

As a result of this campaign, morale plummeted within the civil service.¹⁶ Senior bureaucrats who had not been fired or resigned were said to be desperately casting about for positions in the private sector, and reports circulated widely of the emigration of educated Syrians to Lebanon and to countries outside the Arab world. Among the Damascene elite more generally, bureaucratic restructuring produced an atmosphere of instability, upheaval, and alienation as villagers and peasants became a more visible and more influential presence in official institutions. Civil servants mobilized to oppose some Ba'athist reforms, notably efforts to trim bureaucratic salaries, but could not affect the larger process of institutional change.

Over the course of the first eighteen to twenty-four months of Ba'athist rule, the restructuring of the civil service was broadened to include all branches of the government bureaucracy that were perceived as hostile to the party's consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. By the beginning of 1965, new guidelines had altered hiring and appointment policies for the judiciary, teachers, provincial authorities, and state-employed clerics. Internal security agencies and the police received particular attention.¹⁷ In a number of instances, Ba'athist officials exploited outbreaks of opposition to broaden its control over various state agencies. For example, following violent protests in January 1965 against the nationalization policies of the Ba'ath, in which mosques had been focal points of opposition, the Presidency Council arrogated to itself full authority to dismiss and appoint imams, preachers, and religious teachers for a period of three months. This time frame was seen as adequate to permit the regime to "make any shakeup it has in mind."¹⁸ The 1965 protests also provoked a sweeping change of judicial personnel, providing an excuse to replace judges not appointed by the Ba'ath with those who possessed "a complete understanding of the legislation required by the socialist transformation stage."¹⁹ The same tactic was repeated after the February 1966 coup by radical factions of the Ba'ath, when the government repealed for one day the immunity of judges against arbitrary dismissal, to "reorganize the judiciary 'in harmony with the struggling stage achieved by the Syrian people.'"²⁰

Through these rather heavy-handed forms of political pressure and direct intervention, the leadership of the Ba'ath completely restructured the bureaucracy by the close of 1966. Far from neglecting the demands of in-

16. See T. E. Bromley to Foreign Office, October 1, 1963, PRO, FO371/170600.

17. See D. A. Roberts to Foreign Office, June 15, 1963, PRO, FO371/170599.

18. Damascus to Secretary of State, January 30, 1965, no. 503, RG59/2686, NA.

19. Aleppo to Department of State, June 4, 1965, no. A-598, RG59/2684, NA.

20. "Conservative Syrian Judges Purged," Damascus to Secretary of State, June 4, 1966, no. A-600, RG59/2685, NA.

stitution building, Ba'athist politicians gave it their immediate and sustained attention. It is noteworthy in this respect that the process of state bureaucratic reform preceded and outpaced by a considerable degree the restructuring of Syria's political institutions, the gradual transformation of the National Council of Revolutionary Command into a national assembly, and the drafting of a new constitution. Until the Ba'ath leadership could be assured that the institutions of the state were well in hand, it lacked the administrative capacity to manage its broader agenda of political and economic transformation.

Constructing a Radical-Populist Political Economy

While reorganizing the bureaucracy was essential to the Ba'ath's ability to govern, state reform was also a necessary starting point in the party's larger project of institutional restructuring and social transformation. These processes were widely supported within the party, despite disagreements about their implementation. Like preceding governments, Ba'athist leaders not only restructured the bureaucracy but significantly expanded the size and capacity of the state as well, creating new government ministries, increasing the number and size of state agencies, and adding thousands of civil servants to the public payroll. As in the past, moreover, state expansion was largely the result of deepening state intervention in the economy, in particular the dramatic expansion of the public sector that accompanied the Ba'ath's self-styled "socialist transformation."

It was this transformation more than any other factor during these years—including the regime's lukewarm pursuit of Arab unity—that contributed to the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule and set Ba'athist practices apart from those of previous Syrian governments and from populist regimes more generally. This moment was not the first since independence when struggles over the organization of the Syrian political economy formed the principal axis of social conflict. Yet for the first time such struggles caused a fundamental redistribution of social power from landed and capitalist elites to populist social groups.

Here too the Ba'ath benefited from the degree to which the state had become imbricated in the economy since independence, making available to it a well-established set of interventionist norms. During the union with Egypt, the Syrian economy had been subject to forms of economic restructuring that fit easily within the repertoire of Ba'athist practices. Ba'athist leaders also benefited, moreover, from the norms of distributive justice and popular welfare that had become integrated into Syrian politics, as well

as the extent to which the state had become established as the agent responsible for implementing public policies consistent with these norms. In this area too, however, it would be easy to misread these conditions as indicators of continuity with pre-1963 political practices. In fact, the distinctive ways in which the Ba'ath appropriated these starting conditions and exploited them in the service of a radically transformative strategy of state formation departed sharply from past experience. Moreover, the scale and the structure of the changes brought about by the Ba'ath are strikingly inconsistent with the image of a regime that was too wrapped up in its day-to-day survival to pay attention to the demands of building a radical populist state.

Syria's capitalists, who had spent the eighteen months since the end of the U.A.R. struggling in vain to reconstruct a controlled-liberal political economy, fiercely resisted the Ba'ath's economic and social policies. Their deeply pessimistic reaction to the rise of the Ba'ath also reflected the lessons of the union, in particular what the business community had learned about the boundaries of possible accommodation between their interests and those of a committed populist regime. Little in this experience persuaded them to view the prospects offered by a Ba'athist Syria with much hope. In contrast to earlier periods, however, Syria's capitalists now proved unable to stem the tide of social change or to undermine the growing consolidation of the populist authoritarian system of rule. Having made good use themselves of the authoritarian tools they inherited from the United Arab Republic, Syria's former economic and political elite now confronted a government more than willing to deploy such tools against them.

Restructuring the Economy

At the time the Ba'ath seized power, Syria's economy bore the clear imprint of the political struggles of the postindependence period and the continuing contest to define an appropriate balance between state and market. In previous chapters I have traced the massive changes that accompanied shifts in the pattern of state intervention since 1946, especially the extent to which state expansion came to undermine the autonomy and power of Syria's capitalists and landowners. These changes had fundamentally transformed the institutional and regulatory contours of the Syrian political economy, but the balance of economic resources remained in private hands. During the brief secessionist period from September 1961 to March 1963, business-dominated governments worked to restore the prerogatives of the private sector and to shift the trajectory of Syria's political economy away from Nasserist-style populism toward a system of controlled

liberalism. Despite deep strains among Syrian capitalists and the opposition of workers, communists, and the Ba'ath, this project was still very much under way at the time of the March 1963 coup.

By the time Hafiz al-Asad secured his hold on power seven years later, however, nothing was left of Syria's experiment with controlled liberalism. In the interim, the public sector had grown to account for more than two-thirds of total capital formation (from about a quarter in 1963), as well as 90 percent of banking and insurance, 75 percent of industrial production, and 80 percent of foreign trade. While landownership remained predominantly private, the organization of agricultural production and of agricultural producers had been profoundly reshaped, not only by the continuing application of land reform but also by the spread of agricultural cooperatives and the rise of the state as the direct manager of the agricultural economy. Referring to the overall organization of the Syrian economy in 1965, one observer noted that just ten years earlier, a report of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development had stressed the extent to which economic development was exclusively an activity of the private sector, and urged the state to play a more active role in the process. In the course of a decade, he added, the situation had been completely reversed.²¹

The Ba'ath adopted a number of mechanisms to accomplish this transformation. These included nationalizations, the formation of a vast institutional apparatus to administer the public sector and manage private sector economic activity, and controls over the circulation of capital and goods. The Ba'ath also accelerated the ongoing redefinition of rural property rights in favor of particular classes of peasants and the use of public policy to embed radical populist norms and practices within the new economic institutions of the state. As with the Ba'ath's approach to governance in general, its economic policies frequently were the product of the moment, a response to particular crises or to the imperatives of political expediency. Differences among Ba'athist leaders over the pace and scope of Syria's socialist transformation made the design of development strategy an important arena of intraparty conflict. And there can be little doubt that Ba'athist rule was marked by a severe gap between expectations and performance, particularly concerning the contribution of the public sector to economic growth. Despite these realities it is nonetheless evident that economic restructuring was guided by a general understanding of what constituted an appropriate set of economic arrangements, how the relationship between society and

21. Jean Ducloux, "Secteur public et planification économique en République Arabe Syrienne," *Proche Orient, études économiques* no. 59 (January-June 1969), pp. 37-125. See also Chapter 3, pp. 57-58.

the economy should be organized, and how these relations were to be constructed. It is also evident that differences within the Ba'ath over the pace and scope of economic restructuring and over relations with the private sector have obscured the extent to which this understanding was shared by a Ba'athist leadership that broadly supported the radical redesign of the Syrian economy.²² The outlines of this redesign took shape during the early months of Ba'athist rule and were essentially settled by the end of 1963, permitting its implementation to begin in earnest in early 1964.

The tone for what followed was set by Salah al-Din Bitar in his first policy address as prime minister less than a week after the coup. Bitar's speech, while thin on details and heavy on polemics, was nonetheless an important signal of government intentions, not least in defining the position that capitalists were expected to occupy in the new system of rule. He indicated that the economy would be organized along socialist lines and that economic policies would favor industrialization in both private and public sectors, as well as promote agrarian reform, workers' rights, and large-scale infrastructural development. The government, he asserted, "will protect the aims of the revolution by preventing capitalism from dominating the government."²³

However lacking in detail Bitar's statement might have been, its intentions were transparently clear. U.S. Embassy reports concluded—with much foresight—that the best capitalists could hope for now was "a mixed economic system under which the state will permit the private sector to operate in areas not directly related to the major economic interests of the state."²⁴ Reactions to Bitar's pronouncement from the Chambers of Commerce were at best lukewarm.²⁵ Privately, however, business reactions were far more critical. Capitalists, according to one report, "now fear the reimposition of the nationalisation decrees of July 1961, and the extension of these even to State control of foreign trade, their own subordination to state planning, and an existence as outcasts who owe the new state a living but to whom the state owes nothing."²⁶ Assuming the worst, wealthy Syrians immediately began to transfer their money out of the country. Businessmen postponed investments and asked foreign creditors to make payments into

22. It is worth noting that members of the Syrian business community regarded such internal disputes as insignificant and viewed the Ba'ath as moving rather consistently toward a statist and interventionist economic regime. They also repeatedly noted their sense that despite his moderate tone, Bitar was as committed to social change in Syria as Ba'athists who took a more radical line.

23. Damascus to Secretary of State, March 22, 1963, no. A-268, RG59/4054, NA.

24. Damascus to Department of State, May 10, 1963, no. A-333, RG59/4054, NA.

25. J. C. M. Mason to Foreign Office, March 19, 1963, PRO, FO371/170613.

26. T. E. Bromley to Foreign Office, April 23, 1963, PRO, FO371/170613.

offshore accounts.²⁷ The Syrian pound fell dramatically against the dollar, and requests for import licenses shot up in anticipation of new controls on foreign trade.

Deeply concerned by the outflow of scarce capital, the government quickly seized control over the circulation of foreign exchange. The first decree issued by the National Command of the Revolutionary Council in early March 1963 included a temporary prohibition on large transfers of funds, but capital flight simply accelerated. In response, the cabinet renationalized all banks on May 2.²⁸ It ordered banks and the offices of money changers to be sealed, replacing their boards and directors with government appointees.²⁹ The cabinet also replaced the governor and deputy governor of the Central Bank and dismissed a number of other top-level administrators of key economic agencies. Soon after, the government reestablished currency controls that had been removed less than a year earlier. The new regulations gave Syrians two weeks to exchange all foreign currency in their possession for Syrian pounds. Needless to say, compliance was far from perfect. In announcing these decrees, the regime castigated the bourgeoisie for its reactionary character and its destructive impact on the Syrian economy. To emphasize the commitment to halting capital flight, a number of prominent businessmen in Aleppo were arrested, fined, and forced to post bond of as much as £\$100,000 to secure their release.

These regulations were clearly reactive in character. In private interviews, senior Ba'athist Sami al-Jundi acknowledged that the nationalizations and currency controls were intended simply to "retain in Syria what little Syrian capital still remained in the country."³⁰ Over the next two months, however, other measures were launched that confirmed the perception of a broad-based program intended to restructure the economy along populist lines. On June 23 a new agrarian reform law was announced that tightened limitations on landownership and extended easier credit terms to

27. Initially, the anxiety of Syrian businessmen was directed more toward the role that Nasserists might play in the new government than at the Ba'ath Party, which was seen at first as a useful check on both the Nasserists and Syrian communists. In addition, senior Ba'athists, including Bitar, held private back-channel talks with senior representatives of the business community in the early days after the coup and offered assurances concerning their economic plans. These discussions had no discernible impact, however. Having lived through the union, businessmen had no intention of waiting to see whether Bitar could be trusted before withdrawing their capital. Damascus to Secretary of State, March 12, 1963, nos. 604 and 605, RG59/3398, NA.

28. All banks had been nationalized in July 1961, but those owned by Syrians and Arabs were denationalized after the break with Egypt. See Chapter 6, p. 148.

29. The nationalized banks were reorganized into six banking groups in August and subsequently merged into a single entity, the Commercial Bank of Syria.

30. Damascus to Secretary of State, May 31, 1963, no. 858, RG59/4053, NA.

peasants. On July 3 the Higher Planning Council was created and charged with overseeing and directing the activities of the Ministry of Planning. The ministry would in turn manage a network of local planning bureaus intended to extend the government's planning capacity more deeply into the provinces. On August 13 the government decreed that nationalized banks would be reorganized into five banking groups, a move that business leaders perceived as "making more difficult the securing of large loans by rich private merchants."³¹

Meetings between government representatives and business delegations could only have deepened the growing fears of the business community. In late March, Prime Minister Bitar and Minister of Economy Abd al-Karim Zuhur received a delegation from the Chamber of Commerce of Damascus. One account of the meeting has the minister of economy castigating his visitors, describing them as crooks and flatly asserting that in the future, it would be the government that would "dictate economic policy to businessmen, and not vice versa."³² Direct meetings between U.S. Embassy officials and senior Ba'athist ministers confirmed the deep antagonism of the Ba'ath toward businessmen. In one such meeting, Jamal al-Atasi, who then held the position of minister of information, derided Syrian capitalists as "having learned nothing" from past experiences. "Their sole interest," Atasi claimed, "has been in quick-term profits, and now [their] only concern is in getting their money out of Syria. To this [the Embassy officer] pointed out that telling a businessman, as this government is in fact doing, that he will eventually be nationalized or lose his business in one way or another can never obtain his cooperation. . . . Atasi paid lip service [to the idea of a more conciliatory approach to the private sector] but I derived [the] definite impression that he is closed-minded on the subject of Syrian capitalists."³³

This impression was further reinforced by the results of two party congresses that took place during the early fall of 1963. In September, the Regional Command of the Ba'ath held its first congress since the March coup and endorsed a radical approach to economic restructuring as the party's official position.³⁴ By the time the Sixth National Congress of the party convened in October, Bitar's rough-hewn outline of Ba'athist intentions had

31. American Consulate in Aleppo to Department of State, August 29, 1963, no. A-28, RG59/3398, NA.

32. Damascus to Secretary of State, April 4, 1963, no. 708, RG59/3398, NA.

33. Damascus to Secretary of State, April 29, 1963, no. 786, RG59/3398, NA.

34. The Regional Command was the executive structure of the country-level parties of the Ba'ath. The movement as a whole was represented through a National Command, with the term "national" referring to the Arab nation as a whole, of which individual countries were merely regions.

been recast as a more elaborated statement of the party's determination to transform Syria's political economy. The final resolutions of the Sixth National Congress are widely recognized as a critical point in the consolidation of Ba'athist radicalism, and they reflect the increasing antagonism of the Ba'ath toward Syrian capitalists. Dismissing the possibility of an inclusive social pact, the party declared that on the basis of a "scientific analysis of economic and political conditions . . . the bourgeoisie is unable to carry out any positive task in the economic sphere." "Furthermore," it continued, "the opportunism of the bourgeoisie qualifies it for the role of ally to the new colonialism. The workers, peasants, revolutionary civil and military intelligentsia, and the *petit bourgeoisie* were considered the proper forces for the achievement of the Socialist revolution in its initial stage."³⁵ To further ensure the marginalization of Syrian capitalists, the Ba'ath also recommended the introduction of workplace democracy through worker self-management, advocating the restructuring of government agencies to permit "them to participate fully in the process of conversion to socialism." It emphasized the need for collectivization in agriculture as the "proper Socialist take-off point for the oncoming change in social relations," reinforced the urgency of economic planning, and stressed the need for popular mobilization and the formation of popular institutions to support the party's goals of social and economic reform.

Capitalists against the State

Just seven months after the March coup, therefore, the broad contours of business-state relations had been defined in terms that left little possibility for accommodation between the two. At the same time, however, Ba'athist elites, like Nasser, were mindful of the private sector's importance to the national economy and periodically embarked on campaigns to bolster the sagging confidence of businessmen. These efforts convey, above all, the impression of political theater, spectacles that are notable less for their intended effects than for what they reveal about the relationship between the Ba'ath and the private sector during this early moment of Ba'athist rule. Launched to create the appearance of conciliation, they underscore the tension between the Ba'ath's core project of constructing a radical populist regime and its need to avoid an economic collapse that might place

35. The text of the final resolutions of the Sixth National Congress is reproduced in Kamel S. Abu Jaber, *The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party: History, Ideology, and Organization* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1966), pp. 167-74. Jabber's text is also the basis for subsequent references to the resolutions.

this project at risk. They highlight both the mechanisms through which the business community struggled to retain a measure of influence over economic policy and the issues around which the business community mobilized. They also help to mark the narrowing boundaries of business influence and the shifting balance of political and social power in the country.

One of several such "conciliatory" episodes occurred following the violent suppression of a coup attempt by Nasserist officers in July 1963 and the subsequent consolidation of General Amin al-Hafiz as head of the National Council of Revolutionary Command (NCRC). Feeling that the Ba'ath had at last secured some political breathing room—and hoping to engage business leaders in an anti-Nasserist coalition—Hafiz invited a dialog with the business community.³⁶ Business groups took advantage of the invitation to publicize their opposition to the statist reorganization of Syria's political economy.³⁷ On August 1 the Damascus Chamber of Commerce issued a detailed memorandum criticizing the government's economic conduct, calling for the relaxation of exchange controls and the denationalization of banks and warning about the financial losses Syria would suffer should the government continue to intervene in private sector affairs. Hafiz met with the Damascus chambers shortly afterward, and according to reports published in the party's newspaper, *Al-Ba'ath*, he used the meeting to affirm the party's commitment to social change.³⁸ Comparing the tribulations of the Ba'ath to those faced by the Prophet Muhammad in spreading the faith of Islam, he expressed his belief that the Ba'ath would likewise prevail—sentiments that could hardly have soothed the fears of his audience.³⁹

Ten days later, Hafiz, Bitar, and other cabinet ministers hosted a delegation of some fifty businessmen from Aleppo. Despite securing some concessions from Hafiz on a number of minor issues, government representatives held firm on the larger questions of economic restructuring.⁴⁰ Moreover, evidence suggests that businessmen involved in these discussions

36. According to Salah al-Din Bitar, who surfaced yet again as prime minister after the July 1963 coup attempt, the regime now felt secure enough to turn its attention more fully to economic affairs (Damascus to Secretary of State, August 14, 1963, no. 138, RG59/3398, NA). Following this line, the new cabinet announced that its principal goal would be socialist transformation, rather than the pursuit of union with Egypt (Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy," p. 138).

37. For example, a leading business journal that had toned down its editorial line since March 1963 published an unattributed article that quite openly reiterated private sector concerns about the negative effects of nationalization on trade, production, and investment. See "Une saine gestion du secteur public en Syrie," *FFSPA*, no. 70 (October 1963).

38. T. E. Bromley to Foreign Office, "Syrian Economic Situation," August 19, 1963, PRO, FO371/170613.

39. Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy," p. 192.

40. Aleppo to Department of State, no. A-28, RG59/3398.

fully appreciated the extent to which the regime's radical-populist strategy of state building had undermined possibilities for compromise. As one participant in the August 22–23 meetings indicated, to satisfy the concerns of business, the "Ba'athi rulers . . . must now make important concessions with respect to their sacred doctrines of socialism at the request of their worst enemies, the very capitalists and 'separatists' whom they have so vigorously and bitterly attacked. . . . [S]uch concessions will not be easily won in the councils of the Ba'ath Party."⁴¹ In other words, as early as July 1963, the strategic tensions dividing the Ba'ath and capitalists were simply too great to be overcome.

As a result, efforts to stabilize business-regime relations during the summer and fall of 1963 had scarcely any effect. With little expectation of a change in government policy, the business community found no particular reason to alter its behavior. Capital flight continued at a rapid pace, while new investment ground to a halt.⁴² By the end of the year, Syria was experiencing acute foreign exchange shortfalls, and the government began to acknowledge publicly that the economy was in crisis. In early January, the government introduced a widespread austerity program that included an increase in tariffs on luxury imports and additional protections for local manufactured goods. Other measures soon followed. On January 9 the government introduced a system of ration cards for the purchase of essential goods, and on January 23 new restrictions tightened even further the already extensive regulations on the removal of foreign exchange from the country.

Syrian capitalists and other opponents of the Ba'ath perceived the crisis as a critical turning point. Mounting evidence of Syria's economic difficulties, along with the imposition of new restrictions on foreign trade, prompted the Damascus Chamber of Commerce to present the government with a formal demand for the return to a "free economy," along with a particularly strident attack on the Ba'ath's economic policies.⁴³ More significant, economic conditions helped crystallize an opposition coalition among businessmen and Islamists. Beginning in late February 1964, business groups and Islamist militants, with some involvement of Nasserists as well, launched a nationwide series of protests, strikes, and riots that grew to become the most substantial challenge yet faced by the Ba'athist regime.⁴⁴

41. *Ibid.*

42. U.S. Embassy estimates suggest capital outflows of more than £5200 million in March and April 1964 alone (U.S. Embassy Damascus to Department of State, May 22, 1964, no. A-354, RG59/2685, NA).

43. Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy," p. 263.

44. The timing of the uprising to coincide with the anniversary of the 1958 union with Egypt is usually accorded considerable meaning. However, the date seems to have been more

Like many such events, the immediate trigger for the "spring uprising" of 1964 was a series of relatively minor incidents that were aggravated by the government's heavy-handed reaction. Small-scale violence between Islamist and Ba'athist students in the coastal city of Baniyas in early February was followed by a commercial strike that shut down business activity in the nearby city of Homs. The government's response was immediate and harsh. Within twenty-four hours a small group of businessmen identified by the government as strike leaders had been arrested. Emergency military tribunals sentenced five merchants to prison terms, stripped them of their civil rights, and banned them from residence in Homs for a period of five years. Interior Minister Nur al-Din al-Atasi cast the events in Homs as the precursor to a "general country-wide business protest" against the regime and promised to crack down on any further disturbances.⁴⁵ Government-run newspapers struck a similar chord, describing the strike as a "plot against the state." Business leaders protested the government's behavior to President Hafiz, but there are few indications that their grievances were addressed.⁴⁶

Following the events in Homs, regime officials once again took part in a dialog with representatives of the business community, both public and private, hoping to lessen the tensions between them. As during the previous fall, however, the regime's modest attempts to conciliate the private sector must be read against its highly visible efforts to broaden popular support for its program of economic transformation. In early March, with the economy still in crisis, Economy Minister George Tumeh gave a national radio address supporting the nationalization of banks and blaming capital flight and poor weather for the country's economic problems.⁴⁷ In celebrations on March 8 marking the Ba'ath's first year in power, President Hafiz gave a speech emphasizing the gains of Syria's populist transfor-

coincidental than planned. Damascus businessmen apparently delayed their participation in the uprising to avoid the impression that they were acting in support of Nasser (Damascus to Secretary of State, February 25, 1964, no. 570, RG59/2686, NA). Rabinovich has compiled the most complete published account of the events; see *Syria under the Ba'ath*, pp. 109-17.

45. Damascus to Secretary of State, no. 570, RG59/2686. See also *Arab Political Documents* (Beirut: Political Studies and Public Administration Department, American University, 1964), p. 66.

46. Damascus to Secretary of State, February 27, 1964, no. 572, RG59/2686, NA. The meeting was described in press accounts as a visit by Homs businessmen to show their support for the government in the wake of the strike. According to U.S. Embassy staff, "Despite recent highlighting of grievances of business community and its potential for causing government difficulties, we have definite impression regime believes it can cope with pressure from this quarter."

47. For the text of his address, see George Tohme, "Exposé sur la situation économique Syrienne," *EJSPA*, no. 76 (April 1964).

mation.⁴⁸ The regime's public relations machinery churned out similar messages, with no decline in the level of vitriol it leveled against the "reactionary bourgeoisie."⁴⁹

By early April, with little evidence of meaningful government compromise and with the constant airing by senior officials of deeply anticapitalist rhetoric, business communities in major cities again turned to active opposition. Antigovernment protests spread, becoming more violent. Once again, opposition mobilized around an alliance of business associations and mosque-based religious networks, generating protests that combined student demonstrations and riots with commercial strikes. In Hama, confrontations between high school students and security forces in mid-April escalated into a near insurrection. Government forces sealed the city, imposed a curfew, and sent troops into the old quarter to put down protests. Street fighting culminated with the shelling by government tanks of the city's main Sultan Mosque, killing between ten and fifteen people and causing many injuries. Although the government offered to pay compensation to the families and subsidize the reconstruction of the city, it also made clear its determination not to back down in securing its political hold over the country or in nationalizing private sector assets. On April 16, while Hama was essentially under siege, the NCRC nationalized three major textile firms that were then subjected to the regime's newly announced program of worker self-management.⁵⁰ During a visit to Hama on April 18, Hafiz issued a military order extending the death penalty to those who committed actions against government forces and property.

While Hafiz was touring Syria's strife-torn northern cities, commercial strikes spread to Damascus. Large lines formed outside the few bakeries and food shops that remained open, and military units took up positions around key communications centers. That day, the government announced the nationalization of two Damascus-based flour mills. During an appearance in Homs, Hafiz spent the day "cajoling and threatening the 'bourgeoisie'"

48. The speech is translated in Damascus to Secretary of State, March 10, 1964, no. A-269, RG59/2683, NA.

49. For one example, see *The First Year of the Revolution: An Exposition of Achievements* (Damascus: Ministry of Information, March 1964).

50. The government provided various justifications for the nationalizations, charging factory owners with smuggling their money out of Syria and having debts to the state that exceeded their nominal capital. See Damascus to Department of State, May 12, 1964, no. A-159, RG59/768, NA. On worker self-management, see *Arab Political Documents*, 1964, pp. 134-35. By one account, one intent of the measure was to make clear the distinction between Egypt's approach to economic management, which the Syrian government derided as state capitalism, and Syria's commitment to "authentic" socialism. See J. De Buck, "Les nationalisations en Syrie," *Correspondance d'Orient* 7 (1965), p. 64.

and reaffirming his determination not to deviate from Syria's socialist transformation. Shops that took part in the strike, he threatened, would have their shutters forced open and their goods distributed to the poor.⁵¹

To U.S. diplomats in Syria, clearly sympathetic to the concerns of business, these events, and the Damascus strike in particular, represented "an unusual show of guts and determination. As far as we can recall Damascus has not witnessed similar strike in years. Over and above all causes for dismay of 'haves,' we have definite impression merchants and other govt opponents here and in other cities are thoroughly fed-up with familiar routine of having conciliation sessions with govt leaders followed by measures adverse to their interests. . . . Regime's angry reaction—Hafez being leading spokesman—has been to promise grimly both the crushing of the rebellion and even heavier doses of socialism . . . inciting class struggle with growing fervor."⁵²

In the face of Hafiz's ruthlessness, businessmen in provincial cities began to waver. In Damascus, merchants remained on strike for the following week. By this time, a number of leading professional associations had joined the opposition. The Lawyers Association went on strike and presented the government with a petition calling for the restoration of public liberty, an end to the state of emergency, and a return to democracy.⁵³ Similar protests were submitted by the associations representing doctors and engineers. While the opposition continued to grow, business leaders began a series of quiet negotiations with the government. Unlike earlier such discussions, however, their demands had now escalated. They now called not only for economic reforms but also for free elections and an end to one-party government.

After several days of inconclusive talks, government troops began moving through Damascus smashing padlocks on shuttered storefronts and posting guards to keep stores open. Reports circulated of widespread arrests of business leaders, including those who had played a central role in the business-government negotiations of April 25–28. On April 29 Hafiz signed a military decree declaring that shopowners whose stores remained shuttered would have their inventories seized and their property nationalized and would be tried before military courts. Anyone advocating continuation of the strike would be subject to court martial and the seizure of personal assets. Publication of this decree, accompanied by clear evidence of

the government's determination to enforce it, brought the "battle of the shutters" in Damascus to a rapid end. Shops reopened, and a number of business leaders issued an apology to the government, along with a denial that their actions had been connected to events elsewhere in the country.

Significantly, the repression of business protests was not the only means used by the government to consolidate its system of rule. Even in the midst of a severe political challenge, the Ba'athist leadership remained attentive to issues of institution building. During the commercial strike and in the face of rampant speculation about the regime's survival, President Hafiz announced the completion of a provisional constitution. Included in the document were a number of significant changes, some of which seemed designed to blunt criticism of the regime as antidemocratic but the majority of which were clearly intended to broaden the regime's social base and put in place the institutional framework for a more durable populist coalition.⁵⁴ These included the transformation of the NCRC into an executive Presidency Council to be headed by General Hafiz, as well as the creation of an elected National Council as the country's legislative authority. The National Council would be composed of "its present members [that is, the NCRC] as well as representatives from the popular sectors," such as workers, peasants, and women. And while the provisional constitution included language that affirmed the protection of private property and required "just compensation" for nationalized property, it highlighted the public ownership of all national resources, singled out collective ownership as the basis of Syria's "socialist society," and gave the state explicit entitlement to "nationalize by law every institution or project relating to the general interest in return for just compensation."⁵⁵

By the end of April, the uprising of spring 1964 was over. In the course of the next month, with the political situation firmly in hand, the regime's rhetoric underwent a temporary shift in tone.⁵⁶ Clemency was extended to a number of those who took part in opposition activities—in exchange for

54. In an interview in May 1965, Munif al-Razzaz, then secretary general of the national command of the Ba'ath, told a delegation of visiting British parliamentarians that "this council would not be a real Parliament. The party, industrial trade unions and professional bodies would send elected representatives, but the agricultural trade unions would only have nominated representatives, as the organisation of the agricultural labour had not yet been completed. . . . [H]e admitted that the purpose of the temporary arrangement was to keep the minority Baath Socialist Party in power. He believed that this was right, and was in any case an improvement on keeping a single man in power, as was the case in Jordan" (T. E. Evans to Stewart, May 31, 1965, PRO, FO371/180925).

55. A complete translation of the provisional constitution is in Damascus to Secretary of State, April 28, 1964, no. A-329, RG59/2685, NA.

56. The shift in tone was again highly uneven. Even while inviting closer cooperation with business, a large May Day demonstration in Damascus was marked by crowds of workers chant-

51. Damascus to Secretary of State, April 21, 1964, no. 720, RG59/2686, NA.

52. Ibid. The characterization in this dispatch of Hafiz as a hard-liner contradicts the argument by Rabinovich and others that he was among the Ba'ath leaders who were more conciliatory toward business interests.

53. *Arab Political Documents*, 1964, p. 155.

expressions of support for the regime. A new cabinet was formed, once again with Salah al-Din Bitar as prime minister, which made a number of overtures to the business community. On May 25 Bitar gave a major economic policy address that provided for an explicit division of economic labor between the private and public sector, the creation of a new joint sector, and assurances that Syria's socialist transformation would happen at a more gradual pace and would include room for the private sector to play a role.⁵⁷ In November the Presidency Council abolished the Martial Law Tribunals and National Security Courts that had been created in early 1963.

While the government's repressive measures were immediately responsible for the uprising's swift collapse, the failure of Syria's capitalists to achieve meaningful political gains illustrates not only the dynamics of social change in Syria and the patterns of capitalists' mobilization but also the extent to which Ba' thist practices of state building had transformed the balance of social power since March 1963. They also call into question the dominant narrative of these events as captured in the secondary literature. Without exception, this literature treats the uprising as evidence of the continuing social power of Syria's capitalists in the period after the coup. In Rabinovich's words, the "Ba' th had failed to realize how strong [the capitalists'] social power still was in 1964." From this perspective, the critical accomplishment of the uprising was to bring about a slowdown in the government's efforts to restructure the economy, a withdrawal from its more radical political commitments, and a move toward greater political inclusiveness.⁵⁸

Yet to some contemporary observers, including those based in the U.S. Embassy, the uprising and its aftermath did not constitute evidence of capitalists' social power. Rather, they were viewed as indicators of capitalists' increasing isolation from Syrian society and political ineptness, the increasing salience of populist discourses in Syrian politics, and, by implication, the relative success of the Ba' th in establishing the credibility of its commitment to these ends, particularly among social groups that had previously been

ing. "Nationalize, Nationalize oh our National Council—factories to the workers and lands to the peasants" (Damascus to Secretary of State, May 12, 1964, no. A-349, RG59/4055, NA).

57. Scholars of Syria have used this address to depict Bitar as an economic moderate, yet these commitments did little to ease the skepticism of capitalists, who dismissed them as meaningless gestures. Aleppo businessmen reportedly were "thunder-struck" that anyone might perceive the new Bitar government or its economic policies as moderate. "Most [businessmen] believe Bitar cabinet was simply smoke screen [to] pursue extremist policies" (Aleppo to Secretary of State, June 5, 1964, no. 76, RG59/767, NA). In fact, Bitar's policy statement was followed by a wave of nationalizations.

58. Rabinovich, *Syria under the Ba' th*, pp. 112–13. See also Tabitha Petran, *Syria* (New York: Praeger, 1972), p. 177; Abu Jaber, *Arab Ba' th Socialist Party*, pp. 90–91; Jean Hannover and Michel Seurat, *Etat et secteur publique industriel en Syrie* (Beirut: CERMOC, 1979), p. 10; and Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy," pp. 288–89.

excluded. One assessment of the uprising from a U.S. diplomat noted the inability of capitalists to look beyond their own interests long enough to sustain an alliance of opposition forces. Observing that the "most potent" source of antiregime mobilization was the Ba' th's "disregard and contempt for Islam," this assessment added that "as merchants' strikes progressed, religious issue tended to fade what with careful avoidance by [the government] of further provocation and with surprisingly narrow minded and shortsighted concentration of business elements on [their] own special grievances without reference to or apparent concern for social progress and change."⁵⁹ A second report, from a British diplomat, concluded that "the days of private enterprise in Syria are past. The wind of change in the region is moving toward state control, and I cannot believe that, even should it enjoy a brief return to power, private enterprise will ever again be the dominant influence in Syrian economic development."⁶⁰

Seen in this light, the spring uprising stands out as a defining moment in the dynamic of government-capitalist relations in Syria during the early period of Ba' thist state building. Viewed by many Syrians as a critical test of the Ba' th's power and support, both within the military and among the population at large, its outcome marks a turning point in the consolidation of the Ba' th's populist authoritarian system of rule. The confrontation exposed severe cracks in the social and political power of capitalists. It also cemented the regime's determination to organize its system of rule around a repressive, exclusionary, and increasingly radical populist coalition. Ba' thist elites did exhibit a willingness to make cosmetic compromises in response to the concerns of the private sector. At the same time, however, they continued to restructure the Syrian economy and accelerated their efforts to construct populist institutions such as the National Council. Indeed, the Ba' th's response to economic crisis, capital flight, and evidence of the economy's continuing reliance on the private sector was not compromise and conciliation but increasing state control over economic resources, the strengthening of Ba' thist political institutions, and a further sharpening of its radical populist identity.

Beginning in early January 1965, the regime announced a series of extensive "socialist decrees" that brought the bulk of large and mid-sized industry in Syria under government control. During the course of the month, some twenty-two firms were fully nationalized, including a number of those in which the government already held a minority share; an additional twenty-four firms were nationalized 90 percent; and sixty-one firms were

59. Damascus to Secretary of State, May 1, 1964, no. 747, RG59/2686, NA.

60. T. E. Bromley to Foreign Office, "Syria's Economic Future," May 12, 1964, PRO, FO371/175869.

nationalized 75 percent.⁶¹ Boards of these firms were dissolved and replaced with directors selected by the government, according to the worker self-management guidelines approved in May 1964. Sharp warnings from the regime against opposition accompanied the decrees. New military tribunals were established to back up these threats and enforce compliance with nationalization measures. To underscore the populist dimensions of the decrees, peasants and workers were transported to Damascus for pro-government demonstrations.

The government's initiatives continued throughout the spring. In mid-February, thirty-nine import-export firms were nationalized and placed under the authority of SIMEX, the state-owned import-export organization.⁶² Along with a list of commodities over which SIMEX was given a trade monopoly, the government emphasized that businessmen caught "hoarding or smuggling food items" would receive severe punishments, including life imprisonment and possibly the death penalty.⁶³ In early March, oil and fuel distribution firms, including foreign-owned firms, were nationalized and reorganized under the authority of the General Petroleum Authority.⁶⁴ On May 4, the government nationalized fifty-seven cotton-ginning factories, "the last plants of the modern industrial sector still in private hands," and shifted responsibility for the export of wheat, cotton, barley, and their by-products to the Government Cereals Office and a newly formed Cotton Marketing Authority, a move "crucial to Syria since well over half its foreign exchange is generated from their sale."⁶⁵ Within months, the government also established the General Organization for the Public Industrial Sector and the General Organization for Cereals and Flour Mills, which, along with SIMEX and the Cotton Marketing Authority, created the administrative infrastructure to manage state-owned enterprises.

The socialist decrees and extensive measures that followed left important areas of economic activity in the hands of the private sector—including thousands of small, workshop-based, light manufacturing enterprises, low-

61. *Études sur le secteur public industriel en République Arabe Syrienne* (Damascus: Office Arabe de Presse et de Documentation, 1969), p. 1. See also Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy," pp. 329–40, and Munir al-Hamish, *Tatawwur al-iqtisad al-Suri al-hadith* [Development of the modern Syrian economy] (Damascus: Dar al-Jalil, 1983), pp. 287–89.

62. SIMEX was created in late 1963 but was largely inactive until early 1965. The first director of SIMEX was a graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Mohammad al-Shash. U.S. diplomats believed that he disagreed with "the philosophy of state trading by virtue of his Wharton School training" (Damascus to Department of State, January 19, 1965, no. A-229, RG59/768, NA). Perhaps not surprisingly, Shash was soon replaced by a new director, Saleh Dabbagh, who greatly expanded the scope and authority of the organization.

63. Betz, "Conflict of Principle and Policy," pp. 339–40.

64. *Ibid.* The foreign-owned petroleum firms included Esso, Shell, and Socony.

65. Aleppo to Department of State, no. A-405, May 21, 1965, RG59/768, NA.

level trading firms, retail trade, and residential construction—but it gave the state ownership of virtually three-quarters of the Syrian economy, including full control over critical industrial sectors such as textiles and agricultural processing, as well as a majority of the industrial labor force. And while the decrees briefly reenergized an alliance of business-Islamist opposition, the government kept the upper hand throughout. By recourse to the same kind of drastic measures as those taken the previous April, business unrest was soon quashed, and Syrian capitalists began bitterly to adjust to their new circumstances.

These watershed events in the reorganization of Syria's political economy prompted a reevaluation of the Ba'athist government by the U.S. Embassy, which concluded that January 1965 would stand out as the "date when point of no return from full fledged socialism was reached." While carefully distinguishing between the Ba'athist state and "orthodox" communist states, the report concluded that the Ba'ath had successfully "broken the back of the rightist resistance" and that "a truly revolutionary situation exists in Syria." Distinguishing the current government from its predecessors, the assessment emphasized that "this regime has the will, the determination, and the organized strength to break with tradition and custom in all fields of Syrian endeavor."⁶⁶ One month later, during celebrations marking the second anniversary of the March 8 coup, a further evaluation called attention to the Ba'ath's growing popular support among younger Syrians. The document noted that public participation in anniversary celebrations was larger than any similar event during the secessionist period and larger even than the crowds that greeted President Nasser during his February 1961 trip to Syria. It observed an unsettling similarity between Italy of the 1920s and Germany of the 1930s in the "aggressive" behavior of young men "conducting themselves as if future and state obviously theirs." Reminding readers in Washington that a majority of Syrians remained anti-Ba'athist, it nonetheless considered the strong growth in the regime's social base as "somewhat miraculous" given its position just two years earlier.⁶⁷

The structural and institutional consequences of the period between April 1964 and January 1965 certainly justified the description of revolutionary. There would be further changes in the organization of the public sector over the next several years as various Ba'athist governments struggled to find an effective formula for managing the vast new assets they now controlled. Additional firms would be nationalized; others would be returned to their former owners. Yet with the 1965 decrees, the populist transformation of Syria's economy was essentially complete. In sharp contrast to the

66. Damascus to Secretary of State, February 14, 1965, no. 509, RG59/2683, NA.

67. Damascus to Department of State, March 10, 1965, no. 636, RG59/2685, NA.

experience of 1961, when a previous effort to reorganize Syria's political economy brought about the collapse of the United Arab Republic, the Ba'th succeeded in imposing these changes on a resistant private sector. Chambers of Commerce and Industry continued to submit memoranda to the government demanding liberalization.⁶⁸ Merchants and Islamists would again mount a series of commercial strikes in May 1967, but these too would quickly be suppressed. The balance of social power in Syria had decisively been recast.

Despite these political gains, the public sector did not emerge overnight as the engine of Syrian economic development. Notwithstanding the impressive goals established for the public sector in both the first and second five-year plans (1961–65 and 1966–70), the private sector remained the major contributor to Syria's economic growth for most of the decade. During the initial plan—and keeping in mind that the bulk of nationalizations took place near the end of the plan period—the public sector failed to meet its investment target by almost 50 percent. The private sector, on the other hand, accounted for 141 percent of its planned investment.⁶⁹ During the second plan period, the public sector again failed to meet its investment targets, but the private sector's share of total investment plummeted from almost 70 percent in 1963 and 1964 to 47 percent the next year, dropping to a low of 19 percent in 1967.⁷⁰ Although government statistics are not entirely reliable, it seems likely that the public sector did not contribute more than half of fixed capital formation until the late 1960s at best. Thus, while the rhetoric of radical anticapitalism, revolution, and class conflict was useful for the mobilization of populist social groups and the consolidation of the regime politically, the Ba'th's reorganization of Syria's economy was not motivated by an intent to eliminate markets or construct a Soviet-style command economy.

Reorganizing Syrian Agriculture

Reorganizing Syria's political economy involved not only nationalizations and an increased reliance on central planning but significant shifts in the

68. For the text of one such memorandum, prepared by the Aleppo Chamber of Commerce on the occasion of Safah al-Din Bitar's final appointment as prime minister, see I. S. Winchester to J. L. Y. Sanders, February 12, 1966, PRO, FO371/186917.

69. Ziad Keilany, "Economic Planning in Syria, 1960–1965: An Evaluation," *Journal of Developing Areas* 4 (April 1970), pp. 361–74.

70. Eliahu Kanovsky, *Economic Development of Syria* (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects, 1977), p. 12.

patterns of agrarian reform as well. Ba'thist policies in this arena, as in others, reflected a concern with the formation of institutional arrangements responsive to both the populist and transformational norms that defined its broader political outlook. They also reflected an understanding of the importance of the agrarian sector for the Ba'th's project of building and controlling a populist social coalition.

After 1963, party activists went to considerable lengths to link agrarian reform to the process of state formation. No less a figure than Zaki al-Arsuzi, a cofounder of the Ba'th Party along with Michel Aflaq and Salah al-Din Bitar, published an article in the journal of the Syrian army, *Al-Jundi*, in which he sought to legitimate agrarian reform in terms of social transformation and state building, rather than the more familiar notions of social equity and economic rationality. "Some people," Arsuzi wrote, "imagine that the reason for limiting agricultural ownership is primarily economic." "Fundamentally," however, "the goal . . . is a political one." The core purpose of land reform, Arsuzi argued, was "the overriding need to liberate 75 percent of the Syrian population and to prepare them to be citizens qualified to participate in the building of the state." Similar views were expressed by high-ranking Ba'th politicians such as Hilal Raslan, who served at the time as governor of Aleppo Province.⁷¹

Since the early 1950s, agrarian reform in Syria had been designed to increase the amount of private property held by small-scale farmers. What distinguished agrarian reform after 1963 is a growing emphasis on rural cooperatives and newly established agricultural collectives as the organizing frameworks for agricultural production. Land reform under the Ba'th was recast as a process designed not only to redistribute land but also to restructure agricultural property rights, centralize agricultural production, and insert the state as a central actor in the agricultural economy. This shift was evident in the increasing allocation of state resources toward these ends, as well as the growing reliance on land reform as a means for the reorganization of agricultural producers.⁷²

Agricultural cooperatives were first established in Syria in the 1950s. Their numbers increased more quickly during the United Arab Republic period but showed negligible growth during the secessionist period that

71. Long excerpts from the article are translated in Damascus to Department of State, October 14, 1963, no. A-122, RG59/3398, NA. On this point in general, see Raymond A. Hinnebusch, "Party and Peasant in Syria," *Carro Papers in Social Science* 3, no. 1 (November 1979).

72. See Bichara Khader, "Structures et réforme agraires en Syrie," *Maghreb-Machrek* 65 (September–October 1974), pp. 45–55, and Françoise Meiral, "Le monde rural syrien à l'ère de réformes (1958–1978)," in *La Syrie d'aujourd'hui*, ed. André Raymond (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1980), pp. 297–326.

Table 15. Number of cooperatives formed in Syria by province, 1960-1966

Province	1960		1961		1962		1963		1964		1965		1966	
	Coops	Members	Coops	Members	Coops	Members	Coops	Members	Coops	Members	Coops	Members	Coops	Members
Damascus	42	5,002	48	5,747	54	5,505	49	4,569	45	4,519	50	4,758	60	5,650
Homs	38	3,469	41	3,714	51	3,963	63	3,878	65	4,292	86	5,401	106	5,589
Hama	63	3,863	64	3,999	73	4,333	75	4,443	76	4,467	84	4,318	97	5,492
Latakia	41	4,544	53	4,966	65	6,222	70	6,639	81	7,939	84	7,943	120	8,191
Idlib	72	7,238	79	7,500	82	7,735	84	7,446	85	7,393	94	7,373	99	11,136
Aleppo	35	1,163	48	2,841	71	4,275	75	3,482	92	4,856	150	5,472	98	3,302
Al-Rakka	2	40	4	358	4	343	4	343	2	314	4	360	22	2,069
Al-Hasaka	7	563	15	985	16	994	16	994	17	1,043	18	754	20	1,257
Deir al-Zor	6	471	20	1,839	20	1,773	16	1,753	16	1,757	28	1,913	29	1,322
Suwayda	20	2,458	22	2,568	23	2,771	24	2,434	23	2,431	23	2,631	23	2,419
Der'a	6	206	9	307	17	568	17	568	17	570	4	143	6	206
Qunaitra	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Totals	332	29,017	403	34,824	476	38,482	493	36,549	528	40,041	637	41,629	712	47,704

Source: Syrian Arab Republic, Wizarat al-Takhtit, *Murdirina al-jnsa', al-Majmu'a al-its'aiya al-Suriya* (Syrian statistical abstract) (Damascus: Government Press, 1960-68).
 Note: Data on cooperatives affiliated with both the Ministry of Agrarian Reform and the Ministry of Agriculture are combined.

followed. After March 1963, however, the cooperative underwent unprecedented expansion, a process that has continued essentially to the mid-1990s. By the early 1970s, the number of agricultural cooperatives in Syria had grown from about 500 in 1963 to almost 1,600, with 134,000 members.⁷³ By 1995, there were more than 5,100 cooperatives, covering almost 2.5 million hectares and involving more than 800,000 peasants, of whom some 64,000 were women.⁷⁴ Cooperatives were supplemented by peasants associations, and by 1970 more than twelve hundred associations had been established, with more than one million members. In addition, the first small-scale collective state farms were formed in the Ghouta just outside Damascus in 1965, later expanding to other regions. By the end of the decade they covered some 250,000 hectares.⁷⁵

Underlying these changes were a series of government regulations and incentives supporting the restructuring of agricultural production. These included a requirement introduced in the June 1963 agrarian reform law that peasants receiving expropriated land must be members of cooperatives or collectives. Financial facilities for cooperatives were strengthened in 1966 when the Agricultural Bank was reorganized as the Bank for Agricultural Cooperatives. In late 1967, a decree authorized the establishment of the General Federation of Agricultural Cooperatives to centralize the administration of this increasingly important sector of the rural economy. In addition, cooperatives that originally provided rather limited services to members gradually expanded their roles, becoming the central context for state interventions ranging from participation in training courses to advice on crop management, the provision of credit, and access to equipment.⁷⁶

As this summary suggests, Syria's agricultural sector became much more deeply enmeshed during the 1960s within a network of institutional arrangements that were not only production oriented but also explicitly intended to reorganize relations between peasants and the state. Even though the vast majority of land continued to be privately held, the nationalization of marketing, supply, distribution, credit, processing of crops, and other functions on which the agricultural economy depended meant that the

73. Office Arabe de Presse et de Documentation, "Agriculture in the Syrian Arab Republic" (Damascus, n.d.), p. 3.

74. Naji As'ad, "Cooperative Societies' Achievements Reviewed," *Tishreen*, December 14, 1996, p. 3.

75. By far the most detailed study of agrarian reform in Syria at the local level is Anne-Marie Bianquis, *La réforme agraire dans la ghouta de Damas* (Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1989).

76. See A. Filonik, *Sa'ubat al-zira'iya al-Suriya al-haditha* (Problems in modern Syrian agriculture) (Damascus: Dar al-jumhuriya lil-tiba'a, 1987), pp. 94-125. A survey of the cooperative movement is also contained in Munir al-Hamish, *Tatawwur al-iqtisad al-Suri*, pp. 184-94.

effects of the Ba'ath's restructuring were felt far throughout the agricultural economy. Moreover, as I discuss in the next section, the Ba'ath's emphasis on reorganizing agricultural producers was only part of a much broader strategy for reshaping Syrian society along populist lines.

Popular Institutions and the Reorganization of Syrian Society

Alongside its efforts to restructure the state and the economy, the Ba'ath undertook an equally ambitious drive to reorganize Syrian society. Within the first year following the March 8 coup, Ba'athist leaders began to reshape structures of interest representation to put in place the institutional frameworks needed to mobilize a populist political coalition and permit the more intensive forms of intervention and control that were central to the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. Over the course of the next several years, and particularly in the period following the February 1966 coup, Ba'athist elites would develop a full-blown state-corporatist apparatus, encompassing not only existing professional associations, youth groups, and trade unions but also a large number of newly formed "popular organizations," political structures such as the National Council, and paramilitary groups such as the National Guard and Workers' Militias. In this domain as in others, however, Ba'athist elites had available to them and made ready use of a substantial body of legal precedent, established norms, and prior experience. They relied heavily on well-worn corporatist techniques of social management couched in the same mix of populist and Leninist discourses that served to justify their policies more generally.

The initial targets of Ba'athist restructuring were workers and peasants, the two core "pillars" of the new socialist society (with students, intellectuals, and the army representing three additional "pillars"). Both groups were seen as critical elements of the Ba'ath's populist coalition, yet both were perceived, for different reasons, as problematic sources of support. Labor unions had been thoroughly reorganized as a result of the 1959 labor law, had lost additional autonomy as a result of legislation passed during the secessionist period, and had been virtually purged of communist members. The initial impulse of the regime was to view workers as natural allies, strengthen the independence of the unions, and accord workers a meaningful role in support of its broader project of social transformation. For militant activists within the Ba'ath, union organizations and publications were useful instruments for lobbying the party to move in more radical directions.

At the same time, unions were understood to be, at least potentially, po-

litically unreliable. They remained sites of strong support for the Nasserist opposition and, to a smaller degree, for the Syrian Communist Party. Unions stood out as having the capacity to make organized demands on the government and to mobilize challenges to the hegemony of Ba'athist power. The key concern shaping Ba'athist policies toward labor, therefore, was how to transform a highly mobilized political force into a tractable instrument of the regime, while ensuring that the government retained the capacity to keep unions under control. After an initial period in which engagement seemed to outweigh control in the Ba'ath's relations with labor, the emphasis settled firmly in the other direction, rendering labor a passive and politically demobilized but stable source of regime support.

Peasants were also seen as logical, indeed necessary allies of the regime, given the rural origins of the emerging generation of Ba'athist elites. Yet a large majority of peasants remained politically inactive. Others were responsive to the Islamist-sectarian critique of the Ba'ath, whereas beneficiaries of land reform under the U.A.R. were inclined to support the Nasserist opposition. Moreover, the postsecession split between Akram al-Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party and the Ba'ath had cost the latter one of its most potent political entrepreneurs, a man who had been particularly effective in generating support among the rural poor. In contrast to labor, therefore, the Ba'ath's peasant "problem" revolved around strategies for transferring the political loyalties of peasants to the party, raising their levels of political mobilization, and carefully managing their incorporation into the political arena.

Controlling Workers

Ba'athist efforts to engage the labor movement in Syria began in earnest only in late 1963, when the NCRC circulated preliminary versions of a law intended to restore to labor rights it lost during the secessionist period. Pro-mulgated in February 1964, the new law was widely viewed as broadening the authority and autonomy of labor unions. It restored the principle of leadership by election rather than appointment, called for new elections to be held within six months, and provided modest protections for unions against some forms of state interference.⁷⁷ As in the past, however, these gains were offset by the continuation of the corporatist controls established almost twenty years earlier in the Uniform Labor Code of 1946. And the Ba'ath proved no less willing than its predecessors to use its authority to re-

77. A summary of the decree's provisions is included in U.S. Embassy Damascus to Secretary of State, March 24, 1964, no. A-283, RG 59/1327. NA.

press labor activism. During the spring uprising of 1964, for example, a threatened strike by the twenty-thousand-member Syrian Teachers' Union led to the dismissal of the union's executive councils and the appointment of provisional councils made up of party loyalists.⁷⁸ In late August 1964, the six-month interim period before elections was extended for an additional six months, a delay intended to permit the Ba'ath to bring the General Federation of Trade Unions under its complete control.⁷⁹ During this interval, a new board was appointed, made up largely of individuals with no prior experience in the labor movement. The regime also undertook a reorganization of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. In early October 1964, Amin al-Hafiz (now serving as prime minister) appointed veteran labor leader 'Ali Taljabin as his minister of labor and social affairs.⁸⁰ In January 1965, just as the government was launching its sweeping nationalization measures, Taljabin oversaw a major purge of his senior staff, resulting in the dismissal or transfer of almost ninety ministry officials. "These changes," one observer noted, "fit a pattern in that they strengthen the control of the Ministry and its officials, and hence the Ba'ath party, over the people they hope to organize. Enthusiasm for the goals and programs of Ba'ath socialism was apparently more important in the personnel reshuffling than technical competence."⁸¹

Immediately following his appointment, Taljabin began a high-profile round of speeches, factory visits, and other events on behalf of Ba'athist candidates in the upcoming elections. His efforts had little effect, however, and Ba'athist candidates were soundly defeated in the first round of voting. On February 11, 1965, elections were held for the membership of the Damascus Spinning and Weaving Union, which had about twelve thousand members and nine thousand eligible voters. With about eighty thousand indus-

78. These incidents were wrapped up with the waves of social unrest that preceded the spring 1964 uprising discussed above. U.S. Embassy reports indicate that the regime's willingness to act reflected its perception of the need to ensure loyalty among educators responsible for training Syrian youth (U.S. Embassy Damascus to Secretary of State, April 6, 1964, Embtel 612, RG59/2686, NA).

79. In spring 1964, Ba'athist militant Khalid al-Hakim was appointed president of the GFTU. He used his position to transform the federation into a source of pressure on the regime from the left. Bitar and others in the party were unwilling to hold union elections while Hakim was in charge of the GFTU.

80. Taljabin had most recently served as president of the Syndicate of Railway Workers but had been involved in national-level union affairs since the late 1950s. He was presented as a model for the Ba'athist worker-bureaucrat, and much was made of his relative lack of formal education and his personal modesty (Damascus to Department of State, October 12, 1964, no. A-29, RG59/2685, NA; January 8, 1965, no. A-215, RG59/1328, NA; and January 27, 1965, no. A-238, RG59/1328, NA).

81. Damascus to Department of State, no. A-238, RG59/1328.

trial workers belonging to unions nationwide, the Damascus local was one of the largest and most powerful in the country. By a majority of well over four to one (seven thousand to eighteen hundred), members voted in a pro-Nasserist slate opposed by the government, defeating the handpicked candidates of the ministry.⁸²

Defeated candidates appealed to the government to annul the election results, but Taljabin and Hafiz both refused. Rather than overturn such a powerful expression of worker dissent, Taljabin quickly altered his strategy and took more aggressive measures to ensure that election results elsewhere in the country would turn out more favorably for the regime. In Aleppo, Latakia, and other cities, Nasserist candidates were subsequently defeated through a combination of police intimidation and fraud, resulting in a clean sweep for Ba'athist candidates in elections for the local councils of government workers unions, port workers (a Nasserist-leaning local in Latakia), bank employees, employees of the tobacco monopoly, electric utility workers, and others.

At the regional and national level, control of union leadership was reinforced by an amendment to the selection procedures for union officers which preceded the February elections. In late January, the government changed requirements such that officials needed only to be "representatives" of local unions rather than their elected officials, which left open the possibility that union officers could be appointed at will by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Putting its newly established powers into effect once regional elections had been completed, the ministry announced the formation of a new executive committee of the GFTU and named Khalid al-Jundi, a senior Ba'athist associated with the militant wing of the party, as provisional president. His position was narrowly ratified through elections in April.

For all intents and purposes, these measures completed the corporatist integration of the labor movement into the Ba'ath's system of rule as a subordinate and responsive element of its ruling coalition. During the course of the following year, Jundi worked to broaden the role of the GFTU in such areas as workers' education and training and the settlement of worker griev-

82. Damascus to Department of State, February 12, 1965, no. A-261, RG59/1327, NA. Officers from the U.S. Embassy were among a number of diplomatic missions invited to observe the Damascus elections. The U.S. observers concluded that because all candidates supported the Ba'ath's economic programs, the election results should be seen as "an interesting measure of antipathy to the Ba'ath regime from workers who generally approve its socialistic programs." The elections could not be taken to mean that the regime had lost control but that much work remained to be done "before labor can be counted on as an effective instrument of Ba'ath socialism."

ances and in particular as a source of pressure within the Hafiz-Bitar government for the radicalization of social policy. This is not to suggest that the union movement had been completely neutralized. Toward the end of 1965, bank employees unions succeeded in securing financial concessions from the government following a strike, labor disputes would continue to break out from time to time, and intraparty conflicts would routinely spill over into the arena of union-government or GFTU-local relations, leading to Taljabin's dismissal following the coup of February 23, 1966, and Jundi's ouster a year later.

Overall, however, from spring 1965 forward, the thrust of government efforts toward the labor movement concerned measures to deepen and consolidate its multiple roles as an instrument of regime control among workers, as the central forum for the management of labor participation in the economy, and as a mechanism of political pressure, even organized violence, that the regime could deploy against its adversaries. As the regime's hold on the labor movement became more secure, it gradually restored the electoral prerogatives of workers within the labor movement; created a Workers' Bureau under the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs to "rationalize" administrative relations between different levels of the organization and between the GFTU and the government; and formalized the role of unions in political education with the establishment in 1968 of a national network of workers institutes.⁸³ Since the formation in 1965 of the National Revolutionary Council, workers had been guaranteed representation within national political institutions. With the passage of a local government law in June 1971—a bill that was drafted in 1967 and widely discussed over the following year—workers were among the popular groups that were required to make up at least 60 percent of popular councils at the local level, along with craftworkers, low-income earners, and peasants.

Incorporating Peasants

The integration of Syria's peasants into the Ba'athist system of rule followed much the same trajectory as outlined here for labor, but with some significant differences. Workers had a much deeper history of organization and political mobilization before the coup of March 8 and were the subjects of

83. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs issued a measure stipulating the election, rather than appointment, of workers' representatives to company boards in spring 1966, and in June 1968 the basic labor law was revised to provide for, among other changes, either direct or indirect election to all provincial and national governing boards. Unions were reorganized according to this law in July 1968, and in September, a legislative decree was passed defining and regulating the responsibilities of union members and officials.

a dense array of organizational structures at the domestic, regional, and international levels. Although rural society was hardly bereft of institutions, it was much less integrated than labor into the political arena. These circumstances left the Ba'ath with the triple task of creating new, politically reliable institutions for the mobilization and management of peasants at the national level; centralizing existing local-level institutions to bring them more firmly under the regime's control; and neutralizing or removing from existing institutions those whom the Ba'ath perceived to be antagonistic toward its project of social restructuring. These tasks were complicated by the relative lack of support for the Ba'ath among peasants in general, a condition that had become more acute following Akram al-Hawrani's withdrawal from the party.

The government's response was to construct a laborlike, national peasants organization, establishing the General Peasants' Union (GPU) in December 1964. The GPU was explicitly modeled along the pyramidal and hierarchic lines of the GFTU, was administered according to similar procedures, and became the GFTU's counterpart as the umbrella organization representing village-level and regional affiliates.⁸⁴ Following an extended period of "preparatory work"—essentially purging unreliable peasant officials around the country and replacing them with Ba'ath loyalists—the first national congress of the GPU was held in Damascus in late September 1965. According to Rabinovich, who cites internal memoranda of the organization, the presence of prereform rural elites within local peasant organizations during this preparatory period compelled the Ba'ath to "abandon even the semblance of peasant control of the union" and to ensure that party supporters were appointed as interim leaders of provincial and national GPU councils.⁸⁵ By the time planning got under way for the second national congress, however, sufficient control had been established to permit the election of GPU leadership at these levels of the organization. Elections were held in April, and the second GPU congress convened in late July.

As the GPU became consolidated it underwent a process of role expansion and administrative reorganization similar to the GFTU, taking on political training functions like those provided by the GFTU for workers. By

84. As noted above, Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Dr. Adnan Shuman was credited with bringing about the creation of the GPU. Shuman had been a graduate student in the United States and told U.S. Embassy officials that he had modeled the GPU after the farmers organizations he studied there, notably the National Farm Bureau. See Damascus to Department of State, January 8, 1964, no. A-215, RG59/1328, NA. For the text of the charter creating the GPU, see "Walha'iq: Al-Ithad al-'am lil-fallabin fi Suriya (Documents: The general peasants' union in Syria), *Dirasat 'Arabiya* 2, no. 10 (1965), pp. 93–111.

85. Rabinovich, *Syria under the Ba'ath*, p. 175.

the end of the decade, the GPU counted some 1,650 village-level associations made up of 120,000 members, 52 district-level associations, and a regional federation in all 13 provinces of the country. Although these membership figures reflect impressive growth over a period of five years, they still represented a minority of agricultural labor. Nonetheless, regime statements at the time of the 1970 congress of the CPU emphasize its satisfaction with the success of the Peasants' Union in linking the regime to rural populations and in serving as a vehicle for the downward communication of government policy.⁸⁶

Peasants and workers were hardly the only social groups subject to the organizational processes recounted here. The Ba'ath established similar kinds of pyramidal structures for other "pillars of Syria's socialist society," including women, craftworkers, low-income earners, "revolutionary youth" (*Shabibat al-Ba'ath*), and students, although the post-February 1966 regime had a harder time consolidating its grip over student affairs than it did in other areas. Professional associations, including those representing journalists, lawyers, engineers, doctors, businessmen, and others, were also subjected to growing levels of government intervention and control, though they retained a somewhat greater degree of independence than the national federations and occasionally organized low-level protests against the regime.

What is most striking, however, is the collective impact of the changes brought about by the Ba'ath in the organization of Syrian society and in relations between individuals and the state. Within a relatively short span of time, and drawing heavily on the endowment of institutional practices and forms it inherited from its predecessors, the Ba'ath radically transformed the organizational landscape of Syrian society. Between 1963 and 1970, it created and was able to consolidate a wide range of new institutional frameworks for the integration of citizen and regime, weaving a variety of officially controlled organizational networks into an overarching populist authoritarian system of rule.

Successful Authoritarianism

Consolidation, of course, should not be misinterpreted as leading inevitably to high levels of institutional efficacy. Migdal and others have provided am-

86. Daniel Dishon, ed., *Middle East Record, 1969-1970*, vol. 5 (Tel Aviv: Israel University Press, 1977), p. 1167. Hinnebusch's work provides the most complete available account of peasant-state relations during later periods, especially the 1970s through the mid-1980s. See "Party and Peasant in Syria" and the more detailed study in *Peasant and Bureaucracy*.

ple warning about the risk of confusing the presence of expansive state structures with a high degree of state capacity.⁸⁷ Certainly, Ba'athist institutions were plagued by the many inefficiencies common to peripheral, late-developing, postcolonial states—though to the extent their task was to stabilize Ba'athist rule, it can be argued that they were indeed effective. Such cautions are important, yet they must also be placed in the context of what the Ba'ath accomplished during its first six years in power. From its beginnings as a "small, secretive, and conspiracy-minded" group of coup makers, despite its deeply volatile and conflict-ridden early years in power, the leadership of the Ba'ath successfully implemented the most sweeping transformation of Syrian politics, society, and economy in the history of the twentieth century.⁸⁸

After Syria's defeat in the June 1967 war, the Ba'athist political elite became increasingly entangled in a power struggle pitting a military faction headed by General Hafiz al-Asad against the ruling civilian faction led by Salah Jadid. The key issue dividing these groups concerned whether the defeat signaled a need to accelerate and broaden the process of social transformation, the view of Jadid and his supporters, or to moderate the pace of social change and move Syria in the direction of a national security state capable of carrying on the confrontation with Israel, the view of Asad and his fellow dissidents. As we now know, this was to prove the last major schism within the Ba'ath until the present. Asad's gradual seizure of power between 1968 and 1970 secured the dominance of the national security perspective. His rise slowed the pace of social change. It shifted the central concern of the government from furthering Syria's social transformation to the broadening and deepening of its ruling coalition. It also inaugurated the longest period of stability among Syria's rulers that the country has known since independence.

The system of rule that Asad took over in November 1970 clearly reflected the dramatic transformations the country had experienced since March 1963. Asad took charge of a system of rule possessing powerful and pervasive instruments of repression. The political economy had been thoroughly reorganized along populist lines and the state apparatus restructured, while Syrian society was subject to increasing levels of management, intervention, and control. In the relatively short span of seven years, the distribution of social power in the country had been radically altered, marginalizing the social groups that had dominated the country for much of its modern history and bringing to the center of power social groups that had

87. Joel S. Migdal, *Weak States and Strong Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

88. Damascus to Department of State, March 10, 1965, no. 636, RG59/2685, NA.

long survived on the fringes of Syrian economic and political life. These revolutionary changes consolidated the populist identity of the Syrian state, decisively shifting its developmental trajectory in ways that continue to affect how its leaders respond to such contemporary issues as economic liberalization, political reform, and economic development.

I have argued that these transformations constitute the formative experiences of Syrian politics during the 1960s and contribute to a deeply revisionist reading of the dynamics of authoritarian state formation, both in Syria and more generally. By shifting attention away from the intractable political rivalries that dominate the secondary literature and toward underlying processes of institutional and social transformation, this account focuses on the economic and institutional factors that permitted the Ba'ath to overcome the dilemmas that typically constrain the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. It emphasizes the intentionality of Ba'athist political elites, highlights the strategic and structural factors shaping Ba'athist policies, and stresses the importance of the institutional resources available to the Ba'ath in carrying out its plans. In the process it provides considerable evidence of state formation by design rather than by accident.

This account also establishes both the conditions under which the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule is possible and the dynamics of social change through which the process is carried out. Syria's lack of integration into global capitalist networks reduced the barriers that such ties impose on the populist restructuring of a political economy. Pressures to move toward a more accommodationist, inclusive strategy of state building were also mitigated by the economic and political imperatives associated with securing a populist system of rule. The need to reorganize the allocation of national resources in support of the Ba'ath's project of social transformation helped to structure interactions between the Ba'ath and local capitalists in the form of a zero-sum conflict. The importance of mobilizing while controlling key social groups such as labor and peasants pushed the Ba'ath toward a repressive-corporatist style of political incorporation. In this context, the well-developed repertoire of authoritarian and corporatist practices, populist norms, and state institutions the Ba'ath inherited represented a resource endowment that greatly facilitated its efforts to reshape the Syrian polity and economy. Earlier experiences of populist authoritarianism during the union with Egypt had already cracked open postindependence economic and political arrangements. The union made available to the Ba'ath a model for the construction of a populist authoritarian regime that was largely consistent with its strategic requirements and its political outlook.

By the time the Ba'ath seized power in 1963, therefore, it benefited from

an economic and institutional environment that was exceptionally favorable for the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. But starting conditions alone do not determine outcomes. How the Ba'ath exploited these conditions is also critical in explaining its success. What stands out in this regard was the ability of the party's leadership to put in place the broad outlines of its strategy of rule very soon after it seized power and then its capacity to advance this strategy despite deep, occasionally crippling internal divisions. There is no question that the political rivalries and power politics that dominate conventional accounts of this period were important factors in the dynamic of Ba'athist rule. I have shown, however, that to explain the broader dynamics of Ba'athist state formation, we need to look elsewhere, to the larger processes of social and economic transformation brought about by the Ba'ath and to the conditions that made these transformations possible.

In making these claims about Syria's experience, I also make the general but often overlooked point that multiple trajectories are open to populist authoritarian elites. The constraints that have been identified as decisive obstacles to the consolidation of populist authoritarian systems of rule can in fact be overcome. The dilemmas of populist authoritarian consolidation do not always defeat the efforts of politicians working to secure their power and establish a durable system of rule. This conclusion does not undermine explanations about why populist authoritarianism failed to become consolidated in specific cases. It does undermine, however, the argument that the trajectory of failed consolidation is universal and inevitable. Syria's experience has shown us that this notion is false, no matter how much we might wish it were otherwise.

8

Interests and Institutions in the Persistence of Syrian Authoritarianism

Leaders of the Ba'ath Party have enjoyed long-term payoffs as a result of success in overcoming the core dilemmas associated with the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system. Since 1970, populist authoritarianism has continued to define and animate Syrian politics, society, and economy. The networks of popular organizations that were created in the 1960s as mechanisms of mobilization and control remain highly visible elements of the regime's apparatus of domination. Interest groups and associations remain embedded within top-down, corporatist institutional frameworks controlled and dominated by the state and the Ba'ath Party. Social policy continues to reflect populist distributional concerns. Austerity programs have led to cutbacks in social spending, yet large-scale public health, welfare, and education programs persist despite growing signs of wear, stress, and cracks in the system. New space has opened within Syria's political economy for the private sector, but its larger development strategy and the macroeconomic policies that follow from it remain broadly interventionist.¹ Indeed, senior

1. The Asad regime has made several serious overtures to the private sector since 1970. Not long after Asad came to power, his government undertook what is officially labeled the "corrective revolution." Seeking to broaden the regime's social base, the government encouraged the limited and highly controlled incorporation of the private sector. See Antonie Guine, *La Syrie nouvelle: Exposé sur l'ouverture économique en Syrie suivi d'un bilan politique et économique des réalisations du régime du Président Hafez El-Asad* (Damascus: n.p., 1975). This policy had limited results, however. The effort was halfhearted, and capitalists were largely skeptical of the regime's commitment. After the 1973 war, an increase in both oil rents and, more important, strategic rents associated with Syria's leadership of the hard-line opposition to Israel mitigated the regime's need to engage the private sector. State-capital relations remained at best lukewarm throughout the 1970s and into the mid-1980s. Indeed, capitalists continued to feel sufficient animosity toward the regime to lend their financial support to the Syrian Muslim Brother-

Syrian politicians, including Hafiz al-Asad, have gone to great lengths in recent years to relegitimize their commitment to state-managed development following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Moreover, in the three decades of Asad's leadership, the dominant political class that emerged out of the intraparty struggles of the 1960s has transformed the state into a highly profitable source of rents, giving added impetus to the perpetuation of existing economic and political arrangements.² Within the contours of a populist political economy, new forms of crosscutting alliances and business networks link the state elite and leading capitalists in a wide range of thoroughly profit-seeking activities.

The end of the cold war generated political as well as economic reactions, but these effects too have been muted. In the wake of popular uprisings that overwhelmed the socialist dictatorships of Eastern Europe, Syria's regime did take modest steps to provide new, albeit managed, opportunities for political participation. In 1990 the government enlarged Syria's legislature, the National Council, by about a third, and it increased the number of seats that could be held by politicians not associated with the Ba'ath Party. Such changes have been largely but not entirely cosmetic. Official rhetoric has come to include increasing references to the value of pluralism, as well as to the importance of avoiding changes that might disrupt "social peace"—a term that has acquired particular prominence in the past several years.³ Parliamentary elections in May 1990 did return a small number of private sector representatives to the National Council for the first time since 1963. However, many of the seats set aside for independents in 1990 were won by members or affiliates of the ruling party. And the next year President Asad won reelection to a fourth term in office with the alleged support of 99.8 percent of voters. Assembly elections held in December 1998 again returned an overwhelming majority of Ba'athist representatives. More generally, the constitution promulgated by the Ba'ath in 1964 remains operative, including the requirement that members of popular organizations must constitute a majority of representatives. In addition, the Ba'ath Party itself

hood during a long and bitterly violent confrontation with the regime from 1976 to 1982. More substantive reforms date from May 1986 and have led to a measured rapprochement between the regime and some elements of the private sector. See Volker Perthes, "The Private Sector, Economic Liberalization, and the Prospects of Democratization: The Case of Syria and Some Other Arab Countries," in *Democracy without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World*, ed. Ghassan Salame (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), pp. 243–69.

2. Yahya Sadowski, "Ba'athist Ethics and the Spirit of State Capitalism: Patronage and the Party in Contemporary Syria," in *Ideology and Power in the Middle East*, ed. Peter J. Chelkowski and Robert J. Pranger (Durham: Duke University Press, 1988), pp. 160–84.

3. On renewed Syrian interest in pluralism after the cold war, see Steven Heydemann, "Can We Get There from Here? Lessons from the Syrian Case," *American-Arab Affairs*, no. 36 (Spring 1991), pp. 27–30.

remains the most powerful formal political organization in the country— notwithstanding the symbolic modification of single-party politics through the creation of a national front government in the early 1970s. The party's role in Syrian life has clearly undergone change over the years. Today it functions largely as a major component of the regime's clientelist system and is viewed more opportunistically than ideologically. Yet it continues to serve as an important arena of socialization and mobilization, imposing itself heavily on Syrian society through semimandatory participation in organizations ranging from youth movements for grade-schoolers to summer camps, student groups, and the popular organizations. Collectively, these make the party a critical actor in the reproduction of the system's populist identity, even among those who regard the Ba'ath with deeply felt cynicism.

As this suggests, the defining features of a populist polity as set out in the introduction continue to shape the political logics of Syria's authoritarian ruling elite. An emphasis on redistributive economic policies, a political coalition that relies heavily on a core of populist social groups, and the use of populist transformational discourses as the basis for political mobilization, legitimation, and institution building persist as essential elements of Syria's system of rule. The high profile accorded to radical discourses stands out in particular, perhaps because such discourses have been so thoroughly displaced elsewhere by the developmental failures of state socialism. Yet Syria's media, its popular organizations, as well as the official statements of key party officials and government ministers continue to be infused by appeals to socialism, the needs of the masses, and the forward march to revolution. Several years after history was alleged to have ended with the decisive victory of liberal market capitalism, much of Syrian political discourse remains archaically revolutionary in tone.⁴ What one scholar has called the "triumph" of liberal economic ideas in the developing world remains a distant, as yet untarnished, and meaningful aspiration for many Syrians.⁵

These powerful elements of continuity are not intended to suggest that Syria's political economy or its system of rule have been static and unchanging over the past thirty years. Within the boundaries of its populist authoritarian identity, there have been substantial modifications in structure, practice, and discourse.⁶ It has been pushed to adapt to post-cold war shifts in its strategic environment and to respond to the challenges posed by the

4. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

5. Thomas J. Biersteker, "The 'Triumph' of Liberal Economic Ideas in the Developing World," in *Global Change, Regional Response: The New International Context of Development*, ed. Barbara Stallings (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 174–96.

6. See Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria under Asad* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1995).

ongoing Arab-Israeli peace process.⁷ In its most far-reaching attempt to accommodate new circumstances, the regime has responded to domestic economic difficulties by appropriating and adapting global norms favoring market-based strategies of economic development. Syria's economy, like many in the developing world, was deeply and adversely affected by the debt crisis of the 1980s.⁸ The crisis was exacerbated by sharp declines in the flow of Arab foreign aid and by exceptionally high levels of military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product.⁹ As a result, the regime's capacity to sustain the flow of benefits both to itself and to its clientelist networks declined. Those whose fortunes were linked to the public sector suffered disproportionately severe cuts in their standard of living. Subsidies on basic commodities were reduced, and public sector wage increases lagged well behind the rate of inflation.

In response, the government initiated a selective process of economic reform—undertaken without the involvement of the IMF and driven more by the political logic of regime persistence than by the economic logic of neoclassical growth theory.¹⁰ Economic reform expanded the role of the private sector and eased some constraints on private and foreign investment.¹¹ More recently, the regime has moved to reestablish sound relationships with international lending organizations, repaying long-standing arrears to the World Bank in mid-1997. Efforts by the regime to relegitimize the private sector have not, however, dislodged the public sector from its privileged position as the cornerstone of what is now officially defined as a "mixed economy." There has been no privatization of state-owned enterprises in Syria, and leading Syrian politicians have dismissed the prospect of such moves in the future as unwarranted. The private sector has been further, though not fully, incorporated into the system of rule, but it remains a policy taker, a subordinate participant in the process of economic policy-

7. Fred Lawson, "Domestic Transformations and Foreign Steadfastness in Contemporary Syria," *Middle East Journal* 48 (Winter 1994), pp. 47–64.

8. Volker Perthes, "The Syrian Private Commercial and Industrial Sectors and the State," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24 (May 1992), pp. 297–39.

9. Patrick Clawson, *Unaffordable Ambitions: Syria's Military Build-up and Economic Crisis*, Washington Institute Policy Papers no. 17 (Washington, D.C., 1989).

10. Steven Heydemann, "The Political Logic of Economic Reform: Selective Stabilization in Syria," in *The Politics of Economic Reform in the Middle East*, ed. Henri J. Barkey (New York: St. Martin's, 1992), pp. 11–39. See also Raymond Hinnebusch, "Syria: The Politics of Economic Liberalisation," *Third World Quarterly* 18 (1997), pp. 249–65, and Fred Lawson, "Private Capital and the State in Contemporary Syria," *Middle East Report* 27 (Spring 1997), pp. 8–13.

11. I discuss the effects of selective liberalization on the private sector in more detail in "Taxation without Representation: Authoritarianism and Economic Liberalization in Syria," in *Rules and Rights in the Middle East*, ed. Ellis Goldberg, Resat Kesaba, and Joel Migdal (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), pp. 69–101.

making. It is the state, not capital, that defines the private sector's terms of engagement and the boundaries of its participation.

As modest as they are relative to changes elsewhere, these processes of adjustment and adaptation certainly have the capacity to bring about more far-reaching modifications in Syria's system of rule. They hold out the possibility that Syria could move decisively toward a postpopulist and more pluralist set of economic and political arrangements.¹² Perhaps more than any other challenges the regime has faced, the combination of four factors—economic pressures, strategic realignment, the peace process, and new, decentralized information technologies—could, potentially, overturn the equilibrium established between 1963 and 1970 and permit a wide-ranging redefinition of the system of rule.¹³ Fears that this might happen have sparked a significant debate within the Ba'ath Party and among the radical opposition. Partly to suppress open expression of internal dissension, no major party congress has been held in the past decade.

What is striking about the adjustments of this period, however, is not the extent to which they have destabilized existing arrangements but the extent to which Syria's populist authoritarianism has shown itself able to accommodate them. The regime has consistently exhibited flexibility and adaptability in redefining the terms of inclusion and in reorganizing its economic and foreign policies. It has treated the boundaries of the system as plastic, tractable, and open to modification, thus far avoiding the sharp, either-or choices that might expose it to pressures for broader change. Yet this flexibility too has limits. The imperative of reproducing the populist authoritarian system of rule has tended to define the boundaries of feasible change within Syria's political economy, and anything perceived to threaten this imperative is dealt with quite brutally. Despite its willingness to accommodate a significant measure of change, therefore, the "sacred turf" of Syria's populist "political kingdom" remains fundamentally intact.¹⁴

12. How would we know when such a threshold had been passed? Barring the dramatic and sudden collapse of what still appears to be a resilient system of rule and accepting that such thresholds are often clearer *ex post* than *ex ante*, such a turning point will have been reached once the regime can be said to have discarded the institutional, coalitional, and distributive arrangements that are the defining features of a populist authoritarian system of rule.

13. Syria-hands tend to view the inevitable transition to a post-Asad Syria as another, perhaps more likely opportunity for a substantial shift in the character of the regime. If the current system of rule is as fully consolidated as I argue, it is more likely that the succession will not produce deep changes in the organization of Syria's system of rule or in the regime's style of governance. Rather, a new leader is likely to view the current system as offering an adaptive set of mechanisms for securing political authority.

14. Thomas M. Callaghy, "Lost between State and Market: The Politics of Economic Adjustment in Ghana, Zambia, and Nigeria," in *Economic Crisis and Policy Choice: The Politics of Adjustment in the Third World*, ed. Joan Nelson (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 289.

As a consolidated and adaptive system of rule, radical populism in Syria has developed along a trajectory that defies the widely held view of populism as an inherently unstable foundation for a state-building project. In contrast to what Latin Americanists have portrayed as the modal experience of failed populist state formation, Syrian populism has instead become consolidated within a "politicolegal space and organizational infrastructure" that exerts a powerful and ongoing influence over everyday politics and policymaking.¹⁵ And if Syria's experience forces us to rethink the possibility of successful populist authoritarian state formation, it remains the case that this particular trajectory is not equally accessible to all would-be populist elites. In Latin America, the generic dilemmas that constrain efforts to build a populist system of rule turned out to be decisive. In Syria, they did not. Clearly, the capacity to overcome the dilemmas of populist authoritarian consolidation is unevenly distributed. It is linked, I have argued, to a distinctive set of structural and institutional features and the ways in which these influence the strategic choices of actors. Institutions and economic structures do not in and of themselves explain the specific choices of political actors, but they exert a profound influence nonetheless. They shape a strategic repertoire in ways that make particular choices accessible and place others out of reach, increasing the potential gains to be achieved by pursuing a given strategy and reducing its potential costs.

Among the structural conditions that I have taken into account in this volume, Syria's relative insulation from transnational capitalist networks deserves special weight and has particular theoretical implications. Syria's lack of embeddedness in a larger capitalist system at the moment of independence opened up possibilities for confronting and marginalizing local capitalists that might not have existed otherwise. Certainly, the experience of failed populist state building in other cases is regularly explained, at least in part, by the causal connection between embeddedness in international capitalist networks of exchange and constraints on the extent to which populist politicians can discount the interests of local capital. High embeddedness is thus widely argued to correlate with a high level of constraint on the part of populist political actors. Syria's experience, at least, seems to confirm the negative of this relationship. Low embeddedness correlates with a lack of restraint on the part of radical populist political elites concerning the extent to which the economy could be reorganized and capitalists could be marginalized. Such correlation leaves unanswered whether low embeddedness *caused* the radicalism of Syrian populists, but it certainly

15. The quoted phrase is used by Robert R. Kaufman, "Democratic and Authoritarian Responses to the Debt Issues: Argentina, Brazil, Mexico," in *The Politics of International Debt*, ed. Miles Kahler (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 187–217.

contributed significantly to the creation of a strategic environment in which radical populism was seen as a viable political option.

Attributing this degree of significance to Syria's low embeddedness has theoretical implications that extend beyond the specifics of the Syrian case. Several variants of development theory argue that the embeddedness of developing states in a global capitalist system is a key factor in the rise of authoritarian regimes in the periphery. They focus in particular on forms of authoritarianism whose purpose is to bring local economies into alignment with the interests of foreign capital.¹⁶ Implicit in such arguments is the sense that absent foreign capital, absent global capitalism, more democratic developmental trajectories would become available.¹⁷ Syria's experience suggests that such views are overly optimistic. While variation in the forms authoritarianism might take is hugely consequential—populist forms exhibit sharply different social, economic, and political dynamics than their bureaucratic authoritarian counterparts—it must be acknowledged that low embeddedness may be just as likely as high embeddedness to facilitate the formation of authoritarian systems of rule. Hirschman is no doubt right, therefore, in suggesting that the insertion of an economy into a world market can have constraining effects on the forms of authoritarianism that are available to state elites.¹⁸ But the consequences of less thorough embeddedness in world markets may be less constrained authoritarianism, not the emergence of liberal democracies.¹⁹ Variation in the extent to which devel-

16. Even for Syria, where the subordination of local politics to the requirements of global capitalism would seem a tough position to support, this logic has generated deeply problematic explanations to account for Syria's seeming departure from the normal telos of developing states. One such argument, as I noted in the introduction, is that Syria has not departed at all. In this view, the near complete marginalization of Syrian capitalists between 1960 and 1970 is simply the by-product of how capitalism is developing in Syria and is in the interests of capitalists; furthermore, the immense social conflicts over the organization of Syria's political economy are basically trivial, for they do not affect its long-term developmental trajectory.

17. The arguments are occasionally explicit. According to Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens, transnational economic dependence "had negative effects [for democracy], though mostly in indirect ways. It shaped the class structure in ways inimical to democratization. Economic growth led by agrarian exports reinforced the position of large landholders. Industrialization with imported capital intensive technology kept the working class small and weak. Geo-political dependence relations were even more important. Geo-political interests of core countries generated direct interventions and support for the repressive apparatus of the state and thus created an unfavorable balance of power between state and society for democratization." Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Evelyn Huber Stephens, and John D. Stephens, *Capitalist Development and Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 9.

18. Albert Hirschman, "The Turn to Authoritarianism in Latin America and the Search for Its Economic Determinants," in *The New Authoritarianism in Latin America*, ed. David Collier (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), pp. 61–98.

19. It may be that a broad test would establish a bell curve in which low and high levels of embeddedness and insertion into global markets are both associated with the emergence of authoritarian regimes—populist for states with very low levels of embeddedness and bureaucratic

oping states are embedded in world markets clearly shapes trajectories of authoritarian state formation but does not seem to support the expectation that less embeddedness equals more democracy.

These qualifications are important, but such macrolevel variables leave many questions unanswered. Establishing the domestic factors that determine how a particular state is positioned relative to world markets can help clarify the domestic-level dynamics that support or undermine the consolidation of an authoritarian regime and shape its identity as populist, bureaucratic, or something else. The argument presented here has treated Syria's low embeddedness as one of several core independent variables, but it also explains this condition as the outcome of a particular history, taking into account Syria's experience as a semicolon of France as well as its limited resource endowment, small domestic market, and high levels of regional instability as causes of low embeddedness. This argument thus gives greater independent weight to the effects of domestic-level factors—structural and conjunctural—in explaining both the position of a state within the international system and its trajectory of state formation.

At a more general level, development theory from Gunnar Myrdal and Paul Baran to Peter Evans has conveyed a rather limited sense of the range of developmental trajectories accessible to late-developing states. For theorists associated with forms of dependency theory, situating such states in the periphery was considered sufficient to explain a wide range of political, economic, and social dynamics—and to predict developmental possibilities as well. More recent development theory—and not only the triumphalist writings of the immediate post-cold war period—has been no less quick to find processes of economic, cultural, and political convergence at work in the effects of globalization and the move toward market-based economic arrangements. Like their predecessors, convergence theories also rest on the notion that developmental trajectories are limited and that domestic social, economic, and political dynamics can be explained in terms of movement toward or divergence from the global norm.

Here too, however, Syria's experience seems to confound expectations. Although Syria's recent experiences of selective liberalization might be read as evidence that no state can escape the hegemonic growth strategy of the late twentieth century, the Ba'ath has been able to carve out considerable autonomy from global capitalism, on the one hand, while appropriating discourses of democracy and markets, bending them to suit the needs of an authoritarian and interventionist regime, on the other. Clearly, the apparent isomorphism of late-developing states, whether based on their identity as

for states with higher levels of embeddedness—whereas midrange levels are associated with more pluralist political arrangements.

peripheral or their status as "in transition," masks a wider array of difference than might typically be assumed. Syria's developmental trajectory reinforces the lesson that such differences are tremendously consequential for an understanding of the political economy of development. It also serves as an important reminder that the range of possible trajectories exceeds those imagined within the rigid typologies of either dependency or convergence theories.

The alternative I have pursued has been to construct a hybrid, midlevel approach consistent with what Evans and Stephens have labeled the "new comparative political economy," including its emphasis on historical contingency in accounting for developmental trajectories and on the domestic determinants of social change.²⁰ Yet the argument pushes this approach further. Through a focus on the interactions among state institutions, economic structures, and political agents, I have worked to integrate, rather than counterpose, agent-based and institutional frameworks. My approach provides an analytic context that links the macrohistorical and the methodological individualist in explaining the Ba'ath's high capacity to consolidate a populist authoritarian state.²¹ It also seeks to move institutional approaches from a static to a more dynamic conceptualization of institutions, to treat them not simply as variables but as *dynamic* variables whose values can shift rapidly within a given case. What a more fixed conceptualization of state institutions might have missed, therefore, moves to center stage once institutions are treated as dynamic and fluid.

I have expressed this perspective more concretely by focusing on processes of state expansion in Syria after 1946, the dramatic shifts that took place in postcolonial patterns of state intervention, and the effects these had on the strategic choices of political actors. As I have argued, these variables were critical in defining the organization and reorganization of social conflict in postindependence Syria. They shaped opportunities for popular mobilization and determined which interests would become organized and what forms of organization were available to them. Shifts in the pattern of state intervention after 1946 refashioned the opportunity set of political actors and affected their capacity to achieve their aims. These changes contributed to and helped structure the redefinition of social and economic

20. Peter Evans and John D. Stephens, "Studying Development since the Sixties: The Emergence of a New Comparative Political Economy," *Theory and Society* 17 (1988), pp. 713-45.

21. These approaches have been counterposed in the study of economic and political transitions. For an agent-based approach, see Adam Przeworski, *Democracy and Markets* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); for an institutionally grounded approach, see Stephen Haggard and Robert Kaufman, *The Political Economy of Democratic Transitions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

relations. They helped establish a national market and defined the terms under which the market operated. State expansion created a political arena in which control over the project of building an inclusive social pact—a project inaugurated by capitalists—could be captured by populist reformers. By facilitating new understandings of the relationship between state and society defined in universal terms of citizenship, state expansion deeply compromised the capacity of landlords and capitalists to manage the process of popular mobilization.

At the same time, many, if not all, newly independent late developers experienced rapid state expansion following independence. On its own, therefore, the growth of postcolonial state structures is too ubiquitous a phenomenon to tell us much about how Syria's trajectory of state building diverged from that of many other poor, peripheral late developers to result in a consolidated, populist authoritarian regime. Combined with its low level of embeddedness in a global market system, however, the outcome is less puzzling. As I noted above, low embeddedness had a significant influence within Syria's political arena, removing from consideration an entire domain of relations that often constrain the choices of political actors, including state bureaucratic elites. But there were more direct implications of low embeddedness for the organization of state-capital relations, the most important of which was that the resources needed to finance state growth and to manage a process of popular incorporation could be secured from only one source: local capitalists.

Disengagement from global markets meant that state expansion was also a process of expanding state control over local capital. Domestic expectations about what the role of the state should be in leading Syria's transition from an agrarian to a capitalist economy were reinforced by the hegemonic, state-centric development strategies of the day, imported into Syria via the same carriers of global norms as those who transported them throughout the developing world. These included not only staff missions of the IMF and the World Bank or international consultants such as Gibb and Associates but also the socialist discourses of state planning that in many respects were consistent with the interest of Western institutions in building state capacity. Yet unlike in many other cases, the construction of a state apparatus with the capacity to implement the import substituting, managed development strategies favored in the 1950s was built at considerable cost to the Syrian private sector. This critical dynamic imbued state-capital relations in Syria with a deep structural tension virtually from the earliest moments of independence. It channeled the economic role of the state in managerial and regulatory directions at first and later toward direct forms of state control over productive resources. It gave state bureaucrats a direct and immediate

rationale to use state agencies to secure a stable, predictable flow of revenues through the continual expansion of state management of the economy. Competition for the control of capital between newly autonomous state elites and capitalists contributed heavily to the polarization of Syria's political arena. And as I show in some detail, the expansion of social regulation tended to track the expansion of economic intervention. As levels of economic management grew, the state became a central mechanism for the construction of an inclusive social pact. As these processes transformed Syria's political arena, capitalists, populists, and landed elites redefined their political strategies and alignments, contributing significantly to the polarization that led in early 1958 to the collapse of Syrian politics and the formation of the United Arab Republic.

These shifts in the scope and depth of state institutions over a short period of time, under given structural circumstances, exerted a profound influence on the political dynamics of postindependence Syria. Without taking the mutable quality of Syria's institutional environment into account, without tracing the interaction effects of shifts in this environment on the strategies of political actors, these dynamics are difficult to capture or explain. Typically, however, new institutional approaches limit themselves to integrating institutional variables into theoretical frameworks from which they were felt, often accurately, to be missing. Institutions themselves are treated as givens. Since institutional equilibria are designed to be durable, there will be many instances in which it is reasonable to treat them as such.²² Yet during critical periods of transition when an equilibrium has been destabilized, not least moments of decolonization and postindependence state building, such formulations risk overlooking one of the central variables shaping political outcomes, that is, the effects of institutional transformation on the strategic choices of political actors. These interactions become particularly important during instances of disjuncture, instances in which structural conditions and institutional environments are not in alignment. As manifest in the disjuncture between the agrarian structure of Syria's economy and interventionist industrializing attributes of the state apparatus, the tensions that accompany uneven rates of change on the part of institutions and economic structures almost inevitably emerge as powerful sources of social conflict. In the Syrian case, these conflicts—bitter, often violent struggles between a defensive landed elite, populist reformers, and ambivalent capitalist industrializers—brought about the disintegration

22. As Paul Pierson notes: "Key features of political life, both public policies and (especially) formal institutions, are change resistant. Policies and institutions are in fact *designed* to be difficult to overturn" ("Path Dependence and the Study of Politics," unpublished manuscript, p. 24).

of the existing political order. Through the union with Egypt, they created the conditions that shaped a new equilibrium along populist authoritarian lines after March 1963.

Institutional equilibria come apart, and a dynamic approach to institutions is needed to capture such processes and account for their effects. How new institutional equilibria are formed and consolidated is the other, equally critical part of the equation. If punctuated equilibrium theories hold out promise for explaining processes through which given institutional formations become opened up for reorganization, they leave open the dynamics through which new formations are consolidated. The framework adopted here helps to explain the capacity of the Ba'ath to overcome the dilemmas that typically constrain the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule. Yet how this capacity is translated into a concrete set of institutions and practices, the strategies through which a particular set of capacities is deployed, remains to be explained. What accounts for the particular choices that Ba'athist elites made in bringing about the populist transformation of Syria's state, economy, and society? Here too the argument advanced in this book highlights the structural and institutional imperatives associated with populist state building as one guide to understanding the behavior of Ba'athist politicians. Above all, this process required transforming the identity of state institutions, bringing the state apparatus under the control of the party, and making the state bureaucracy a reliable instrument of Ba'athist rule. Once these aims had been accomplished, it became feasible to mobilize and control large segments of Syrian society and to reorganize political institutions. Similarly, the imperative of restructuring the economy along populist lines cemented an antagonistic relationship between the Ba'athist state and Syria's private sector, leading to the decisive marginalization of capitalists.

Is it simply the case, then, that the Ba'ath's leadership did what was necessary to secure its grip on power? If so, then how did the leadership know what was necessary, and why did it work? State building is one of those tasks that requires assembly, and instructions do not come printed on the side of a box. As I have argued, however, the Ba'ath's leaders brought into power a fairly well-developed understanding of the state they hoped to construct. The lessons Ba'athist elites absorbed through their participation in previous cycles of social conflict and from their negative experience of the United Arab Republic had reinforced their commitment to a radical form of populist state building. They also operated within an environment that had become well endowed with populist norms and authoritarian practices of governance. These experiences and lessons represented a critical legacy available to the Ba'ath as it moved from opposition to government.

Thus, there is a clear "path-dependent" quality to the Ba'ath's strategy of state formation, both in the narrower sense of that term—that the decisions taken by Ba'athist elites were constrained by the consequences of previous choices—but also in the sense that certain kinds of choices invoked lower costs and generated increasing political returns by moving along an established path. The appropriation of existing approaches to state building thus increased the efficiency of the Ba'ath's strategies of governance, institution building, social mobilization, and economic management. Precisely because the scale of the transformations intended by the Ba'ath was so large, the advantages of exploiting known political technologies and mechanisms increased. The legacies available to the Ba'ath did not determine that it would inevitably succeed. The dilemmas that constrain the consolidation of a populist authoritarian system of rule are both real and consequential. Yet this legacy did embody a powerful set of facilitating conditions. In the absence of compelling external constraints, it provided the means for the Ba'ath's leadership to establish a new institutional equilibrium. Combining radical populist norms and sharply authoritarian practices of governance, the Ba'ath succeeded in building a durable populist authoritarian system of rule and in shaping the organization of Syria's state, society, and political economy for decades to come.

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