The Alawi Community of Syria: A New Dominant Political Force

Mahmud A. Faksh

In the 1950s, I remember it was common for upper-class Syrian families, mostly urban Sunnis, to have Alawi maidservants. The practice was indicative of the extreme poverty and low status of the Alawis, whose most needy families indentured their daughters to domestic servitude. At the time, the Alawi community, the majority group in the Latakia region in northwest Syria, was the poorest and least educated social stratum in Syria. As a religious minority, they were dominated and discriminated against by Sunni Muslims, who usually regarded them with contempt.

Almost twenty years later, in February 1971, Hafiz al-Asad became the first Alawi president of Syria, thus ending the traditional Sunni succession. The occasion also capped the evolution of the Alawis from a discriminated against, socially and economically backward religious minority, to an emancipated group of significant power. The Alawis are now the foremost political force in Syria, displacing almost completely the Sunni Muslim majority which had provided Syria’s political leadership in the first years of independence.

Who are the Alawis? How did this radical transformation come about? What are its ramifications for the Alawis and for Syria? This study will try to answer these questions in light of the changes in political life that finally brought about the Alawi ascendancy. The years under Hafiz al-Asad since 1971 and the decade before that, when the Alawis under Salah Jadid were a force to be reckoned with in the previous government, are the culmination of a process that began with independence in 1946. The most important fact of post-independence Syrian political life has been the complete political, social and economic collapse of the leading families in each ‘agro-city’ coupled with the eclipse of the old power structure, which had been dominated by men of Damascus and Aleppo. Concomitantly, a new political elite made up of men of minoritarian background has emerged, representing specific sectarian, regional, socioeconomic, and political groups.

The change in composition of the elite structure effected companion changes in the relationships between Sunni and non-Sunnis Muslims, urban and rural people, rich and poor, and conservative and progressive political groups. The process has reached a climax in the political ascendancy of the Alawis. Their policies have brought about entirely different elite recruitment and structure, allocation and distribution of political power, political communication, and almost all major domestic policies, including those pertaining to economic development – all with the purpose of enhancing Alawi control.

The position of the Alawis today is reflective of the importance of Muslim religious minorities in Syrian politics, which is greater by far than their small numbers would suggest. The fact that these minorities are less than 20 per
cent of the population is a deceptive guide to their political standing. This seems to lend credence to the argument made in 1940 by a leading French student of the Alawis, Jacques Weulersse, who maintained that a minority can dominate a majority if it has political, military or economic superiority.

THE ALAWI COMMUNITY: ITS REGION AND ITS RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

The Alawis are the largest Muslim minority in Syria (12.5 per cent), and live for the most part on the coast. Smaller numbers are found in other adjacent areas of the Middle East, mainly the Alexandretta and Cilicia Regions in Turkey and in the Akkar district of Lebanon. Table 1 shows that Syria's Alawis are more than 75 per cent of the total Alawi population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syria</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>1960</td>
<td>680</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1956</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>874</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Little is known of the origin of the Alawi community. Some believe that it is the remnants of an ancient Canaanite people who led an isolated existence in the mountainous region, and thus retained ancient pagan customs. Later they were influenced only slightly by Christianity and Islam. In the Middle Ages, they adopted the Arabic language and adhered to the Islamic faith in the version of the Isma'iliyyah sect. Subsequently, they became a separate sect, some of whose beliefs are secret and known only to a circle of the initiated. Historically, then, the Alawi community was set apart from the Sunni Muslim majority who regarded it as different and somewhat suspect. Although the Alawis do not exhibit marked linguistic or ethnic differences from the Sunnis, they were not accepted as equal members of the Muslim community, and were always treated as inferiors and persecuted.

The Alawis of Syria are concentrated (75 per cent) in the Latakia region, with a significant number in the neighboring plains of Homs and Hama. They constitute a majority in the region (62.1 per cent), but a minority (11 per cent) in the capital city (Latakia). In former times, the numerical superiority had no social, political or economic relevance locally for the Alawis' weak minority status, for most of them live in numerous small mountain villages (known as Jabal al-Alawiyyin or Jabal al-Nusayriyah) and work in the agrarian sector. Thus, they represent the overwhelming majority of Latakia's rural population, whereas in the coastal cities and towns they are in the minority in comparison to Sunnis and Christians. Therefore, it is evidently clear that in the Latakia region where the Alawis represent a compact religious minority, the urban–rural composition of the population overlaps with sectarian differences.
The bulk of the Syrian Alawis of the mountain villages were exceptionally poor, and the region decidedly under-developed.\textsuperscript{15} Traditionally, the cities of the Middle East exercised total socio-economic and political domination over the rural populations who were predominantly poor, landless sharecroppers. Indeed, urban–rural disparities were sometimes so great that the cities looked like settlements of aliens living off the poverty-stricken and oppressed rural population. Weulersse observed in the 1940s that the antagonism between the two was so deep that one can speak of two separate populations co-existing within the same political framework, but without intermingling.\textsuperscript{16} The dire economic conditions of the Alawis adds a class dimension which coincides with the urban–rural dichotomy and sectarian divisions. These contrasts along with the historical sectarian minority status of the Alawis can help us to understand the deep-seated resentment, antagonism and distrust that the Alawi community had developed in the course of time against the Sunnis, its oppressors.\textsuperscript{17}

The contrasts can also shed light on the regional, sectarian and economic factors that influence the structure and behavior of the present Syrian political elite. The rulers of Syria are predominantly regional (Latakian), sectarian-minoritarian (Alawis) and rural (poor).\textsuperscript{18} They are trying to improve the lot of the Alawi community by changing the established rural pattern of living. As is the case with all transitional societies, Syria is becoming increasingly urbanized, and the Alawis are no exception to the rule. Many are migrating to the cities in search of education and employment in the modern sectors.

We have seen that religious beliefs are a major factor separating the Alawis from the Sunni Muslims. The Alawi religion was founded in the tenth and eleventh centuries as a blend of various Islamic and non-Islamic beliefs and practices, which can be summarized as follows.

First, from paganism the Alawis adopted the idea of a divine triad, of its successive manifestation in the seven cycles of world history, and of the transmigration of souls. God revealed Himself to the world seven different times: each time with two persons who, with God, made a holy trinity.\textsuperscript{19} The Alawis also believe that at first all Alawis were stars in the world of light, into which a virtuous Alawi is transformed upon death. A sinning Alawi becomes a Jew, Muslim or Christian.

Second, from Shi'a Islam the Alawis took over the belief in a system of successive divine emanations and the cult of Ali (the Prophet's cousin and his son-in-law). Unlike other Shi'ites, the Alawis believe that Ali was the incarnation of God Himself in a divine triad: Ali is the Ma'na (meaning or essence); Muhammad, whom Ali created in his own light, is the Ism (name), and Salman al-Farsi (the Persian; one of the Companions of the Prophet) is al-Bab (gate).\textsuperscript{20} This is the most distinguishing feature of the Alawi religion, namely the centrality of Ali, whom the Alawis deify.

Third, in common with Isma'ili Shi'ites, the Alawis subscribe to the idea of an esoteric religious knowledge hidden from the masses and revealed to only a few who are initiated into the secrets in a lengthy and complex initiation. In fact, both the Isma'illis and the Alawis are known in Arabic as \textit{al-batiniyah}, referring to the undisclosed tenets of their religion.\textsuperscript{21}
Finally, much of the ritual that sets Alawis off from other Muslims has been taken from Christianity. The use of ceremonial wine and the observance of Christmas are two of the borrowed practices.\textsuperscript{22}

What does their religion mean to the Alawis? Since many of its tenets are closely guarded and the Alawis refuse to discuss them with outsiders, and since only a few initiates are privy to such knowledge, the doctrine and theology of the religion remain a mystery for even the ordinary Alawi. As a result, the common folk have developed strong beliefs in amulets, magic and\textit{ziyaras} (visitations to the grave sites of certain religious\textit{shaykhs}). Also common is the belief in\textit{khadr}, a holy savior who may reveal himself on occasion in corporeal form, but in essence is divine.\textsuperscript{23} As to the educated, non-initiated Alawis who are now the mobilized stratum of the Alawi community, they maintain that their religion means little to them because they lack any knowledge about it. This, in actuality, is a method to identify with other members of the Alawi religion,\textsuperscript{24} for Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims and Christians do know something about their religion.

\textbf{COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION AND COHESION}

In terms of social organization, the Alawi community can roughly be divided into two major traditional groups: the mountain Alawis, and those of the coastal areas and the lower plains. A third emerging group is the educated, mobilized stratum now in power. The Alawis of the mountains are predominantly peasants who either own land or sharecrop for notable Alawi families. Both strata, notables and peasants, have developed strong tribal affiliations and an independent spirit during their centuries-long isolation.\textsuperscript{25}

By contrast, the Alawis in the coastal areas of the Latakia region and in the lower plains of the provinces of Homs and Hama have traditionally been dominated economically and socially by members of other religious communities, mainly by Sunni Muslims and partially by Greek Orthodox Christians.\textsuperscript{26} Prior to land expropriation in Syria which began in the late 1950s, most of the large landowners in these regions were absentee Sunni Muslims or Christians of the main cities of Latakia, Homs and Hama. Thus, the Alawis of the plains were controlled and exploited by members of a different religion, a circumstance that inhibited the rise among them of families of substance.\textsuperscript{27} The property arrangements, the scarcity of leading families, and scattering of the plains Alawis have all contributed to the weakening and even disappearance of tribal ties that are so strong among the mountain Alawis. The plains Alawis are more fragmented, dependent and ineffective. Whatever solidarity there is tends to be familial, making identification with the community at large, if present to a degree, less pronounced.

Land expropriation and redistribution after 1958 freed Alawi peasants from economic subservience, but did not bring about social equality in the traditionally Sunni-dominated regions. They are still looked down upon by the Sunni majority as backward and inferior. But over the past two decades, a third group – an educated, mobilized stratum – has come to the fore. It is composed largely of young Alawis with professional skills in the bureaucracy, in education, and in the army. Like most such groups in
changing societies, a heavy premium is placed on educational attainments and career advancement. Consequently, these Alawis tend to be more achievement-oriented, as against the aspiritive orientation of the predominantly traditional Alawi community. The transition, however, does not necessarily entail a complete dissociation from traditional values and prirmordial feelings about the family, tribe or religious group, but rather a lessening in level of commitment. Parochial sentiments more often than not remain latent and could surface again depending on the Alawis’ power position in the country, as will be discussed below.

Structurally, the Alawis are divided into four loose tribal associations: Khayyatun, Haddadun, Matawirah and Kalbiyyah. Many Alawi villages and families in the Latakia region and its surrounding areas belong to these tribes, which are weak or nonexistent among Alawis in the plains of Homs and Hama. The Alawi tribe is not a unified, hierarchical structure with internal cohesion or a central leadership authority. It has sectional and subsectional divisions with no focal leadership to connect them and provide a sense of cohesiveness. Thus, the tribe is ‘inherently segmentary; each segment at each level had a separate identity and a degree of power and authority of its own.’ Moreover, tribal leadership, though usually acquired by certain notable families through inheritance, could also be acquired by an influential religious shaykh or an ordinary Alawi of undistinguished background who had attained a high position in a national power institution. Such men were ‘movers’ at the tribal level in their regions, and could even undermine or take the places of tribal leaders by depriving them of followers. As a result, there is no guaranteed line of succession for tribal chiefs. The educated, mobilized stratum is posing a major threat to the traditional tribal leadership, increasingly challenging chiefs whose positions are based primarily on feudal economic relationships, religious status, or both. Because of their education and their high standing in the army, in the government bureaucracy, or in the party the newcomers to power are able to dispense favors and to provide services, jobs and economic benefits, thereby usurping some of the principal social and political functions of the traditional leaders.

These developments do not mean that the traditional leaders have been completely displaced. In fact, despite the socio-economic changes that have taken place in Syria, tribal leaders and shaykhs have been able to retain a certain measure of control. They can still command the loyalty of the bulk of the non-educated or semi-educated rural Alawis and that of some of the educated and politically mobilized Alawis. Further, many of the traditional leaders have accommodated to the times and demonstrated considerable flexibility. In one manifestation of modernity, they are sending their sons to schools to prepare for important government positions. Thus, they maintain standing by securing a niche in the new national leadership structure.

In summary, the Alawis do not constitute a monolithic, cohesive group with a coherent structure. They are a collectivity that lacks organizational unity and political effectiveness at a community level. They are divided into tribes characterized by sectionalism and rivalries, with no overall ruling authority. Tribal affiliation is scant or nonexistent among the Alawis of the
plains, and is increasingly suppressed among the new educated, mobilized stratum. Finally, the Alawis are religiously divided into sects (Shamsis, Qamaris, and Murshidiyyun), which further erodes their sense of oneness.

EXOGENOUS TRENDS: COMMUNAL SEPARATENESS VERSUS INTEGRATION

Alawi relations with other religious groups have been marred by tension, conflict, discrimination and economic exploitation. A number of factors contributed to the rift, which helped to foster development of an Alawi communal identity distinct from the larger national identity prior to Syria’s independence in 1946.

Syrian society under Ottoman Turkey was segmented into a number of ‘closed communities’ along local, tribal, linguistic and religious lines:

Each was a ‘world’, sufficient to its members and exacting their ultimate loyalty. The worlds touched, but did not mingle with each other; each looked at the rest with suspicion and even hatred. Almost all were stagnant, unchanging and limited; but the Sunni world, although torn by every sort of internal dissension, had something universal, a self-confidence and a sense of responsibility which the others lacked. They were all marginal, shut out from power and historic decision.  

This system was still prevalent during the first half of the twentieth century. Weulersse observed it in the 1940s and defined it as a ‘minority complex’, ‘which makes each gesture by the neighboring community appear a menace or challenge to one’s own community, and which unifies each collectivity in its entirety at the slightest offense committed against any one of its members’.  

The most important factor distinguishing these various communities and giving them a separate identity and status is religion. This actually became institutionalized under the Ottomans by official recognition of non-Muslim communities of *ahl al-kitab* (people of the Book, meaning Jews and Christians) as *millets* (religious nations). But the Sunni Muslim majority did not show much tolerance toward the heterodox Muslims, such as the Shi‘ites, the Alawis, Druze and Isma‘ilis. The Alawis, along with the other Muslim religious minorities, were discriminated against and persecuted by the Sunni majority. Even the Alawis who lived in the towns were made unwelcome by the traditional urban Sunni population. They were treated with contempt and were not allowed to partake in the city life. Only minimal contact, if any, existed between the Alawis and other religious groups in the urban centers.

As a result of their long history of persecution since the time of the Mamluks and through the Ottomans, the Alawis developed a proclivity for isolation and sought protection in the mountains of the Latakia region. The inaccessible ranges within the Alawi area had enabled the community to resist central state control, and to preserve its distinctive character, ‘like an encysted foreign body in the successive empires, participating neither in their life nor in their death’.  

Finally, the Alawis’ economic relations with other communities were most onerous. Their areas in the mountains were poor, underdeveloped and
at the mercy of the surrounding rich urban towns. The Alawis of the plains were mostly peasants and sharecroppers working the holdings of absentee landowners. Whichever their location, they were disadvantaged and exploited vis-a-vis other communities.

All these factors combined had early contributed to the Alawis’ increasing awareness of their communal identity as a territorial, compact religious minority. This was accentuated later, during the French Mandate (1921–1945), by the creation in 1922 of an Alawi state in Latakia, and the encouragement of a more independent Alawi identity with ‘a more conscious particularist spirit’ than before.39 The colonial policy fomented communal differences by nurturing the already existing kernel of separatism as a way to stifle the national independence movement. The Alawis’ historical background made them fit neatly and naturally within the French designs, for they did not have much, if anything, in common with the struggling Arab nationalist movement or with the emerging Syrian nation.

In the past, the Arab nationalist movement had always been closely associated with and controlled by Sunni Islamism; heterodox Muslims and other religious groups were assigned a secondary place.40 Some Sunni Arab nationalists even tended to regard members of the Arabic-speaking religious minorities as ‘imperfect Arabs’, which was deeply resented by these minorities, who perceived Arab nationalism as a continued Sunni supremacy in disguise — the only difference was that Arab Sunnis were replacing Ottoman Sunnis.41 There was then little sense of loyalty or commitment among the Alawis when their area was incorporated within the newly established Syrian Republic of 1936, which remained under French control. They reacted as they had against the Mamluks, the Ottomans and the French in the early days of the Mandate: led by Sulayman al-Murshid, the Alawis revolted against the central government before and after World War II.42

Following the independence in 1946, the Syrian leaders had the awesome task of integrating the Alawis and other minority communities — who thus far had enjoyed a certain measure of autonomy — into the national life of the country. The republic was certainly ‘a state without being a nation-state, a political entity without being a political community’.43 Successive governments embarked on a policy of stemming the Alawis’ and other minorities’ separatist, centrifugal tendencies and later subduing these fractious elements.

The process of integration involved both strong measures, including the use of force, and socio-economic improvements and modernization for the general mobilization of these communities and the society at large. Thus, the national government quickly crushed the Alawi uprising in 1946, executing Sulayman al-Murshid. His son Mujib led another abortive uprising in 1952, and met the same end. Concomitantly, the government pressed harder its efforts toward further integration. It passed drastic political measures to reduce and later abolish communal representation in parliament, which the Alawis and other minorities had enjoyed under the French; and it abrogated separate jurisdictional rights in matters of personal status, which the French had granted the Alawis and the Druze.44 Now these communities were brought under Syrian law, and were bereft of their former special privileges.
These actions were designed to destroy the traditional centrifugal Alawi aspirations and to fix more firmly the rule and authority of the national government. The process climaxed when the Druze rebellion in 1954 was put down by Adeeb al-Shishakli. The national government succeeded thereby in establishing its authority over the entire country, thus ending the isolation and autonomy of territorial, compact minorities such as the Alawis and the Druze. Henceforth, the Alawis began to enlarge their role in national life, as will be shown in the next section.

On another level, the process of integration was enhanced by ongoing socio-economic changes and modernization. The growth in mass communications and transport was breaking the older pattern of community isolation; Syrians of all kinds were brought into closer touch with one another. Most notable was the vast expansion of the educational system and its increasing Arabization by the government during the 1950s and 1960s. The number of state schools grew from 658 in 1948 to 3,804 in 1964, against an increase of only about 300 schools between 1925 and 1945; foreign and private schools went down from 40 per cent of all schools in 1945 to 19 per cent in 1951, and to almost nil in 1967. Thus, educational opportunities became more and more available to a greater number of poor Alawi, former peasants who vigorously sought social advancement for themselves and their people. In this way, a new and growing segment of the Alawi community became mobilized and began to play a major role in national political life – eventually controlling it.

The socio-economic reforms of the 1950s, especially during the union with Egypt, and the government’s implementation in the 1960s of radical socialist measures in the different sectors of the economy had further ameliorated the circumstances of the lower-middle classes and impoverished minorities. The revolutionary impact of the policies, however, was most drastic on the urban rich, for they led to the ultimate destruction of the old ruling class: big landowners, industrialists and leaders of the traditional parties. The post-war socio-economic status quo became the status quo ante.

All the above developments brought the Alawis into the mainstream of Syrian political life, where they competed for power and influence mainly through the Ba'th party and the army. Indeed, the increasing affiliation of many young educated, mobilized Alawis in these two national organizations, and their attendant disproportionate share of power later would have important socio-political consequences for the Alawis and for Syria.

THE ALAWI RISE TO POWER

The two major national organizations that were instrumental in the Alawi rise to power and eventual control of political life in Syria were the Ba'th party and the military. With respect to the former, many educated Alawis and members of other religious minorities, such as the Druze and Isma'ilis, found the Ba'th most appealing, as they sought to free themselves of minority status. The secular ideology of the Ba'th may explain why a higher proportion than their representation in the population at large joined its ranks. The notion of a secular, socialist political system, advocated by the
Ba'th, was extremely attractive to minorities. Such a system would certainly weaken the traditional Sunni-urban establishment's hegemony in Syrian political life and, consequently, would eliminate the prevailing political and socio-economic discrimination against heterodox Muslim minorities. The Ba'thist secular national ideology regarded them as full Arab Syrian nationals, irrespective of religion, and admitted them to unfettered party membership. They were allowed to be active in party politics and to compete for power with other groups on an equal basis both regionally (in the Latakia region) and nationally.

The socialist ideals of the Ba'th found their strongest appeal in the rural towns and destitute countryside rather than in cities dominated by traditional bourgeoisie. As we have seen, compact religious minorities usually live in the Syrian hinterlands, leaving the cities to the Sunnis. Thus it is only logical for the former to be receptive to socialist ideas, and hence to be heavily represented in the Ba'th party. Accordingly, the party developed far more strongly in the Latakia region, in Jabal al-Druze, and in outlying areas such as Hawran and Dayr al-Zur than in the urban centers where its minimal support was derived mainly from former peasants and rural migrants.

The fact that the bulk of the Ba'th rolls in the decade following independence was drawn from rural and minoritarian backgrounds further inhibited the membership of urbanites and Sunnis, who traditionally did not mix with people from rural communities and religious minorities. This gave the Ba'th party a regional, minoritarian, rural imprint that impeded its growth as an effective nationwide organization. Thus, irrespective of its espoused national political ideology, regional and communal interests remained paramount. The Ba'th party, like most Syrian parties, reflected the traditional paramountcy of regionalism in political life. Consequently, the party's disproportionate expansion in the Latakia region gave the Alawis a strong base from which to gain power in the region in the 1950s and in the nation later. There was a brief interruption during the union with Egypt between 1958 and 1961, when political parties – including the Ba'th, much to the dislike of the Alawis and Druze – were dissolved. But some Alawi groups chose to remain organized clandestinely and so maintained a certain measure of power and control in the Latakia region. Following the secession of Syria from the union in 1961, the earlier dissolution of the Ba'th proved to be a major political gain to the Alawis, for they now were the strongest and most organized force in the much-weakened national organization.

Thus, when the Ba'th party came to power in a coup d'état by a group of Ba'thist army officers on March 9, 1963, the Alawis were able, from their firm organizational regional base in Latakia, to increase their strength in the party and to position themselves in less than three years in high party and government positions. They triumphantly controlled the party and national politics between 1966 and 1970 under Alawi General Salah Jadid, and now do so under Alawi General Hafiz al-Asad, who has been president since February 22, 1971. This marked a radical change in the composition of the Syrian political elite.

One index of change is the background of Syrian cabinet members since 1963. Between 1942 and 1963, Sunni urbanites, particularly from Damascus
and Aleppo, dominated cabinet positions (83.2 per cent); the Alawis, Druze, and Isma'ilis together had 5.7 per cent. After 1963, between 1963 and 1976, there was a decline in Sunni representation to 77.1 per cent, and a corresponding rise in minority representation (to 16.6 per cent), with the Alawis enjoying a predominate position (9.4 per cent). In terms of regional affiliation, between 1942 and 1963 Damascus and Aleppo had the highest representation (43.0 per cent and 20.3 per cent, respectively); the predominantly rural regions of Latakia and Hawran had only 6.6 and 0.7 per cent. Between 1963 and 1976, Damascus and Aleppo went down to 21.8 and 7.9 per cent, respectively; Latakia and Hawran increased to 21.2 and 10.5 per cent.

Thus, after 1963, the way was opening for persons from the rural lower strata and minority groups to be at the forefront of Syrian political life, which in turn would bring about drastic socio-economic and political benefits for the rural poor and members of religious minorities who had previously been ignored. This can also be shown more accurately by examining the composition of the Regional Commands of the Ba'th party, which became the center of political power after March 1963. Table 2 reveals that Alawis, among religious minorities, had the strongest representation since 1966, reaching its highest (23.4 per cent) between 1966 and 1970, when Alawi General Salah Jadid held the party reins.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>% (no.)</td>
<td>% (no.)</td>
<td>% (no.)</td>
<td>% (no.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunni</td>
<td>54.0 (27)</td>
<td>51.6 (33)</td>
<td>69.6 (39)</td>
<td>58.2 (99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alawi</td>
<td>14.0 (7)</td>
<td>23.4 (15)</td>
<td>21.4 (12)</td>
<td>20.0 (34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Druze</td>
<td>20.0 (10)</td>
<td>9.4 (6)</td>
<td>3.6 (2)</td>
<td>10.6 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isma'ilis</td>
<td>10.0 (5)</td>
<td>9.4 (6)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>6.5 (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2.0 (1)</td>
<td>6.3 (4)</td>
<td>5.4 (3)</td>
<td>4.7 (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100 (50)</td>
<td>100 (64)</td>
<td>100 (56)</td>
<td>100 (170)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


During the Jadid period, there was no representation at all of people from Damascus, Aleppo and Hama; the predominantly rural areas of Latakia, Hawran and Dayr al-Zur together accounted for 65.6 per cent of the entire roster of the Regional Commands. The inclusion of many Sunni members from Damascus (25.0 per cent) in 1970–78 only indicates the desire of Alawi General Hafiz al-Asad to win this important urban segment to his side in order to lessen the Alawi regime’s isolation from the critical urban masses. It was a tactical political move, designed to pacify the capital city, but not to set in motion a trend toward enhanced Sunni-urban participation. The same treatment was not extended to Aleppo, the other major Sunni-urban center,
which was kept isolated and had no representation at all during the same period.60

The other and more important national organization that many educated, mobilized Alawis and other religious minorities were attracted to and through which they came to powerful positions in national political life is the army. They flocked to it in numbers far greater than their percentage of the population. As they rose in rank, the Alawis in particular became a significant component of the Syrian officer class. The Alawis, Druze and Isma‘ilis, who together represent about one-sixth of the population, are better represented in the armed forces, both among the officers and the enlisted men, than is the Sunni majority.

There are a number of reasons for the non-representativeness of the Syrian army. First, the French had encouraged minority recruitment as a means to counter the nationalist tendencies of the Arab-Sunni majority and to secure the allegiance of the minority communities.61 Second, minority groups came mainly from economically less developed rural areas and were therefore attracted by the economic opportunities and social advancement of a career in the army.62 Third, following independence, the Sunni towns- men, who had led the Arab nationalist struggle against the French, indirectly reinforced the trend toward overrepresentation of minorities in the army; they avoided sending their sons to military service by paying a redemption fee (badal ‘askari) or refused to let them join the army as a profession. They considered the military academy at Homs as ‘a place for the lazy, the rebellious, the academically backward, or the socially undistinguished’.63 It was certainly not a fit place for the sons of Sunni-urban, middle-and upper-class families, who could afford to provide university education or to subsidize business ventures instead. The minority, rural poor, saw the military academy as a doorway to social advancement and economic security.64 All this meant that the urban Sunnis no longer held the upper hand. The situation within the army was well described in a 1949 report: ‘All units of any importance as well as the important parts (‘anasir) were under command of persons originating in [religious] minorities’.65

The bulging representation of minorities and rural poor people grew steadily in the 1950s and early 1960s. With the vast expansion in the number of state schools which made education, especially high school, available to a larger number of poor people in the countryside and in minority areas, applications for the military academy abounded,66 and eventually added many minority officers of peasant origin, many of whom had Ba‘thist orientation or affiliation. Once in high posts, these officers, motivated by a general sense of solidarity with their fellow minority members, tended to act favorably on applications from their sectarian and regional communities and later helped academy graduates to advance in the officer corps.67

Successive military coups d’état since the first coup of Colonel Husni al-Za‘im in 1949, and the subsequent increasing politicization of the officer class in the 1950s and the early 1960s, brought about an ever-shifting composition of the senior ranks. Indeed, the history of the Syrian army in politics is a long saga of struggles, sometimes violent, among power factions or blocs (kutal) linked with different political ideological parties or interests.
Thus, it was as much factionalized as Syrian political life itself. During this period and until the Ba'th officers' coup d'état on March 8, 1963, the most prominent factions in the army were headed primarily by Sunnis. It was mainly they who bore the heavy toll of the power struggle and the successive later purges of leading senior officers, which further debilitated Sunni representation in senior army positions. Officers of minoritarian backgrounds were not at the front edge of the power struggle and generally had been less politically active in the 1950s and the early 1960s, and hence suffered less. They moved easily into the top positions left vacant by the departing Sunni officers.

Emboldened after the coup of March 1963, minority officers, especially Alawis and Druze, became more active as a group in the ensuing power struggle among Ba'thist army officers. They spearheaded a minoritarian-rural, radical-revolutionary faction against the moderate lower-middle-class Sunni Ba'thist officers. The end came in a bloody takeover in 1966 by the minoritarian-rural-radical faction, which cemented its control. The event marked an important change in Syrian post-independence history: control of the Syrian army and Syrian political life had passed to the heterodox Muslim minorities, led by the Alawis; the Sunni majority was in a subordinate, inactive position. In 1966 and 1968, the Alawi faction terminated the other two minoritarian-sectarian factions (the Druze and the Isma'ili), and became the masters of Syria. Since then, the Alawis have discriminated against the Sunnis in the armed forces, have given preference to their co-religionists in appointments and promotions, and have shown favoritism in the development of their home region – all of which have bolstered the communal solidarity that has helped to maintain their dominance.

The rise of poor people from the rural and religious minority areas in Syria since early 1963, and the eventual control by the Alawis of the reins of power starting in 1966 are manifest in the regional and sectarian backgrounds of military members of the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'th party, which are the leading indicators of power in the army and in the party. This shows more strongly the increased representation of these groups than in either the Syrian cabinets or the entire Regional Commands of the Ba'th during the same period. Between 1963 and 1978, officers from the predominantly Alawi region of Latakia had the highest representation (49.0 per cent) among all military members; the traditionally Sunni regions of Damascus and Aleppo had only 5.7 per cent each. In terms of religious minoritarian background, Table 3 shows that Alawi officer representation increased from 30 per cent in 1963–66 to 42.1 per cent in 1966–70, and to 42.9 per cent in 1970–78. During the same periods, Druze officers declined from 25 per cent to none; the Isma'ili went from 10 per cent to 15.8 per cent and dropped to none in 1970–78. The Alawis were clearly the preponderant minority force in the Ba'thist military structure.

Although between 1970 and 1978 Sunni officer representation in the Ba'th Regional Commands (57.1 per cent) outnumbered that of the Alawi (42.9 per cent), the figures do not tell the story about actual power in the armed forces. First, Sunni officers come from various regions, and have no common ties and interests to support the sectarian loyalty that would help knit
together a regional-sectarian bloc, as is the case with officers belonging to territorial compact minorities. Sunni officers neither represented nor led strong army factions to contest the supremacy of Alawi officers. They could act only on an individual basis, not as a group. Second, only Alawi officers were ‘trusted’ because of communal ties with the important strategic, political and intelligence positions in the armed forces. They also commanded key army strike units and special forces stationed close to or around the capital, Damascus, while many Sunni officers were assigned to less important units in faraway regions. A few Sunni officers are kept in high positions to satisfy the different Sunni elements: and to dispel the impression that key military posts are held mainly by Alawis. Such officers have no independent power nor a base of support from which to muster strength of their own within the armed forces. They remain as long as they act in line with al-Asad’s policies. Third, during this period, al-Asad co-operated with leading Sunni Damascene Ba’thist officers in an effort to win Damascus to his side. They were given high representation (21.4 per cent) in the military structure of the Regional Commands of the Ba’th, but the outlying traditional Sunni towns of Aleppo and Hama had no representation at all. These were the two main areas where major Sunni opposition to Alawi hegemony was strong and violent.

SECTARIAN POLARIZATION OF POLITICAL LIFE

The increasing Alawi domination of political life in Syria since 1966 has had two major antithetical and polarizing consequences. On the one hand, it has strengthened Alawi cohesion and consciousness, with attendant discrimination against Sunnis, especially urbanites. On the other hand, it has engendered Sunni reaction and opposition, spearheaded by the urban-centered movement of al-Ikhwan al Muslimun (the Muslim Brotherhood). The new dichotomy in Syrian society and politics and the strife in the body politic are somewhat of a departure from the established post-independence pattern of multiple groups and interacting interests. The ascending of one sectarian,
minority group and the subordination of the others, including the Sunni majority, have destroyed the old multiplicity of forces and have polarized the country on religious grounds. Sectarianism (al-\textit{ta'ifiyah}), a condition that hitherto had been quiescent, was increasingly manifest in Alawi-Sunni tension and strife.

The present importance of Alawi communal solidarity in the political equation of Syria does not necessarily mean that it has always been that strong. The Alawis have always felt themselves to be a religious minority, but such status did not evolve into communal-political solidarity until the mid-1960s. Their various groups had so little in common that each went its own way. Isolation and backwardness and the absence of communications and education stood in the way of group awareness. Collective alignments took place under both Alawi and non-Alawi leaders competing with each other. It is accurate to say that as late as the 1950s ‘Alawite communal consciousness was neither great nor an overriding factor’.\textsuperscript{74}

As the Alawi circumstances changed with the spread of education and communications, with the rise of the educated, mobilized Alawis and their widespread prominence in the army and in the Ba'th party, there has occurred a substantial sense of oneness among them. Thus, in the wake of the March 1963 Ba'thist officers coup d'état, as intra-Ba'th rivalry and intra-army factionalism intensified, Alawi primordial loyalties became an important factor in political alignments.\textsuperscript{75} Alawi officers formed a relatively homogeneous, strong clique based on what was later called ‘communal clannishness’.\textsuperscript{76}

The emergent Alawi solidarity certainly contributed to the Alawis’ triumph over other factions in 1966 in both the Ba'th party and the army, and has since helped to maintain their dominance.\textsuperscript{77} To be an Alawi was and is a considerable political asset. Most, if not all, Alawis are conscious of the advantage of their religious and communal identity. They are practically certain of preferential treatment in appointments and promotions in government, party, and army, and in the development of their home regions. The transcendent importance of membership in the Alawi community now enhances its cohesion and draws members to support one another against members of other religious communities, regardless of most other considerations.\textsuperscript{78}

Today, under President Hafiz al-Asad, Alawi communal solidarity remains the mainstay of the Alawi-Ba'thist-military regime of Syria. In fact, this is the case even more now than under the previous Alawi-dominated regime of Salah Jadid, who attempted to move somewhat beyond Alawi or military support to establish his power.\textsuperscript{79} In the process, his power weakened among the Alawis and the military, and he was deposed by the strong Alawi-military faction of Hafiz al-Asad. Thus, since coming to power in November 1970, al-Asad has consistently concentrated on building from a firm Alawi ‘sectarian grouping’ (\textit{takattul ta'ifi}) in the centers of power, especially in the army. He has relied heavily on his one and only officer faction, whose core is members of his immediate family and close relatives, and it then extends to include first members of his tribe (al-Matawirah) and then others in the Alawi community at large.\textsuperscript{80}
Members of other religious groups, including Sunnis, also rank high in the officer corps, but are in no position to mount a serious challenge to the Alawi-dominated regime. They are usually dispersed geographically in peripheral units away from the capital. If some Sunni officers have important roles, it is as individuals and not as a group, and military professionals, not as political operatives. This even applies to Sunnis who occupy leading positions in the regime, like Premier Abd al-Ra’uf al-Kassam and Minister of Defense Mustafa Tlas. Both were appointed by the president and exercise authority in conformance with his policies. Deviation or challenge would not be countenanced and would be checked easily by the president’s Alawi supporters in the army and in the party. Hafiz al-Asad’s faction in the power centers rules supreme and has considerably diminished the chances for non-Alawis to form independent blocs of any significance to threaten the regime.\textsuperscript{81}

As a group the Alawis favor and support continued improvement of their position in Syrian society. They tend to cluster most homogeneously on any issue that concerns their advancement and the development of their home region. Over the past decade, their region has benefited directly more than any other area from the socio-economic development of Syria. The regime has diverted a great proportion of government investment to the Latakia region, which is flourishing with government projects. While this may look like a policy commitment to close the long-existing gap between the impoverished rural areas and the rich urban towns, the fact that Latakia is particularly favored can be construed as preferential treatment. This even has been the case with the (US) Agency for International Development programs in Syria, which under Syrian government pressures are more heavily concentrated in Latakia than elsewhere.\textsuperscript{82} Indeed, this has not only bridged the gap between rural and urban, but has given rise to an upper class of Alawis who differentiated themselves from the rest of the community and in whose ranks is ‘a group of millionaires, waxing rich from fat commissions on state contracts’.\textsuperscript{83} A contrast indeed from the days when the only Alawis the Sunnis knew in Damascus and other major cities were housemaids.

The Alawi rise to prominence at the expense of members of other communities has naturally enough provoked conflict with the displaced, particularly the urban Sunnis. At the heart of Sunni opposition and struggle, spearheaded by the Muslim Brotherhood since the mid-1960s, is religion; orthodox Islam versus heterodox Alawi-Ba’th secularism. During the 1960s rioting and clashes occurred within such Sunni strongholds as Hama, Damascus and Aleppo. Muslim ulama and the local Muslim Brothers accused the ‘godless’ regime of ‘heretic tendencies’ and used slogans such as ‘Allah Akbar! Either Islam or the Ba’th!’\textsuperscript{84} They were dealt with harshly by the regime, especially in the bloody suppression of the revolt in Hama in April 1964.

President al-Asad made some overtures to the Sunni majority after 1970. He relaxed economic restrictions on Sunni merchants and small industrialists, promoted small private enterprises with a limited ‘open door’ economic policy, visited and prayed at mosques, and held meetings with Muslim religious leaders. But the lingering misgivings of the orthodox Sunni com-
munity were soon reinforced by the non-inclusion of the ‘Islamic clause’ in the 1973 draft of the Syrian Constitution. Violent demonstrations against the non-Islamic draft constitution and against Alawi primacy broke out in Hama.

Later in the 1970s acts of violence against individual Alawis and attempts on the regime’s leaders’ lives grew to worrisome proportions. The worst incident was the murder of some 50 Alawi cadets in Aleppo in 1979. Then, in early 1980, serious fighting in Aleppo was crushed by the Special Forces, a regime-shielding unit of about five to eight thousand commandos and paratroopers under Ali Haydar, who belongs to the Alawi tribe of al-Haddadun.85 The regime has blamed the outbreak on the Muslim Brotherhood, and in July membership in the group was made a capital offense.

Despite the government’s harsh countermeasures, anti-regime violence and bombings continued in the major cities throughout 1981. The most recent and the largest uprising occurred in Hama in February 1982; it is said to have been occasioned by an abortive coup by a large number of Sunni and some Alawi officers, in concert with the National Liberation Front – an alliance of former Ba’thists, Arab Socialists, Nasserists, nationalist politicians, and Ikhwan members. The regime deployed its elite security units with their modern weapons and dealt a destructive indiscriminate blow to the city and its Sunni inhabitants.86

The intensification of violence by the urban Sunnis and the severe repression, including the use of military forces, by the Alawi-dominated regime since the mid-1960s, illustrate clearly the deepening sectarian schism in Syrian society and politics. So far, the regime’s iron fist has triumphed over Sunni opposition, but how long it can continue to maintain itself against the broadening of this opposition raises questions about the regime’s future stability.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

We have seen that the Alawis have come a long way from underdog status in the Syrian power structure. While this gives credence to Weulersse’s claim that a mobilized (religious) minority can rule a majority, it by no means implies that the Alawis will maintain their hold in the long term, especially if their power is constantly under attack by the majority.

It is difficult to assess the future prospects of any system of government, especially those of the Third World countries. This certainly applies to the future of the present Alawi-dominated regime in Syria. One can safely assume, however, that given the continued preponderance of the Alawi faction in the army, the regime of Hafiz al-Asad will continue for some time into the 1980s. It cannot be denied that al-Asad’s position is contingent upon his control of the armed forces and their support of him. Nor can it be denied that the Alawis are the central element in the armed forces. As long as the status quo remains there is little likelihood of emergence of Sunni or other opposition that would constitute a real threat. The Sunni officers in particular are not able to form a faction and no longer act as a group. The Druze officers who, coming from a territorially compact religious minority, could
form a faction, have been reduced in strength since 1966. Recent reports, then, about a large number of dissident Sunni officers and some Alawis trying to bring down the regime exaggerate by giving the impression of a viable Sunni faction in the army.57

A most dangerous opposition to al-Asad’s regime could arise principally among Alawi officers. Not all Alawis are always united, and there is rivalry among Alawi groups. But these very human characteristics should not lead one to conclude that some Alawis will try to topple the present regime, irrespective of the consequences. The Alawis are not about to attempt such folly, let alone to permit it to happen, for it might set in motion a chain of events that could eventuate in the loss of Alawi dominance in the power structure, a development dreaded by almost every Alawi. Thus, for now and the immediate future, there appears to be an overriding cohesion among Alawis based on fear of the consequences that might ensue for them should the existing Alawi regime be overthrown.

In the long run, one thing we can be almost sure of is that the Alawi’s tenure is not indefinite. The question that comes to mind is: What will become of the Alawis when their ‘turn’ is over? Some political analysts argue the possibility of an Alawi secession-state on the basis of Alawi centrifugal tendencies in recent history. They cite neighboring Lebanon, where the Maronites were contemplating such an option, and the current regime’s heavy investment in the Latakia region, which may be anticipatory of a future Alawi independent state when the Alawis fall from power.58

The potential for secession cannot be ignored, especially in view of the fact that Alawis are a preponderant element in the army and are in control of key strike units and special forces. They would surely attempt to use these resources to strike violently and inflict heavy losses, but this is as far as they would go – which falls short of seceding. Why? First, the strong central authority of the Syrian state is a well-established post-independence fact, especially after the crushing of the Druze rebellion in 1954. The Syrian state could deal effectively with a single isolated, though strong, dissident group in the Alawi region and frustrate any secessionist attempt. The Lebanese state, for a number of historical and communal reasons, has not developed a central authority that could be uniformly imposed on the various regional-tribal and religious groups. This is especially true of the Maronites who since the seventeenth century have lived autonomously in their traditional region of Mount Lebanon. The Alawis of Syria have not enjoyed such a high degree of autonomy, and all attempts at achieving such have been unsuccessful, except for a brief interlude early during the French Mandate.

A second reason that an Alawi secession is unlikely is that the Alawis are a religious minority (12.5 per cent) whose members rank relatively low in Syrian socio-economic and political life. The Maronites of Lebanon are neither a small minority nor the underdogs of Lebanese society; they represent 26.8 per cent of Lebanon’s population59 and are the country’s socio-economic and political elite.

A third reason is that even if some Alawis were to entertain secessionist ambitions and try to lead the community in that direction, there is no certainty that all other Alawis would support such a move, given the tribal,
religious, and now economic stratification and differentiation among them. Indeed, under adverse conditions Alawi solidarity might be less firm than it once was, for it is more a function of ‘situational selectivity’. In contrast, the Maronites of Lebanon have historically been and still are a cohesive group with a strong sense of leadership.

Ruling out an Alawi secession state, the Alawis’ power will certainly be reduced relative to their proportion of the population or even below, in an effort to restore the former social-political balance or to fashion a new one. How ever the changes come about, the process is likely to be untidy and disruptive.

NOTES

1. Syrian officer and politician who belonged to the Alawi Haddadun tribe. He was Syria’s strongman between 1966 and 1970, but chose to remain inconspicuous by wielding power through his control as deputy secretary of the ruling Ba’th party (civilian) apparatus.

2. On the concept of the ‘agro-city’, see Michael H. Van Dusen, ‘Political integration and regionalism in Syria’, The Middle East Journal, 26 (Spring 1972), 124–125; and Albert H. Hourani and S. M. Stern (eds.), The Islamic City (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 16ff. Indeed, in the years before and after independence in 1946, Syrian politics could best be described as family politics. Most political leaders derived their power from local family position, such as the Jabris. Kikhias and Oudis of Aleppo; the Azms, Barazis and Kaylanis of Hama; the Atasis of Homs; and the Asalis, Haffars, Mardams and Quwatifis of Damascus.

3. Each group formed its regional political base: the Sha‘b (People) party of Aleppo and the Watani (National) party of Damascus. They were in constant conflict and bickering with one another, which brought about their ultimate downfall. See Michael H. Van Dusen, ‘Syria: downfall of a traditional elite’, in Frank Tachau (ed.), Political Elites and Political Development in the Middle East (Cambridge, MA, 1975); and Patrick Seale, The Struggle for Syria (London, 1965).


5. Van Dusen, ‘Political integration and regionalism in Syria’, op. cit., p. 136. The three major Muslim religious minorities in Syria are: the Alawis, Druze, and Isma‘ilis. However, if one adds non-Muslim minorities, such as Christians and Yazidis, religious minorities would constitute almost 30 per cent of the population.


8. The Alawis of Arab origin in Turkey should not be confused with Turkish Alevis, who are Shi‘ite Muslims.


12. Ibid.


14. The Alawi mountains extend from the south of Latakia to the Turkish region of Alexan-
dretta in the north, and to the east join the Syrian provinces of Homs and Hama. An alternate name is the Nusayriyah mountains in reference to an early sect's theologian, Ibn Nusayr.

15. As an indication of the deplorable conditions of the Alawi peasants, they resorted to the practice of selling or hiring out their daughters as servants to affluent city-dwellers. It is reported that in 1938, the average daily income of these peasants was only about 22 Syrian piastres, while the daily cost of living per capita was approximately 50 piastres. See Hanna Batatu, 'Some observations on the social roots of Syria's ruling military group and the causes for its dominance', *The Middle East Journal*, 25 (Summer 1981), 334.


17. See al-Sharif, op.cit., and al-Tawil, op.cit.

18. Indeed, President Hafiz al-Asad and most of his core Alawi group belonged to very poor Alawi families from the village of Qardahah.

19. For the seven appearances of God in a holy trinity, see Gubser, op.cit., p. 20.


21. Thus, when General Salah Jadid, Syria's Alawi strongman in 1966–70, voiced concern about the growing sectarian feelings in the country, his Isma'ili Minister of Information suggested that the 'secret books' of the Alawis be made public. Jadid refused, fearing the power of his co-religionists *shaykhs*. See Sami al-Jundi, *Al-Ba'th (The Ba'th)* (Beirut, 1969), 144–45.


24. The same also applies to the Druze community. This became evident from personal conversations I had with some Alawis and Druze while I was a student at the American University of Beirut in the early 1960s.


26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.


30. al-Sharif, op.cit.


32. In the 1940s *Shaykh* Sulayman al-Marshid, a humble shepherd who claimed prophetic powers, attained great power and influence at the tribal level. Nowadays, President Hafiz al-Asad and his family are able to assume a leadership position in their tribe (al-Matawirah) because of the powerful national position they have attained.


35. A case in point would be the notable al-Ali family which had a member, Ibrahim al-Ali, occupying the position of commander of the Syrian army in the early 1970s, and another, Dr Ali Abid al-Ali (Professor at Aleppo University), who was assassinated in November 1977.


42. See al-Sharif, op.cit., and al-Tawil, op.cit.
44. Ibid., p.399.
45. Ibid., p.399.
46. See Martin Seymour, 'The dynamics of Syria since the break with Egypt', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 6 (January 1970), 35-47; and Van Dusen, 'Syria: downfall of a traditional elite', op.cit.
48. Other secular ideologies which attracted many minority members were the Syrian Communist Party and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP).
49. Muta Safadi, *Hizb al-Ba’th: Ma’sat al-Mawlid, Ma’sat al-Nihayah (The Ba’th Party: Tragedy of Birth, Tragedy of End)* (Beirut, 1964), p.69. He maintains that the religious minorities, with the Alawis in the lead, were seeking to overthrow the traditional order in which urban Sunni Muslims dominated.
53. Immediately after the coup, as the need to fill the many available government vacancies by party supporters became more urgent, the Alawis took advantage of the relaxed requirements for party membership to admit family members and friends, thus strengthening their position in the party. See van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, op.cit., p.36. While a student at the American University of Beirut in the early 1960s, the author was asked by some student party members to join the party, but declined.
54. Numerous studies have been done on the power struggles in the 1960s within the party and the army, which had brought the Alawis to power. See, for example, Be’eri, op.cit.; George M. Haddad, *Revolutions and Military Rule in the Middle East: The Arab States*, vol.2 (Santa Barbara, 1971); Seymour, op.cit.; van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, op.cit.; Van Dusen, 'Political Integration and Regionalism in Syria', op.cit.; Itamar Rabinovitch, *Syria Under the Ba’th 1963-1966: The Army-Party Symbiosis* (Jerusalem, 1972); Moshe Ma’oz, ‘Alawi military officers in Syrian politics, 1966–1974’, op.cit.
55. van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria*, op.cit., Table 4.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., Table 1.
58. Ibid., Table 2.
59. Ibid., Table 3.
60. Ibid.
63. Be’eri, op.cit., p.37.
64. Be’eri, op.cit., p.336-37.
67. Be’eri, op.cit., p.337.
69. Be’eri, op.cit., p.337.
70. The Coup’s prominent leaders were: (Alawis) Salah Jadid, Izzat Jadid, Hafiz al-Asad, and Ibrahim Makhouss; and (Druze) Salim Hatum and Izzat Ubaid.
71. al-Razzaz, op.cit., p.159.
73. Ibid.
74. Gubser, op.cit., p.42.
76. Be’eri, op.cit., p.168.
77. See al-Razzaz, op.cit.; and al-Jundi, op.cit.
79. In addition to the Latakia region, he extended his power base to the rural areas of Hawran and Dayr al-Zur.

80. Thus, the president’s brothers: Rif’at al-Asad is the commander of Saraya al-Difa’ (Defense Units) which are in charge of protecting the regime and Jamil al-Asad is the commander of a special unit of Saraya al-Difa’ in charge of the security of the Alawi community. His cousin, Adnan al-Asad, is commander of Saraya al-Sira’ (Struggle Companies) which play a similar protective role. Two nephews of the president occupy major positions in the Defense Units. Also, a number of leading figures in the regime belong to the president’s tribe of al-Matawirah. These include: Brigadier Muhammad al-Khawli, adviser to the president, chief of air intelligence, and chairman of the presidential intelligence committee; Brigadier Ali Dubah, the head of military intelligence; Brigadier Ali Aslam, deputy chief of staff and the chief of the bureau of military operations and training; and Major General Ali Salih, commander of the air defense forces and missile corps. To the same tribe belong a great number of the non-commissioned officers and men of Saraya al-Difa’ and Saraya al-Sira’, who are also assumed to be from the president’s birthplace, the village of al-Qarandahah.

Alawis from other tribes include: Yunis Yunis (of al-Haddadin) commander of the Ninth Armored Division; Tawliq al-Jahani (of al-Kalbiyyah) head of the First Armored Division from 1971 to 1978; and Ali Haydar (of al-Haddadin) head of the Special Forces. Batatu, op.cit., pp.331–2.

81. van Dam, The Struggle for Power in Syria, op.cit., p.89.
82. Gubser, op.cit., p.43.
84. Personal experience with events in the early 1960s.
85. The author witnessed some of the recurrent violent clashes while visiting Aleppo in July 1980. Also, see David B. Ottaway, ‘Syria’s Asad gets upper hand over grave challenge to his roles’, The Washington Post, October 23, 1980.