



The Syrian Army: Between the Domestic and the External Fronts

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The Syrian army lost political power during the regime of President Hafiz al-Asad as that former officer knew how to control the armed forces. The transition to his son and successor, Bashar al-Asad, again raises the question of military influence in the government. This article reviews the relationship between government and army, focusing on the control mechanisms used by the regime, and analyzes how this situation might change under a new leadership that lacks the kind of military experience and authority exercised by Hafiz al-Asad and his colleagues.

On the evening of June 10, 2000, Syria's citizens were told that Hafiz al-Asad, who had been their leader for 30 years, had passed away. Asad was the president of the Syrian Republic, secretary-general of the ruling Ba`th Party, and head of the National Progressive Front (the formal framework for any permitted political activity in Syria, which includes the Ba`th party and six other small parties). But among the plethora of titles he carried and functions he fulfilled, Asad was also general commander (al-Qa'id al-`Amm) of the Syrian Army, holding the rank of Fariq (Lt. General).

The following evening, Sunday, June 11, 2000, Vice President `Abd-al Halim Khaddam, serving as temporary acting president, promulgated two decrees, announcing the appointment of Bashar al-Asad, the late president's son, as the general commander of the Syrian Army in addition to his being promoted to the rank of Fariq, the most senior rank in the army, which his father had held.(1) Several hours later, Bashar received members of the senior officers' corps, headed by Defense Minister Mustafa Talas and Chief of the General Staff (CGS) `Ali Aslan. They had come to offer their condolences on the death of his father, and to pledge their loyalty and complete support.(2)

The appointment of Bashar al-Asad as general commander of the army, and his subsequent election as president, marked the completion in the grooming process of a man who had only held the rank of captain (Naqib) when he returned to Syria in January 1994 following the death of his brother, Basil, in a car accident. This process was conducted under the guidance of his late father. It included rapid promotion and such accelerated military training courses as those for tank battalion commanders, senior officers, and staff officers.(3) Alongside this, the late president and his son effected unprecedented changes in the senior army command echelons, which removed several veteran officers, members of Hafiz al-Asad's generation. These had been the men who had for decades been charged with ensuring the stability and very existence of the Syrian regime. They were replaced by younger officers, mostly `Alawis, apparently closely associated with Bashar.(4)

Hafiz al-Asad's efforts to ensure this son's standing as his heir were concentrated, at least in the initial stages, on the military. This demonstrated that the army, especially a loyal base of support within the officers' corps, remained a key source for legitimacy and political support for any Syrian leader.

Indeed, since Syria gained independence in April 1946, its history has been accompanied by the continuous involvement of the military in the country's political life. In the "Corrective Revolution" of November 1970, which brought Asad to power, military intervention of the Syrian army in the country's affairs had ostensibly reached its peak. It had been a victory for the army and for the senior officers' echelon over their rivals in the Ba`th Party institutions, the governmental apparatus, and within the Syrian public in general. However, this time this revolution was a kind of victory of the army over itself. After all, for the first time the army stood in solid unanimity behind its commander, Hafiz al-Asad -- as opposed to the military coups of the 1950s and 1960s, when army units and their commanders fought each other due to discord within its ranks. Asad's base in the military was reinforced by personal, familial, regional, ethnic and mainly ideological factors.

Nevertheless, a study of the period of Asad's rule (1970-2000) reveals that the "Corrective Revolution" was not only the peak of military involvement, but also largely the end -- at least thus far -- of this involvement. Indeed, in the course of the 30 years Asad was in power he successfully subordinated the army to his rule and distanced it from involvement in the day-to-day affairs of Syrian political life. Thus the regime was able to maintain prolonged political stability, with the army focusing on its military duties, thus becoming a more professional army. The need for professionalism became more acute with the increasing awareness on the part of the decisionmakers in Damascus, especially following 1967, of what they perceived as a real Israeli threat to Syria's national security.

Thus, in the course of Asad's rule, the army became an instrument in the hands of the regime not only in stabilizing its rule at home, but also in promoting Syrian national

interests in the region: in Lebanon and vis-a-vis Jordan, Turkey, Iraq, and mainly Israel.

The death of Hafiz al-Asad, and the rise of his son as his successor, once more raised the question of the army's role in present-day Syria. Is it indeed to be the trained, obedient watchdog of the Asad family, enabling it to maintain its rule in the country, or rather a focus of power holding the key to the country's future in its own hands? Actually, when the moment of truth did arrive, the senior officers' echelon of the Syrian army stood unanimously and firmly behind Bashar. Nevertheless, many -- inside and outside Syria -- cast doubt as to whether this demonstration of loyalty and support would continue for any length of time. Uri Lubrani, who served as coordinator of the Israeli activity in Lebanon for 20 years, was rather blunt in his assessment: "They [the Syrians] have crowned a 34 year-old fellow. They made him the military commander overnight. [It is not hard to guess] what the generals in the Syrian army are thinking. I would say that he has as barely a fifty percent chance of survival".(5)

The very fact that these doubts have surfaced bears witness to the fact that the army -- trained and obedient as it may be -- has remained the main player in Syrian politics. With the demise of the man who had been its master for three decades, it could sooner or later resume its previous role in the country's politics. This process might have implications for the army's capabilities in confronting the Israeli army as well as Syria's regional standing and, especially, its standing in Lebanon. In any event, the Syrian army, as indeed the entire Syrian state, is now at a crossroads.

THE SYRIAN ARMY -- THE ROAD TO THE TOP (1946-1970)

The Syrian army began as the "Syrian Legion," established by the French in the

course of World War I. In 1923, the French established the "Special Forces (Troupes Speciales) of the Levant" to help maintain law and order in the territories of the Levant under their control. On August 1, 1945, these forces were turned over to the governments of Syria and Lebanon and became their national armies. Ever since, these countries commemorate Army Day on this date.(6)

The French recruited volunteers for the "Special Forces" from among members of the minority communities and the lower classes of society. They hoped to gain from the separatist tendencies that had existed at that time within the minority communities. The latter, for their part, as well as members of the Sunni community from the rural areas and the periphery, tended to enlist in the ranks of the "Special Forces" to improve their socioeconomic situation and overcome the limits of their ethnic status and constraining communities.(7) The biography of Hafiz al-Asad provides a good example of this process. When young Asad had completed his secondary education, he wanted to study medicine in Beirut but, because his family was unable to finance his studies, he was forced to opt for a military career.(8)

Thus, the "Special Forces," and later the Syrian army, became the main route of social mobility for large portions of Syrian society who until then had been on the sidelines of the existing socioeconomic and political order. It may also be claimed that the Syrian army became the melting pot which brought together -- and to a certain degree even fused together -- groups of various different backgrounds who formed personal and political alliances crossing ethnic, regional and family lines. In the course of their army service, the recruits even acquired new world views -- pan-Arab, Ba`thist, Pan-Syrian views, and even Communist -- which they shared with other recruits from different origins and backgrounds.(9)

Given the Syrian state's weakness in the early years of its independence, the army's involvement in Syria's political life was inevitable, as happened in neighboring Arab states. There were those who viewed this involvement as unavoidable in states devoid of societal or civilian frameworks, and largely lacking an educated, politically conscious middle class capable of filling the vacuum created with the end of colonial rule. Under these circumstances, the army stood out as a modern institution, whose core -- the officers' echelon -- was often characterized by professional unity, ideology, and a desire for change.(10)

In his book *The Policy of Social Change* in the Middle East and North Africa, Manfred Halpern presented the officers' corps as representing the new salaried middle class that emerged in the Arab world as the result of the modernization process. This class also includes teachers, administrators in the civil service and government apparatus, technicians, high school and university professors, journalists, lawyers and others. This explanation helps, at least in part, in understanding the Ba`th Revolution of March 8, 1963, which brought the Ba`th Party to power in Syria, and the Ba`th officers' echelon to rule. These officers had come from a defined social stratum, as members of minority ethnic groups, mainly `Alawis, and Sunnis from the rural areas and the periphery. These men had enlisted in the army in massive numbers, risen through its ranks, gained control of it and on that basis seized power over the entire country.(11)

Although in the 1950s and the 1960s, the army did succeed in successive military coups and seized power in Syria, it just as often failed to maintain rule for any length of time. This was mainly because the joint experience gained through military service which was to have created a common denominator for the officers and serve as a binding and unifying element, was constantly

overshadowed by power struggles within the military based on ideological, and sometimes ethnic and personal differences. From this aspect, the army genuinely reflected the general situation of the Syrian society as being divided into factions and groups on the basis of family, ethnic affiliation and -- in those years -- ideology as well. The army was unable to maintain unity since it lacked an effective hierarchy at whose apex was a commander able to enforce his will on the army's units.(12)

The "Corrective Revolution" which brought Asad to power in November 1970, was the first coup in which the army stood united behind its commander. However, Asad deliberately refrained from establishing a military regime, i.e., from handing the regime's institutions entirely over to army officers. He may have been motivated by doubts as to their ability to conduct the state's affairs and he may possibly been of the opinion that military support for his regime was insufficient to bring legitimacy. Therefore, Asad preferred to base his rule on a broad political and even socio-economic coalition. This coalition centered around the members of the `Alawite community, to which Asad added members of other ethnic minorities and members of the Sunni community from rural areas and the periphery.(13)

In effect, Asad established his regime as a personal, familial and even tribal and ethnic-oriented regime. This was a regime based on ties of loyalty, mainly blood ties, between Asad and members of his family, tribe and ethnic group who had been granted key positions in the military security apparatus. There were also patron-client ties, between Asad and the members of his tribe and his community, as well as supporters from other ethnic communities also integrated into the ruling leadership. Thus, while the army and the security forces were viewed as an important element in Asad's regime, the

loyalty of the army units and senior officers to Asad was not automatic support for the military commander by a unified professional group of officers. Rather, it was the support of individuals for Asad, based on blood or patron-client ties.(14)

THE SYRIAN ARMY – ASAD'S ARMY

Despite Hafiz al-Asad's efforts to distance the army from involvement in the state's politics, ever since he took over, the army had been called on repeatedly to ensure the regime's stability and even existence. Thus, for example, it was called in during the years 1976-1982, in order to put down the Islamic revolt. This revolt, which at its peak at the beginning of 1980, presented a palpable challenge to the Syrian Ba`th regime, was finally quelled through the use of army and security forces. In February 1982, toward the end of the revolt, army units were sent to the northern town of Hama to suppress the uprising there. The uprising was crushed by artillery and armored units and combat helicopters which destroyed considerable parts of the town, causing thousands of casualties among its residents.(15) A year later, towards the end of 1983, army units were used by Hafiz al-Asad in addressing the threat from his brother Rif`at al-Asad, who wanted to take advantage of the president's November 1983 heart attack to ensure his status as heir. After Hafiz al-Asad recovered from the heart attack and expressed open dissatisfaction with his brother's moves, Rif`at threatened to use the elite force under his command, the "Defense Companies" (Saraya al-Difa`), against the president. However, Hafiz al-Asad succeeded in recruiting most of the army commanders to his side, thus forcing Rif`at to give up his efforts.(16)

Thus, Asad succeeded in making the army a loyal and obedient watchdog. His success was due to number of political

moves. First, he bolstered the `Alawite presence, and even control, in the army. Most of the senior officers were `Alawite and some were even members of his tribe, the Kalabiyya. Indeed, at the time of Asad's death more than 90 percent of the officers carrying the rank of general are of the `Alawite community.(17) It seems that the military has remained the preferred path for social mobilization for members of the `Alawi community, although some of them have found their way into other state or party institutions. It should also be noted that in certain cases, for example in the wake of Asad's heart attack in 1983, the `Alawite generals banded together in order to protect their personal and even ethnic community interests. It was this that resulted in igniting the flame which led to the struggle between Rif`at and his brother. It seems that even after Asad's death a consensus was reached among the senior officers regarding support for Bashar al-Asad, as his father's heir.(18)

Second, Hafiz al-Asad established a network of patron-client ties, whose aim was to ensure the complete loyalty and support of the army generals, mainly the `Alawis, for him as their commander. These generals were well-rewarded and even allowed to turn their units into political and economic fiefdoms, providing them with secure power and substantial financial earnings.(19) These sources of income were essential in view of the fact that the average salary of a senior Syrian officer during the 1990s was around SL 8,000 (\$150) a month, a very modest sum, even in Syrian terms, certainly for people charged with the country's fate.(20)

Third, Asad established several security apparatuses, which strike fear in the hearts of all Syrians, but focussed on the senior officers' echelon in the army. These included the Air Force Security Administration headed by Ibrahim Khuwayji, as well as the Military Security Department headed since February 2000 by Hasan Khalil,

who replaced `Ali Duba who had served as head of this department since 1974.(21) Alongside these internal security apparatuses, the regime established strike forces whose task was to ensure its existence and defend it from any threat coming from within the army's own ranks or from opponents in Syria. These units had been granted the best military equipment and personnel, and are almost exclusively members of the `Alawite community. They were subordinated directly to President Asad and not to the army command. One of these had been Rif`at al-Asad's "Defense Companies" unit. However, after Rif`at had tried to use this unit to promote his own standing against his brother's will, it was converted into a regular army division and subordinated to the army general command. It was replaced by the Republican Guard Division, which was established in the mid-1980s under the command of `Adnan Makhluaf, a relative of Asad's wife's, Anisa. Both of Asad's sons, Basil and Bashar served in this division, as now does Bashar's younger brother, Mahir. In the course of his path to becoming Syrian president, Bashar dismissed Makhluaf as the division's commander replacing him with `Ali Hasan, an `Alawite officer close to Bashar.(22)

Worthy of note is the fact that Asad took care to integrate senior army officers in the Ba`th Party institutions because he was aware of the important role these institutions played as a meeting point between members from different apparatuses on which Asad based his regime. The Party provides an ideological and organizational base common to all the forces which play a role in Syrian politics: the bureaucrats of the party, government and civil service, as well as senior army officers. It has branches in the army units and security forces, which send representatives to the senior Party institutions. Senior army officers are members in such institutions as the Central Committee (al-

Lajna al-Markaziyya) and Regional Command (al-Qiyada al-Qutriyya), alongside party bureaucrats.(23)

These steps were sufficient to ensure Asad's control over the army and ensured his rule in Syria for decades. Towards this end Asad was prepared to compromise on everything having to do with the army being a professional institution. Appointments were made on the basis of political and personal convenience. Asad appointed as high army commanders his close associates, family members and sometimes personal friends on whose loyalty he could depend. Among those appointments of special note was Asad's colleague from his pilot course, Naji Jamil, who served as Air Force commander from 1970 to 1978, although he never finished the flying course.(24) Another prominent appointment based on politics was the appointment as Air Force commander, in the spring of 1993, of Muhammad al-Khuli, who in the past had been a security officer but not a pilot.(25)

This category of political appointments also included Mustafa Talas, who has served as defense minister since 1972. Talas is viewed as a ceremonial figure and has long since lost any connection to the day-to-day professional management of the army. Despite the fact, though, that he became a frequent source of embarrassment to the regime, he remained firmly ensconced in his position as a repayment to a loyal friend who had known Asad since 1953 when they spent several weeks together in preparation for a flying course.(26)

Another outstanding characteristic of the manner in which Asad managed things as the commander of the army was his tendency to allow army officers to retain their positions for long periods. This may have had its roots in this desire to allow his senior officers to acquire professional depth and experience, but was based on retaining those who had shown personal loyalty. Thus a considerable

number of senior officers remained firmly fixed in their positions for a decade or more. Thus, for example, `Ali Duba served in his post as head of the Military Security from 1974-2000, Hikmat Shihabi served as CGS from 1974-1998. Such longevity became a source of stagnation for the armed forces in professional terms.

THE SYRIAN ARMY IN THE EXTERNAL FRONTS

For years, and certainly after Asad's rise to power, the Syrian regime vacillated between the need to continue relying on the army's support in ensuring its stability and its desire to build a professional army capable of promoting Syria's national interests, mainly on the Israeli front. Internal security considerations have remained the regime's principle concern, though Asad did manage to strike some balance between these two missions.

For example, the increase in the army's size during Asad's rule -- to 500,000 in the year 2000 -- served the regime's domestic needs while also arising from the long-standing confrontation with Israel.(27) It also appears that one of the things motivating Asad to refrain from deepening the army's involvement in Syrian politics was his feeling that the army had to focus more and more on the struggle against Israel. That had been the main lesson that Asad drew from the 1967 war, a defeat that greatly shaped his thinking. This war taught him that the Israeli threat was very real and demanded the recruitment of all the national resources, both Syrian and those of other Arab countries.(28)

On the eve of the 1967 war, the Syrian army numbered about 50,000 men, while on the eve of the 1973 War, it already numbered 170,000 men.(29) It was this increase in the strength of the Syrian army that allowed Asad to start the October 1973 war on the basis of an ambitious operational plan, whose aim was

to occupy the entire Golan Heights. This goal was not attained in the end, but nevertheless, in the war's early days, Syria enjoyed some impressive -- though temporary -- achievements in penetrating the Israeli defense lines, gaining control over considerable parts of the Golan Heights, and capturing the Mt. Hermon post on the first day of the war. However, the end of the war was less spectacular. Israel, which gave the northern front priority because of its proximity to concentrations of population in Israel, repulsed the Syrians on the Golan Heights, pushing them towards Damascus.(30) Moreover, the war did not lead to the creation of a united Arab front, but rather shattered it. Indeed, in the wake of the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement in March 1979, a central element in Syria's security concept collapsed: the concept of inter-Arab cooperation and coordination. Asad's efforts to establish an eastern front based on an Iraqi-Syrian axis as an alternative to the Egyptian-Syrian axis failed and Syria quickly found itself standing alone in its struggle with Israel.(31)

Israel did not wait very long before exploiting the new regional reality created with the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement. It quickly initiated moves designed to push Syria out of Lebanon, exploiting the domestic turmoil in Syria at the time (the Islamic revolt), in its June 1982 operation in Lebanon.(32) This war served to strengthen the feeling in Damascus that Israel posed a real threat, resulting in an unprecedented build-up of Syrian military strength. The Syrians quickly revised their concept of strategic parity. Inter-Arab coordination and cooperation was to be replaced by the building of a strength that would allow the Syrians to fight Israel alone, with no assistance or aid from other Arab countries. Damascus's ambitious goal to achieve strategic parity with Israel was expressed in the slogan *al-Sumud wal-Tasddi*

(standing fast and meeting the challenge). This slogan symbolized the two steps that the Syrian army had to take. One was achieving a defense capability that would allow it to repulse any Israeli attack. The other was mounting an attack that would enable Syria to defeat Israel.(33)

In the years following the 1982 War, the Syrian army grew considerably, almost doubling from about 300,000 men in 1983 to about 500,000 in 1985. New divisions were formed and the army was equipped with advanced Soviet weapons: fighter planes, improved long-range surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles and electronic war and air defense systems. These means were meant to close, or at least narrow, the qualitative gap between Israel and Syria, which was blamed for the defeat in Lebanon.(34)

However, Syria's build-up efforts exacted a price. It demanded increasing political reliance on the Soviet Union as the sole source of weapons and political backing. More serious than that, this build-up effort created a substantial increase in defense spending which Syria found difficult to maintain. In previous years, military expenditures had amounted to almost half the Syrian GNP, far beyond the officially published budget allocations. The Syrian build-up from 1982 onward to achieve strategic parity with Israel increased military expenditures even beyond this. This resulted in a severe economic crisis, which brought the Syrian economy at the end of 1985 to the brink of collapse.(35)

Asad's lesson from the economic crises of the mid-1980s was clear: Syria's resources were not sufficient for it to engage in a process of unlimited military build-up, a process necessary and even imperative if Syria wanted to continue the military struggle against Israel. The truth of this conclusion became even more evident with the collapse of the Soviet Union toward the end of the 1980s, which seriously eroded one of the

main components in the Syrian national security concept. The USSR could not be relied on as the sole source of weapons and as protector when needed against Israel and its ally, the United States.(36)

During 1991, Syria participated in the war over Kuwait, playing a minor role in a coalition led by the United States against its Arab "brother," Iraq. Despite Syria's insignificant contribution to this war, it provided the Syrian army with an excellent lesson on the modern battlefield, on which it was liable to find itself in a future military confrontation with Israel. One of the main lessons Syria learned, was that it needed to gain a defense capability against Israel's air power.(37) As a result, Syria procured Scud-C surface-to-surface missiles from North Korea and then worked on the development of the Scud-D with North Korean and Iranian assistance. These missiles have a range that covers most of Israel's territory (600-700 kilometers) and can carry chemical or biological warheads. Thus, for the first time in the history of the conflict, the Syrians had the capability of hitting populated areas deep inside Israeli territory.(38)

When Moshe Arens became Israel's minister of defense in March 1999, on the eve of the May 1999 elections in Israel, he began promoting the concept that the Syrian army had ceased to pose a serious threat to Israel. Arens argued that since the Syrian economy was on the brink of collapse, the Syrian army became incapable of procuring new and advance equipment or even basic logistic items. Furthermore, this army also failed to address the technological developments and other changes that took place in the modern battlefield, thus, enabling the Israeli army to increase its military and technological superiority over the Syrian army.(39) The military establishment in Israel, led by intelligence, came out strongly against Arens' ideas by arguing that Syrian society was

better able to absorb loss of life and economic damage.(40)

Despite the growing technological gap between the Israeli and the Syrian army, the latter has invested considerable efforts in improving its capability in those areas which it enjoys a relative advantage, or at least parity, in relation to the Israeli army, while also upgrading its training and professionalism. The Syrian army strengthened its conventional warfare capability through the procurement of advanced Russian tanks and anti-tank missiles that can deal successfully with the Israel's advanced tanks. It has also equipped itself with surface-to-surface missiles of the Scud-C and Scud-D models, in addition to which it is working on the development of biological and chemical warfare. This strengthens Syria's deterrent against Israel, neutralizing the latter's strategic advantage in nuclear weapons and long-range aircraft.(41) On the political level, Syria succeeded in preserving and increasing its strategic alliance with Iran, while at the same time taking steps to improve relations with Iraq. These other two countries are on the brink of obtaining nuclear weapons, and might -- in an emergency -- lend Syria the strategic depth, which it so very much lacks.(42)

As a result, though, there arose some feeling of complacency in the Syria army despite its technological inferiority to Israel and awareness that it would lose a war against Israel. During the 1990s, for example, Syria's army tried to obtain the capability to mount a limited surprise attack against Israel on the Golan Heights, perhaps as a means to gain Israeli concessions on that territory.(43)

The fact that the Syrian army, despite its weakness, is a difficult opponent for Israel, gave Asad the ability to promote Syrian regional interests. He was able to take control over Lebanon in the mid-1980s and use Hizballah against Israel without fearing that the latter would turn its weapons against

Syria. Nevertheless, when in the fall of 1998 tensions between Syria and Turkey intensified, the limitations of the Syrian army became all too apparent. It could not deploy itself and prepare to deal with Turkey, as well as Israel. The result was Syria's total capitulation to Ankara's demands to stop its assistance to the Kurdish PKK forces operating against Turkey.(44) This is a clear indication that although Syria considers all of its neighbors - Turkey, Iraq and Jordan - as posing potential threats to its national interests and to its internal stability, it still views Israel as its major enemy and most threatening neighbor.

An interesting issue is what the future role of the Syrian army in the event that the country would some day make peace with Israel. Worthy of mention in this connection, are reports that several high-ranking generals opposed Syria's signing a peace agreement with Israel for fear that such an agreement would diminish the role of the army in Syrian politics.(45) According to these reports, the then commander of the Syrian Special Forces, `Ali Haydar, expressed his opposition to such an agreement in the summer of 1994, challenging President Asad. Haydar was dismissed from his post and even arrested. However, it seems that the army in general did not oppose Asad's policy, and that the Haydar episode had to do with personal dispute between `Ali Haydar and the Asad family.(46) Moreover, it may be assumed that even in the event that an Israeli-Syrian peace agreement is signed, the regime would continue to rely on the support of the army in order to preserve its stability and ensure its continued existence.

Syrian generals also might note how the Egyptian army became stronger after the 1979 peace agreement with Israel, obtaining advanced equipment from the United States. They can also assess, however, clear reluctance on the part of American leaders to become Syria's main source of aid and

weapons. At any rate, even a peace agreement with Israel would not mean any change in the view of that country as a threat. Similarly, it may be assumed that there would be no change in the way Syria looks at its regional environment and will continue developing and strengthening its army.(47)

CONCLUSION

The involvement of the army in political life in Syria went along with its becoming an independent state. This involvement constantly increased until it brought army officers to rule. The rise of the army officers to power reflected the emergence as a dominant force in Syrian politics of a socio-economic as well as political coalition based on members of the `Alawite community together with members of other ethnic minorities and Sunnis from rural areas and the periphery. Army officers quite often behaved as a social stratum with a definite ethnic identity.

In the long years of Hafiz al-Asad's rule, the army, which had been the nightmare of Syrian politicians in the 1950s and the 1960s, became the lapdog of the Asad family, did its masters' bidding and bared its teeth to the enemy. Asad's powerful control over the army allowed him to focus most, even if not all, of the army's efforts towards the external fronts, mainly, the struggle against Israel and efforts to consolidate Syria's hold over Lebanon. The Syrian army acquired professional and operational skill and considerably increased its strength and capabilities. This was not sufficient for it to be able to defeat Israel. Nevertheless, the army has apparently succeeded in coming to terms with its disadvantages, lack of funding and technological backwardness. The answers that it found in overcoming its limitations in comparison with Israel -- for example, the procurement of poor man's non-conventional combat means (biological and chemical

weapons and surface-to-surface missiles) -- made it an enemy considered by Israel to pose a real threat despite the obvious weakness, which even the Syrians themselves were willing to admit.(48)

In any event, the Syrian army will continue to be a key pillar for the government and will continue to be used as an instrument in promoting the regime's interests on the domestic as well as external fronts. The question is how the armed forces will adjust to the era following the demise of Hafiz al-Asad, who enjoyed the personal loyalty of its commanders.

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This article is based on a presentation made at the conference "Armed Forces in the Middle East: Politics and Strategy," held on November 15-16, 2000. The conference was sponsored by the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) Foreign Policy Institute, the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, and the Bar-Ilan University Department of Political Studies. This article will also appear as a chapter in an upcoming book Barry Rubin and Tom Keaney (eds.) Armed Forces in the Middle East (Frank Cass, upcoming).

NOTES

1. *Tishrin*, 12 June 2000.
2. Syrian TV, 11 June 2000; see also *al-Hayat* (London), 12 June 2000; *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 13 June 2000.
3. See Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy -- Syria in Transition* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 160; see also *al-Ba`th*, 17 April 1996; *al-Wasat*, 14 August 1997; *al-Hayat* (London), 3, 5 January 1998.
4. See Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp.160-175; see also Eyal Zisser, "Will Bashshar al-Asad Last", *MEQ* (Middle East Quarterly), Vol. II, No. 3 (September 2000), pp.3-12; see also *al-Watan al-`Arabi*, 18 February, 17 March 2000.
5. *Yedi`ot Aharonot*, 23 June 2000; see also an interview with Uri Lubrani by the author, Tel Aviv, 29 August 2000.
6. For more on the establishment of the "Troupes Specials," see Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate, the Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 170-172, 430, 617. See also N. E. Bou-Nacklie, "Les Troupes Specials: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-46," *IJMES* (International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies) 25 (1993), pp. 645-660.
7. See N. E. Bou-Nacklie, "Les Troupes Specials: Religious and Ethnic Recruitment, 1916-46," *IJMES*, 25 (1993), pp. 645-660.
8. See Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1988), pp. 11-13, 24-40.
9. For more see Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria, A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965); Andrew Rathmell, *Secret War in the Middle East: The Covert Struggle for Syria, 1949-1961* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995). See also, Michael H. Van Dusen, *Intra- and Inter-Generational Conflict in the Syrian Army* (Unpublished thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 1971).

10. See Eliezer Be'eri, *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society* (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1969).
11. See Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); see also Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: The Free Press, 1959). For more on the social background of the Syrian officers see Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables and their Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999)
12. For further discussion, see Itamar Rabinovich, *Syria under the Ba`th, 1963-66, The Army-Party Symbiosis* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1972); Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1996); Michael H. Van Dusen, *Intra- and Inter-Generational Conflict in the Syrian Army*.
13. See Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria*; Moshe Ma`oz, *Asad, the Sphinx of Damascus* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1988); Raymond A. Hinnebusch, *Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba`thist Syria - Army, Party and Peasant* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1990); see also Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 25-35.
14. Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 169-184, 439-444; see also Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 28-35; Eyal Zisser, *Decision Making in Asad's Syria* (Washington: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), pp. 17-27.
15. See Umar F. Abdallah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria* (Berkley: Mizan Press, 1987), pp. 88-103; see also Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 316-338.
16. See Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 421-440; see also Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 155-158.
17. See Eyal Zisser, *Decision Making in Asad's Syria*, pp. 21-25.
18. See Eyal Zisser, "Will Bashshar al-Asad Last."
19. See Eyal Zisser, *Decision Making in Asad's Syria*, pp. 17-21; Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked, the Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 38-53.
20. For the average salaries in Syria see for example, *Tishrin*, 20 April 2000.
21. See Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 166; Eyal Zisser, "The Succession Struggle in Damascus," *MEQ*, Vol. II, No. 3 (September 1995), p. 59.
22. See Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 160, 162.
23. For the list of new members of these committees see *al-Ba`th*, 20 June 2000; see also Middle East Watch, *Syria Unmasked, the Suppression of Human Rights by the Asad Regime*, pp. 22-53.
24. See Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 323-324; Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 34-35.
25. See Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 164, 181. See also Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, p. 166; "The Succession Struggle in Damascus," pp. 58-59.
26. See Mustafa Talas, *Mir'at Hayati (The Story of my Life)* (Damascus: Dar Talas lil-Dirasat wal-Tarjama wal-Nashr, 1992), Vol. I, pp. 264-271.
27. See Fred H. Lawson, *Why Syria Goes to War: Thirty Years of Confrontation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); see also Yaacov Bar-Siman Tov, *Linkage Politics in the Middle East: Syria Between Domestic and External Conflict, 1961-1970* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1983).
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29. See Moshe Ma`oz, *Asad*, pp. 93-113; see also Ze'ev Ma`oz, "The Evolution of Syrian Power, 1948-1984," in Moshe Ma`oz and Avner Yaniv (eds.), *Syria under Assad*

- (London: Croom Helm, 1986), pp. 69-82; Ze'ev Eytan, "The Syrian Army," in Avner Yaniv, Moshe Ma'oz and Avi Kover (eds.), *Syria and Israel's National Security* (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 1990) (Hebrew), pp. 155-170.
30. See Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria*, pp. 202-225.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 290-315; Moshe Ma'oz, *Asad*, pp. 121-142.
32. See Itamar Rabinovich, *The War for Lebanon, 1970-1985* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986). See also Ze'ev Schiff and Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984). See also, Mustafa Talas, *al-Ghazw al-Isra'ili liLubnan (The Israeli Invasion of Lebanon)* (Arabic) (Damascus: Mu'assasat Tishrin lil-Nashr, 1983).
33. See `Amos Gilbo`a, "Syria's National Security concept," in Avner Yaniv, Moshe Ma'oz and Avi Kover (eds.), *Syria and Israel's National Security*, pp. 143-154. See also Asad's speeches during the 1980s, *Tishrin*, 9 March 1987, 9 March 1988, 9 March 1989, 9 March 1990.
34. See Ze'ev Eytan, "The Syrian Army," in Avner Yaniv, Moshe Ma'oz and Avi Kover (eds.), *Syria and Israel's National Security*, pp. 155-170, see also Shlomo Brom and Yiftah Shapir (eds.), *The Middle East Military Balance* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2000), pp. 345-357.
35. See Eliyahu Kanovski, *What's Behind Syria's Current Economic Problems* (Tel Aviv, The Moshe Dayan Center for middle Eastern and African Studies, 1985).
36. See Eyal Zisser, *Asad's Legacy*, pp. 37-51.
37. *Ibid.*, pp. 52-65.
38. See *Ha'aretz*, 10 November 2000.
39. *Ha'aretz*, 9 April 1999; see also an interview by the by the author with Moshe Arens, Tel Aviv, 17 May 2000.
40. See *Ha'aretz*, 9 April 1999; see also an interview with Maj. Gen. Amos Malka, head of the IDF's Intelligence, Bamachane, 9 July 1999.
41. See *Ha'aretz*, 21 July, 10 November 2000.
42. See Eyal Zisser, "Syria," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (ed.), *MECS (Middle East Contemporary Survey)*, Vol. XXI (1997), (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, 1999), pp. 674-676.
43. See *Ha'aretz*, 18, 22 August 1996, 10 November 2000; *Yedi`ot Aharonot*, 23, 30 August 1996, 10 November 2000.
44. See Eyal Zisser, "Syria," in Bruce Maddy-Weitzman (ed.), *MECS (Middle East Contemporary Survey)*, Vol. XXII (1998), (Boulder, Colorado: Westview, forthcoming).
45. Ma`ariv, 4 September 1994; *al-Hayat* (London), 25 October 1994; *Yedi`ot Aharonot*, 25 November 1994.
46. *Yedi`ot Aharonot*, 25 November 1994; see also Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of its Lesser Rural Notables and their Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 237-238.
47. See *Ha'aretz*, 24 August 1999; *Yedi`ot Aharonot*, 24 December 1999; see also, `Adil Hafiz, *Hafiz al-Asad - Qa'id wa'Umma (Hafiz al-Asad - the Leader and the Nation)* (Arabic) (Damascus: al-Markaz al-Dawli lil-Nashr wal-Ilam, 1994).
48. See a statement by Faruq al-Shar` in February 2000, *al-Safir*, 12 February 2000; see also al-Jazira TV, 24 May 2000.