

THE SEPARATIST PERIOD IN SYRIA, 1961 – 1963*

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On 28 September 1961 a group of Syrian army officers rebelled and announced Syria's secession from the United Arab Republic. A new government was hastily formed from conservative (reactionary) Syrian politicians. Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir initially contemplated intervening, but changed his mind when all resistance to the coup rapidly faded. It was a time for his many enemies both in the Middle East and elsewhere to triumph. Western governments were delighted, but equally the leaders of Iraq, Jordan and Saudi Arabia did nothing to conceal their pleasure. However, pan-Arab emotion was a powerful factor in a further coup in Iraq on 8 February 1963. Syria's fragile government could not long resist the joint pressure from Cairo and Baghdad. Exactly one month after the Iraqi revolt, a military coup in Damascus swept aside all the men who had been in power since the break-up of the UAR.

Key words: the Syrian secession from the UAR; factional differences in the Baʿth Party; military meddling in the politics; the Shtawra conference; the struggle between “progressive” and “reactionary” forces in Syria

It is well known that the Syrians see themselves as the natural leaders of Arab nationalism since many of the activities for Arab liberation came from there. By 1958 internal and external factors convinced Syrian leaders that the cure for their ills was the union with Egypt. Egyptian President Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir, although he wanted a merger on a slower footing, was none the less looking for such unity with eagerness. He agreed to bind Egypt to a country he had never seen. He knew it would be hazardous, but he was seduced by the boldness and the magnitude of the enterprise. He was also trapped by his role as champion of Arab rights and arbiter of Arab destinies.¹ The union, which took place in

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February 1958, did not last long. Many Syrians began to feel frustrated by the way Egypt was ruling their country. Instead of progress, Syria experienced regression. Thus Syrian initial enthusiasm for union was soon to be replaced by disenchantment and discontent.

The Syrian army officers were accustomed to intervention in their country's politics. In making the union with Egypt they had reluctantly agreed to withdraw from politics, but they had not foreseen the extent to which the army would be brought under Egyptian control. Beginning in March 1958, the Egyptians purged first the communists, then the *Ba'athists*, and finally any who opposed the Egyptian lead. *Ba'ath* partisans were usually posted to the diplomatic service or transferred to Egypt. The purges involved some of Syria's most qualified officers. Even seventy-five Palestinian officers given commissions in the Syrian army after the Palestine war as a first step towards training a Palestinian army were purged. The Syrian officer corps was reduced by half. During the union (1958 – 1961), a total of 4,800 commissioned and non-commissioned officers were ousted or transferred. In an effort to keep retired officers quiet the UAR regime raised pensions to the point that their payment became a burden on the state budget. Some 3,300 Egyptian officers came to Syria, where even the lowliest received, in addition to his basic pay, a monthly salary of at least 800 Syrian pounds paid by the Syrian Treasury.²

The desire for unity was stimulated by the popularity of Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir among the Syrian masses. But this alone was not enough to sustain the common state. The differences and the difficulties which existed inside the two countries were not the same nor was the external situation the same. On the one hand, Syria and Egypt were geographically separated by an enemy and the sea, which obstructed the consolidation of mass relationships, a fundamental aspect in any union.³ A number of *Ba'ath* officers stationed in Egypt reacted to the sharpening conflict between the *Ba'ath* and Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir in 1959 by forming a secret organization, later known as the Military Committee, to await the moment to rectify the situation. They did not tell even the *Ba'ath Party* leadership about

¹ SEALE, Patrick *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of post-War Arab Politics, 1945 – 1958*, p. 325.

² *Wathā'iq Mu'tamar Shtawra* (Documents of the Shtawra Conference, 22 – 30 August 1962.). Damascus, Syrian Government Publishing House 1962. (*Texts and documents of the Syrian Complaint Before the Arab League against the Nasserite Intervention in Syrian Affairs*). These complaints were published by the Syrian government, but the UAR and Lebanese governments prohibited its distribution.

Ḥadīth al-baṭal az-za'īm Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir ilā al-umma. (Speech of the Hero, Leader, Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir to the Nation), Vol. IV (1961 – 1963).

³ HASOU, Tawfig Y. *The Struggle for the Arab World. Egypt's Nasser and the Arab League*, KPI 1985, p. 114.

their organization. Their leaders were three °Alawī officers – Ṣalāḥ Jadīd, Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad, Muḥammad °Umrān – and a Druze, Ḥamad °Ubayd.⁴

There existed many important factors which led to the failure of the UAR: the politics of the *Ba'ṭh*, the army, Egypt's strong man in Syria °Abdalḥamīd as-Sarrāj, the apparent Egyptian sense of domination in the Syrian army and other key areas. Moreover, there were Egyptian socialist programmes which were unfamiliar to many Syrians and outside conspiracies originating from countries that opposed the politics of Jamāl °Abdannāṣir. The final blow was when the president shocked the Syrian bourgeoisie on 23 July 1961 by his socialist laws which nationalized all banks, insurance companies, industrial plants and public utilities. Feudal practices were officially liquidated, workers were to share profits with industries and to have their representatives on all management boards and other far reaching measures.⁵ Through socialist laws, the President wanted to eliminate all opposition to the union. It is impossible to judge the relative importance of each of the diverse elements that together led to the secession of Syria from Egypt, but two months later the forces opposed to Jamāl °Abdannāṣir seceded from the union what clearly shows how influential the bourgeois Syrian class was.

At that time a crisis in the relations between the Syrians and the Egyptians broke out on an entirely different issue. °Abdalḥamīd as-Sarrāj was the last of the Syrian leaders to remain in the highest UAR echelons until the summer of 1961. In the UAR government which was formed on 17 August when the regional governments were abolished, he was one of the seven Vice-Presidents, with the portfolio of internal affairs.⁶ A month later there were sharp differences between him and °Abdalḥakīm °Āmir. On 21 September 1961 both were called to Cairo for talks with the President, and on 26 September the public heard that °Abdalḥamīd as-Sarrāj had resigned as minister of the interior of the UAR and that his resignation had been accepted.⁷ On the same day °Abdalḥamīd as-Sarrāj returned to Damascus, °Abdalḥakīm °Āmir went too – and two days later both were arrested by the Syrian officers who had dissolved the UAR. The intelligence apparatus and security agents of °Abdalḥakīm °Āmir must at the time have concentrated their attention on °Abdalḥamīd as-Sarrāj and the possible reactions to his resignation, with the result that a third party was able to

⁴ Ar-RAZZĀZ, Munīf *At-tajriba al-murra*. (Bitter Experience), p. 87; DEVLIN, John F.: *The Ba'ṭh Party. A History from Its Origins to 1966*, p. 203.

⁵ LENCZOWSKI, George *The Middle East in world Affairs*, pp. 537-538.

ḤAMRŪSH, Aḥmad *Qīṣṣat tawrat 23 yūliyyū*. (The Story of the 23 July Revolution). Vol. III. °Abdannāṣir wa al-°Arab. (°Abdannāṣir and the Arabs) 1976.

⁶ HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn *Sanawāt ḡalayān*. (The Years of Boiling), p. 564.

⁷ ZAKARIYĀ, Ghassān *As-sulṭān al-aḥmar*. (The Red Sultan), p. 206.

surprise with a coup.⁸ The surprise was absolute.

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The junta of Syrian officers that took control of Damascus in the early morning of 28 September 1961 acted without reference to the people. At 4 a.m. on 28 September two columns of troops entered Damascus – an armoured column arrived from thirty kilometres distant Qaṭanā camp in the southwest under the command of Lt-Colonel ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī, the chief of Field Marshal ʿAbdalḥakīm ʿĀmir’s bureau in Syria; and the Desert Guard (quwāt al-bādiya) under the command of Lt-Colonel Ḥaydar al-Kuzbarī reached the capital from sixty kilometres distant aḍ-Ḍumayr in the east.⁹ Ḥaydar al-Kuzbarī was a cousin of Dr. Maʾmūn al-Kuzbarī, Prime Minister of the first government after the secession and a representative of the wealthy middle class. In Damascus they were joined by the garrison commanded by Brigadier ʿAbdalḥanī Dahmān and air force Brigadier Muwaffaq ʿUṣāṣa,¹⁰ who was acting commander of the air force that day and succeeded in grounding all the Egyptian pilots in Syria.

Within half an hour the rebels seized the army headquarters, the broadcasting station and the airport. The Syrian commander of the First army Lieutenant General Jamāl Fayṣal, was arrested in his house and shortly afterwards his Egyptian deputy, Major General Anwar al-Qaḍī. Vice-President of the UAR, Field Marshal ʿAbdalḥakīm ʿĀmir was also arrested. Before his arrest he had time to command an Egyptian Major in an artillery brigade at Quṭayfa, north-east of Damascus, to hurry to the capital to suppress the uprising. The major bypassed the brigade’s Syrian commander, who was asleep at his home in Damascus, ignored the protests of the duty officer, and issued an order to move on the capital. The soldiers were told of an Israeli surprise attack. On the way to Damascus the brigade was met by its commander who had been informed of events. He sent the men back to base and the Egyptian officers were arrested.¹¹ At 6.30 a.m. the first communiqué was broadcast from Damascus radio in which the “Supreme Arab Revolutionary Command of the Armed Forces” (Al-qiyāda al-ʿarabīya ath-thawrīya al-ulyā li-l-quwāt al-musallaḥa) refrained from naming the country liberating itself from dictatorship and corruption and mentioned neither Syria nor the UAR. They stated they have acted under the “banner of Arabism”, and Arab unity was not said to have failed

⁸ HAYKAL, *Sanawāt ḡalayān*, pp. 565-566.

⁹ BIZZĪ, Nājī ʿAbdannabī Sūrīya. *Ṣīrāʿ al-istiḡfāb, 1917 – 1973*. (Syria. The Struggle for Polarization), p. 319.

¹⁰ HAYKAL, *Sanawāt ḡalayān*, p. 568.

¹¹ Middle East Report, 1961, pp. 605-623. It is a detailed and well-documented account of the events mentioned here.

but to have been perverted.¹²

The union was already doomed by the wide popular revulsion against the UAR's police dictatorship with its suffocation of freedom of expression and its destruction of civil liberties. President Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir's popularity in Syria was eroded, yet for many Syrians he was still the hero of Suez and the only Arab statesman of international stature. His occasional tours of Syria drew big and apparently enthusiastic crowds. No less than four secret police networks operated in Syria. Responsibility for this state of affairs was not only Egyptian. Three of the four intelligence networks were under Syrian direction; the other was attached to the President's Office in Cairo. The struggle was not between separatists and unionists or between socialists and reactionaries but simply between Syrians and Egyptians. "The failure of the UAR was not a matter of promoting socialist ideology, but of providing a field for effective political participation and expression of opinion, so as to take the edge off the widespread sense of disillusion among soldiers, political notables, businessmen, and ordinary citizens that made the secession possible."¹³ The only people who demonstrated in Damascus that morning in support of the UAR were Palestinian refugees.

The President's answer from Cairo radio came at 9.00 a.m. He resolutely denounced the rebellion "of some small military units in Damascus that occupied the radio station and surrounded the general headquarters ... I have issued orders to the First Army in Syria to move toward Damascus from all sides and repress the rebellion."¹⁴ The reaction of ʿAbdalḥakīm ʿĀmir was different. From what he saw in Damascus he believed that it would be possible to save the union by granting certain concessions to the Syrian officers. From eight o'clock in the morning of 28 September negotiations took place between the rebels and ʿAbdalḥakīm ʿĀmir, Jamāl Fayṣal and the officer ministers of the UAR government (all prisoners at headquarters). At 1.30 p.m. there was a broadcast of communiqué No. 9 in which the Supreme Arab Revolutionary Command of the Armed Forces declared that its goal was "to defend and preserve the attachment of the Arabs for each other", that it had no intention of "endangering the victories which had already been achieved by Arab

¹² The text of Communiqué No. 1, In *Al-ḤAWRĀNĪ*, Akram *Mudhakkirāt Akram al-Ḥawrānī*. (The Memoirs of Akram al-Ḥawrānī). Vol. IV., p. 2906.

¹³ KERR, Malcolm H.: *The Arab Cold War. Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958 - 1970*, p. 25.

¹⁴ Speech of the President from the Broadcasting Station in Cairo, in the morning of 28 September 1961. In *Al-majmūʿa al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa aḥādīth wa taṣrīḥāt Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir. Sanawāt al-waḥda*. (Complete Collection of Speeches, Interviews and Statements of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir. The Years of Union). Vol. III, Part II, 1st January 1960 to 5 October 1961, pp. 831-836.

nationalism"; that it had explained to "Field Marshal 'Abdalḥakīm 'Āmir the problems and aims of the army" and that in full understanding he had "made the necessary decisions to safeguard the unity of the armed forces of the United Arab Republic. Thus army matters have been restored to their normal course." The communiqué again spoke of the UAR and of 'Abdalḥakīm 'Āmir as "the Vice-President of the Republic and the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces,"¹⁵ and created the impression that agreement had been reached.

The authors of the 28 September 1961 coup declared they wanted Syrian autonomy within the UAR, not separation from it. But President Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir refused to yield to this demand. Moreover, the process, once set in motion, acquired its own momentum and could not be stopped. Syrian coup leaders Lt-Colonel 'Abdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī and Air Force Brigadier Muwaffaq 'Uṣāṣa negotiated at General Headquarters with Field Marshal 'Abdalḥakīm 'Āmir in the presence of the Commander of the First (Syrian) Army, Lieutenant General Jamāl Fayṣal, and the Syrian ministers of the UAR. 'Abdalḥakīm 'Āmir in principle accepted their demands which were concerned primarily with the grievances of Syrian officers but, awaiting Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir's word, he did not sign Communiqué No. 9 which announced the agreement. However, it must be said, that the whole negotiations over this communiqué were simply a manoeuvre to gain time and at 3.15 p.m. when it was learned in Damascus that in the meantime support for the uprising had spread in most of the Syrian provinces, Communiqué No. 10 cancelled the previous one. At 5.20 p.m. 'Abdalḥakīm 'Āmir was flown to Cairo¹⁶ and the union was dissolved.

However, the communiqué was not broadcast in the name of 'Abdalḥakīm 'Āmir who would not sign it without authorization from the President. He was permitted to communicate with him by wireless, and it then became clear that Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir was against compromise. If the rebels' intention had been autonomy within the union, it became clear that this was the last thing to which Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir would agree. He confronted them with the choice of surrender or secession. Whoever heard his two speeches of 28 September could have entertained no doubt that he had been surprised and deeply shocked.¹⁷ He was not ready for any compromise, either in the hope that the uprising would fail, or with the understanding that any retreat under the pressure of revolt was likely to shake the structure of the regime in Cairo as well – a matter he considered to be worse than the loss of Syria.

Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir's adherence to principles and his inability, to make a

¹⁵ The text of Communiqué No. 9, In *Al-ḤAWRĀNĪ*, Akram *Mudhakkirāt Akram al-Ḥawrānī*. (The Memoirs of Akram al-Ḥawrānī). Vol. IV., p. 2907.

¹⁶ NAṢR, Ṣalāḥ *Mudhakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr*. (The Memoirs of Ṣalāḥ Naṣr). Vol. II., p. 204.

¹⁷ HASOU, *The Struggle for the Arab World*, p. 115.

compromise, cost him Syria. On 28 September 1961 the union of Syria and Egypt came to an end. However, it is not clear whether or not the Syrian rebels had intended absolute secession. They may only have wanted to obtain military and political autonomy for Syria and abolish nationalization while yet preserving the framework of the union.¹⁸ The communiqués broadcast from Damascus that day left room for both interpretations. A clear demonstration of independence and secession did not come until late at night – Damascus Radio ended its broadcast with the old Syrian anthem. The officers then sought out the politicians to constitute a government. Ma'mūn al-Kuzbarī, who had served as Secretary of the National Union in Damascus during the UAR regime, accepted.¹⁹ He formed a Cabinet of *National* and *People's Party* politicians, businessmen, and lawyers. This government, evoking no enthusiasm among the people, tried to win public confidence by promising to restore political liberties, freedom of the press and opinion, to abolish the emergency laws, and to extend the rights of workers and peasants.

At 7.30 a.m. on 29 September the radio announced that the *Supreme Arab Revolutionary Command of the Armed Forces* had asked Dr. Ma'mūn al-Kuzbarī to form a new government, and several hours later the composition of the new government was announced.²⁰ As in the early fifties the Syrian officers at first wanted to operate from behind the scenes and prevent their personal aspirations and political views from flaring into open dissension. On the day after the secession an officer who had not until then been active in politics was appointed commander-in-chief of the army. He was Major-General 'Abdalkarīm Zahraddīn, a 48-year-old Druze, who in the period of union had been director of the department of equipment and supply in Syria.²¹ His appointment was also calculated to allay the apprehensions of the Druze, who were not happy to have as Prime Minister Dr. Ma'mūn al-Kuzbarī who in the past had worked with their inveterate enemy, Adīb ash-Shīshaklī.

Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir had already ordered the First Army to march on Damascus and, since Aleppo and Latakia had not yet rallied to the coup, orders were issued to naval units to leave for Latakia and Aleppo. Major Jalāl Huraydī commanded an advance company of paratroopers to crush a rebellion the President apparently believed was confined to Damascus. But no unit of the

¹⁸ STEPHENS, Robert Nasser. *A Political Biography*, p. 341.

¹⁹ Al-^cAẒM, Khālīd *Mudhakkirāt Khālīd al-^cAẓm*. (The Memoirs of Kh. al-^cAẓm) Vol. III., p. 206.

²⁰ The statement was broadcast in the Communiqué No. 17, on 29 September 1961. In: MUḤAMMAD, Najāh *Al-ḥaraka al-qawmīya al-^carabīya fī Sūriyā, 1948 – 1967*. (The Arab National Movement in Syria). Vol. I., p. 421.

²¹ Van DAM, Nikolaos *The Struggle for Power in Syria. Sectarianism, Regionalism and Tribalism in Politics, 1961 – 1978*, p. 42.

First Army obeyed his order. And, by the time Egyptian forces arrived, both Latakia and Aleppo had gone over to the insurgents. The Egyptian paratroopers who landed during the night were ordered by Syrian forces to surrender and to consider themselves prisoners of war.²² Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir then recalled his naval forces, announced he would never transform unity into a military operation, and accepted the fait accompli.²³

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The Arabic equivalent of secession (infiṣāl) with its derivations immediately acquired a bad connotation in the modern Arabic political vocabulary. Within 24 hours of the beginning of the revolt, the military junta proclaimed the end of the UAR and – to emphasize its dedication to Arabism – renamed Syria (formerly called the Syrian Republic) the Syrian Arab Republic. The new regime after the disruption of the union with Egypt had therefore a difficult task to justify their action, particularly in the face of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir’s decision to retain the name United Arab Republic as a challenge and an aspiration.²⁴ Hence the prime minister of the new Syrian regime hastened, ten days after assuming office, to put forward to other Arab governments a comprehensive plan for a federal union of the Arab states without the mistakes supposedly made in the establishment of the UAR.²⁵ The regime’s position was, however, greatly strengthened when the secession was publicly approved by the former prime ministers and the two leading *Baʿth* members (Akram al-Ḥawrānī and Ṣalāḥaddīn al-Bīṭār) who had previously resigned from the union government. Nevertheless the secession cost the *Baʿth* a considerable loss of members through split and protest resignations.²⁶

The military junta ostensibly withdrew from politics. But ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī soon established a National Security Council – in which the Army Command as well as the President and five key ministers were members – to supervise the government. The junta’s political and social policies closely resembled those of the UAR regime: strong police controls over the people combined with a number of social measures for the poorer classes. However, on

²² NAṢR, *Mudhakkirāt Ṣalāḥ Naṣr*, Vol. II, p. 211.

²³ Speech of the President broadcast from Cairo on 5 October 1961. In: *Al-majmūʿa al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa aḥādīth wa taṣrīḥāt Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir. Sanawāt al-waḥda*. (Complete Collection of Speeches, Interviews and Statements of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir. The Years of Union). Vol. III, Part II, 1 January 1960 to 5 October 1961, pp. 864-871.

²⁴ BIZZĪ, *Sūriya. Ṣirāʾ al-istiḳfāb, 1917 – 1973*, p. 322.

²⁵ TIBAWI, A. L. *A Modern History of Syria including Lebanon and Palestine*, p. 408.

²⁶ ABU JABER, Kamel S. *The Arab Baʿth Socialist Party. History, Ideology, and Organization*. New York, Syracuse University Press 1966, p. 66; OLSON, Robert W. *The Baʿth and Syria, 1947 to 1982. The Evolution of Ideology, Party, and State*, p. 34.

1 October the junta dissolved the Syrian branch of the *National Union* – a major Egyptian vehicle for controlling Syrian internal affairs.²⁷ The junta acted against some of those who had served in or collaborated with the UAR. The main target was the intelligence apparatus, which was primarily responsible for the creation of a police state in Syria. Its head, °Abdalḥamīd as-Sarrāj, and about thirty of his staff were arrested.²⁸ Workers and peasants were granted some of their former achievements. On the other hand, the junta retained the emergency laws, banned political parties, advocated the formation of a “popular rally” (on the lines of the National Union) to support “the principles of the Revolution”, prohibited workers from engaging in political activity, denied freedom of the press and civil liberties, and refused to reinstate thousands who had been purged from their jobs by the UAR regime.²⁹

Meanwhile several Arab and non-Arab countries recognized the new regime in Damascus. Jamāl °Abdannāṣir, faced with Syrian reality, spoke to his listeners on 5 October, announcing – after defending the Egyptian role in Syria during the union – that UAR would not stand against Syria’s readmission to UN membership and that he would not hinder the readmission of Syria to the League of Arab States. He refused, however, to recognize any government in Damascus except after a Syrian popular and free-will decision which chooses for itself its own road.³⁰ On 29 October 1961 Syria was re-admitted to the Arab League. The League’s secretary-general initiated a series of meetings between Syrian and Egyptian representatives and an agreement was reached between the two countries on the outstanding issues. On 2 November Syria agreed to repatriate 870 Egyptian officers and other ranks, while Egypt reciprocated by allowing 960 Syrian officers to go back to their country.³¹

Cairo, after its initial moderate opposition to the secession, soon began to attack and denounce the Syrian leaders. In the 13 October cabinet meeting, Jamāl °Abdannāṣir told his aides and ministers that “the coming struggle will be an ideological struggle with the reactionary forces in the region” and he called on his cabinet to be ready for that by strengthening the Egyptian internal front.³²

²⁷ Middle East Record, 1961, p. 491.

²⁸ CAROZ, Yacov: *The Arab Secret Services*, p. 108.

²⁹ PETRAN, Thabita: *Syria*, p. 152.

³⁰ Public speech of the President at al-Jumhūrīya Square in Cairo on 29 September 1961. In: *Al-majmūʿa al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa aḥādīth wa taṣrīḥāt Jamāl °Abdannāṣir. Sanawāt al-waḥda*. (Complete Collection of Speeches, Interviews and Statements of Jamāl °Abdannāṣir. The Years of Union). Vol. III, Part II, 1 January 1960 to 5 October 1961, pp. 841-853.

³¹ Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, 1958 – 1970. Cit. in: HASOU, *The Struggle for the Arab World*, p. 117.

³² AL-BAGHDĀDĪ, °Abdallaṭīf: *Mudhakkirāt °Abdallaṭīf al-Baghdādī*. (The Memoirs of

He insisted that the struggle for Arab unity would continue no matter how great the challenge was.³³ Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir declared that he could no longer co-operate with Arab “reactionaries” and therefore he could not accept their charges that he was wrecking Arab solidarity. “I want Arab unity of purpose (waḥdat al-hadaf) before I talk about Arab unity of ranks (waḥdat aṣ-ṣaff)”, he said.³⁴ Cairo waged its cold war against Damascus in the name of “Arab socialism” and “popular Arabism” against “capitalists and reactionaries”. Its propaganda blamed the break-up of the UAR on a minority of “feudalists and reactionaries” who acted “against the will of the Syrian people” and simultaneously emphasized the “revolutionary” character of the Egyptian regime.³⁵ This theme was devised to divert attention from popular Syrian demands for restoration of democratic institutions, demands which could have an echo in Egypt itself. Cairo’s cold war prevented re-examination of the priorities of pan-Arabism and compelled Syrians to exhaust their energies in self-defence instead of using them to put their own house in order.

On 17 October, in an attempt to reassure the economic elite that had supported the secession, Maʾmūn al-Kuzbarī published a statement nullifying the July 1961 socialist decrees. The urgency with which he acted to abolish these measures substantiates the assertion that their promulgation, as far as the economic elite was concerned, was the immediate cause of the secession. Cairo’s propaganda attacked the rightist bourgeois forces that were brought to power by the coup and were behind Syria’s withdrawal from the UAR. It correctly claimed that some of the officers involved had links to Jordan: both Lt-Colonel ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī and Lt-Colonel Ḥaydar al-Kuzbarī, received help from Jordan and Saudi Arabia to facilitate the coup.³⁶ For that reason Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir broke off diplomatic relations with Jordan, accusing King Ḥusayn of being involved in the secession; he terminated the loose confederation existing between the UAR and Yemen; he denounced King Saʿūd, and he vowed not to recognize the new Syrian government. He argued

A. B.) Vol. II., p. 156.

³³ Public speech of the President in Port Said on 23 December 1961. In: *Ḥadīth al-baṭal az-zaʿīm Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir ilā al-umma*. (Speech of the Hero, Leader, Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir to the Nation), Vol. IV (1961 – 1963), pp. 233-248.

³⁴ Speech of the President on the Fourth Anniversary of the Union of Egypt and Syria on 22 February 1962. In: *Ḥadīth al-baṭal az-zaʿīm Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir ilā al-umma*, Vol. IV (1961 – 1963), pp. 260-261.

³⁵ Speech of the President on the Fourth Anniversary of the Union of Egypt and Syria on 22 February 1962. In: *Ḥadīth al-baṭal az-zaʿīm Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir ilā al-umma*, Vol. IV (1961 – 1963), pp. 257-275.

³⁶ ḤAMRŪSH, Aḥmad *Qīṣṣat tawrat 23 yūliyū*. (The Story of the 23 July Revolution). Vol III, *ʿAbdannāṣir wa al-ʿArab*. (ʿAbdannāṣir and the Arabs), p. 90-91.

that for Arab unity to be achieved Arab "reactionaries" must go. This could be done through internal upheavals and agitations by the Arab masses, upon whom the President relied so much in achieving his Arab policy goals. Later President accused the Syrian leaders Ma'mūn al-Kuzbarī and others, of being US agents in the Middle East, and of receiving American bribes, before the union occurred, in order to serve US interests in Syria.³⁷

The *Ba'ath Party* was disorganized and split. Akram al-Ḥawrānī's socialist faction of the *Ba'ath* supported Syria's withdrawal from the UAR. Akram al-Ḥawrānī himself became the first Syrian politician to take a strong stand against President Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir. From this time his faction became in effect a separate party, although the split was not formalized until May 1962.³⁸ Confusion reigned in the faction of Michel 'Aflaq and Ṣalāḥaddīn al-Bīṭār. The latter joined with Akram al-Ḥawrānī to sign a manifesto issued by eighteen politicians in support of the separation, while Michel 'Aflaq refused to sign. When the *Ba'ath's* National Command attacked "secession", Ṣalāḥaddīn al-Bīṭār repudiated his signature. Another group of *Ba'athists*, led by Sāmī Sūfān, angered by Akram al-Ḥawrānī's and Ṣalāḥaddīn al-Bīṭār's signature of the separation manifesto, quit the party to organize the pro-*Nāṣirist* "Socialist Unionist Movement" (Ḥarakat al-waḥdawīyīn al-ishtirākīyīn).³⁹ *Ba'athists* and former *Ba'athists* in the provinces, who had secretly tried to rebuild the party during the union, were in revolt against the authority of Michel 'Aflaq and the pan-Arab National Command. The *Ba'ath* Military Committee in the army maintained its own independent and secretive organization. Some fifty *Ba'ath* officers, including the Military Committee, returned from Egypt to support Syria's withdrawal from the UAR and co-operate with the ruling junta of 'Abdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī. These officers turned against "secession" only after Lt-Colonel 'Abdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī cashiered them in a drive to clean the army of partisans of political parties.⁴⁰ When they found they had gained nothing from the separation, they joined with *Nāṣirist* officers in attempts to overthrow the "secessionist" government. Like the *Ba'ath* provincials, the *Ba'athist* officers were primarily interested in Syria. If sincere about unity, they had no intention of subordinating their country once again to Egypt.

³⁷ Speech of the President on the Fourth Anniversary of the Union of Egypt and Syria on 22 February 1962. In: *Ḥadīth al-baṭal az-za'īm Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir ilā al-umma*, Vol. IV (1961 – 1963), pp. 257-275.

³⁸ DEVLIN, John F. *The Ba'ath Party. A History from Its Origins to 1966*, p. 197.

³⁹ OLSON, Robert W. *The Ba'ath and Syria, 1947 to 1982. The Evolution of Ideology, Party, and State*. Princeton, N. J., The Kingston Press, Inc. 1982, p. 35; MUḤAMMAD, Najāḥ *Al-ḥaraka al-qawmīya al-'arabīya fī Sūriyā, 1948 – 1967*. (The Arab National Movement in Syria). Vol. I., p. 424.

⁴⁰ PETRAN, Thabita *Syria*, p. 151.

Developments in Syria after the secession from the UAR resembled the events that followed the ousting of Adīb ash-Shīshaklī in 1954. A government of civilian statesmen was formed and elections took place two months later. Among the first tasks of this government was to change the electoral law and prepare a provisional constitution. It was published in mid-November, providing that an elected assembly should designate the President of the Republic for the next five years and should become a Constituent Assembly for six months to draft a permanent constitution. In the meantime, the new Cabinet would exercise power according to the 1950 Constitution.⁴¹ However, parliamentary elections and a plebiscite on the new constitution were rushed through on 1 December 1961 before clear-cut political currents could develop and political groups could reconstitute themselves. Although no activity by political parties had been officially allowed, the Constituent Assembly elected on 1 December 1961 surprisingly resembled the one elected in the fall of 1954; 42 per cent of the deputies were independents or the representatives of Bedouin tribes (in 1954 they constituted 47 per cent); the largest party was once again the *People's Party* with 33 seats, constituted the single biggest grouping (22 per cent of the seats in comparison with 21 per cent in 1954); the *National Party* won 21 seats (14 per cent of the seats to 13 per cent in 1954).⁴² The Muslim Brotherhood won 10, and Independents 62 seats. Akram al-Ḥawrānī, the dissident *Ba'ṭh* leader with his allies, captured about 15 seats while Ṣalāḥaddīn al-Bīṭār was defeated along with all candidates of his faction of the *Ba'ṭh*. The "Red Millionaire" Khālīd al-ʿAẓm, a forceful advocate of full democratization and an opponent of the union from the beginning, won the highest number of votes.⁴³

The Right was clearly in the ascendant. Ma'mūn Kuzbarī was elected Speaker of the assembly by 114 votes to 47 for the candidate of the Left, Jalāl Sayyid.⁴⁴ *People's Party* leaders Ma'ṣūf ad-Dawālībī and Nāẓim al-Qudsī, both of whom had won respect by refusing to become involved in the National Union during the UAR regime, became premier and President of the Republic respectively.⁴⁵ Many restrictions circumscribed the electoral campaign, and the

⁴¹ Text of the Provisional constitution of 15 November 1961, in: Al-ḤAWRĀNĪ, Akram *Mudhakkirāt Akram al-Ḥawrānī*. (The Memoirs of Akram al-Ḥawrānī). Vol. IV., pp. 2944-2946.

⁴² Middle East Record, 1961, p. 502.

⁴³ Al-ʿAẒM, Khālīd *Mudhakkirāt Khālīd al-ʿAẓm*. Vol. III, p. 220.

⁴⁴ Al-ʿAẒM, Khālīd *Mudhakkirāt Khālīd al-ʿAẓm*, Vol. III, p. 224.

⁴⁵ BIZZĪ, Nājī ʿAbdānnabī *Sūriya. Ṣirāʿ al-istiqtāb, 1917 - 1973*. (Syria. The Struggle for Polarization), p. 323.

election, held under the emergency laws and with political parties banned, could hardly be marked as democratic. Landlords, the bigger capitalists, and the traditional Right maintained constant pressures to secure cancellation of the economic and social measures taken by the UAR regime. The assembly lifted ceilings on landownership so high as to reduce the amount of land subject to requisition by two-thirds and improved the terms of compensation to landlords. It denationalized all industries totally or partially nationalized in July 1961.⁴⁶

During the subsequent period the majority of Damascene officers rallied around ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī were gradually purged from politically strategic army units around Damascus and elsewhere. They were replaced – as the then the Druze General ʿAbdalkarīm Zahraddīn, put it – “by officers who harboured nothing but hatred and aversion towards Damascus and its inhabitants”.⁴⁷ These were probably mostly officers from the Syrian countryside, who had so often been held in contempt by the people from Damascus. The numerous army purges resulting from the struggle for political power between the senior (and mainly Sunnī) officers, greatly weakened the Sunnī representation in the upper echelons of the officers’ corps.⁴⁸ Whereas officers of Arabic-speaking religious minority groups had been less active in the political sphere in the 1950s and consequently had suffered less from its wear and tear, in the early 1960s they were able to occupy important positions of command which had been made vacant by the successive dismissals of Sunnīs by one side or the other.⁴⁹

The three governments in the first half year after the secession all worked for a gradual and consistent elimination of the heritage bequeathed by the period of union.⁵⁰ The laws of agrarian reform were changed to the detriment of the peasants; nationalization acts were cancelled; instead of establishing closer relations with the Soviet Union, economic collaboration with West Germany was increased. Trade agreements restored Syria’s traditional trade with its neighbours. Egypt’s intensifying cold war spurred a dramatic rapprochement with Iraq. Iraqi military and economic delegations visited Syria. A highly significant turning point occurred in the sensitive sphere of inter-Arab relations which suggested something close to a Syrian-Iraq alliance, the prevention of which has always been a primary objective of Egyptian policy. In the middle of

⁴⁶ Details of the proceedings in the assembly In: Al-ʿAẒM, Khālid *Mudhakkirāt Khālid al-ʿAẒm*, pp. 241-254.

⁴⁷ ZAHRAADDĪN, ʿAbdalkarīm *Mudhakkirātī fī fītrat al-infiṣāl fī Sūriya*, pp. 372.

⁴⁸ Ar-RAZZĀZ, Munīf *At-tajriba al-murra*. (Bitter Experience), p. 159.

⁴⁹ BE’ERI, Eliezer *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*, p. 337.

⁵⁰ The governments of Ma’mūn al-Kuzbarī (29 September 1961 – 21 November 1961), ʿIzzat an-Naṣṣ (21 November 1961 – 21 December 1961), Maʿrūf ad-Dawālībī (22 December 1961 – 28 March 1962).

March 1962 President Nāẓim al-Qudsī met Iraq's Prime Minister ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim at Ruḥba on the Syrian-Iraqi frontier, and their joint announcement of 16 March proclaimed far-reaching political and military coordination.⁵¹

Throughout this period Cairo's radio-station Voice of the Arabs maintained an unremitting attack on the "secessionist" government of Syria. Trends in the Syrian government both in domestic and foreign affairs were not likely to bring stability to the country, and Egypt exerted herself to the utmost to add to the ferment. All her organs of propaganda unremittingly and vehemently attacked the rulers in Damascus as reactionaries, separatists and traitors.⁵² Numerous broadcasts – directly addressed to Syrian officers – incited them to revolt and had an enormous effect. The government's cancellation of the nationalizations and emasculation of the land reform played into Cairo's hands by giving credibility to its charges. So in Syria an ever stronger demand arose for cancellation of the emergency laws, lifting of the censorship and all restrictions. Khālīd al-ʿAẓm and Akram al-Ḥawrānī led this campaign in the assembly, where it won strong backing, since most deputies wanted to get rid of army control. Although severely hampered by the police and the censorship, this movement gathered growing popular support. By mid-March demands for democratization had become so insistent that Premier Maʿrūf ad-Dawālībī was compelled to permit the assembly to debate the question. The assembly demanded his resignation to make way for a National Union Government pledged to cancel the emergency laws and restore political and civil liberties. Therefore he resigned on 27 March.⁵³ Consultations on the formation of a new government were soon interrupted.

* * * * *

During the so-called Separatist Period (Fitrāt al-infiṣāl), Sunnī Damascene officers led by Lt-Colonel ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī, reached the climax of their power.⁵⁴ It was no coincidence that Damascene Sunnī officers were able to stage a successful coup on 28 September 1961, and caused Syria's separation from the United Arab Republic. During the union, whether purposely or not, military command over Syria's military districts had mainly been entrusted to

⁵¹ BIZZĪ, Nāǧī ʿAbdannabī *Sūriya. Širāʿ al-istiḳfāb, 1917 – 1973*. (Syria. The Struggle for Polarization), p. 323.

⁵² BE'ERI, Eliezer *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*, p. 145.

⁵³ AL-ḤAWRĀNĪ, Akram *Mudhakkirāt Akram al-Ḥawrānī*. (The Memoirs of Akram al-Ḥawrānī). Vol. IV., p. 3010.

⁵⁴ In the years preceding the formation of the UAR, Damascene officers also played an important role in politics. In: TORREY, Gordon H.: *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945 – 1958*, pp. 350-355; SEALE, Patrick *The Struggle for Syria. A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945 – 1958*, pp. 238-246; AL-ʿAẒM, Khālīd *Mudhakkirāt Khālīd al-ʿAẓm*. (The Memoirs of Kh. A.) Voll II., pp. 500-503.

these Damascene Sunnīs who therefore occupied an exceptionally strong position.⁵⁵ Also important was the fact that, in the period preceding the coup, the Sunnī Damascene ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī occupied the key military position of Deputy Director of Officers' Affairs – his direct superior being an Egyptian. From that position he could transfer officers who supported him to army units that were of political and strategic importance to the plans for the coup, which he had drawn up together with a number of his fellow Damascene officers. The anti-union coup was consequently almost exclusively a "Damascene" affair.⁵⁶

During the separatist period, however, the power position of the faction of Damascene officers crumbled quickly, partly because ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī never received the full support of the non-Damascenes. On 28 March 1962, he tried in vain to tighten his slackening grip on the army and government apparatus by way of a new military coup. Following this abortive attempt, he was expelled from Syria together with five of his most prominent Damascene military colleagues. The events around 28 March 1962 clearly showed how the Syrian officers' corps had become polarized on a Damascene against non-Damascene basis.⁵⁷ The coup was made during the night of 28 March by Lt-Colonel ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī and some of the officers of his original junta. Its proclaimed aim was to restore the land reform, the nationalizations, and the union. The Army High Command announced that it had assumed control.⁵⁸

The rebels tried to persuade President Nāẓim al-Qudsī to dissolve the assembly and act as their front, but he refused and resigned. The Assembly was dissolved, the government dissolved and a curfew imposed. More than a hundred leading officials, including the Premier and all the ministers, with one exception, were arrested. The coup was carried out mostly by the same officers who had headed the secession coup of 28 September 1961.⁵⁹ Therefore they tried to emphasize its connection with the 28 September 1961 coup. The officers claimed that the government had deviated from the principles of the former revolt. On 30 March General ʿAbdalkarīm Zahraddīn called a press conference and in the presence of Brigadier ʿAbdalghanī Dahmān, commander

⁵⁵ Zahraddīn, ʿAbdalkarīm *Mudhakkirātī fī fitrat al-infiṣāl fī Sūriya mā bayna 28 aylūl 1961 wa 8 ādhār 1963*. (My Memoirs of the Secessionist Period in Syria between 28 September 1961 and 8 March 1963), p. 22.

⁵⁶ Zahraddīn, *Mudhakkirātī fī fitrat al-infiṣāl fī Sūriya*, pp. 22-24.

⁵⁷ Zahraddīn, *Mudhakkirātī fī fitrat al-infiṣāl fī Sūriya*, pp. 66.

⁵⁸ Al-Ḥawrānī, Akram *Mudhakkirāt Akram al-Ḥawrānī*. (The Memoirs of Akram al-Hawrānī). Vol. IV., pp. 3011-3013.

⁵⁹ They were: ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī, Maḥīb al-Hindī, Fāyiz ar-Rifāʿī and Hishām ʿAbd Rabbihi. Cf. Muḥammad, *Al-ḥaraka al-qawmīya al-ʿarabīya fī Sūriyā, 1948 – 1967*. Vol. I, p. 428.

of the Damascus garrison, Brigadier Nāmiq Kamāl, and Colonel ʿAdnān ash-Shaykh Faḍlī, commander of the Damascus region informed that this movement meant a continuation of the September uprising and that the responsible persons, both military and civilian, would be tried publicly by a people's tribunal and special committees would reconsider the passed laws.⁶⁰

The military junta in Damascus paid lip service to the slogans of union and socialism but had no intention of putting them into practice. However, in a number of other centres, especially in the north, there were officers who looked forward to the restoration of union. When they realized the true intentions of Damascus they were surprised and defiant. During the night of 31 March, *Nāṣirist* and *Baʿthist* officers recently dismissed from the army, joined by others earlier dismissed by Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir, made the second coup. These two groups acted together but their aims were divergent. The *Nāṣirists* were headed by Colonel Jāsim ʿAlwān, the commander of the Aleppo garrison. On 31 March Aleppo rebelled against Damascus. Jāsim ʿAlwān had restored to active service a number of officers who had been relegated to the retired list after the secession from the UAR. The UAR flag was then raised over the fortress at Aleppo, and in the first three days of April 1962 "the UAR broadcasting station in Aleppo" came on the air in the name of the "Free Officers' Movement".⁶¹ The *Nāṣirists* acted to regain posts of prestige in the army and to restore the union under their aegis. Other non-party officers participated for opportunist reasons. The *Baʿthist* officers, led by the Military Committee, acted because they wanted both to get back into the army and to prevent ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī from restoring the union with Egypt.⁶² They had suffered from the union. If unity was to be restored, they were determined they would be in charge and control its terms and timing.

The Supreme Military Command sent troops to suppress the movement in Aleppo. An exchange of fire between the rival factions occurred near Ḥumṣ and in Aleppo demonstrators demanded union with Egypt on a sound basis.⁶³ This delicate situation led the commander-in-chief, General ʿAbdalkarīm Zahraddīn, all military faction leaders, as well as several civilian politicians, to convoke a conference at Ḥumṣ on the night of 31 March – 1 April. Following a stormy meeting, several secret decisions were adopted, known as the "Ḥumṣ Convention": 1. to exile the insurgent officers; 2. to return to constitutional life, reinstate Nāẓim al-Qudsī as president and form a transitional civilian cabinet; 3. to hold new elections and a plebiscite on the question of union with Egypt; 4. to

⁶⁰ Al-ḤAWRĀNĪ, *Mudhakkirāt Akram al-Ḥawrānī*. Vol. IV, p. 3014.

⁶¹ BIZZĪ, *Sūriya. Ṣirāʿ al-istiḳḳāb, 1917 – 1973*, p. 323.

⁶² OLSON, Robert W. *The Baʿth and Syria, 1947 to 1982. The Evolution of Ideology, Party, and State*, p. 36.

⁶³ BIZZĪ, *Sūriya. Ṣirāʿ al-istiḳḳāb, 1917 – 1973*, p. 324.

reshuffle the power groups in the high command so as to reflect the views of younger *Nāṣirist* officers; 5. to revise nationalization and agrarian reform laws back toward their UAR origins; and 6. to ensure the submission of the Aleppo command to these decisions.⁶⁴ The succeeding days and weeks were permeated with the spirit of these decisions. ʿAbdalkarīm Zahraddīn formulated Syrian policy in a communiqué broadcast on the morning of 2 April: "General headquarters of the armed forces of the Syrian Arab Republic announces that the High Command favours unity with the liberated Arab countries headed by Egypt, providing that this unity be established on proper foundations, that the country's honour and existence be safeguarded by preventing the recurrence of past mistakes, and providing that these foundations be subject to a free plebiscite."⁶⁵ In other words, they paid lip service to Arab unity and acknowledged Egypt as the leader of the Arab world, but opposed factual unification, particularly with Egypt. The promise of a plebiscite remained unhonoured.

The various groups involved in these coups had one goal in common – to prevent the restoration of democracy in Syria, since a democratic regime would exclude the army from power. This aim was revealed on the eve of the 28 March coup in reports that the military were determined to avoid the "embarrassment" of a return to political, press, and trade union freedoms and wanted a dictatorial regime. Another goal was to restore the land reform and the nationalizations, as many young officers were from the countryside or from the lower-middle classes of the provincial cities.⁶⁶ Some *Baʿthist* and *Nāṣirist* officers came from regions that were largely controlled by the big merchants and businessmen of Damascus, just as the economic destinies of the Jazīra were largely dependent on the wealthy merchants and businessmen of Aleppo. Jāsim ʿAlwān, who was of Bedouin origin, came from Dayr az-Zūr, a rather poor city in constant contact with the Bedouin. Many of the *Baʿth* officers were from the underprivileged provinces of the Jabal Druze and Latakia. The social ideas of these officers were not developed. They had little stake in the Damascus-Aleppo controlled existing order but their background gave them a genuine interest in social reform.⁶⁷

On the morning of 3 April seven officers, leaders of the September and March coups, were flown to Switzerland.⁶⁸ Until the previous day some of the

⁶⁴ RABINOVICH, Itamar *Syria under the Baʿth*, pp. 33-34.

⁶⁵ BE'ERI, Eliezer *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*, p. 147.

⁶⁶ PETRAN, Thabita *Syria*, p. 156.

⁶⁷ PETRAN, Thabita *Syria*, p. 157.

⁶⁸ They were Brigadier ʿAbdalghanī Dahmān and Lt. Colonels Hishām ʿAbd Rabbihi, ʿAbdalkarīm Naḥlāwī, Maḥīb al-Hindī and Major Fāyiz ar-Rifāʿī. Cf. *Al-Ḥayāt*, 4 April 1962. Cit. in: BE'ERI, Eliezer *Army Officers in Arab Politics and Society*, p. 147.

officers had held various leading military posts. Now they were civilians in exile who lived in hope of appointments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or an opportunity to return to the army and the domestic political arena. Jāsim °Alwān, too, had to leave that afternoon. He did not go abroad but went underground. He handed over the Aleppo command to Colonel Lu'ay al-Atāsī, an officer who until then had maintained a position of neutrality among the rival groups of officers while in command of the Dayr az-Zūr region. In the following year he was one of the central figures among the Syrian officer politicians.⁶⁹

On 4 April 1962 Major-General °Abdalkarīm Zahraddīn, who had remained commander-in-chief, carved several new appointments for the army command. Brigadier Nāmiq Kamāl was promoted to major-general and became chief of staff. On 13 April President Nāẓim al-Qudsī returned to his office,⁷⁰ and three days later, a new government was sworn in. °Abdalkarīm Zahraddīn, who had given himself the defence portfolio, defined it as "a government of technicians." An "independent progressive", Dr Bashīr al-°Azma, President of the Doctors' Association, was named to head a "transitional government" of technicians of varying political shades.⁷¹ His government duly renationalized the powerful Khumāsīya Company, and restored the agrarian reform with amendments devised to do away with its inequities and to give the peasant title deed to the land when it was distributed, and not forty years later. It also enacted legislation providing for nationalization of all foreign banks and a 40 per cent government share in all Syrian banks.⁷² Although promising democratization, the government took no steps in this direction. On social and domestic problems the government made pious remarks without carrying them out. The 1958 agrarian reform law was restored but altered to benefit the landlords. These actions conformed to the policies demanded by the officers, but neither the officers, nor Cairo were satisfied. Voice of the Arabs was soon calling for Bashīr al-°Azma's overthrow; within weeks the officers again became involved in conspiracy. A many-sided struggle now began in Syria.

All three coups were made in the name of restoring the union. Yet in discussions the Army High Command and the commander-in-chief held with "unionist" politicians and public figures before the coups, only one individual (the Nāṣirist officer Nihād al-Qāsim) was willing to accept unconditional union. The rest, though ready enough to resort to conspiracy, wanted only a "moderate" union. The Syrian people did not take seriously the unity slogans

⁶⁹ RABINOVICH, *Itamar Syria under the Ba'ath*, p. 34.

⁷⁰ Al-°AZM, *Khālid Mudhakkirāt Khālid al-°Azma*, Vol. III, p. 281.

⁷¹ MUḤAMMAD, *Najāḥ Al-ḥaraka al-qawmiya al-°arabiya fī Sūriyā, 1948 – 1967*. (The Arab National Movement in Syria). Vol. I, p. 429.

⁷² BIZZĪ, *Sūriya. Ṣirā' al-istiqlāl, 1917 – 1973*, p. 324.

chanted by the rebels. The prevailing view was that "the officers do not want a return to union but want to rule themselves". But on this question the officers were, in their own fashion, true believers. President Nāẓim al-Qudsī shared the opinion of the premier that a "good majority of Syrians desire a federal bond with Egypt short of full union."⁷³ General ʿAbdalkarīm Zahraddīn described Cairo as "the known financier and planner" of the coups, while asserting that the American embassy in Damascus and the American consulate in Aleppo financed and planned the coups "behind the scenes".

The party's Fifth National Congress in May 1962 still tried to hide basic differences between the party's National Command and the Syrian provincials or regionalists (al-quṭrīyūn), who had tried to maintain a party organization on their own during the union. Regionalist demands for a reorganization of the party from its base and election of a new National Command were rejected.⁷⁴ Even though strong criticism was directed against Akram al-Ḥawrānī and his faction, the National Command hesitated to take direct action against them. It waited until Akram al-Ḥawrānī issued a manifesto in the name of the Baʿth Socialist Party of Syria about 20 June criticizing the original *Baʿth Party* and its role in the union and condemning any return to union with Egypt. Then the split between the factions of Akram al-Ḥawrānī and that of Michel ʿAflaq and Ṣalāḥaddīn al-Bīṭār of the *Arab Resurrection Socialist Party* (the *Baʿth*) became final.⁷⁵

After the fifth National Congress, Cairo's attacks on the *Syrian Baʿth* tapered off, and *Baʿth* leaders Michel ʿAflaq and Ṣalāḥaddīn al-Bīṭār began to take a line on Syrian affairs similar to Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir's. In the summer of 1962 the *Baʿth Party* in Syria was divided into four distinct factions. The faction of Akram al-Ḥawrānī and the regionalists supported the existing order. On the other hand Sāmī Sūfān's *Socialist Unionist Movement* and Michel Aflaq's new *Baʿth* counted among the unionist opposition,⁷⁶ which had become involved – along with Hānī al-Hindī's *Arab National Movement* and various other *Nāṣirists* and unionists – in still another Egyptian conspiracy. Among the reasons drawing *Baʿthist* and *Nāṣirist* officers into this conspiracy was their desire to save themselves from trial and jail for killings and other acts committed during their recent coups and to return to the army. There followed labour troubles, clashes, bomb explosions, Cairo's incitements to revolt, and the infiltration of

⁷³ PODEH, Elie *The Decline of Arab Unity. The Rise and Fall of the United Arab Republic*, p. 168.

⁷⁴ *Niḍāl al-Baʿth*. Collection of Documents. (The Struggle of the Baʿth). Vol. IV. *Al-muʿtamarāt al-qawmīya as-sabaʿa al-ūlā*. (The First Seven National Congresses), pp. 141-144.

⁷⁵ DEVLIN, John F. *The Baʿth Party. A History from Its Origins to 1966*, p. 201.

⁷⁶ RABINOVICH, *Syria under the Baʿth*, p. 40.

money and arms from the Lebanon heralded the approach of a new Egyptian conspiracy. A new coup was planned and its conspirators, meeting on 6 July, had decided to seize power on the 28th and install a civilian government including *Nāṣirists* and *Baʿthists*. The conspirators received support and arms from Egypt via Lebanon. In speeches celebrating the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, President Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir on one occasion in his speech named Syria “the Northern Region of the UAR” and declared in this hard times Egyptian people standing with the valiant Syrian people against reactionary forces and their stooges.⁷⁷ By this time, however, the Syrian authorities had the situation in hand. The government announced that an attempted *Nāṣirist-Baʿthist* coup on the night of 28-29 July had been frustrated. Documents, tapes of wireless conversations between the conspirators and Cairo, and confessions of the accused exposed the plot.

Discovery of the plot provoked the now predominantly anti-*Nāṣirist* government to complain formally to the Arab League about Egypt’s constant interference in Syria’s internal affairs. The Syrian foreign minister in his complaint to the secretary-general of the Arab League requested an immediate meeting of the League’s council to look into the situation created by the Egyptian president’s statements and actions towards Syria which amount to a open attack on the sovereignty and dignity of Syria. Moreover, the minister asked that the League meeting be held in any Arab state but Egypt.⁷⁸ The extraordinary session of the League, held at Shtawra in Lebanon, in late August heard the complaint. The session was characterized by a violent confrontation between the Syrian and Egyptian delegations. The Syrian delegation offered a wealth of documentation: the tape recordings, written documents of a similar nature including instructions from the Egyptian embassy in Beirut, confessions of the conspirators, and so on. The Syrian delegation charged *inter alia* that Egypt was plotting to topple the government in Damascus and aiming to “annex” Syria; that the Egyptian ambassador in Lebanon ʿAbdalḥamīd Ghālib and Akram ad-Dayrī former Syrian minister in the UAR government were personally involved in that plot; that Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir was pursuing a “soft” policy toward Israel,⁷⁹ and so on. The Egyptian delegation, highly embarrassed, then walked out threatening that Egypt would quit the League if it did not

⁷⁷ Speech of the President on the Tenth Anniversary of the (1952) Revolution, 22 February 1962. In: *Ḥadīth al-baṭal az-zaʿīm Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir ilā al-umma*, Vol. IV (1961 – 1963), pp. 413-414.

⁷⁸ *Wathāʾiq Muʾtamar Shtawra* (Documents of the Shtawra Conference, 22 – 30 August 1962.), pp. 24-25.

⁷⁹ The Syrian delegation declared, that „the imperialist agent and the reactionary is he who lets Israel have a free passage in the Gulf of ʿAqaba“. In: *Wathāʾiq Muʾtamar Shtawra*, pp. 28-53.

condemn the Syrian charge. The League Council then passed a non-committal resolution which suspended the Syrian complaint so long as the UAR did not attend League meetings.

The Shtawra Conference, occurring almost a year after Syria's withdrawal from the UAR, marked the first strong Syrian government stand against Egypt. This stand reflected the gathering strength of the democratic movement and the coming-together of all anti-*Nāṣirist* forces. Syria announced that it had given political asylum to the Egyptian military attaché in Lebanon, Lt-Colonel Zaghlūl ʿAbdarrahmān.⁸⁰ The Syrians were, naturally, strongly supported by the Saudi and Jordanian delegations. In a statement made in Damascus Zaghlūl ʿAbdarrahmān accused Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir of personally directing a pro-Cairo terrorist and sabotage network which was operating in Syria. After a violent meeting which necessitated the intervention of the Lebanese police, the Egyptian delegation walked out of the meeting, and for the next year Egypt snubbed the Arab League.⁸¹

Efforts to restore the dissolved National Assembly, suspended during the Shtawra Conference, now resumed. On 14 September, the assembly met, amended the 1950 Constitution as proposed, and gave a vote of confidence to Khālīd al-ʿAẓm, who on 17 September 1962 had been named premier because he was the only political figure acceptable to both Right and Left.⁸² Nāẓim al-Qudsī then dissolved the assembly as promised. Khālīd al-ʿAẓm with great difficulty managed to form a National Union Cabinet representing all trends, except the *Baʿth* which refused to serve, the *Nāṣirists*, and the *Communist Party*, which accused the new government of reactionary and anti-unionist leanings.⁸³ Khālīd al-ʿAẓm declared that his government would uphold the principle of "social justice" and proceed with the agrarian reforms. It would also work towards Arab unity and restitution of the Arabs of Palestine and maintain a neutral policy in international relations. He and some of his ministers made a valiant attempt to carry out the government's mandate. This was to cancel the emergency laws, restore democratic institutions, hold parliamentary elections, lift the standards of workers and peasants, and encourage private capital to participate in development. Under the circumstances the government's achievements were remarkable. The new Agrarian Reform Minister, Amīn Nafūrī, an ally of the socialists of Akram al-Ḥawrānī, began an intensive

⁸⁰ This officer was a notorious gambler who sold secret files of the Egyptian undercover operations against the Syrian regime which included lists of Egyptian agents operating in Syria, to a Saudi secret agent. Details in: NUTTING, Anthony: *Nasser*, pp. 314-316.

⁸¹ DAWISHA, A. I. *Egypt in the Arab World. The Elements of Foreign Policy*, p. 37.

⁸² MUḤAMMAD, *Al-ḥaraka al-qawmīya al-ʿarabīya fī Sūriyā, 1948 – 1967*. Vol. I, p. 432.

⁸³ BIZZĪ, *Sūriya. Širāʿ al-istiqlāl, 1917 – 1973*, p. 325.

campaign to speed the land reform. The government of Khālid al-ʿAẓm took a number of measures to restore business confidence.⁸⁴

On 22 December the government of Khālid al-ʿAẓm ended the state of emergency.⁸⁵ For two weeks thereafter Syrians enjoyed political freedoms. Politicians began to reconstitute old political parties or to form new ones. The government promised new political party legislation and national elections by July at the latest. But the secessionist regime as a whole was a dismal failure. None of the four successive governments lasted more than four months. Quarrels between the politicians and factions in the army rendered stable government impossible.⁸⁶ The country was steadily heading towards another upheaval and the counterattack was not long in coming.

The Khālid al-ʿAẓm government had always refused to build a coterie in the army and now declined to deal with officers other than on a constitutional basis. Early in January 1963, ʿAbdalkarīm an-Naḥlāwī and his fellow-exiles returned to Syria, made contact with their former units, and – backed by a number of supporters – demanded reinstatement in the army, a ban on all communist activities, reorganization of the High Command, and an immediate plebiscite on union with Egypt.⁸⁷ However, Arab nationalist outbreaks against the governments also occurred in Iraq and Jordan. The Cairo press, predicting the imminent overthrow of the governments in Baghdad, Damascus, Amman, and Riad, wrote that “winds of revolution are blowing across the Arab World” and that “blood will be shed on the Arab land... in the battle against reactionary and secessionist elements”.⁸⁸

On 8 February a Baʿth-Nāṣirist coup in Iraq brought down the ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim government and so removed Syria’s strongest support. The coup found Syria virtually without a government. Khālid al-ʿAẓm was seriously ill.⁸⁹ Many Syrian politicians tried to woo the new Iraqi government, but the new leaders in Baghdad spurned these appeals. On 22 February, the Iraqi leaders journeyed to Cairo to celebrate the anniversary of the Syrian-Egyptian union and with President Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir to herald in veiled terms the overthrow of the reactionary regime in Damascus.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ PETRAN, *Thabita Syria*, p. 163.

⁸⁵ Al-ʿAẒM, *Khālid Mudhakkirāt Khālid al-ʿAẓm*, Vol. III, p. 331.

⁸⁶ TIBAWI, A. L. *A Modern History of Syria including Lebanon and Palestine*, pp. 409-410.

⁸⁷ Al-ḤAWRĀNĪ, *Mudhakkirāt Akram al-Ḥawrānī*. Vol. IV, p. 3136.

⁸⁸ Cit. in: PETRAN, *Thabita Syria*, p. 164.

⁸⁹ Al-ʿAẒM, *Khālid Mudhakkirāt Khālid al-ʿAẓm*, Vol. III, p. 437.

⁹⁰ Speech of the President on the Fifth Anniversary of the Union of Egypt and Syria on 21 February 1963. In: *Ḥadīth al-baʿal az-zaʿīm Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir ilā al-umma*, Vol. IV (1961 – 1963), pp. 526-527.

Three main officer groups were then preparing coups. They were the Arab nationalist and other *Nāṣirist* officers, the *Ba'ṭhists*, and a group led by Major Ziyād al-Ḥarīrī, the brother-in-law of Akram al-Ḥawrānī. Ziyād al-Ḥarīrī assured the anti-*Nāṣirists* that his coup would not mean the re-establishment of the union with Egypt. He was also in touch with the *Nāṣirist* and *Ba'ṭhist* officers, however, *Nāṣirist* hesitations permitted him to take the lead and stage his coup with the help of the *Ba'ṭhists* on 8 March 1963. The easy success of the coup was not due to the absence of opposition but to the confusion engendered by its dual character, at once pro- and anti-Nasser, and to betrayal in high places. The Syrian coup came exactly one month after the Iraqi coup and took place without great effort and without bloodshed. This proved that the secessionist regime was already too weak to resist. The great majority of the people saw the coup as just one more act in an infernal cycle of army interventions and showed their disdain by completely ignoring the new regime.

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