet. The Provisional Government of Hashim al-Atasi discussed the subject of unity during several cabinet meetings, but no final decision was taken as it was thought that so important a matter should be decided by the Constituent Assembly, representing the wishes of the people, rather than by a provisional government. Furthermore, while the majority of the cabinet wanted unity with Iraq, there were differences of opinion as to what sort of unity should be achieved. Some of the members of the cabinet insisted that Syrian independence and the republican regime should be maintained within the larger frame of the Syro-Iraqi union. Others demanded that both the Syrian Army and Syria's foreign policy should remain independent of the Iraqi Army and Iraqi foreign policy. But all accepted, if unity were ever achieved, that a Supreme Council of the Union should be set up composed of equal representation of Syrians and Iraqis, presided over alternately by a representative of each country. The Iraqi Government offered to accept the maintenance of the independence and the republican regime of Syria, but demanded that the Supreme Council be presided over by a single head jointly elected by the Syrian and Iraqi peoples. Iraq demanded, likewise, the formation of a Union Cabinet composed of a Prime Minister, and Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Defense, Finance, and Economics. Iraq and Syria were to be equally represented in this cabinet, which was to be responsible to the Union Council. Common affairs of the two countries were to be administered by the Union Cabinet and Administration, including diplomatic representation, a customs and monetary union, and the merging of the two armies under a unified command.

The public statements of the leaders of the Arab countries showed a reluctance to admit that the negotiations which were being carried on between the

206. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," p. 161.

representatives of the two countries would cause any ill will between any of them, or to identify those negotiations with the Fertile Crescent or Greater Syria projects, which had been given so much adverse publicity. Doctor Nazim al-Qudsi, of the People's Party, even tried to put the shoe on the other foot when he declared on 17 August that Husni Zaim had dreamed of heading a united Greater Syria and had "had no confidence in Iraq and Jordan." "Contrary to the policy adopted by Husni Zaim," he said, "the new Syrian Government will return to the Arab League," and all Arab countries would be viewed on an equal footing.²⁰⁷

Nuri as-Said gave his official opinion in Alexandria on 24 August:²⁰⁸

I can only express my condemnation and amazement at the rumors that Iraq is supporting the Greater Syria Project or the Fertile Crescent Plan. Iraq is aiming at a coherent unity and full cooperation which can be realized by legal means and not by pressure or incitement. Iraq will never think of prejudicing the political status of any Arab country which wishes to cooperate with an Arab sister country by means of treaties or agreements. I am of the opinion that the conclusion of agreements and treaties is not detrimental to the interests of the Arab states. Several treaties have in the past been concluded between the Arab states for the purpose of safeguarding their interests. There is no doubt that such treaties form the foundation stone of a complete cooperation in the future. I am sparing no effort to strengthen the collaboration between the Arab states.

207. Alif Ba', 18 August 1949.

208. Al-Ingilab, Damascus, 25 August 1949.

A few days later, Doctor Fadil al-Jamali, the Iraqi Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that, in his opinion, there had never been such a thing as a Fertile Crescent Plan, but that there had always existed "a true desire for complete Arab unity to be achieved by the free will of each Arab country."²⁰⁹

Reports from Jidda indicated that King Abdul Aziz ibn Saud had not changed his mind about granting Syria the \$6 million loan which had been in the process of negotiation with the previous regime. That question was stalled along, however, under various pretexts and never actually granted to the new government. Repeated assurances were given that the question had "nothing at all" to do with the foreign policy of the Hinnawi government.

The Egyptian Government remained silent about the negotiations. Evidence arose that all was not well between the Egyptian and Syrian Governments, though, when Egypt refused to accept a Syrian military mission which had been sent there for training purposes in conformity with a previous agreement.²¹⁰ During the October meeting of Arab League delegates in Cairo, Egypt offered her counter proposal. In an attempt to head off the

209. Alif Ba', 30 August 1949.

210. Al-Inqilab, 19 September 1949.

Syro-Iraqi union, and being barred from placing the question of the union on the agenda for discussion in the conference because of the opposition of the Syrian and Iraqi delegates, the Egyptian delegation proposed the establishment of a collective security pact to which all the Arab countries would adhere.²¹¹ Such a pact would, of course, duplicate the original purpose of the Arab League itself, and was therefore the same tactic which was used to prevent the Syro-Iraqi union in 1943. Nevertheless, it was necessary to solemnly discuss the proposal, and might have gained some time for the enemies of the union to take more effective steps.

Meanwhile, the battle lines were becoming more clearly drawn in Syria between the advocates of the union and its enemies. A reporter from al-Ayyam polled various people in Damascus on the question and heard the following opinions voiced:²¹²

1. Commercial and economic circles in the capital support the project because they believe that it will open wide markets for the consumption of Syrian products, and will increase the commercial transactions between the two countries.

2. Certain political circles fear that the consequences of unity should the Anglo-Iraqi treaty of alliance remain unamended. Other circles believe

211. Al-Inqilab, 24 October 1949.

212. Al-Ayyam, 10 October 1949.

that the materialization of such a unity is a primary step in the realization of the dream of "Arab Empire."

3. The failure of the Arab League is the direct cause of the creation of such a project of unity, since the member states of the Arab League have not been able until now to conclude any bilateral commercial agreements.

4. The impending Zionist danger and Zionist activities aiming at sowing dissention between the Arab countries cause desire for such a unity.

5. The European pacts and unity movements to confront international political trends have also stimulated the idea of such a unity.

6. Certain foreign and Arab states which reject such a unity are Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and France.

The National Party, which had been the most bitter opponent of Syro-Iraqi union surprisingly declared its support for that project at the end of September.²¹³ Likewise, the most conservative of the pan-Arab movements, the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan al-Muslimin) declared its conditional support in the following announcement by its secretary general:²¹⁴

We welcome unity of the Arab countries on a wide scale, by which all artificial frontiers and restrictions would be abolished. It is only natural that we welcome union with Iraq as a first step toward the longed for Arab unity. However, we do not want this union to be a means for binding free and independent Syria with new bonds. We want a union with free and independent Iraq which is the master of itself. As to the form of rule, we insist on the maintenance of the republican regime which has been accepted by all parties and blocs.

213. Al-Qabas, Damascus, 30 September 1949.

214. Al-Alam, Damascus, 11 October 1949.

That statement sounded strange, of course, coming from a group whose theocratic concept of government was incompatible with "republicanism."

On 5 October, the Regent of Iraq, Amir Abdul-Ilah, paid a visit to Damascus while enroute from London to Baghdad. He was met at the airport by the members of cabinet, Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi, Faris al-Khourri, and Sabri al-Asali, Secretary General of the National Party; and held private conversations with some of the Syrian leaders. "Informed circles" in Syria and Iraq interpreted the warm welcome accorded him as a "significant step" toward the realization of the unity.²¹⁵

With the elections for the Constituent Assembly approaching the statements in favor of the union became somewhat more blunt. Sami al-Hinnawi, who had assiduously kept in the background since the coup, stated on 9 October that the army would welcome "any unity." On 2 November, Nuri as-Said passed through Damascus on his way to Baghdad from the Arab League conference and stated that "the internal events in Syria, as well as the emergence of a Jewish state . . . have induced the Syrians to think of their safety. Their deliberations led them to think of the nearest quarter which can partially guarantee their safety. That is why they began to talk

215. An-Nasr, 7 October 1949.

about alliance or union with Iraq." He made a point of the fact that the union would have to depend on the wishes of the Syrians themselves. In that connection, he pointed out that "those who signed the decisions of the General Syrian Congress . . . have forgotten what they signed."²¹⁶

The elections for the Constituent Assembly took place in November. Both the advocates of unity and its opponents appealed to the public for a final decision. The advocates of unity, notably the People's Party, did not achieve the spectacular victory they expected, gaining only forty to forty-nine of the 114 seats in the assembly. The elections were "characterized by public indifference. Only a small percentage of the eligible voters went to the polls, including the women, who cast their ballots for the first time in an Arab country."²¹⁷

Akram al-Hourani claimed that the elections in Hama had been rigged by the government. He stated that the gendarmes exerted "terrible pressure" on the voters, that the police failed to protect the voters, and that the electoral law was shamefully violated.²¹⁸

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216. Barada, Damascus, 3 November 1949.
217. Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity,"
p. 162.
218. Al-Ayyam, 21 November 1949.

He enumerated some of the specific ways in which the elections were manipulated;²¹⁹

Even the Muhafiz was seen in the company of a policeman who was writing the ballot papers and distributing them to the electors, urging them to vote for the coalition ticket.

A second measure was adopted. The coalition candidates presented, 15 minutes before the closing of the candidacy period, 13 nominal candidates in order to enjoy the right of appointing representatives at the polling centers, thus placing 18 representatives against four of us.

Presents and money estimated at half a million pounds were also distributed to the supporters of the People's Party/. Even this was not sufficient to influence the electors had it not been for the partiality on the part of the local authorities.

Hourani was not the only one to claim that the elections were crooked. Michel Aflaq voiced substantially the same complaints, and the Damascus newspaper, Ash-Sha'b, accused the police and the "terrorists of the People's Party" of forging the elections. The paper claimed that the police raided homes to bring out the voters by force, and, if they were not at home, to demand their identity cards. It listed the names of three dead persons whose identity cards were used by the police to cast votes. The invalid identity cards, with the stamp of the electoral supervisors on them, could be observed in the possession of the families of the named deceased persons, claimed Ash-Sha'b.²²⁰

219. Alif Ba', 22 November 1949.

220. Ash-Sha'b, 21 November 1949.

The fraudulent nature of the elections undoubtedly lent impetus to the budding plans for the next coup d'etat.

After two ridiculously easy coups d'etat in a short space of time, there was a number of veterans among the key army officers and noncoms who were experienced in the specific techniques of seizing control of the government. It could almost be said that a tacitly understood "standing operating procedure" had been evolved which was known as well as the standard problems used in training, including the key terrain features. As the officers gained confidence and realized that the overwhelming power which they held in their hands made them the masters of the state, it became inevitable that they could be easily unleashed for a third time.

The officers who had participated in Hinnawi's coup began to realize that they had been used as tools by the main core of conspirators—that Hinnawi had planned to flee to Iraq and abandon them to their fate should the coup fail instead of continuing the struggle as he had pretended; and that a great deal of Iraqi money had been divided among the leaders without filtering down to the others.²²¹ Those who sought vengeance

221. Abu Mansour, op. cit., p. 82.

for being duped and those who opposed the union with Iraq because of their personal convictions (sometimes due to the influence of their relations with civilian politicians), formed an "opposition group" of officers headed by Lieutenant Colonel Adib ash-Shishakli, now commander of the First Brigade, Colonel Hinnawi's old command.²²²

It is not clear just why Shishakli became the leader of the opposition group. It may have been simply because of his position as commander of the unit in which the dissident group started to form,²²³ or it may have been that he was influenced by foreign agents. It has been alleged that he was closely in touch with the French, for example.²²⁴ It seems significant, however, that he was the friend of Akram al-Hourani since childhood. Shishakli seems to have been the logical person for al-Hourani to contact in the army when he started contemplating a coup d'etat against the Hinnawi group. Shishakli may have been motivated by any one or a combination of those reasons, or by others which are not evident. There is little to support the theory of French influence, however.

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222. op. cit., pp. 84-85, Khadduri, "Fertile Crescent Unity," pp. 163-164.
223. Abu Mansour, op. cit., p. 83.
224. Ziadeh, op. cit., p. 145

As plans for the coming coup got under way, Abu Mansour, the executioner of Husni az-Zaim, was now a captain, a member of the opposition group, and still commanding the armored car company of the First Armored Battalion, which had been moved to a barracks in Kabun, near Damascus. Because of his former close relationship with Hinnawi and the necessity for his retaining the key command position he held, it was decided by the opposition group that he would pretend neutrality in the controversy and act as a spy for the conspirators.²²⁵

When Hinnawi learned of the group of officers who were opposing him, he called a meeting of his key supporters one week before the third coup in order to plan the liquidation of the plotters. It seemed to him that another occasion had arisen in which the rash young Druze officer could be used. Abu Mansour's story of the part he played in that meeting is as follows:²²⁶

At that time, I held acting command of the armored battalion in the absence of Amin Abu Assaf, who was spending a month's leave in Jebel ad-Duruz. The meeting which al-Hinnawi held in his home was on Friday, a holiday. Because of that, I had put on civilian clothing for the purpose of spending my weekend in the city.

At about 2:30 in the afternoon, the telephone in my quarters inside the barracks rang. When I answered, a voice asked: "Who are you?"

225. Abu Mansour, op. cit., p. 85.

226. op. cit., pp. 85-91.

"Captain Fadhlallah Abu Mansour," I said.

"This is General Sami al-Hinnawi. Fadhlallah, come to my home immediately. I need you badly."

"Yes sir, General," I said, "I'm in civilian clothing, so I'll be somewhat delayed until I can take them off and put on a uniform."

"Never mind," he said. "Come immediately as you are. There's no time to lose."

I left my quarters immediately and went to Hinnawi's home where the commander of the guard stopped me, and then gave a signal to the guard to permit me to enter . . . When I entered the house, I was met by the bodyguard, Khalid Jada, who started to gently scold me: "We love you, Fadhlallah, you are welcome! But why have you broken off our acquaintance and stayed away from us? Did we wrong you to make you neglect us like this? Don't you know that we respect and esteem you, and want to remain by your side?"

"Really, Khalid," I said, "there has been no neglect or breaking off of acquaintance between us. But we are in a period of reorganization and training, and that mission occupies all my time. The battalion..."

"God bless you," he said. "Come in. General Hinnawi awaits you." I entered the room which the bodyguard indicated, and found in it Hinnawi and three of his officers: Mahmud ar-Rafai, Muhammad Ma'ruf and Isam Mraywad. Khalid Jada entered behind me.

Hinnawi welcomed me and then asked me whether I was aware of the activities of the opposition officers . . . I answered in the negative.

"I don't know what turned Adib ash-Shishakli against me," he said. "As a matter of fact, I reinstated him in the army after Husni az-Zaim had discharged him; and I gave him the best command in the army, as well as my sincere confidence and affection. Now suddenly he turns against me without reason and conspires to carry out a coup d'etat. Last night, he and his officers sent a telephone threat to Hamad al-Atrash. You can see the confusion, fear and anxiety which they cause among the politicians and some of the officers with their rumors of anarchy and breach of the peace."

After a short silence, he began to toy with the pencil which he held between his hands and said: "Fadhlallah, tell me by your God: What do you want?"

"General," I said, "I really know nothing of their purpose."

The others then exchanged opinions about how the opposition should be liquidated. They decided to arrest them and try them before military courts. Major Muhammad Ma'ruf, Commander of the Military Police, was given the task of arresting them. In order to facilitate their apprehension, it was planned to call them one by one to report to Hinnawi at his home and then take them into custody when they came . . .

After that conference, Hinnawi took us into the living room and addressed me aside: "Fadhlallah, I depend on you today as I depended on you before. These traitors have become my enemies without justification. You know me well. I swear that I have no ulterior motives, personal interests, nor desire to rule the country. I strive only for that which is in the best interests of the country and for the good of the people . . . Now I want you to alert your armored unit and ready it for action at a moment's notice. I'm ready to reward you with promotion and any sum of money you wish. I will also send you at the head of a mission to France."

As if he sensed that I felt that the promise of a promotion was late in coming, he took to patting my hand lovingly and said: "I swear, Fadhlallah, that I didn't forget you and that your matter never left my mind. But you see the circumstances which face me. The serious problems which occupy my time don't leave me time to look into the cases of deserving officers. It's necessary for us to stand shoulder to shoulder and cooperate now for the sake of our common goal. I repeat that I have big hopes for you and am confident that you won't waver. I assure you that I appreciate your efforts as they deserve to be appreciated."

"I swear to you, General," I said, "that I don't want anything which you have promised me. It is enough for me to have the honor of serving my country in loyalty and sincerity. I am a man of principle, and I promise you that I will do everything in my power in the interests of the country. Of that you can rest assured."

"How much of your unit is ready now," he asked.

"None of it—not even one armored car."

He was momentarily stunned. Then rage glistened in his eyes and he demanded: "Why? Where did your unit go?"

"The G-4 sent a written order for the armored car drivers to be sent to Beirut to receive new armored cars which have arrived from Europe; and Adib ash-Shishakli transferred the company of tanks to his headquarters in Qatana. The battalion is completely inoperative."

Hinnawi completely lost his temper, and screamed at Major Khalid Jada: "What is this? What's going on in the army? Did you hear what Captain Abu Mansour said?"

"I know absolutely nothing about what's going on," Jada answered. "This is decisive evidence that there is a conspiracy afoot, and I'm afraid that they plan to carry out a coup d'etat tonight."

[After a conference with his officers] . . . Hinnawi ordered me to go directly to the transportation company and return my armored car drivers to their barracks, and then to go to Qatana to arrange for the return of the tank company. "It's possible," he said, "that Shishakli will equivocate, trying to keep that company; but be sure not to listen to him, because I hereby give firm orders in that respect. Go ahead and don't lose one minute . . ."

Thanks to Abu Mansour's warning, only Shishakli and Lieutenant Colonel Abdul Aziz Karim responded to the orders to report to Hinnawi's home. Hinnawi pretended to be convinced by the protestations of those two officers that no coup was planned. Seeing that his plan to arrest them had failed, he then decided to transfer some of the opposition officers to less sensitive posts and to discharge others.²²⁷ That, of course,

227. Abu Mansour, op. cit., p. 94.

only encouraged them to hasten the execution of their plans while the key units were still in their control and their strength not dissipated.

Meanwhile, the Constituent Assembly met for the first time on 12 December and elected Rushdi al-Kikhya of the People's Party to the presidency of the Assembly. Speeches during that meeting advocated the drafting of a constitution embodying democratic principles and pan-Arab unity. In the third sitting on 14 December, Hashim al-Atasi was elected Temporary Head of State with special legislative and executive powers pending promulgation of the constitution.²²⁸

The fourth sitting was the crucial one. When debate was opened on the form of the oath which would be taken by the Head of State, the opponents of unity with Iraq criticized the text which had been submitted because it mentioned that the Head of State would work for Arab unity, but did not obligate him to uphold the republican form of government. They reasoned that the change of the text which they advocated would block the proposed merger. Those opponents of unity formed a group called the Republican Bloc, led by Akram al-Hourani and Abdul Baqi Nizam ad-Din. They argued that a reference to Arab unity in the oath was an uncalled-for anticipation of what the Constituent Assembly might

approve or reject. The advocates of unity, the Peoples Party and a number of Independents, formed a majority in the Assembly; and the oath was therefore accepted without reference to the form of government.²²⁹ It was now perfectly clear to Hourani and his allies that union with Iraq could not be prevented by so-called constitutional means.

That night, Hourani visited Lieutenant Colonel Amin Abu Assaf and Captain Fadhlallah Abu Mansour at the barracks of their armored battalion. He lectured them on the graveness of the situation and said:²³⁰

You alone are now responsible for saving the country and putting a stop to this deterioration . . . History will record your achievements and appreciate your efforts. The fate of the country is in your hands. If you hesitate for just a few days before taking decisive action, you will lose the opportunity. An imperialist army will enter Syria behind the curtain of the Iraqi Army. It will encumber our country again with the yoke of slavery and humiliation.

In a dramatic speech, Abu Mansour pledged the service of the armored battalion to maintain the "safety, sovereignty and independence" of the country.

Playing the scene to the hilt, Hourani said: "God bless you," and allowed "complete relief" to show in his eyes and face. He cried and then left, returning to Damascus.

229. op. cit., pp. 162-163.

230. Abu Mansour, op. cit., p. 96.

At last suspicious of the officers of the First Armored Battalion, Hinnawi decided to replace them with an officer of undoubted loyalty. On the following day, he sent the new commander, Major Subhi Ibareh, to the barracks in Kabun, escorted by a squad of military police and Captain Khalid Jada. That action triggered the coup against him. During the night, the mutinous officers arrested Major Ibareh and occupied the key governmental installations in the pattern which they had followed in the previous coup.²³¹ On the morning of 19 December, the people of Damascus, who had become as thoroughly accustomed as the army to the palace revolutions, found a new group in power. They took little heed.

Unlike his predecessor, Hinnawi was allowed to leave the country, only to be killed later in Beirut by a relative of Muhsin al-Barazi in revenge for the latter's execution.

The new coup d'etat was another victory for the Saudi-Egyptian forces over the Hashimites. The Fertile Crescent Unity plan which had been so near to consummation was again frustrated. That is not to say, however, that the issue was dead. Far from it. The People's Party remained a power in Syrian politics; and the Nationalists, who promptly did another about face on

231. op. cit., pp. 97-100.

the issue, were able to prevent closer cooperation with Iraq only by forming an alliance with the Socialists (Akram al-Hourani's Arab Socialist Party and the Resurrection (or Renaissance) Party of Michel Aflaq and Salah ad-Din Bitar. The two combined in 1954, becoming the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party, better known by the Arabic word, Baath). Iraq's attitude toward the leaders of the third coup d'etat might be illustrated by the fact that she withheld recognition of the new government until 1952. The attempt on Shishakli's life on 11 October 1951 might also be attributed to his frustration of the Iraqi plans.

Although a civilian government was established, it was obvious that the army continued to rule from behind the scenes. It was not until 1951, however, that Shishakli assumed direct rule.

CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS

The principal causes of the first coup d'etat were the nature of Syrian politics and the loss of the war in Palestine.

Although truly dedicated national leaders existed among all political groupings at the end of the French mandate, they were not sufficiently numerous or powerful to challenge the control of the government by the traditional ruling classes. Oligarchic rule continued in much the same way as it had under the Ottoman Empire. By manipulation of elections and other corrupt practices, the vested interests retained control of the government. Instead of receiving responsible leadership, the general public was ruthlessly exploited in many cases by the public officials. The control of the government by the ruling oligarchy was facilitated and perpetuated by the traditional-feudalistic structure and political fragmentation of society, and the widespread ignorance which prevailed.

The government gave an outward appearance of stability, but the rigidity of control made it susceptible to violent change. Among the educated and politically articulate younger generation, there were many capable and intelligent men who realized—and sometimes

emotionally overestimated—the adverse effect which the continuation in power of the vested interest groups had on national progress. They recognized the virtual impossibility of changing the transparent facade of parliamentary rule into a genuine democratic government through the means specified in the written constitution. That constitution was flouted in practice, bearing little resemblance to the actual exercise of political power. As all open opposition was suppressed and the frustration and impatience of the younger generation and their allies among the older elements grew, many became increasingly amenable to the appeals of the extremists of both the right and left. They were in the mood to welcome a violent end to the existing government.

Although the exploited masses seemed to be politically apathetic, their response to the electioneering of the Baath Party in the 1954 elections indicated that they had always felt a deep resentment in some cases, and had no feeling of affection or loyalty in others, towards their rulers. With a tradition of authoritarian rule and a lack of sentimental attachment on the part of the people to the government, they had no prejudices against any methods used to change the government which facilitated their exploitation as long as the actions taken did not offend their deep religious beliefs.

In that tense and brittle atmosphere, the army was of prime importance. Since it was the most powerful source of physical coercion in the country, groups which wished to seize or retain power had to have control of the army, at least to the extent that its power would not be used against them. Due to the limited population of the country, and the corresponding smallness of the army, a small number of officers controlled the bulk of its power. They commanded a few key units, especially armored units in strategic locations, which possessed the coercive force necessary to seize control of and rule the country by force in the absence of widespread popular resistance which was not likely to arise as long as the religious beliefs and safety of the public were not threatened. As a result, political groups actively solicited the support of the army officers and men, thereby involving them in politics. Close family connections between some of the officers and politicians and the minority factors helped to interest the officers in political matters.

The emotional upheaval caused by the loss of the Palestine War, due to a large extent to the blunders and misdeeds of the politicians, and their attempt to shift the blame for the disaster onto the army was the immediate cause of the first coup d'etat. The attacks

on the army had alienated most of the key officers and directed their combined wrath toward the government. The opponents of the government were therefore able to muster sufficient cohesive strength among the officers and civilian opposition to ensure success of the movement.

The principal causes of the second coup d'etat were Husni az-Zaim's defective leadership and the success of the first. Important contributing factors were Zaim's adherence to the Saudi-Egyptian bloc in the inter-Arab feud and his alleged betrayal of Anton Saadeh.

Zaim's egoistic personality defects alienated many of his former supporters on personal grounds. His failure to properly inspire and utilize his subordinates in the governmental apparatus ensured the failure of his admirable projects, thereby alienating his subordinates and those who expected him to carry out his promises for improvement of living conditions. The methods which he used to ensure control of the army caused many of his former comrades to fear that the only alternative to his overthrow was their own liquidation or dismissal. The frank adherence of the Syrian Government to the Saudi-Egyptian bloc in the inter-Arab feud alienated those officers and civilians who either favored union with Iraq and Jordan, ~~or~~ desired closer relations with those two countries, or believed that Syria should stay neutral in the inter-Arab feud.

The widely believed allegation that he betrayed Anton Saadeh caused bitter opposition to Zaim among Saadeh's followers as well as many others who resented that flagrant violation of the traditions of Arab hospitality.

Iraqi agents in Syria encouraged and financed the coup d'etat in order to ensure that the government which succeeded Zaim's regime would be predisposed toward the union or closer cooperation with Iraq which many patriotic and dedicated leaders in both Iraq and Syria believed to be necessary to future progress of the two countries. Since Zaim had few friends or supporters left at the time of his downfall, there is reason to believe that a coup d'etat against his regime would have occurred in any event. The Iraqi intervention probably did no more than to hasten the execution of the coup and to select its leaders from the existing opposition.

The ridiculous ease with which the first coup d'etat was carried out, and the establishment then of a successful pattern of action for seizing power, gave many officers increased confidence in their ability to follow suit. Realizing the extent of the power which they controlled undoubtedly made the officers less tolerant toward actions taken by their government which

were contrary to their concept of what should be done. This situation, of course, made it much easier to mount the second coup d'etat than the first.

The principal causes of the third coup d'etat were the fraudulent elections of November 1949, the impending Syro-Iraqi union, and the success of the first two.

The elections to the Constituent Assembly which would decide whether there would be a union of Syria and Iraq were manipulated in the usual way. Due to the resulting composition of the Assembly, it seemed obvious that some sort of union was impending, and those politicians who opposed it saw quite clearly that their only hope of preventing its occurrence was in the seizure of power before the question could be decided upon. Feeling justified due to the fraudulent nature of the elections, some of them turned to the army in order to achieve that end.

For the same reasons enumerated above concerning the second coup d'etat, the confidence of the officers in their ability to seize power had further increased with their second easy success. When the connection of Hinnawi's group with Iraq became known to the officers who participated in the second coup d'etat, some of them felt the need to avenge their supposed

betrayal. It was therefore a relatively simple matter to gather enough support for the third coup d'etat from among those who opposed the Syro-Iraqi union for some reason, and those who sought revenge for having been used as tools during the previous movement.

As a consequence of the three coups d'etat in Syria during 1949, the possibility of establishing democratic government in the country became more remote.

Although successive army commanders avidly declared that the army would thenceforth be divorced from politics, it was obvious that such was not the case. As long as the army possessed the power to overthrow the government at will, the army commanders would be the ones to judge in the final analysis whether an action taken by the government was acceptable or not. If they did not agree with the action of the politicians, there would be a strong temptation to forcibly replace them by others of their choice. The politicians were therefore forced to act with a view to that reality. Until the situation changed, there was no possibility of establishing a truly democratic government in the country.

It is misleading to state that Husni az-Zaim was tried by court martial before his execution. That implies that he was permitted to face his judges and present evidence in his defense. The testimony of his

executioner, Fadhlallah Abū Mansour, as presented in his memoirs indicates that such was not the case. Although the members of the court may have been chosen, the court duly convened and Zaim's fate discussed by the members before they ordered his execution, that does not fulfill the requirements of such a trial. It would be more correct to simply state that Zaim's execution was carried out by order of the revolutionary group.

APPENDIX A¹

GENERAL NURI AS-SAID'S FERTILE CRESCENT ^{UNITY} ^ SCHEME

In my view the only fair solution, and indeed the only hope of securing permanent peace, contentment and progress in these Arab areas is for the United Nations to declare now:

1. That Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Trans-Jordan shall be reunited into one State.

2. That the form of government of this State, whether monarchical or republican, whether unitary or federal, shall be decided by the peoples of this State themselves.

3. That there shall be created an Arab League to which Iraq and Syria will adhere at once and which can be joined by the other Arab States at will.

4. That this Arab League shall have a permanent Council nominated by the member States, and presided over by one of the rulers of the States who shall be chosen in a manner acceptable to the States concerned.

5. The Arab League Council shall be responsible for the following:

- a. Defence.
- b. Foreign Affairs.
- c. Currency.
- d. Communications.
- e. Customs.
- f. Protection of Minority rights.

6. The Jews in Palestine shall be given semi-autonomy. They shall have the right to their own rural and urban district administration including schools, health institutes, and police subject to general supervision by the Syrian State.

7. Jerusalem shall be a city to which members of all religions shall have free access for pilgrimage and worship. A special commission composed of representatives of the three theocratic religions shall be set up to ensure this.

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1. Hurewitz, J. C. Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East, Vol. II. Princeton, D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. 1956. pp. 236-237.

8. That if they demand it, the Maronites in the Lebanon shall be granted a privileged regime such as they possessed during the last years of the Ottoman Empire. This special regime like those to be set up in paragraphs 6 and 7 above shall rest on an International Guarantee.

If it is possible in the manner suggested above to create a Confederation of Arab States including Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Trans-Jordan at the beginning, to which other Arab States may later adhere, then a great many of the difficulties which have faced Great Britain and France in the Near East during the past two decades will disappear. The Arabs of Palestine at present fear that they will become a minority in a Jewish State, and therefore bitterly oppose the grant of special rights to the Jews, but this hostility would be allayed if Palestine became part of a large strong Arab State. The Jews could establish their National Home in those parts of Palestine, where they are now the majority, with a greater feeling of security, because there would be more good will on the part of their Arab neighbors, and as a semi-autonomous community in a much larger State their economic opportunities would increase.

The British Empire is not founded on negations but on positive ideals. Free institutions and free cooperation give it a living force of tremendous strength. Upon this foundation of free cooperation a true union of many diverse peoples and countries has been formed, depending less upon stipulations and statistics and more upon the nobler and more permanent principles which are written on the heart and conscience of man. If an opportunity is given to the Arab peoples to establish such a free cooperation among themselves they will be prepared to deal generously with all the Jews living in their midst whether in Palestine or elsewhere. Conditions and guarantees there must be, but let them not constitute a dead hand lest they become a dead letter, as so many minority provisions in European constitutions became during the past twenty years.

If my proposals meet with favor they will require careful examination, so that the appropriate steps are taken at the right time and in the right order. Obviously, the union of the various parts of historic Syria must come first. It may at first take the form of a federation of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine and Trans-Jordan, each state continuing its own local administration, leaving defence, foreign relations,

currency and customs to the Central Government. On the other hand it may be found possible to unite Syria at once, making provision for the Jewish enclaves and the Jerusalem regime at the same time. Steps should be taken at once to define these enclaves and for this purpose it would be necessary to prepare an accurate ethnographical map of Palestine showing the number of Arabs and Jews in each Nahya and town, also, a map on the same scale showing the land under cultivation and the land which can be cultivated intensely in the future. An inquiry should also be made as to the number of Jews who have settled in Palestine since the outbreak of the war in September, 1939.

To secure Arab union sacrifices of sovereignty and vested interests may have to be made. Similar sacrifices have been made in the British Dominions and can be equally demanded from Arab leaders.

I have throughout assumed that as France before the war declared that she was prepared to grant independence to Syria and the Lebanon she will not be allowed by the United Nations to repudiate her offers, nor to obstruct any federation of Arab States by insisting on old privileges or antiquated rights.

APPENDIX B

DOCUMENTS PERTAINING TO THE COUP D'ETAT OF HUSNI AZ-ZAIM

COMMUNIQUE NO. 1¹

Motivated by our interest in the national welfare of our country, and aggrieved at the present situation of the country which has resulted from the corruption and oppression of the so-called loyal governors of our country, we have decided to temporarily take over the administration of our country's affairs. We shall spare no effort to preserve the independence of our country, and we shall perform all our duties in accordance with its interests. We do not seek power. Our sole aim is to replace the present corrupt regime. We call upon the citizens to resort to calmness and tranquility so as to enable us to carry out our mission of liberation. Any attempt against public security which may be undertaken by opportunistic and destructive elements shall be ruthlessly dealt with at once.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

COMMUNIQUE NO. 2²

The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces calls upon the Syrian people to resort to calmness and tranquility. All those who carry arms are liable to immediate execution.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

COMMUNIQUE NO. 3³

There will be a curfew starting today, the 30th of March, from 6 o'clock a.m. until further notice.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

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1. An-Nasr, Damascus, 31 March 1949.
 2. ibid.
 3. ibid.

COMMUNIQUE NO. 4¹

The General Command of the Syrian Army and Armed Forces warns bakers and food dealers not to raise their prices. Drastic measures shall be taken against violators.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

COMMUNIQUE NO. 5²

The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces calls the attention of the noble people to the necessity for remaining calm and tranquil; and cautions them against any misdirected inclination toward disrupting army movements. The country undergoes a great test today. The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces has resorted to the temporary assumption of power in the country solely with a view to ending the dishonest, despotic government of the ruling class. The mission of the General Command is presently confined to the preparation of the country for a true democratic regime which will rescue it from the disaster it has undergone; and to the preparedness of the nation which will enable it to preserve its freedom and sovereignty. This mission can be accomplished only with the close cooperation of all citizens.

Accordingly, the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces cautions the people against disturbance of public security. Any such attempt will be mercilessly and ruthlessly suppressed. It also cautions the people against believing rumors spread by destructive elements whose only motive is to destroy the independence of the country. It also cautions the public against carrying arms, because the penalty for any infringement of that order is immediate execution. Free circulation of the populace will be permitted from 7 a.m. until 8 p.m. effective Thursday.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

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1. An-Nasr, 31 March 1949.
 2. ibid.

COMMUNIQUE NO. 6¹

On the morning of 30 March 1949, the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces has temporarily assumed the helm of the ship of state. Its sole aim is to organize the country for true democratic rule and to rescue the country from the chaos into which it has sunk, a chaos which is seriously threatening its independence.

The General Command, in venturing on this movement, wishes only to save the country from destruction and to rescue the gallant Syrian Army from the danger of sabotage and ruin which threatened it during the recent past. The Syrian Army, which has sacrificed its youth and shed the loyal blood of its soldiers for the protection of our borders and for the expulsion of the enemy from our country, will never hesitate to undergo further sacrifices. The army, which has successfully recorded wonderful victories in spite of its limited potentialities, cannot tolerate the ill treatment which it has been encountering.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

COMMUNIQUE NO. 7²

All officials of the Syrian Government shall resume their normal duties under the supervision of the secretaries-general of their ministries effective tomorrow, 31 March 1949.

The secretaries-general of the various ministries shall submit a list of absentees to the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces. All absentees will be relieved of their posts effective 1 April 1949.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

COMMUNIQUE NO. 8³

The curfew will be lifted between the hours of 7 o'clock a.m. and 8 o'clock p.m. effective 31 March 1949.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

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1. An-Nasr, 31 March 1949.
 2. ibid.
 3. ibid.

COMMUNIQUE NO. 9¹

His Excellency az-Zaim, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Armed Forces, received local journalists and foreign press correspondents yesterday and made the following statement to them:

"The motive for the movement undertaken by the army is the repeated assaults on and the disgrace brought to the army both inside and outside the Chamber of Deputies; and the ill treatment of the army. We have repeatedly cautioned the responsible authorities about this condition without avail.

"We were aware of the people's dissatisfaction and discontent with the previous regime, and their dislike for the state of confusion which existed in the country. We knew that the reputation of the army had been damaged as a result of the arrest of some officers on charges of theft and embezzlement and their continued detention despite the establishment of their innocence."

H.E. az-Zaim was asked whether Major Fuad Mardam had been released. He said: "Fuad Mardam's case differs from that of the innocent officers. Mardam is still under arrest and his trial will proceed."

H.E. stated: "We have been compelled to take certain measures and arrest certain persons temporarily for reasons related to the welfare of the nation."

Asked who would succeed the previous government, he answered: "We are studying the situation and we are trying to form a parliamentary and constitutional government. Consultations in this respect are continuously taking place with the Speaker of the Parliament, Faris al-Khoury. It is up to the new government to decide on the future of the country. The new government may, if it is deemed necessary, conduct new elections. At any rate, the opinion of the nation will be sought in all measures which we will carry out."

Asked whether the coup d'etat movement was purely internal, he answered: "The movement is purely internal and has no connection with any other state, Arab or otherwise. We are Arab nationals. Any attempt by any

1. An-Nasr, 31 March 1949.

foreign authority, regardless of its source, to attack our independence and sovereignty will be checked.

"The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces has temporarily assumed power. It seeks no dictatorial coup. It will give up its authority in favor of a loyal government which will be formed as soon as possible. After that, conditions in the country will return to normal."

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

DECREE NO. 1¹

To His Excellency, the respected Speaker:

Whereas the Syrian Army, supported by the various classes of the people, has undertaken a national coup d'etat which aims at establishing a true democratic regime in which the people will restore their stolen and looted rights and freedoms; and

Whereas the overwhelming majority of the present Parliament does not represent the real desires and aims of the voters, but was elected under pressure of the ruling class using various means of falsification, violence and compulsion; and

Whereas the falsification of the election of deputies has been established by quantities of absolute proof, while the first basis in establishing a democratic regime is the conduct of free and true elections by which the people express their desire in a completely free atmosphere without pressure and compulsion; and

Whereas the present Parliament, the election of the majority of which was falsified and the remainder was more or less appointed, kept pace with the despotism of the ruling class and approved more than once of the shameful violation of the country's constitution and laws; and

Whereas the majority of the deputies have been used as a tool by the ruling class, obeying its orders; and

1. An-Nasr, 4 April 1949. Broadcast by Damascus Radio on 31 March 1949.

Whereas the Syrian people charged the valiant army to rescue them from the illegal and extraordinary conditions in the country.

The Supreme War Council of the General Command of the Syrian Army has decided to issue the decree hereto attached:

Sgd: The General Commander of
the Army and Armed Forces

/s/ Husni az-Zaim

DECREE NO. 2

Az-Zaim, the General Commander of the Army and Armed Forces, in accordance with the decision of the Supreme War Council of the Syrian Republic, and in accordance with Military Order No. 2, dated 31 March 1949, decrees the following:

Article 1: The Syrian Parliament is hereby dissolved. A constitutional committee will be formed to prepare the constitution of the country and the electoral law as soon as possible.

Article 2: The constitutional committee, provided for in the previous article, will be assigned by a decree issued by the General Command of the Army and Armed Forces.

Article 3: The date of parliamentary elections will be fixed upon the termination of the constitutional committee's task specified in Article 1 of this decree.

Article 4: This decree will be published and communicated to all concerned.

Damascus, 1 April 1949.

Sgd: The General Commander
of the Army and Armed
Forces

/s/ Husni az-Zaim

COMMUNIQUE OF 31 MARCH 1949¹

The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces in Syria, after having recognized the defection of the existing regime, and after having ascertained that its regime would lead the country to confusion and bloody disturbances, has worked for the establishment of a true democratic and parliamentary regime in order to save the country from corruption and prevent the peril of confusion and disturbances. In undertaking this task, the General Command only responds to the aspirations and ambitions of all elements and classes of the Syrian people.

The Syrian people have been complaining of the disrespect of the ruling class for the principles of human rights, and of its continuous struggle to destroy the democratic spirit which is deeply rooted in the hearts of Syrians. The Syrian people have expressed on many occasions their absolute determination and deep desire for the establishment of a true democratic regime which will liberate the people from need, ignorance, disease and fear; and will rescue them from oppression so that they might participate with the other democratic nations in the realization of the common good.

The General Command wishes to emphasize that the new Syrian State respects Syria's international obligations and pledges, adheres to true democratic principles, respects the United Nations Charter, spares no effort for the realization of the people's aspirations and aims, protects the independence of the country from any intervention, establishes strongest relations with the brother Arab countries, cements the foundation of the Arab League, and improves and strengthens relations with all democratic states.

Sgd: The General Command of
the Army and Armed Forces

LEGISLATIVE DECREE NO. 1²

The General Command of the Army and Armed Forces,
in accordance with Decree No. 2, dated 1 April 1949 and

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1. Ash-Sha'b, Damascus, 1 April 1949.
 2. An-Nasr, 4 April 1949.

stipulating the dissolution of the parliament and the drafting of a new constitution for the country, decrees the following:

Article 1: The General Commander of the Army and Armed Forces will assume legislative and executive powers until the restoration of parliamentary life.

Article 2: The secretaries-general of the various administrative sectors will take charge of the administration of the public offices belonging to their ministries in accordance with the authority vested in them by the basic regulations for civil servants, classification regulations, and other regulations in force. They are authorized to issue ministerial orders and are under the instructions of the General Commander of the Army and Armed Forces.

Article 3: All provisions contradictory to this decree are revoked.

Article 4: This decree will be published and communicated to all concerned.

Damascus, 2 April 1949

Sgd: The General Commander of
the Army and Armed Forces

/s/ Husni az-Zaim

ADDRESS BY HUSNI AZ-ZAIM¹

The following address was broadcast by Colonel Husni az-Zaim at the Damascus radio station at 8:00 p.m., Sunday, 3 April 1949, and constituted his first major address to the Syrian people:

My most courageous officials and soldiers!

Greetings, and may God take care of you until you complete the mission whose responsibility you have borne and which is most truly appreciated by the nation. You have raised the prestige of the daring Syrian Army and immortalized its valor on the Palestine Front whose thirsty soil you have sated with your dear blood. For this you deserve well the gratitude of the nation and the praise of history. May God champion you and give you victory.

L. An-Nasr, 4 April 1949.

Syrians!

I start by extending to you my thanks for the true and noble feelings you have expressed toward me, and for the support I encounter everywhere and from everyone. I am confident that this support which you demonstrate is directed toward your daring and proud army which undertook to defend your country and to relieve you of oppression.

On behalf of the Syrian Army, the command of which I am honored to hold, I ask Lord God Almighty to realize your hopes and expectations from the army.

Proud Syrian People!

Seeing the state of chaos, exploitation, suspension of liberties, violations of laws and the constitution to which the country has been subjected, realizing that the nation was headed toward collapse, your courageous army has determined to eliminate the ruling class which enslaved the people. It has done all this with the will of God and your help.

Your army would not have ventured to take this step had it not been sure of your support and assistance. In the meantime, the army feels that it has complied with one of your wishes and realized one of your aspirations. There is no better proof of that than the support which it has encountered. Be sure, dear sons and brethren, that your army will finish its work and lead you to the goals to which you aspire, with the assistance and support of the Almighty.

Brothers and Sons!

The administration of the previous era was working without order and without any distribution or regulation of duties. The man primarily responsible for the administration was exceeding the bounds of his powers and was using them to further his own private interests while the Chamber of Deputies was unable to maintain the balance between the legislative and executive authorities. That was the reason for the spread of chaos, discrimination, and favoritism in the various affairs of state.

Noble Syrian People!

The army and its individual soldiers and officers perceived all this. They remained silent until they

could no longer be patient. Then they rebelled against the despotism of the government and overthrew the former president and the former cabinet with the intention of establishing a new progressive government based on the wishes and aspirations of the people.

We shall form committees to investigate the deficiencies of the previous regime and the behavior of those who then held administrative posts, who squandered the money of the people and spent it for private purposes.

I hereby declare that my office is ready to hear complaints against any member of the old administration no matter how important. I swear that I shall have no pity toward anyone proved guilty. Those oppressors will soon realize that the hour of punishment has arrived and that justice shall now take precedence over all else.

And to you, brothers, laborers and workers, I bring the good news that I shall do my utmost to realize social justice by reconsidering the redistribution of land and by introducing legislation for the limitation of huge wealth.

I shall also do whatever is in my power to raise the standards of the poor and needy. I shall combat adversity and eliminate unemployment. I shall raise the living standards of laborers and guarantee their food and clothing, paying special attention to the aged.

May the noble Syrian people be confident that I voice only that which I will accomplish.

Let no one believe that I shall neglect those who try to spread among the workers harmful propaganda or destructive thoughts contrary to our glorious Arab hereditary traditions. I am determined to ruthlessly and pitilessly deal with such criminals—the propagators of Communism and other pernicious creeds.

Let such people know that we are, above all, Arab nationals and that we spare no effort to preserve our Arab heritage and our national traditions. I hereby frankly declare that I shall destroy anyone who tries to sow seeds of dissention, disturb the equanimity of the people, encroach upon the sovereignty of the army, or anyone who contemplates a rebellion against this coup. I shall very shortly begin strengthening our relations with the various Arab states with which we are connected by our hopes and our common Arab ideology.

As to our brother state, Lebanon, we support its present status and respect its independence and sovereignty. We hope in the near future to solve all our outstanding problems with a spirit of friendship and brotherhood.

I shall also work to cement the foundations of the Arab League whose correct principles we are most keen to give our allegiance.

The Arab public will soon realize that our liberation movement is strictly an internal movement aiming at two things: The destruction of the old era, and, second, the direction of Arab policy toward a new path different from the dishonest and archaic system followed by the authorities of the old regime.

So much for our internal policy. As to our foreign policy, we are determined to strengthen the position of Syria in the field of foreign affairs and to sustain the policy established by our respected Sheikh Faris al-Khouri at the United Nations. We are also resolved to bind ourselves to all the treaties and international obligations signed in the name of Syria.

I seize this opportunity to praise the noble attitude of the foreign countries toward this coup of the people, hoping that God will extend through us a prosperous age for new Syria.

ADDRESS BY HUSNI AZ-ZAIM¹

The following is the text of Colonel Zaim's second major radio address, broadcast at 8:00 p.m., Thursday, 7 April 1949, from the Damascus radio station:

Struggling People!

Four days ago I addressed a word of gratitude to you for your generous sympathy. I am now addressing the following words in which I will detail what I summarized then and will acquaint you with new developments, for you are the source of power. My speech tonight deals with the following points: Elections, the administrative machinery and justice to civil servants in the lower grades, combatting the high cost of living, unemployment and the question of redistribution of lands, pernicious creeds, the Arab League, and the army.

1. An-Nasr, 8 April 1949.

the 1. Elections: I have formed a committee composed of prominent legislators to draft an electoral law on a new basis designed to decrease the number of deputies. As Syria is a small country, a limited number of deputies should suffice. This Chamber will represent the true spirit of Syria and will comprise a selected group of active, vigilant, educated persons. There will be no place in Parliament for lazy deputies or those who would exploit their position. I am pleased to announce to you that in the new epoch we will give the educated Syrian woman the right of suffrage, thus being the first Arab state to grant such right to women.

2. I have decided to cleanse the administrative machine about the superfluous personnel of which you have always complained, and the personnel of which have accomplished so little despite their large number. This cleansing will be performed in a manner compatible with the new epoch by entrusting the work to sincere, productive, efficient officials. I am also determined to be fair to honest civil servants in the lower grades by improving their condition, for I cannot believe that an employee can fulfill his duty with integrity and sincerity when he endures need and sees his family suffer from the burdens of life because of the smallness of his salary and the high cost of living.

3. I have placed as my objective when I conducted this coup d'etat the improvement of conditions of the miserable, the poor, and the laborers. I will undertake the combatting of the high cost of living in a decisive and practical way. I have asked the Muhafizeen to impose fixed prices for articles of food and clothing and not to hesitate to punish anyone who dares plunder the money of the poor, orphans, widows and small employees through hoarding and high prices. I am also working to take measures against unemployment, for every Syrian is entitled to the right to obtain his food, clothing and medicines.

In Syria there are vast areas of abandoned state lands and many landlords who possess huge estates. The principle of collective security to which I adhere provides for the redistribution of abandoned state lands, the limitation of huge property holdings, and for the deliverance of the country from vassaldom.

4. Pernicious creeds: I previously declared that we are Arabs. We will have no place for pernicious creeds, communist or otherwise, to penetrate into

the blood of the nation which I wish to lead to a new era. The best remedy to combat these creeds is for us to work to revive the national renaissance and to raise the standard of living of the working classes, guaranteeing to them a good life and prosperity.

5. The Arab League: I declared previously that we are a constitutional, republican, Arab state linked by a charter with our sister Arab states. I declare today that we are anxious to bind ourselves to the Arab League Charter and that we will hold no unilateral views toward any of the Arab political questions. I hope that the League will cement its foundations anew, because we face external problems which necessitate the strengthening of the Arab League and running it on a new plan.

I also declare that I welcome every union or charter among the Arab states. I also support any plan aiming to strengthen the ties of amity between our republic and its brothers. I want everyone to understand that I do not mean to imply by this that I support any one project of the many projects repeatedly mentioned by political circles and the press.

6. The Army: As for the valiant army which became the pride of the nation and the symbol of the country's dignity, I am striving to revive it anew, sustain its machinery, and supply it with the most modern equipment so that it will be able to undertake the national Arab aspirations assigned to it.

APPENDIX C¹

DOCUMENTS PERTAINING TO THE COUP D'ETAT
OF SAMI AL-HINNAWI
COMMUNIQUE NO. 1

Syrians!

Your valiant Syrian Army effected the coup d'etat of the thirtieth of last March in order to save the country from the deplorable conditions which were then prevailing. The news of that coup was then received by you with satisfaction and appreciation. For, in his first declarations, the leader of that coup promised to save the country from anarchy and restore to it its prestige. But no sooner had he been established in power than he and his clique began to waste the wealth of the nation and to squander it illegitimately in complete disregard for the prestige of the country, the sacredness of its laws, and the freedom of its individuals.

Furthermore, the administration was characterized by anarchy, abuse, and deterioration to such an extent that the people began to disparage the army personnel, resenting the deterioration of conditions in the state. What made things worse is that the chaotic internal policy was accompanied by an unprincipled foreign policy.

Consequently the army, relying on God the Almighty, and interested as it is in the welfare of the country, has decided to save the nation from the tyrant who, together with the clique of his suppressed government, followed an unscrupulous, despotic policy. What the army wished, it has achieved. It has saved the country from the tyranny of its oppressors. The army has also decided to hand over authority to the loyal, free and devoted patriots of Syria.

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1. The texts of all communiques were published by an-Nasr on 15 August 1949. Legislative decree number 1 was published in Alif Ba' on 22 August 1949.

The army and its officers invoke God and history to witness that their sole aim is to give Syria the opportunity to live as a free and independent state, and that it will entrust the government of the country to its own leaders.

Every Syrian is called upon to pursue his occupation in complete tranquility and confidence. All Syrians can rest assured that the commanders of the army will return to their barracks so as to organize the army and leave the direction of the state's policy in the hands of its leaders.

Sgd: General Commander of the
Army and Armed Forces

/s/ Sami al-Hinnawi

COMMUNIQUE NO. 2.

In accordance with the order issued by the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and the Armed Forces, Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi, it has been decided that the following commanders and officers shall be nominated as President and members of the Supreme Council of War, which will be vested with the administration of the country until a legal and constitutional government is established:

Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi - President
Lieutenant Colonel Bahij Kallas
Lieutenant Colonel Alam ad-Din Qawwas
Major Amin Abu Assaf
Captain Muhammad Ma'ruf
Captain Isam Mraywad
Captain Khalid Jada
Captain Mahmud Rifa'i
Captain Muhammad Diyab
Captain Hussein Hakim
Husayn

Sgd: General Commander of the
Army and Armed Forces

/s/ Sami al-Hinnawi

COMMUNIQUE NO. 3

The Supreme Council of War has met and decided to nominate the following commanders and officers as members of a court for the trial of the tyrant Husni

az-Zaim, the counterfeit president, and his premier, the traitor Muhsin al-Barazi:

Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi
Lieutenant Colonel Bahij Kallas
Lieutenant Colonel Alam ad-Din Qawas
Major Amin Abu Assaf
Captain Muhammad Ma'ruf
Captain Isam Mraywad
Captain Khalid Jada
Captain Mahmud Rifa'i
Captain Muhammad Diyab
Captain ~~Hasan~~ al-Hakim
Husayn

After a legal trial, they were both sentenced to death, and were executed by a firing squad this morning at al-Mezzeh fortress.

Sgd: General Commander of the
Army and Armed Forces

/s/ Sami al-Hinnawi

COMMUNIQUE NO. 4

In accordance with the orders issued by the headquarters of the Army and Armed Forces, citizens are requested not to organize demonstrations so as not to prejudice the tranquility and security of the country which are absolutely imperative at the present stage.

Sgd: General Commander of the
Army and Armed Forces

/s/ Sami al-Hinnawi

COMMUNIQUE NO. 5

Free Syrians!

The real coup d'etat has now been effected. The country has now been saved from its criminal and unscrupulous tyrant who deviated from the right path and followed a despotic and arbitrary policy. All this took place in spite of the fact that he had made lavish promises, practiced deceit both near and far, and pretended good will and interest in the nation's welfare. But no sooner had he established himself in power than his true self was revealed. He directed

the affairs of the country in accordance with his own capricious interests. What made things worse is that he relied on a premier who was notorious for his immorality, treason, maltreatment of all honest patriots, and for his policy which was detrimental to the national spirit, patriotic feeling, and the Arab principles. The free patriots of the country have witnessed this sorry state of affairs and have often tried to punish wrong, but in vain.

In order to justify his coup d'etat, the tyrant said that he had undertaken his movement with a view to save the country from the state of misery and confusion into which it had formerly drifted. But he followed a policy which made the people recall the past regime with regret and long for its return despite its defects.

The tyrant accused the leaders of the former regime of counterfeiting the general elections. But he counterfeited an entire public referendum, disregarding the interest of the people and depreciating the prestige of Syria for the sole purpose of occupying the Presidency of the Republic. He declared that his movement had not been motivated by a desire to seek power or leadership. His deeds have proven the falsehood of his statements. The tyrant accused the former government of opposing the parties and suspending their activities. But his oppression in this connection was even much worse—for he suppressed all criticism and sacrificed the state to the interests of his clique.

The tyrant claimed that he had affected his coup in order to serve the cause of the nation, to save its press from suppression, and to free its parties and citizens from the restrictions imposed on their activities and their liberty. But actually he and his government suppressed all free citizens, restricted their freedoms, and reinstated the advocates of the mandate of the government. The face of the mandate could be seen although concealed behind camouflage.

The tyrant accused the leading men of the former regime of misusing the wealth of the nation and squandering it on celebrations and parties, restricting government posts to their supporters regardless of considerations of competence and righteousness, and following a policy of evasiveness and subterfuge with regard to important questions such as the currency question and the common interests. What he did was even much worse.

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Husni Zaim and his propagandists alleged that the leaders of the former regime corrupted the uprightness of the people, resorted to intimidation and terrorism and filled the prisons with free patriots. What he did was even much worse. He relied on traitors and unscrupulous supporters, maltreated families of long-standing respectability, oppressed all honest patriots, and filled the prisons of Mezzeh, Aleppo, Latakia, Homs, and Hama with loyal and free patriots.

The same tyrant accused the leaders of the former regime of imposing most of the taxes, notably the indirect taxes on the poor and middle classes, and of confining hard currency and export licenses to the use of a limited section of traders. What he did was even much worse. He imposed more taxes on the poor and middle classes. The rich began to seek his favor with bribery, presents and all sorts of corrupt methods.

Husni Zaim claimed that he had undertaken his movement in order to put an end to bribery, corruption, the abuse of posts on the part of senior government officials, to reduce public expenditures, purge the government departments of deleterious elements, and discharge all those who are inefficient and untrustworthy. What he did was contrary to what he promised. He surrounded himself with a group of ignorant and untrustworthy people. He discharged honest and needy junior officials. In all departments of the government, he relied on accomplices of foreigners and those who were susceptible to bribery and corruption. He suppressed the freedom of all sincere and loyal patriots who are reputed for their discernment and honesty.

Husni Zaim and the members of his government claimed that they intended to follow a sound internal and foreign policy. What they did was to follow a subversive and partial policy in their relations with both the Arab and foreign states. Their policy was designed to lead the country to isolationism, and was characterized by selfishness and complicity with imperialism. They tried their best to cause disunity in the Arab nation and to foment factional disputes.

Husni Zaim claimed that he had undertaken his government in order to preserve the Constitution and prestige of the country, and to seek vengeance from those who violated the Constitution and acted in a way which was inconsistent with the principles of a government based on consultation. What he did was

the contrary to what he promised. He violated the Constitution and suspended laws. When he was told that the country could not do without a constitution, he diverted the attention of the people and the press by the setting up of committees and the holding of meetings. When the committee had completed the drafting of certain articles of the Constitution which were incompatible with his caprice and subversive mentality, he resented its activities and dismissed its members who, but a short time before, were considered the closest of his friends.

That is the story of the government and public activities of Husni Zaim which aroused the resentment and indignation of the people.

With regard to his private life and morals, and those of the other members of his clique, their depravity and corruption were indescribable. It seems that he ignored the fact that Syria is a conservative country devoted to its traditions and high morals, and is averse to voluptuousness, effeminacy, excess and licentiousness. What he thought was that he had become a dictator who could act in accordance with his own capricious interests. He also expected the people to follow his example, thinking that his actions provided a sacred license and his activities an exemplary model.

Now that the army has effected another coup d'etat, its commander-in-chief pledges himself that the sole purpose of his movement is to save the prestige of the country and liberate it from the deplorable state into which it has drifted. Tomorrow, he will invite the liberal patriots of this country, of whatever party or point of view they may be, to take over the control of the government in any way they choose. He and the members of his army will retire to where they will defend the frontiers and uphold the glory of their nation. They will not interfere in political affairs, but will leave questions of policy to those who are qualified for the job. The Commander-in-Chief of the Army calls upon all citizens to pursue their occupations as usual in an atmosphere of tranquility and calm, leaving the government of the country to its political leaders. They can place their confidence in those leaders who are reputed for their honesty, integrity and loyalty.

Sgd: General Commander of the
Army and Armed Forces

/s/ Sami al-Hinnawi

LEGISLATIVE DECREE NO. 1

Article 1: Legislative decrees bearing the signature of the Prime Minister, as well as the signatures of all the ministers, shall be promulgated after being approved by the Council of Ministers.

Article 2: Regulative decrees, and decrees which legislative provisions stipulate must be adopted by the Council of Ministers, shall bear the signature of the Prime Minister and the minister concerned after having been approved by the Council of Ministers.

Article 3: Ordinary decrees shall be issued in accordance with the proposal of the minister concerned; and shall bear the signature of the Prime Minister and the minister concerned.

Article 4: This legislative decree shall remain in force until the new constitution is drafted and promulgated.

Article 5: All provisions inconsistent with this legislative decree are declared null and void.

Article 6: Ministers of state are directed to execute the provisions of this legislative decree.

Article 7: This legislative decree shall be published and communicated to all concerned in order that its provisions may be executed.

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AL-AYYAM, Damascus: 23 August, 10 October and 21 November 1949.

ALIF BA', Damascus: 27 April, 27 June, 4 August, 5 August, 18 August, 22 August, 30 August and 22 November 1949.

AL-INOILAB, Damascus: 25 August, 19 September and 24 October 1949.

AL-MANAR, Damascus: 27 April and 5 May 1949.

AL-QABAS, Damascus: 30 September 1949

AN-NASR, Damascus: 31 March, 1 April, 4 April, 8 April,
18 April, 2 June, 23 June, 27 June, 11 July,
25 July, 15 August and 7 October 1949.

ASH-SHA'IB, Damascus: 1 April, 5 April, 7 April and
21 November 1949.

BARADA, Damascus: 3 November 1949.

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