

# POLITICAL REVIEW

## Sectarian and Regional Factionalism in the Syrian Political Elite

*Nikolaos van Dam*

"The Arab nation constitutes a cultural unity. All differences existing among its sons are accidental and spurious, and will disappear with the awakening of Arab consciousness" (The Constitution of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, 1947).

Ever since the rise of nationalism in the Arab world, a transformation process has been going on in which the traditional religious, tribal and regional loyalties are being replaced, completely or partially, by national and/or socio-economic loyalties.

Nevertheless, these traditional loyalties can still play an important rôle in the struggle for political power. This can especially be the case in states containing a great variety of religious groups, and may become evident when the backgrounds of the political power élites of the respective states are investigated.

Syria may in this respect serve as a grateful example for research, since the population of this state is characterized, *a.o.*, by a great diversity of religious communities. Moreover, since 1963 Syria has been ruled by a single political party, or a faction thereof, which pursued an ideology aimed at the disappearance of sectarian, regional and tribal loyalties, but at

the time of a complete or partial takeover of power found itself more or less forced to revert to just these traditional loyalties in order not to lose the power necessary for realizing that ideology.

The major religious groups in Syria are the Sunnī Muslims, forming a majority of 68.7 per cent of the total population, the 'Alawīs (11.5 per cent), Druze (3.0 per cent), Ismā'ilīs (1.5 per cent), and Christians (14.1 per cent), of whom the Greek Orthodox (4.7 per cent) constitute the most important community.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the Sunnīs and Christians live scattered through the country, the 'Alawīs, Druze and Ismā'ilīs form so-called compact minorities whose members are mainly concentrated in particular districts in which they form a local majority.<sup>2</sup> Thus, most Syrian 'Alawīs live in the northwestern Latakia region, where they constitute a majority of 62.1 per cent of the local population.<sup>3</sup> Most Syrian Druze live in the southern province of Suwaydā', also

1. Gabriel Baer, *Population and Society in the Arab East* (London, 1964), p. 109. For different statistical data concerning the major Syrian religious communities, see Eugene Wirth, *Syrien: Eine Geographische Landeskunde* (Darmstadt, 1971), p. 452. The Christians mentioned in the tables of this article are almost exclusively Greek Orthodox.

2. Cf. Albert H. Hourani, *Minorities in the Arab World* (London, 1947), p. 14.

3. In this article the words "Latakia region" denote the area of the present provinces Latakia and Tartūs, which before 1966 formed one province called Latakia. The "Dayr al-Zūr region" denotes the area of the present provinces of Dayr al-Zūr, al-Raqqa and al-Ḥasakah. Cf. Michael H. Van Dusen, "Political Integration and Regionalism in Syria," in *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Spring 1972, p. 124.

△ NIKOLAOS VAN DAM is a staff member of the Middle East Section of the African and Middle Eastern Affairs Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The views expressed in this article are his own and do not reflect those of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This article is based on research done for his doctor's dissertation (*De Rol van Sektarisme, Regionalisme en Tribalisme bij de Strijd om de Politieke Macht in Syrië* (1961-1976), University of Amsterdam, 1977).

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TABLE I *Regional and Sectarian Representation in Syrian Cabinets (1942–1963)*

Cabinet No.:		31–65	66–69	70–75	31–75
Period:		1-'42/2-'58	2-'58/9-'61	9-'61/3-'63	1-'42/3-'63
<i>District</i>	<i>Religion</i>				
Damascus (21%)*	Sunnī	36.9% (117)	36.8% (21)	37.1% (33)	37.3% (171)
	Christian	6.1% ( 19)	—	7.9% ( 7)	5.7% ( 26)
	Shī'ī	—	—	—	—
	Total	43.6% (136)	36.8% (21)	44.9% (40)	43.0% (197)
Aleppo (20%)	Sunnī	17.0% ( 53)	14.0% ( 8)	13.5% (12)	15.9% ( 73)
	Christian	5.8% ( 18)	—	2.2% ( 2)	4.4% ( 20)
	Total	22.8% ( 71)	14.0% ( 8)	15.7% (14)	20.3% ( 93)
Idlib (7%)	Sunnī	1.0% ( 3)	—	—	0.7% ( 3)
	Total	1.0% ( 3)	—	—	0.7% ( 3)
Ḥamā (8%)	Sunnī	5.8% ( 18)	8.8% ( 5)	5.6% ( 5)	6.1% ( 28)
	Ismā'īlī	0.3% ( 1)	—	—	0.2% ( 1)
	'Alawī	—	—	—	—
	Christian	—	—	—	—
Total		6.1% ( 19)	8.8% ( 5)	5.6% ( 5)	6.3% ( 29)
Ḥoms (10%)	Sunnī	8.0% ( 25)	7.0% ( 4)	3.4% ( 3)	7.0% ( 32)
	'Alawī	—	—	—	—
	Christian	—	—	—	—
	Total	8.0% ( 25)	7.0% ( 4)	3.4% ( 3)	7.0% ( 32)
Latakia (13%)	Sunnī	1.9% ( 6)	—	10.1% ( 9)	3.3% ( 15)
	'Alawī	2.6% ( 8)	1.8% ( 1)	2.2% ( 2)	2.4% ( 11)
	Ismā'īlī	—	—	—	—
	Christian	—	—	4.5% ( 4)	0.9% ( 4)
	Total	4.5% ( 14)	1.8% ( 1)	16.9% (15)	6.6% ( 30)
Dayr al-Zūr (12%)	Sunnī	6.7% ( 21)	7.0% ( 4)	6.7% ( 6)	6.8% ( 31)
	Total	6.7% ( 21)	7.0% ( 4)	6.7% ( 6)	6.8% ( 31)
Ḥawrān (4%)	Sunnī	—	1.8% ( 1)	2.2% ( 2)	0.7% ( 3)
	Christian	—	—	—	—
	Total	—	1.8% ( 1)	2.2% ( 2)	0.7% ( 3)
Qunayṭarah (2%)	Sunnī	—	—	—	—
	Druze	1.0% ( 3)	—	—	0.7% ( 3)
	Total	1.0% ( 3)	—	—	0.7% ( 3)
Suwayḏā' (3%)	Sunnī	—	—	—	—
	Druze	1.9% ( 6)	3.5% ( 2)	3.4% ( 3)	2.4% ( 11)
	Total	1.9% ( 6)	3.5% ( 2)	3.4% ( 3)	2.4% ( 11)
Non-Syrian	Sunnī	4.2% ( 13)	—	—	2.8% ( 13)
	Christian	0.3% ( 1)	—	—	0.2% ( 1)
	Total	4.5% ( 14)	—	—	3.1% ( 14)
Unknown	Sunnī	—	19.3% (11)	1.3% ( 1)	2.6% ( 12)
Total		100.0% (312)	100.0% (57)	100.0% (89)	100.0% (458)

\* The percentages placed directly after the regional names indicate the respective parts of the total population by region.

called *Jabal al-Durūz* (Mountain of the Druzes) or *Jabal al-'Arab*, where they make up 87.7 per cent of the population. The Ismā'īlīs live mainly in the two districts (*mantiqahs*) Maşyāf and Salamīyah of the central province Ḥamā. Whereas the above mentioned religious minorities are mainly concentrated in specific areas of the Syrian countryside, the populations of the bigger cities have a Sunnī majority.

This implies that sectarian categories can overlap to a great extent with socioeconomic categories, and that urban-rural contrasts can coincide to an important extent with sectarian contrasts. On the one hand, sectarian loyalties can have a catalyzing influence on the take off of a class struggle in case sectarian contrasts coincide with socioeconomic differences. In such a case, a class struggle can be directed and stimulated through sectarian channels. On the other hand, however, the growth of class consciousness can specifically be impeded by solidarity with one's own religious community, since one such community usually comprises different socioeconomic classes. An overlap of sectarian, regional, tribal and socioeconomic loyalties can consequently result in their elements being tied to each other in an inseparable way, as well as in their complementing and reinforcing each other. This applies specifically to the case of the compact minorities, because in their case the involved categories coincide relatively the most. It may, therefore, be incorrect to attribute the representation of specific religious communities in power institutions to the existence of sectarian loyalties, or explaining it therefrom, without taking into account the regional, tribal, socioeconomic and politico-historical backgrounds of the persons involved. In the same way it may be incorrect to attribute the representation of specific regional groups in power institutions mainly to the existence of regional loyalties.

In this article some results are given of a research concerning the composition of the Syrian political power élite by means of a statistical analysis of the sectarian, regional,

socioeconomic and political backgrounds of the members of important political power institutions. In this research the Syrian cabinets between 1942 and 1976 were investigated, as well as the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'th Party which have been in power in Syria since 1963 (see tables 1-7).<sup>4</sup> Special attention is given to the military members of the last mentioned institution, since after March 8, 1963, they were Syria's most important rulers. Their backgrounds, therefore, will come closest to those of the "core" of the political power élite of that time.

*An Historical Revolution in the Syrian  
Political Elite (1963)*

It turns out to be possible to show clearly that the year 1963 was an important turning point in modern Syrian history, with a view to the representation of specific sectarian, regional, socioeconomic and political groups of the country. The relationship between Sunnīs and non-Sunnīs, urban and rural people, richer and poorer classes, and conservative and progressive political groups underwent an abrupt change with the Ba'thist takeover of power after March 8, 1963. This found clear expression in the composition of the political élite which simultaneously underwent drastic changes. Thus it appears, amongst other things, that from 1942 till 1963 mainly Sunnīs, urbanites (and especially Damascenes, with people from Aleppo in the second place), and persons from the more well to do classes, and conservative political parties, filled the senior and most powerful positions. At the same time, members of religious minorities (and especially the heterodox Islamic ones), and people from the countryside were heavily underrepresented in the same institutions, and were discriminated against, both politically and socioeconomically, compared to the other population groups mentioned (see tables 1 and 4).

After March 8, 1963, the relationship between the above mentioned groups was reversed. This is shown by the fact that mainly members from heterodox Islamic communities (and especially

4. In January 1942 the political entity Syria within its present boundaries was formed. The cabinet which was then in power was the 31st since Syria's separation from the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, in tables 1 and 4 the numbering of the cabinets since 1942 starts with no. 31. In table 2 the ministers originating from the Alexandretta district (notably the 'Alawīs Fāyiz Ismā'īl, Adham Muşţafā and 'Adnān Muşţafā) are for convenience included in the category of ministers from the Latakia region.

TABLE II *Regional and Sectarian Representation in Syrian Cabinets (1963-1976)*

Cabinet No.: Period:		76-83 3-'63/2-'66	84-88 2-'66/11-'70	89-95 11-'70/8-'76	76-95 3-'63/8-'76
	<i>District</i>				
	<i>Religion</i>				
Damascus (21%)*	Sunnī	20.2% ( 34)	20.0% ( 24)	20.0% ( 36)	20.1% ( 94)
	Christian	4.2% ( 7)	—	—	1.5% ( 7)
	Shī'ī	—	0.8% ( 1)	—	0.2% ( 1)
	Total	24.4% ( 41)	20.8% ( 25)	20.0% ( 36)	21.8% (102)
Aleppo (20%)	Sunnī	13.1% ( 22)	4.2% ( 5)	5.0% ( 9)	7.7% ( 36)
	Christian	0.6% ( 1)	—	—	0.2% ( 1)
	Total	13.7% ( 23)	4.2% ( 5)	5.0% ( 9)	7.9% ( 37)
Idlib (7%)	Sunnī	3.0% ( 5)	2.5% ( 3)	3.3% ( 6)	3.0% ( 14)
	Total	3.0% ( 5)	2.5% ( 3)	3.3% ( 6)	3.0% ( 14)
Ḥamā (8%)	Sunnī	7.1% ( 12)	10.0% ( 12)	7.8% ( 14)	8.1% ( 38)
	Ismā'īlī	3.6% ( 6)	0.8% ( 1)	1.1% ( 2)	1.9% ( 9)
	'Alawī	1.2% ( 2)	—	2.8% ( 5)	1.5% ( 7)
	Christian	—	—	—	—
	Total	11.9% ( 20)	10.8% ( 13)	11.7% ( 21)	11.5% ( 54)
Ḥoms (10%)	Sunnī	7.1% ( 12)	5.0% ( 6)	10.6% ( 19)	7.9% ( 37)
	'Alawī	1.2% ( 2)	—	—	0.4% ( 2)
	Christian	0.6% ( 1)	2.5% ( 3)	—	0.9% ( 4)
	Total	8.9% ( 15)	7.5% ( 9)	10.6% ( 19)	9.2% ( 43)
Latakia (13%)	Sunnī	7.1% ( 12)	9.2% ( 11)	16.7% ( 30)	11.3% ( 53)
	'Alawī	4.8% ( 8)	12.5% ( 15)	6.7% ( 12)	7.5% ( 35)
	Ismā'īlī	1.2% ( 2)	2.5% ( 3)	1.1% ( 2)	1.5% ( 7)
	Christian	—	1.7% ( 2)	1.1% ( 2)	0.9% ( 4)
	Total	13.1% ( 22)	25.9% ( 31)	25.6% ( 46)	21.2% ( 99)
Dayr al-Zūr (12%)	Sunnī	4.2% ( 7)	9.2% ( 11)	4.4% ( 8)	5.6% ( 26)
	Total	4.2% ( 7)	9.2% ( 11)	4.4% ( 8)	5.6% ( 26)
Ḥawrān (4%)	Sunnī	8.9% ( 15)	8.3% ( 10)	6.7% ( 12)	7.9% ( 37)
	Christian	1.2% ( 2)	4.2% ( 5)	2.8% ( 5)	2.6% ( 12)
	Total	10.1% ( 17)	12.5% ( 15)	9.4% ( 17)	10.5% ( 49)
Qunayṭarah (2%)	Sunnī	—	3.3% ( 4)	2.2% ( 4)	1.7% ( 8)
	Druze	—	—	—	—
	Total	—	3.3% ( 4)	2.2% ( 4)	1.7% ( 8)
Suwaydā' (3%)	Sunnī	—	—	—	—
	Druze	6.0% ( 10)	3.3% ( 4)	2.2% ( 4)	3.8% ( 18)
	Total	6.0% ( 10)	3.3% ( 4)	2.2% ( 4)	3.8% ( 18)
Non-Syrian	Sunnī	—	—	—	—
	Christian	—	—	—	—
	Total	—	—	—	—
Unknown	Sunnī	4.8% ( 8)	—	5.6% ( 10)	3.8% ( 18)
Total		100.0% (168)	100.0% (120)	100.0% (180)	100.0% (468)

\* The percentages placed directly after the regional names indicate the respective parts of the total population by region.

'Alawīs, followed by Druze and Ismā'īlīs), and people from the poor countryside (and especially from the Latakia region) then rose strongly and became relatively overrepresented in the main Syrian institutions of power (see tables 2–7). Furthermore, after 1963 Syrian political life came to be dominated mainly by persons from the lower middle class, and from progressive political parties. In fact, the strong rise of the above mentioned religious minorities and rural people since March 8, 1963, can be considered as a kind of national emancipation.

A great deal of Syria's political instability in the twentieth century was caused by a so called "traditional" intra-élite conflict, being determined by a struggle for power between socioeconomic élites originating from roughly the same classes, trying to cause the fall of their political rivals in order to be able to realize their limited self interests. Before 1963, this struggle for power went on almost completely without involvement of the rural masses and lower urban classes.

After the takeover of power by the Ba'th in 1963, the struggle for power between rival political élites with roughly the same backgrounds continued in the above mentioned "traditional" way. The big difference with the period before 1963 was, however, that the backgrounds of the new political élites involved differed considerably from those of their political predecessors, since after March 8, 1963, mainly persons from the countryside and the lower middle class, and members of religious minorities had the political power.<sup>5</sup>

#### *The Syrian Cabinets and Regional Commands of the Ba'th Party*

When comparing the sectarian backgrounds of the members of the Syrian cabinets since 1942, it is striking that during the Syrian-Egyptian union (1958–1961) there were no Christian ministers at all filling posts in the Syrian Regional Cabinets, whereas Sunnī representation

(95.5 per cent) was stronger than in both the periods preceding and following that of the union. In the Central Governments of the United Arab Republic (UAR) the percentage of the Syrian Sunnīs was, relatively, even higher.<sup>6</sup> This might be explained by the strong Sunnī acculturation that took place during the Syrian-Egyptian union, which was mainly caused by the dominating position of the (predominantly Sunnī) Egyptians. On the other hand, during the periods before and after the UAR, Christians (and especially the Greek Orthodox) were duly represented.

Whereas the Syrian cabinets reflect the backgrounds of the Syrian political power élite to a certain extent, the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'th Party present a much more accurate picture of the era since March 8, 1963, since political power in Syria was concentrated much more in the latter institution in that period. The above-mentioned trend—a strong rise in the representation of persons originating from the lower classes, the countryside, the Latakia region, as well as from religious minorities, in Syrian power institutions in the period after March 8, 1963—can be far more clearly seen in the composition of the Syrian Regional Commands than in that of the Syrian cabinets of the same period.

As to the era after that, it should be noticed that during the period between February 23, 1966, and November 13, 1970, the representation of rural people as well as of members of religious minorities in both the Syrian cabinets and the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'th Party reached a climax. During the period 1966–1970 people from the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo were not represented at all in the Syrian Regional Commands. Regionally, the centers of gravity of its members lay in the rural Latakia region (29.7 per cent), the southern province Ḥawrān (20.3 per cent), and the northeastern Dayr al-Zūr region (15.6 per cent). This was not accidentally so, since the 'Alawī General, Ṣalāḥ

5. Cf. Ronald R. Macintyre, *The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party: Ideology, Politics, Sociology and Organization* (Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, June 1969), p. 254. Michael H. Van Dusen, "Syria: Downfall of a Traditional Elite," in Frank Tachau (ed.), *Political Elites and Political Development in the Middle East* (New York, 1975), p. 139, has defined the core of the new political élite that came to power after 1963 as "simply those Syrians of the lowest socio-economic background to whom a high school education was available."

6. Ronald R. Macintyre, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

TABLE III *Regional and Sectarian Representation in the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'th Party (1963-1976)*

Regional Command No.:		1-4	5-8	9-11	1-11
Period:		3-'63/2-'66	3-'66/11-'70	11-'70/8-'76	3-'63/8-'76
<i>District</i>	<i>Religion</i>				
Damascus (21%)*	Sunnī	2.0% ( 1)	—	25.0% (14)	8.8% ( 15)
	Christian	—	—	—	—
	Shī'i	—	—	—	—
	Total	2.0% ( 1)	—	25.0% (14)	8.8% ( 15)
Aleppo (20%)	Sunnī	8.0% ( 4)	—	—	2.4% ( 4)
	Christian	—	—	—	—
	Total	8.0% ( 4)	—	—	2.4% ( 4)
Idlib (7%)	Sunnī	4.0% ( 2)	—	7.1% ( 4)	3.5% ( 6)
	Total	4.0% ( 2)	—	7.1% ( 4)	3.5% ( 6)
Hamā (8%)	Sunnī	—	—	3.6% ( 2)	1.2% ( 2)
	Ismā'īlī	10.0% ( 5)	9.4% ( 6)	—	6.5% ( 11)
	'Alawī	—	—	5.4% ( 3)	1.8% ( 3)
	Christian	—	—	1.8% ( 1)	0.6% ( 1)
	Total	10.0% ( 5)	9.4% ( 6)	10.7% ( 6)	10.0% ( 17)
Homs (10%)	Sunnī	10.0% ( 5)	9.4% ( 6)	5.4% ( 3)	8.2% ( 14)
	'Alawī	2.0% ( 1)	—	—	0.6% ( 1)
	Christian	—	—	—	—
	Total	12.0% ( 6)	9.4% ( 6)	5.4% ( 3)	8.8% ( 15)
Latakia (13%)	Sunnī	10.0% ( 5)	6.3% ( 4)	5.4% ( 3)	7.1% ( 12)
	'Alawī	12.0% ( 6)	23.4% ( 15)	16.1% ( 9)	17.6% ( 30)
	Ismā'īlī	—	—	—	—
	Christian	—	—	3.6% ( 2)	1.2% ( 2)
	Total	22.0% ( 11)	29.7% ( 19)	25.0% ( 14)	25.9% ( 44)
Dayr al-Zūr (12%)	Sunnī	12.0% ( 6)	15.6% ( 10)	8.9% ( 5)	12.4% ( 21)
	Total	12.0% ( 6)	15.6% ( 10)	8.9% ( 5)	12.4% ( 21)
Hawrān (4%)	Sunnī	6.0% ( 3)	14.0% ( 9)	8.9% ( 5)	10.0% ( 17)
	Christian	2.0% ( 1)	6.3% ( 4)	—	2.9% ( 5)
	Total	8.0% ( 4)	20.3% ( 13)	8.9% ( 5)	12.9% ( 22)
Qunayṭarah (2%)	Sunnī	2.0% ( 1)	6.3% ( 4)	—	2.9% ( 5)
	Druze	—	—	—	—
	Total	2.0% ( 1)	6.3% ( 4)	—	2.9% ( 5)
Suwaydā' (3%)	Sunnī	—	—	3.6% ( 2)	1.2% ( 2)
	Druze	20.0% ( 10)	9.4% ( 6)	3.6% ( 2)	10.6% ( 18)
	Total	20.0% ( 10)	9.4% ( 6)	7.1% ( 4)	11.8% ( 20)
Non-Syrian		—	—	—	—
Unknown	Sunnī	—	—	1.8% ( 1)	0.6% ( 1)
	Total	—	—	1.8% ( 1)	0.6% ( 1)
Total		100.0% ( 50)	100.0% ( 64)	100.0% ( 56)	100.0% ( 170)

\* The percentages placed directly after the regional names indicate the respective parts of the total population by region.

Jadīd, who was then at the zenith of his power, owed his prominent position in the Syrian party apparatus of the Ba'th mainly to (party) factions from these regions. Of the religious minorities the 'Alawīs were represented most strongly with 23.4 per cent.

In the period after November 13, 1970, the percentages of Sunnīs and urbanites increased again both in the Syrian cabinets and the Regional Commands, at the expense of the representation of rural people and members of religious minorities. Of the Sunnī urbanite members of the Regional Commands the number of Damascenes increased in a remarkable way to an average of 25 per cent, notwithstanding the fact that the Ba'th Party had always had relatively few adherents among the inhabitants of the Syrian capital. This might be explained by the fact that the 'Alawī Syrian President, General Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad, in the period in question, coöperated with some high Damascene Ba'thist officers, and tried to win the urban population to his side, much more than the Ba'thists who were in power before him had done. Moreover al-Asad engaged in a somewhat more liberal domestic economic policy towards part of the Syrian bourgeoisie. Especially in the era of General Ṣalāḥ Jadīd (1966-1970) a tough line was followed against the Syrian bourgeoisie and the remaining large land-owners. This slackened somewhat after 1970.

*The Military in the Syrian Regional Commands (1963-1976)*

An investigation into the regional and sectarian backgrounds of the military members of the Syrian Regional Commands after March 8, 1963, shows that the trend of a strong rise of rural people and

religious minorities in Syrian power institutions finds a much stronger expression in their case than in that of either the Syrian cabinets or the complete Syrian Regional Commands of the same period. As to region of origin, the officers of the Latakia region were represented by far the strongest with 49 per cent of all military members. In the "Jadīd Era" (1966-1970) their representation even reached a climax of 63.2 per cent. Concerning the religious minorities, the 'Alawī officers in the period after March 8, 1963, were most strongly represented in the Syrian Regional Commands with an average of 37.7 per cent, followed by Druze (9.4 per cent) and Ismā'īlī (9.4 per cent) officers (see tables 6 and 7). Sunnī officers were represented with 43.6 per cent. This percentage says little, however, about the power Sunnī officers had in the Armed Forces, since the officers in question, different from their colleagues originating from compact minorities, in a majority of cases were born in different regions. Therefore, in their cases eventual sectarian loyalties could not be supported or strengthened by common regional ties, with the result that they could not form a power bloc on a regional basis as the officers of the compact minorities were able to do.

One does not find any Christian officers among the military members of the Syrian Regional Commands. Although Christian officers sometimes occupied very high positions in the Syrian Armed Forces, their importance often lay rather in the military-technical field. In the political field they could play an important rôle on an individual basis, but never as a group: like the Sunnīs, the Christian officers originated from regions all over the country.

TABLE IV *Sectarian Representation in Syrian Cabinets (1942-1976)*

Cabinet No.:	31-65	66-69	70-75	31-75	76-83	84-88	89-95	76-95
Period:	1-42/2-'58	2-'58/9-'61	9-'61/3-'63	1-42/3-'63	3-'63/2-'66	2-'66/11-'70	11-'70/8-'76	3-'63/8-'76
<i>Religion</i>								
Sunnī	82.1% (256)	94.7% (54)	79.8% (71)	83.2% (381)	75.6% (127)	71.7% ( 86)	82.2% (148)	77.1% (361)
'Alawī	2.6% ( 8)	1.8% ( 1)	2.2% ( 2)	2.4% ( 11)	7.1% ( 12)	12.5% ( 15)	9.4% ( 17)	9.4% ( 44)
Druze	2.9% ( 9)	3.5% ( 2)	3.4% ( 3)	3.1% ( 14)	6.0% ( 10)	3.3% ( 4)	2.2% ( 4)	3.8% ( 18)
Ismā'īlī	0.3% ( 1)	—	—	0.2% ( 1)	4.8% ( 8)	3.3% ( 4)	2.2% ( 4)	3.4% ( 16)
Christian	12.2% ( 38)	—	14.6% (13)	11.1% ( 51)	6.5% ( 11)	8.3% ( 10)	3.9% ( 7)	6.0% ( 28)
Shī'ī	—	—	—	—	—	0.8% ( 1)	—	0.2% ( 1)
Total	100.0% (312)	100.0% (57)	100.0% (89)	100.0% (458)	100.0% (168)	100.0% (120)	100.0% (180)	100.0% (468)

After the Ba'athist takeover in 1963 an internal struggle for power developed within the Armed Forces and party organization of the Ba'ath among members of the Ba'athist political power élite themselves. Apart from ideological differences, this power struggle became manifest in the shape of sectarian, regional and tribal factionalism: just as the civilian party apparatus, the military party organization of the Ba'ath was afflicted deeply within its ranks by the formation of sectarian, regional and tribal blocs.

At the time, power relations in the Syrian Armed Forces were determined mainly by personal alliances between leaders of officers' factions, which in turn drew their cohesion to an important extent from existing sectarian, regional and tribal ties. It can not be said, however, that the officers' corps as a whole was divided along these lines. Existing alliances between leaders and officers' factions often cut across factors such as common religion, tribe, region of origin or ideological points of view. Officers' factions, the members of which belonged mainly to the same religious community, could easily belong to opposing political camps.

Personal interests of officers often played an important rôle in the formation or breaking up of alliances with other officers. Existing alliances could easily be broken up, and ideological principles could easily be set aside by officers whose power positions or personal interests were threatened.

During some particular crisis situations, however, like those which occurred in the months

preceding the military *coup* of February 23, 1966, sectarian tensions within the Syrian Armed Forces as a result of manipulations with sectarian, regional and tribal loyalties increased to such an extent, that a far reaching polarization occurred between Sunnīs on the one hand and members of religious minorities on the other hand. This caused the officers' corps to become divided into two main rival camps, in which Sunnīs were heavily represented on the one side, and 'Alawīs, Druze and Ismā'ilīs on the other. Such a polarization was not so much based on a sectarian unanimity among military men from the same religious community, as on a common opposition and sectarian distrust directed against military men belonging to a different religious community or communities, who, it was felt, were threatening one's own position, and whose ways of acting were interpreted as being a form of sectarianism, regionalism and/or tribalism aimed at the strengthening of their own position as a religious, regional and/or tribal group, to the disadvantage of other groups. A number of officers—during crisis situations—had indeed deliberately stimulated a sectarian, regional and/or tribal sense of solidarity so as to strengthen or consolidate their positions of power.

The sectarian polarization culminated on February 23, 1966, in a military *coup d'état* resulting in the overthrow of the régime of the Sunnī Syrian President, General Amīn al-Ḥāfiẓ (who was from Aleppo), and in the purging of the most prominent Sunnī officers' factions from the Army.

The *coup* of February 23, 1966, did not end the

TABLE V *Sectarian Representation in the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'ath Party (1963-1976)*

Regional Command No.:	1-4	5-8	9-11	1-11
Period:	9-'63/2-'66	3-'66/11-'70	11-'70/ . . .	9-'63/ . . .
<i>Religion</i>				
Sunnī	54.0% (27)	51.6% (33)	69.6% (39)	58.2% ( 99)
'Alawī	14.0% ( 7)	23.4% (15)	21.4% (12)	20.0% ( 34)
Druze	20.0% (10)	9.4% ( 6)	3.6% ( 2)	10.6% ( 18)
Ismā'ilī	10.0% ( 5)	9.4% ( 6)	—	6.5% ( 11)
Christian	2.0% ( 1)	6.3% ( 4)	5.4% ( 3)	4.7% ( 8)
Total	100.0% (50)	100.0% (64)	100.0% (56)	100.0% (170)

power struggle: in the course of 1966 and the first part of 1967 some of the most prominent Druze officers from the Jabal al-Durūz were purged from the Army and the party organization of the Ba'th, after a number of them had made an abortive *coup* attempt on September 8, 1966. Afterwards, the Druze officers, as separate power blocs, no longer constituted a serious threat to the remaining part of the Syrian political power élite.

In the course of 1967, 1968 and the beginning of 1969, the most important non-'Alawī blocs left in the Syrian Army were eliminated or neutralized. In this period particularly some prominent Ismā'īlī and Ḥawrānī Ba'thist factions lost power.

A result of the above mentioned developments was that some 'Alawī officers' factions which had survived the preceding struggle for power ended up in a supreme position. The monopolization of power by some Ba'thist 'Alawī officers' factions, of which those of the generals Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad and Ṣalāḥ Jadīd were the most important, found expression in the fact that the subsequent struggle for power was mainly confined to members of the 'Alawī community themselves.

On November 13, 1970, political power was almost completely monopolized by the officer's faction of Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad, who became Syria's first 'Alawī president a few months later. This ended Syria's tradition of filling the presidency by a Sunnī, and furthermore underlined in a symbolic way the fact that the 'Alawīs had politically gone through a clear evolution from

a discriminated, socioeconomically backward, religious community to a nationally emancipated population group in a dominant position. The supreme position of the officers' faction of Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad after November 13, 1970, considerably dimmed the possibilities for non-'Alawī officers to form independent power blocs with a capability of seriously endangering the position of the established régime.

Dangers of a possible challenge to al-Asad's position after 1970 originated mainly from within the 'Alawī community itself. This appears from the fact that, in the main conspiracies directed against him, and discovered since November 1970, predominantly 'Alawī officers and civilian Ba'thists from the Latakia region were involved. This can be deduced from the arrests and dismissals occurring at the time.

In order to secure his position against persons from his own religious community as well, al-Asad started to rely increasingly on persons with whom he entertained as narrow a relation as possible, such as members from his own family, tribe or village.

The above mentioned power struggle among the Ba'thist military themselves can be traced clearly in the composition of the Syrian Regional Commands: after February 23, 1966, there were no Sunnī officer members from Aleppo left, and no Druze officers either. Since October 1968 no officers from Ḥawrān have been represented, and after March 1969 no Ismā'īlī officers, either. Since then only 'Alawī and Sunnī officers remained as military members.

TABLE VI *Sectarian Backgrounds of the Military Members of the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'th Party (1963-1976)*

Regional Command No.:	1-4	5-8	9-11	1-11
Period:	9-'63/2-'66	3-'66/11-'70	11-'70/ . . .	9-'63/ . . .
<i>Religion</i>				
Sunnī	35.0% ( 7 )	42.1% ( 8 )	57.1% ( 8 )	43.4% (23)
'Alawī	30.0% ( 6 )	42.1% ( 8 )	42.9% ( 6 )	37.7% (20)
Druze	25.0% ( 5 )	—	—	9.4% ( 5 )
Ismā'īlī	10.0% ( 2 )	15.8% ( 3 )	—	9.4% ( 5 )
Christian	—	—	—	—
Total	100.0% (20)	100.0% (19)	100.0% (14)	100.0% (53)

TABLE VII *Regional and Sectarian Backgrounds of the Military Members of the Syrian Regional Commands of the Ba'th Party (1963-1976)*

Regional Command No.:		1-4	5-8	9-11	1-11
Period:		9-'63/2-'66	3-'66/11-'70	11-'70/ . . .	9-'63/ . . .
<i>District</i>	<i>Religion</i>				
Damascus	Sunnī	—	—	21.4% ( 3)	5.7% ( 3)
Aleppo	Sunnī	15% ( 3)	—	—	5.7% ( 3)
Ḥamā	Isma'īli	10% ( 2)	15.8% ( 3)	—	9.4% ( 5)
Ḥoms	Sunnī	5% ( 1)	10.5% ( 2)	21.4% ( 3)	11.3% ( 6)
	'Alawī	5% ( 1)	—	—	1.9% ( 1)
	Total	10% ( 2)	10.5% ( 2)	21.4% ( 3)	13.2% ( 7)
Latakia	Sunnī	15% ( 3)	21.1% ( 4)	—	13.2% ( 7)
	'Alawī	25% ( 5)	42.1% ( 8)	42.9% ( 6)	35.8% (19)
	Total	40% ( 8)	63.2% (12)	42.9% ( 6)	49.0% (26)
Dayr al-Zūr	Sunnī	—	—	14.3% ( 2)	3.8% ( 2)
Ḥawrān	Sunnī	—	10.5% ( 2)	—	3.8% ( 2)
Suwaydā'	Druze	25% ( 5)	—	—	9.4% ( 5)
Total		100% (20)	100.0% (19)	100.0% (14)	100.0% (53)

In April 1975 Lieutenant Colonel (then Major) Rif'at al-Asad, a brother of the Syrian President who was in command of some politico-strategically important army units around Damascus, was chosen as a member of the Syrian Regional Command. This could be interpreted as a reflection of the fact that the Syrian President relied to an important extent on officers from his own family or tribe. Other brothers of President Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad occupied important positions in Syrian power institutions as well.

### *Conclusion*

It can be concluded that the power of military officers and civilian politicians at the national (Syrian) level depended to a great extent on the power base they had been able to build up at a regional, sectarian and/or tribal level. A struggle for power between persons from different regions and/or religious communities often was expressed in the form of an inter-regional and/or inter-sectarian conflict. In case of struggles for power between persons from the same region and/or religious community, these

often were expressed in the form of an intra-regional and/or intra-sectarian conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the conclusion can be drawn that there is a relation between political stability and the measure of sectarian, regional and tribal factionalism within the political power élite. A great diversity in the above-mentioned formation of factions clearly gives rise to political instability. The relatively long period of stability—since November 1970—of the Syrian régime can be attributed to an important extent to the fact that army and party discipline were not undermined as much as before by sectarian, regional and tribal factionalism, while at the same time there was only one relatively homogeneous 'Alawī officers' faction left (notably that of Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad), possessing supreme power, and able to impose its will on the others. The undermining influence on military discipline of the formation of factions was clearly shown by the military achievements of the Syrian Armed Forces: during the October War (1973) these were considerably better than during the June War (1967), when the Syrian officers' corps and party organizations of the Ba'th were deeply affected by sectarian, regional and tribal faction formations.

7. Cf. Michael H. Van Dusen, "Political Integration and Regionalism in Syria," p. 136.