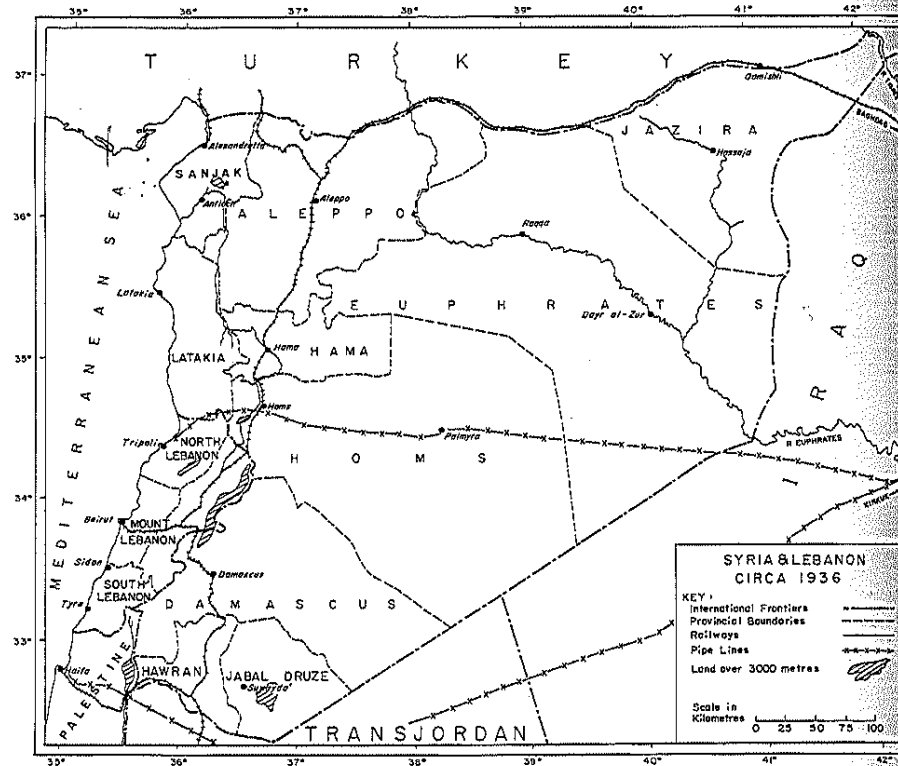*Syria and Lebanon during the French Mandate, circa 1936*

INTRODUCTION

"IN AN ERA of upheaval, it is continuity and stability that need explanation."[1] The end of 400 years of Ottoman rule, the vast destruction of world war, the imposition of European, of Christian rule, the sting of a thousand injuries, and the discovery, out of these injuries, of the common bond of Arab nationalism were all momentous events in the lives of the men and women of the Middle East. By 1920 the familiar outlines of Middle Eastern life appeared to have dissolved. Alien governments imposed from distant capitals set up in *sérails* and government houses. New mores, both social and political, and foreign languages restricted local comprehension and participation. The fabric of daily life was stretched taut. Riots and revolts broke out across the Middle East. And yet, for all the outward appearance of cataclysmic upheaval and for all the inward sense of grievance and rage, there was no sharp break in the political life of Syria, in the forms and aims of political action, or in the actors themselves during the French Mandate.

In the first generation after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the major political movements in Syria were led by members of urban upper class families and former officials of the Sultan who brought a certain style of political action and a common way of looking at the world to the new political circumstances. Indeed, there was a remarkable degree of continuity in the exercise of local political power in Syria which was not disrupted by the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. For the most part, men important in local affairs under the Ottomans were the same men, or their sons, who wielded political influence under the French. Political leaders organized their personal support systems in interwar Syria as they had in Ottoman Syria. In Ottoman times, political power was based in the city and then extended from there to the settled countryside and eventually into the semi-nomadic tribal areas. Under the French, political power likewise emanated from the city. Moreover, the methods urban leaders used to acquire political power and their aims remained consistent. Whatever the projected scope of power and whoever the political overlord, the basic building block of political influence in Syria was the same: urban leadership.

Within the city, the political and social influence of local leaders was

[1] Charles S. Maier, *Recasting Bourgeois Europe. Stabilization in France, Germany, and Italy in the Decade after World War I* (Princeton, 1975), p. 3.

rooted in some cases in ancient status as descendants of the Prophet (*ash-raf*), leaders of religious orders, and jurists and educators; in other cases, it grew from military or commercial position.[2] In the last decades of Ottoman rule, landowning and office-holding augmented and gradually supplanted older bases of influence. The marriage bed, financial arrangements, and the acquisition of Ottoman cultural trappings including fluency in Turkish knit together the urban upper class of the Arab provinces.

But urban political position was not simply a passive status based on birth, wealth, and style. Urban politics was a delicate balancing act: local leaders could neither appear to oppose the interests of the government because they risked being deprived of their access to the ruler, nor could they jeopardize the interests of their local clientele because they risked losing their independent influence and thus their usefulness to the ruler. It was usual for local leaders to defend the social and political order by supporting the government. But there were occasions when they led movements against the government by mobilizing those popular forces from which they derived their independent influence. Such occasions arose when a particularly strong government sought to dissolve the partnership or when a weak government could no longer maintain the stability which ensured the prosperity of the local urban leadership. Rarely, however, did urban leaders aim to overthrow the system of rule. Rather, their intention was to restore the delicate balance between government and society. Although in the last decades of the nineteenth century the Syrian provinces enjoyed comparative stability and tranquility which local urban leaders wholeheartedly supported in their capacity as officials of the Ottoman state, by the First World War the delicate balance between central authority and provincial influence had been sufficiently upset by changes in Istanbul to warrant a re-assessment of the partnership with the Ottoman government.

The advent of French rule in Syria did not fundamentally change the behavior patterns of urban leaders or the fundamental character of political life. But there was a significant difference in the nature of the new imperial authority: it was illegitimate and thus was unstable. France was not recognized to be a legitimate overlord, as the Sultan-Caliph of the Ottoman Empire had been. The Ottoman Empire had behind it four centuries of rule and the very important component of a common religious tradition.[3] France had the dubious, even in Western eyes, legitimization conferred by the weak and imperfectly conceived Mandate system. Be-

[2] The following section is based on my *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus 1860–1920* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 1–52.

[3] Albert Hourani, "Revolution in the Arab Middle East," in P. J. Vatikiotis (ed.), *Revolution in the Middle East and Other Case Studies* (London, 1972), pp. 70–71.

cause France had historically tried to establish and strengthen her position in the Levant by posing as the protector of Christians, she was doubly distrusted by the Muslim majority of the region. In part because she was illegitimate and in part because of certain exogenous factors—the international and moral restrictions of the Mandate system and the fragility of France's postwar economic and political order—her position in Syria was inherently unstable, much more so than the Ottoman position had ever been.

Contributing to this instability were specific French policies in Syria which inflamed traditional sectarian conflict by distinctly favoring religious minorities and by promoting a series of administratively isolated minority enclaves. The French threatened the Muslim majority by seizing control of their institutions and debasing the symbols of their culture. France was also unwilling to promote any recognizable financial and economic interests, other than her own and those of her principal minority clients. French monetary policies had disastrous financial repercussions on Syria. The devastation wrought by World War I, the debilitating re-orientation forced on the Syrian economy by the partition of geographical Syria and the creation of distinct and separate mandatory regimes, and the continued erosion of Syrian industry by the spread of the European economy helped to create and maintain a situation of widespread unemployment and high inflation, all of which added to the political instability inherent in the Mandate situation.

In such circumstances, Syria's urban leadership was obliged to create a new balance of power between itself and the French. The French, like the Ottomans before them, had to govern in association with elements from the urban upper classes. But, given the intrinsic illegitimacy of France's position in Syria and her penchant for dictatorial policy without regard for the position and interests of the local elite, urban leaders became opposition forces—the spokesmen of the people in the halls of power—rather than the agents of a foreign ruler. To gain recognition from this strong-minded regime, they would not only have to mobilize the active forces of society on a more regular basis, but they would also have to seek broader political alliances than before. Hence, they required not only a shared dedication of purpose, but an ideology to express this new solidarity and drive. Nationalism provided the kind of ideological cohesion and emotional appeal urban leaders needed to be politically effective between the wars.

The rise of nationalism in the early twentieth century initially reflected broad changes in Arab society, especially within the urban upper class of Syria: the rising number of Syrians attending professional schools in Europe, their increased exposure to European ideas, the accelerated pace of

Ottomanization, and, after the rise of the Young Turks in 1908, growing Turkish insensitivity to local Syrian needs. All of these changes encouraged "more frequent inter-Arab contacts," "the emergence of pan-Arab clubs and societies," and a "greater interest in Arab history" and culture. Above all, "the pull of a common language" and "ethnic origin" gave the new loyalty to the nation greater attraction, enabling it to grow at the expense of other loyalties to religion, family, tribe, and region.[4] But it was the collapse of Ottoman authority at the end of World War I and with it the demise of the ideology of Ottomanism, of an Ottoman nation of Turks and Arabs, and the imposition of French rule in 1920, that allowed nationalism to emerge as the dominant political ideology in Syria.

In the hands of members of the urban upper class, nationalism never acquired revolutionary content; rather, it was fashioned to restore a balance of power between government and society which had been upset by the French occupation. Nationalism could be directed against the French without harming the local status quo. With its romanticized vision of the Arab past, nationalism appealed to the hearts and minds of a broad section of the population—both to traditional merchants, artisans, and popular religious leaders and to newly educated youth, the growing professional class, and an incipient modern working class. It was an attractive and compelling ideology, more so, for example, than Islam which had lost much of its power owing to the spread of secularism. Nationalism capitalized on Islam's political misfortunes by absorbing the still important component of religious solidarity into its ideological formation and expression. Yet it was cast in a secular idiom, which was best suited to counter the force of sectarianism, which French policies exacerbated, and it blended comfortably with the behavior and style of the urban leadership who, for the most part, had been trained in secular professional schools and nurtured in the secular environment of Young Turk politics, and who had grown accustomed to working together in secret Arab societies and for the brief period of Amir Faysal's Arab Kingdom after World War I.

For all its appeal, interwar nationalism was contradictory and poorly articulated. Perhaps the most visible tension was between nationalism's highest aim, the achievement of pan-Arab unity and independence, and its tendency toward provincialism. The division of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire into separate administrative units under British and French authority and the further separation of Syria from Lebanon frac-

[4] Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq* (Princeton, 1978), p. 23. Batatu examines the impact of these same changes on Iraqi society in the early twentieth century.

tured Arab nationalist forces and strength. The Syrian leadership came to concentrate its efforts on securing Syrian independence before all else. In this way, nationalism acquired a rather narrow focus.

THE SCALE OF POLITICS

Within the newly created Syrian state, the scale of the nationalist movement was virtually restricted to the domain of urban politics during the Mandate. If it is possible to speak of a code of behavior to which political actors in Syria generally adhered, then one of its major tenets was that the use of the countryside as a political weapon was to be discouraged. Indeed, it was only during the early years of the French Mandate that nationalist leaders carried their resistance into the countryside and then only because the French were in temporary control of their political bases in the towns. Why was this code adopted and enforced by Syrian urban leaders? One reason is that it was more difficult to organize the countryside and peasant society for resistance to French rule because of the comparatively low level of political consciousness of the peasantry. An equally important reason was the deep-seated fear that if rural society were encouraged to mount resistance to the French then agrarian productive forces would suffer, thereby jeopardizing the financial interests of the urban absentee landowning class from which the nationalist leadership was drawn.

But to explain how urban leadership kept rural forces in check during the political upheavals of the interwar period, we must briefly examine the relations of power between town and countryside in Syria. One of the primary consequences of the European commerical and financial penetration of Syria in the nineteenth century was a more decisive shift in the balance of power between town and countryside in the direction of the town, and a considerable expansion of the town's authority into the countryside. The widespread decline of Syria's native handicraft industries, which brought urban productive forces to a near standstill, and the gradual introduction of capitalist agriculture made the towns increasingly conscious of the need to intensify their exploitation of the countryside for enrichment. The agricultural areas around the city, which had always been one of several vital functions sustaining urban life, were now saddled with the burden of keeping the city economically viable. The desire to tie the countryside more securely to the towns was given added impetus particularly in grain-producing regions, which was reflected in the growing demand for cash crops for urban consumption and for export. This desire was particularly keen in the interior Syrian towns which had experienced a relative loss of commercial importance as coastal towns en-

joyed a new era of prosperity owing to their vital role in the revived Mediterranean trade with Europe.[5]

In tandem with these developments, a reinvigorated Ottoman state, in need of more taxes to support its vast reform efforts and to impose stability in its central Islamic lands, expanded the frontiers of settlement in Syria. Military force and financial inducements in the form of land grants and special tax concessions gradually turned tribal chiefs into landlords and their tribesmen into cultivators.[6] Agrarian commercialization encouraged urban groups, particularly merchants already in possession of tax farms, to expand their landholdings by the manipulation of land laws and by usury, and when the opportunity arose in the 1860s, by legalizing the process of land accumulation in the form of private property rights.[7]

Landownership in Syria was to a very large degree an urban-engineered process. Land became more and more concentrated in the hands of urban dwellers as the countryside was drawn more rigidly into the orbit of the city. Small peasant proprietorship was significantly reduced as large and middle-sized estates and intensively cultivated plantations owned by a powerful group of townspeople were more formally organized around the metropolis.[8]

Big landowners were usually permanent residents of cities, though

[5] See Dominique Chevallier, "Un exemple de résistance technique de l'artisinat syrien aux 19ᵉ et 20ᵉ siècles. Les tissus ikatés d'Alep et de Damas," *Syria*, 39 (1962), pp. 300–24; Chevallier, "A Damas. Production et société à la fin du 19ᵉ siècle," *Annales*, 19 (1964), pp. 966–72; Jacques Weulersse, "La primauté des cités dans l'économie syrienne (Etude des relations entre villes et campagnes dans le Nord-Syrie avec exemples choisis à Antioch, Hama, et Lattaquié)," C. R. Congrès International de Géographie (Amsterdam, 1938), pp. 233–39. Also see Roger Owen, The Middle East in the World Economy, 1800–1914 (London, 1981).

[6] See Philip S. Khoury, "The Tribal Shaykh, French Tribal Policy, and the Nationalist Movement in Syria between Two World Wars," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 18 (April 1982), pp. 180–93.

[7] R. Montagne, "Le pouvoir des chefs et les élites en Orient," CHEAM, no. 17 (12 May 1938), pp. 3–4. Also see ʿAbdullah Hanna, *al-Qadiyya al-ziraʿiyya wa al-harakat al-fallahiyya fi suriyya wa lubnan, vol. 1, 1820–1920* (Beirut, 1975). Peter Sluglett and Marion Farouk-Sluglett, "The Application of the 1858 Land Code in Greater Syria: Some Preliminary Observations," in Tarif Khalidi (ed.), *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East* (Beirut, 1984), pp. 409–21.

[8] On the process of large-scale accumulation of land in Syria by region see, for Aleppo: Charles Pavie, *Etat d'Alep. Renseignements agricoles* (Aleppo, 1924), pp. 105, 113–14, 118, and Abdul-Rahman Hamidé, *La région d'Alep. Etude de géographie rurale* (Paris, 1959); for Hama: [J. Gaulmier], "Note sur la propriété foncière dans la Syrie centrale," *L'Asie Française*, no. 309 (April 1933), 130–37; for Homs: P. Berthelot, "Notes sur la mise en valeur de la région du 'Caza' d'Homs," CHEAM, no. 249 (Feb. 1938), and A. Naaman, "Précisions sur la structure agraire dans la région de Homs-Hama (Syrie)," *Bulletin de l'Association de Géographes Français*, 208–09 (March–April 1950), pp. 53–59; for Jazira, where many Aleppines also owned land: Roupen Boghossian, *La Haute-Djézireh* (Aleppo, 1952), pp. 122–40.

many also maintained estate homes or farm cottages for social purposes. There also existed a more diffuse group of rural landowning notables in each province whose ties with the provincial capital were maintained through the closest regional market center. But, because rural landowners were scattered and tended to be completely preoccupied with organizing the exploitation of their individual estates, they found it more difficult to strike up the type of political alliances which were commonplace among absentee landowners in the city.[9]

With so many big landowners residing in the city and depending on agents to administer the system of agricultural production and rent collection, it is not surprising that proprietors came to regard their peasants and not the land on which they toiled as the domain of exploitation. Absentee landowners were neither farmers nor agricultural entrepreneurs but town dwellers, preoccupied with urban life. They viewed the countryside as little more than a source of steady income and social prestige, not as a place in which to work or to risk capital. They showed little interest in putting their profits back into land development schemes.[10] Landowners found that the practice of usury, which required only small capital outlays, served their immediate financial interests better than reinvesting in the land. It not only increased their percentage of the rent, but it also strengthened their hold over cultivators by keeping them permanently dependent.[11]

As the Syrian town expanded control over its agricultural hinterland, rural society grew more dependent on the urban families who owned large portions of the surrounding countryside. In a sense, towns had become "parasites" living off the exploitation of the countryside and giving little in return. Rural society certainly regarded the city as a "foreign"

[9] Conversation with ʿAli ʿAbd al-Karim al-Dandashi (Damascus, 21 October 1975). The Dandashi clan was the biggest landowning family of Tall Kalakh, between Homs and Tripoli.

[10] During the interwar years, several big landowning families in Damascus, Homs, and Hama had sons who were trained in agricultural sciences in Europe (at Cirencester Agricultural College in England and at Grenoble and Montpellier in France). Although they were normally assigned to look after the family estates, few showed interest in land development and most preferred to leave the actual management to an agent (wakil) whose primary task was to collect rents. Information was found in George Faris, *Man huwa fi suriyya 1949* (Damascus, 1950), and FO 371/2142, vol. 20849, 6 May 1937. In 1930, a member of one big landowning family (the ʿAjlanis) in the Damascus region was brought to trial for having a tractor which was being used on a neighbor's estate destroyed. The defendant claimed that the tractor threatened his system of land exploitation because some of his sharecroppers had become curious about the uses of the tractor and had begun to ask if one could be bought for use on the ʿAjlani estate. MWT, *Registre des jugements du Tribunal de Iʳᵉ Instance Correctionnelle, 1931 et 1932*, pp. 22–25.

[11] Saʿid B. Himadeh, *The Monetary and Banking System in Syria* (Beirut, 1935), pp. 255–56.

creation bent on exploitation, as a devious outsider which offered little in exchange for labor and surplus except land appropriation and usury. But towns could never have engineered such a thorough and consistent exploitation of their hinterland had the absentee landowning class not had direct access to and even control of the various institutional components of government and the judiciary.[12] It had such access during the late Ottoman period, but the advent of a French regime with French institutions and an interest in creating a clientele in the countryside as a counterweight to hostile urban politicians threatened to alter urban–rural relations.

The scale of the independence movement was not simply restricted to the towns, but in fact to only four towns: Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. They were the only permanent centers of nationalist activity during the Mandate. In other towns and districts, especially those containing the compact minorities—Alawites and Druzes—the movement operated on an intermittent basis. But, although in territorial terms the movement was limited, in demographic terms it was extensive, especially given that it concentrated on the mobilization of urban forces. If the four towns received most of the nationalist leadership's attention, they well deserved it; they were the four most populated areas in Syria. What these cities and the regions under their influence represented to Syria in demographic terms enabled the nationalist leadership to legitimize its claim to represent the will of the Syrian people.

During the Mandate, Aleppo was slightly larger than Damascus and both towns dwarfed Homs and Hama, which themselves were roughly the same size. Aleppo and Damascus were each larger than the combined populations of Homs, Hama, and the next five largest towns in Syria: Antioch, Dayr al-Zur, Latakia, Alexandretta, and Idlib (see Table I-1). Together, Aleppo and Damascus held 60 percent of Syria's total urban population; with the addition of Homs and Hama, nearly 80 percent of Syria's urban population was represented.

In those Syrian provinces where a rough demographic balance existed between rural and urban society, the nationalist movement thrived. Ob-

[12] This is one of the central arguments made in my *Urban Notables*. In Damascus, the great urban families who controlled the land system in the province—the 'Azm, 'Abid, Yusuf, Mardam-Beg, Quwwatli, Barudi, 'Ajlani, Ghazzi, Hasibi, Kaylani, and Jaza'iri families—produced a high percentage of its administrators, judges, and financiers. In Aleppo, Hama, and Homs, a similar situation existed. Among the big landowning families of Aleppo and its province were the Jabiri, Kayyali, Qudsi, Rifa'i, Mudarris, Mar'ashli, Ibrahim Pasha, Kikhya (Ketkhuda), Nayyal, and Hananu families. In Hama, four families—the 'Azm, Kaylani, Barazi, and Tayfur—monopolized power in the town and district. In Homs, the big landowning families included the Atasi, Jundi, Raslan, Suwaydan, Durubi, and Siba'i.

Table I-1
Population of Important Cities and Towns in Syria During the French Mandate

City or town	1932	1936	1943
Aleppo	232,000	254,696	319,867
Damascus	216,000	238,480	286,310
Homs	65,000	68,981	100,042
Hama	50,000	50,313	71,391
Antioch	30,000	34,716	—
Dayr al-Zur	30,000	33,716	61,139
Latakia	24,000	—	36,687
Alexandretta	16,000	18,097	—
Idlib	13,000	14,527	18,719
Qamishli	—	—	18,188
Duma	12,000	11,830	17,863
Bab	7,000	10,707	15,148
Dir'a	8,000	—	10,737
Salimiyya	6,000	10,378	13,368
Nabk	—	—	10,681
Suwayda'	6,000	—	8,000
Hassaja	—	—	7,835
Tartus	—	5,000	—

SOURCES: Robert Widmer, "Population," in S. B. Himadeh (ed.), *Economic Organization of Syria* (Beirut, 1936); Emile Fauquenot, "L'état civil en Syrie en relation avec les questions de nationalité et de statut personnel des communautés religieuses," CHEAM, no. 50, n.d.; *Recueil de Statistiques de la Syrie et du Liban,* 1942–43.

versely, in regions where the size of the urban population was relatively insignificant, nationalist activity was limited. Damascus housed 48 percent of the population of its *muhafaza* (governorate); Aleppo, 37 percent (see Table I-2). By contrast, Suwayda' contained 10 percent of the Jabal Druze and Latakia 8 percent of its *muhafaza*. Furthermore, the Latakia province and Jabal Druze contained Syria's two largest compact minorities respectively and both were farming communities. Rural minority communities were the least susceptible to the forces of nationalism, a reality the French sought to maintain.

Of greater importance than demography in defining the scale of the nationalist movement was the relative uniformity and sophistication of urban political culture in the four towns. To start with, the characteristics of the local upper classes in these towns were strikingly similar. In each, this class was composed of a socially integrated network of families whose material resource base was built on large-scale landownership. In late Otto-

TABLE I-2
Breakdown of Urban and Rural Population in Syria by *Muhafaza* (1943)

Muhafaza	Pop. of capital city	% of total pop.	Total urban pop.	% of total pop.	Total rural pop.	% of total pop.	Total pop. of muhafaza
Aleppo	320,167 (Aleppo)	37.0	354,034[a]	40.5	516,105	59.5	870,139
Damascus	286,310 (Damascus)	47.5	314,854[b]	52.0	289,035	48.0	603,889
Homs	100,042 (Homs)	47.0	100,042[c]	47.0	112,382	53.0	212,424
Hama	71,391 (Hama)	45.5	84,759[d]	54.0	72,699	46.0	157,458
Hawran	10,737 (Dir'a)	9.5	10,737[e]	9.5	102,105	90.5	112,842
Euphrates	61,139 (Dayr al-Zur)	27.0	61,139[f]	27.0	163,884	73.0	225,023
Jazira	18,188 (Qamishli)	12.5	25,933[g]	18.0	120,048	82.0	146,001
Jabal Druze	8,000 (Suwayda')	10.0	8,000[h]	10.0	72,128	90.0	80,128
Latakia	36,687 (Latakia)	8.0	41,687[i]	9.0	410,820	91.0	452,507
GRAND TOTAL	912,661	32.0	1,001,205	35.0	1,859,820	65.0	2,860,411[j]

SOURCES: For population by *muhafaza*, see A. H. Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon* (London, 1946), p. 385. For population of towns and cities, see *Recueil de Statistiques de la Syrie et du Liban, 1942–43.*

[a] Aleppo, Idlib, Bab
[b] Damascus, Duma, Nabk
[c] Homs
[d] Hama, Salimiyya
[e] Dir'a
[f] Dayr al-Zur
[g] Qamishli, Hassaja
[h] Suwayda'
[i] Latakia, Tartus
[j] This figure does not include nomadic and semi-nomadic populations, estimated in 1943 at 300,000–400,000.

man times, this class furnished the high-ranking bureaucrats and top local politicians as well as many cultural and religious leaders. Members of this class had gone to Istanbul for a modern secular education, had served in the provincial administration, and were among the first to promote the idea of a separate Arab nation on the eve of World War I.

Although ethnically the great families were of mixed stock—Arab, Turkish, and Kurdish—they were all Arabic-speaking (many also spoke Turkish) and Sunni Muslim. The bonds of a common language and religion were strong enough to mitigate the potential for ethnic conflict within the class. Its qualities—its nature, style, and political behavior—underscored a high level of social and cultural homogeneity which helped to reinforce its class solidarity. A relatively high degree of social and religious uniformity and cohesion in urban society itself allowed the urban upper class to pose successfully as a "natural" leadership.[13] In a sense, its domination of urban society was "legitimized" because a high proportion of the population in each town—a population that, despite the dramatic changes of the era, was still very much attached to its traditional religious beliefs, cultural practices, and customs—identified the defenders of faith and the guardians of culture as well as the providers of vital goods and services with the local upper class. In brief, a cohesive Sunni Muslim upper class in the four towns not only patronized but also represented a predominantly Sunni Muslim populace, providing it with its cultural and religious leaders who embodied and articulated its beliefs and enforced its code of moral behavior. This permitted the birth of the nationalist movement within a relatively unified and integrated political culture.

The individual power of the elite families stemmed from relations of personal dependence which cut vertically through the social strata of their respective towns and surrounding countryside, just as it had during the Ottoman period. These relations, from the top down, were built on the premise that both urban leader and client provided a service valued by the other. Political benefits normally favored the leader. Clients usually did not act independently in the political arena but instead depended on their patrons to solve their political problems for them. Patrons bound clients to themselves by distributing benefits downwards which generally discouraged clients from organizing themselves in any meaningful horizontally-bound interest groups. Even trade unions, which might have been expected to approximate horizontal or class-based organizations, were often personal support systems integrated into the patronage network of a great urban family.

[13] Albert Hourani adopts the term "natural" in "Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables," in William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers (eds.), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 41–68.

Only at the uppermost level of politics were horizontal alliances regularly formed—among urban leaders themselves—in order to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the state and to protect themselves better against pressures from further down the social scale. The need for a pulling together of forces was at no time more necessary than during the Mandate period. It helped that urban leaders were homogeneous in the sense of belonging to a particular class and not severely divided along ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other categorical lines. But, because they were relatively secure in their exclusive position at the summit of politics, they felt little obligation to maintain closed ranks and to clarify common interests on crucial political issues. Consequently, alliances among the urban leaders were rarely stable; indeed, intense factionalism and shifting alliances characterized the summit of political life in Syria.

Although urban leaders from the four largest towns were cut from the same social fabric and defined their interests in a similar fashion, there was no natural reason for them to link up in a common political front until the early twentieth century, when historical forces created both an opportunity and a need for collaboration.

It is true that by virtue of their language, religion, and customs the bulk of the inhabitants of Syria possessed common bonds and also formed part of a wider unit, the Arab people. However, certain Syrians were differentiated from one another and from their neighbors in their outlook and perhaps also in their interests. For instance, although the majority of Syrians during the Mandate era were Muslim, a significant minority of them were heterodox Muslims, and there were also many Christians. Of the total population of that part of geographical Syria which came under French control after World War I (corresponding to the modern Syrian republic), 69 percent were Sunni Muslims and 16 percent were heterodox Muslims (Alawites, Druzes, Isma'ilis). As for the 14 percent of the population who were Christians, some were Catholics or Uniates (that is, members of churches which recognize Papal supremacy but preserve certain special traditions), while others belonged to other rites, in particular the Greek Orthodox rite. There were also several thousand Arabized Jews in the large towns. (For a population breakdown by religion, see Tables I-3 and I-4.) This multiplicity of sects gave rise in Syria to a fierce sectarianism which was exacerbated by the Ottoman system of granting a certain degree of self-government to each recognized religious community or *millet* and by the intervention of the Western powers during the nineteenth century.

Syria also had other socio-economic and cultural differences which contributed to the reinforcement of local loyalties and to internal conflict. Some of them were inseparable from the religious divisions. The moun-

TABLE I-3
Percentage Distribution of Syria's Religious and Ethnic Minorities by Muhafaza (1945) [a]

Muhafazat (Governorates)	Alawites	Druzes	Isma'ilis/ Shi'ites	Greek Orthodox Christians	Other Christians	Armenian Orthodox/ Catholics	Jews/ Yazidis	Sunnis
Euphrates				0.1	0.8	1.1		98.0
Hawran	0.4	2.5	0.1	2.6	4.4	0.1		92.5
Damascus	0.7	0.2	1.0	3.9	4.7	3.2	2.2	82.7
Aleppo	0.3			1.1	4.3	8.9	1.8	82.4
Jazira	0.1		0.2	0.2	22.4	6.8	2.4	67.9
Homs	10.4		1.3	9.4	11.2	1.4		66.3
Hama	9.5		13.2	11.0	1.3	0.4		64.6
Latakia	62.1		1.8	12.8	3.1	1.3		18.9
Jabal Druze		87.6		5.7	4.2	0.7		1.8
TOTAL	11.5 [b]	3.0 [c]	1.5 [d]	4.7 [e]	5.2 [f]	4.2 [g]	1.2 [h]	68.7 [i]

SOURCES: Gabriel Baer, *Population and Society in the Arab East* (London, 1964), p. 109; Republic of Syria, Ministry of National Economy, Department of Statistics, *Statistical Abstract of Syria* (Damascus, 1952), p. 20.

[a] Total population of Syria in 1945 was 2,949,819.
[b] Alawites numbered 335,454.
[c] Druzes numbered 89,796.
[d] Isma'ilis and other Shi'ites numbered 42,757.
[e] Orthodox Christians numbered 140,832.
[f] Other Christians (Syrian Orthodox/Catholic, Greek Catholic, "Latin," Maronites, Chaldeans, Protestants, Nestorians) numbered 152,769.
[g] Armenian Orthodox/Catholics numbered 121,310 (Armenian Orthodox, 104,331).
[h] Jews numbered 30,309; Yazidis numbered 2,858; total was 33,167.
[i] Sunnis numbered 2,033,734.

Urban Kurds were predominantly Sunni Muslim and assimilated culturally and linguistically into Arab society; however, 8.5 percent of the total population of Syria in 1945 were Kurdish speakers, mainly semi-nomadic Kurdish tribes of the Euphrates and Jazira regions. In 1945 Turkish was used as a first language by 3 percent of the Syrian population.

TABLE I-4
Populations of Damascus and Aleppo by Religious Community

| | 1935 | | 1943 | |
	Damascus	Aleppo	Damascus	Aleppo
Sunnis	186,726	155,558	227,674[b]	196,745[c]
Alawites	—	—	40	480
Shi'ites	166	—	167	5
Isma'ilis	—	—	9	3
Druzes	287	—	493	16
Yazidis	—	—	6	1
Jews	4,179?	10,094	13,007	13,361
Greek Orthodox	5,162?	2,579	10,217	5,984
Greek Catholic	5,098	10,190	9,806	11,846
Syrian Orthodox	1,431	4,557	899	5,393
Syrian Catholic	1,447	5,183	2,076	6,009
Armenian Orthodox	5,682	49,563	16,785	59,850
Armenian Catholic	1,517	6,843	2,062	8,777
"Latins"[a]	101	1,868	423	2,713
Maronites	265	3,185	936	3,636
Chaldeans	102	1,888	188	2,202
Nestorians	—	—	—	—
Protestants	860	2,045	857	2,846
Unknown	—	—	665	—
TOTAL	213,023	253,553	286,310	319,867

SOURCES: For 1935: Emile Fauquenot, "Les institutions gouvernementales de la Syrie," CHEAM, no. 201 (17 June 1937).
For 1943: Emile Fauquenot, "L'état civil en Syrie en relation avec les questions de nationalité et de statut personnel des communautés religieuses," CHEAM, no. 50, n.d.
[a] "Latins" are Roman Catholics of the Latin rite.
[b] Sunnis represented 79.5 percent of the total population of Damascus.
[c] Sunnis represented 61.5 percent of the total population of Aleppo.

tains and hill districts harbored the compact minorities: Druzes southeast of Damascus and Alawites in the northwest. Sparsely settled areas such as the Jazira in the far northeast contained significant communities of Christians and Kurds. The First World War forced large numbers of Armenian Christians to take refuge from Turkish oppression in Syria, es-

pecially in Aleppo. There were also local differences not based on religion: for example, those between Damascus and Aleppo, which were two different provincial capitals with different political traditions and different economic orientations, and between the coastal areas which face the Mediterranean and the interior which faces the desert.

Beyond these religious and social divisions were others which are characteristic of the entire Middle East: the division between townspeople, peasants, and nomads and, by the interwar period, the differences in the degree of contact with the West by individuals, communities, districts, and generations as a result of Western missionary activity and the expansion of the Western economy into the region.[14]

As a consequence, there was a low degree of political integration in Syria when the French arrived. Political cooperation between her most important towns, Aleppo and Damascus, was not extensive. Although under the Ottomans both towns were capitals of neighboring provinces, administered through identical sets of institutions, and connected by road and eventually by rail, their political and economic orientations took quite different directions. Damascus was a large provincial market center for its more immediate vegetable orchards and fruit gardens and for the Hawran and the Biqa'. It maintained strong trading links with northern Palestine and was firmly tied to Beirut, its main outlet to the Mediterranean, by the mid-nineteeth century. It also carried on a brisk trade with the Hijaz by virtue of its important role as the eastern gathering point for the pilgrimage. Its previously lucrative trade with Baghdad across the Syrian desert waned after the opening of the Suez Canal.

Aleppo was regarded as Ottoman Syria's leading commercial center; however, its preoccupation was with regions to its north and east. It served as the chief market center for northern Syria, northwestern Iraq, and southeastern Anatolia, and lay along the great northern trade route from Iran and further East. The port of Alexandretta was Aleppo's outlet to the Mediterranean world.

The political horizons of Damascus and Aleppo reflected their different economic orientation and their geographical location. The bonds between them were loose and tenuous. They even employed different sets of weights and measurements and different currencies, and they showed a relatively wide variation in the price of the same commodity, suggesting different marketing conditions in each. Moreover, because both towns were of vital importance to the Ottoman Empire, Damascus for its politi-

[14] FO 371/8310, vol. 27319. "Syria and Lebanon," report by A. H. Hourani, 5 Dec. 1941, p. 2.

cal and cultural influence and Aleppo for its strategic economic role, each answered directly to Istanbul rather than to one another.

Homs and Hama were always less important entities, with small town mentalities, even by Syrian standards. Unlike Aleppo or Damascus, they were never great entrepôts for international trade nor centers of traditional learning, nor anywhere near as cosmopolitan. Their roles were a function of their size and thus were restricted to servicing and exploiting their agricultural hinterlands and to serving as exchange centers for the tribes of central Syria. The Ottoman provincial re-organization of Syria in the 1860s placed both Homs and Hama more firmly under the administrative jurisidiction of Damascus. Consequently, both became increasingly prone to political influences emanating from Damascus. However, of the two, Hama, though it was further from Damascus, had stronger ties with its provincial capital, if only because by the eighteenth century two of Hama's most powerful families had influential branches in Damascus.[15] The coastal outlet for Homs was Tripoli to which it was more closely tied than to Damascus, while Hama depended on the port of Latakia and to a lesser extent Tripoli. Both towns, which are near one another, were in the habit of political squabbling owing to an ancient but persistent conflict over the allocation of water resources from the Orontes River.[16]

What sparked the development of closer political ties between the four largest towns was an externally induced crisis. Although the upper classes were not free of internal political factionalism, after consolidating their social and political hold within the towns of Syria in the late nineteenth century, they enjoyed several decades of political stability and comparative economic security. The Young Turk Revolt of 1908 brought an end to this era. The Young Turks' renewed emphasis on centralization and Turkification of the Arab provinces sufficiently threatened the interests of a significant number of the Syrian political elite to elicit a violent reaction. To legitimize their opposition to the Young Turks, factions within the elite tapped a number of new intellectual currents which had developed in reaction to or in defense of the forces of modernization and secularization that had penetrated Syria and other parts of the Empire in the course of the nineteenth century. These currents were a mixture of traditional Islamic and modern secularist elements. At their core lay an emphasis on the primacy of the Arabs, their great cultural influence upon Islam, and their language, from which an ideological weapon, Arabism,

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[15] The 'Azm and Kaylani families.

[16] J. Gaulmier, "Note sur une épisode poétique de la rivalité seculaire entre Homs and Hama," *Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales*, 2 (1932), pp. 83–90.

was fashioned. Using Arabism, disaffected members of the urban elite could both justify and advance their opposition movement.[17]

In its early stages of development, the ideology of Arabism brought together disaffected leaders from Syrian towns in order to widen the base of their opposition to Turkish policies and to redress the balance of power. Some leaders formed literary societies which emphasized Arabic culture and called for political decentralization, while others met at the Ottoman Parliament in Istanbul where they pressed for greater administrative autonomy in the provinces. Younger elements formed clandestine organizations which were more radical in their aims and pressed for Arab independence on the eve of World War I. It was at this time that urban leaders in Syria first began to discover how much they had in common; and it was then that some began to reject their Ottoman identity for a Syrian-Arab one.

Although the framework of political collaboration between Syrian towns was under construction by the First World War, it was not until the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and its replacement by an Arab state (1918–20) based on the principles of Arab national unity and independence that it becomes possible to speak of an articulated desire and need for these towns to link up politically. During the brief existence of Faysal's Kingdom of Syria, the radius of its authority did not really extend beyond the four towns.[18]

The important point is that nationalism would not have spread so quickly had these towns not had a unified and cohesive local upper class which came to regard the national idea as a viable and useful substitute for "Ottomanism," an ideology which after 1918 no longer served its interests. The receptivity of the four towns to nationalism, although it varied in intensity and timing,[19] was the result of a political culture that was very much this urban leadership's own creation and which it willingly embodied and represented. Nationalism reflected a conflict within the local upper class and, as long as it remained a vehicle of elements from this class, it was not regarded as a destructive force but rather as the best available weapon to defend its interests.

If the espousal of Arabism was the first stage in the development of political links between the four towns, and Faysal's Arab Kingdom was the second stage, it was the imposition of French rule in Syria in 1920 which accelerated this process and, as a consequence, more clearly defined the scale of nationalist politics in interwar Syria. The official partition of ge-

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[17] I have detailed this argument in my *Urban Notables*, Chapter 3.

[18] *Ibid.*, Chapter 4.

[19] The urban leadership in Aleppo adopted nationalism later than did the Damascus leadership; and, after the collapse of Ottoman rule, Aleppo lived in a politically inferior position to Damascus. The reasons for this are examined in Chapter 4.

ographical Syria into separately administered Mandates under French and British authority isolated a truncated Syria surrounded by new, artificial and hostile frontiers and customs barriers which obstructed the free passage of goods and peoples. The placement of Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate alone and Syria's administrative separation from Lebanon eventually brought the four towns under a single administrative setup.

PERIODIZATION

This study will examine the evolution of the independence movement by tracing political developments in Syria during the French Mandate through four phases. In these phases certain factors remained constant, in particular the French government's determination to safeguard its own essential interests and France's friendly attitude to the minorities. Other factors, however, changed, most notably the relationship between the French and the nationalist leadership.

The first phase lasted until 1927 and was marked by a head-on confrontation between the French and the nationalist leadership. After toppling Faysal's Arab government in Damascus, the French constructed an administrative system which separated Lebanon from Syria and then divided Syria into separate units along ethno-religious and regional lines. The French centralized power in their own hands and adopted measures which caused serious discontent throughout much of the country. Nationalists transformed a local uprising in the Jabal Druze in 1925 into a revolt of national proportions which lasted for two years but which ultimately was crushed. The Great Revolt was itself a watershed because it created the opportunity for a more stable balance of power between government and society, something both the nationalist leadership and the French desired.

In the second phase which lasted until 1936, the French realized the need to make some concession to the desire for self-government in Syria. A constitution was promulgated and a parliament elected. Meanwhile, the failure of the Great Revolt convinced the nationalist leadership to drop armed confrontation as a strategy for winning French recognition. Instead, it adopted an evolutionary approach to the nationalist goals of unity and independence. This more delicate strategy reflected the urban leadership's preference for an ideology which aimed at restoring a balance between foreign rule and local leadership which had been operative in late Ottoman times. Armed struggle and revolutionary upheaval were never again regarded as serious alternatives during the interwar years. The National Bloc, an alliance formed of nationalists in the four towns, became the most important political organization of the Mandate era; it would

steer the course of the nationalist movement until independence was finally achieved at the end of World War II. This second phase ended in a sense in 1933 when the radical wing of the National Bloc found unacceptable the terms of the treaty which the French had negotiated with a ministry which included moderate nationalists.

In 1936, the revival of measured confrontational tactics in the form of a General Strike, together with events in Egypt and Ethiopia, caused the French government to recognize the necessity of coming to an agreement with the nationalists. A Syrian delegation composed mainly of National Bloc leaders went to Paris to negotiate another treaty. At first discussions did not go smoothly, but when the left-wing Popular Front came to power in June, negotiations reached a relatively swift and satisfactory conclusion. The terms of the treaty were hammered out and it was agreed it would not come into force for three years. These years were to serve as a transitional period in which the National Bloc was permitted to govern and to share power with the French High Commission.

But this transitional period was not allowed to run its course. In France, the quick decline of the Popular Front brought into power some who had never believed in the policy of 1936. And, many who had believed in it changed their opinion, either because the international situation made it important that French authority should not be weakened in Syria and Lebanon, or else because events in Syria convinced them of the country's unreadiness for self-government. Similarly, the nationalists came to doubt the sincerity of French intentions, above all because the French ceded the district of Alexandretta to Turkey, but also because it became clear that the French Parliament would not ratify the treaty of 1936, even after the nationalist government granted additional concessions to France. Meanwhile, the government's strength declined as suspicious minority communities, quietly encouraged by French agents, caused frequent disturbances, and radical nationalists attacked it on the grounds that it had compromised Syria's integrity and future as a politically independent state. This third phase ended with the resignation of the National Bloc government in early 1939 and the placement once again of the compact minorities under separate administrations. The nationalists had not advanced their demands for unity and independence much beyond the stage they had reached in the mid-1920s.

The final phase covered the years of the Second World War and culminated in Syrian independence in 1945. Although in Syria there was a certain sympathy with the Allied cause there was clearly no great enthusiasm. Memories of the misery and starvation experienced during World War I were still fresh. Moreover, the broken promises of the last war, the Alexandretta debacle, and the unratified treaty of 1936 made Syrians from all walks of life wary of French intentions. However, the Allied in-

vasion in June 1941 introduced direct British influence into Syria and the possibility of re-establishing a more equitable balance of power between foreign rule and local leadership. Denied access to the French who still preferred to prop up discredited Syrian notables in government, the National Bloc sought British support for its return to power. Owing to a perceptible difference in her policy toward Arab nationalism, Britain encouraged the nationalist movement while she applied subtle pressure on the more rigid but weakened French High Commission. As a consequence, a nationalist government supported by a newly elected nationalist Parliament returned to office in 1943, and remained there after France withdrew from the Levant at the end of the war. The nationalist leadership had secured Syria's independence in the manner which it preferred, by patient negotiation and measured pressure, not by revolutionary means which might upset the local status quo.

CHALLENGES FROM WITHIN

Although this study emphasizes the remarkable degree of continuity in the character of political life in Syria under Ottoman and French rule, it also has to account for why the interwar years were an important pivotal period for political life in Syria. Many new features were introduced into politics which had their origins in the changes that had swept Syria since the second half of the nineteenth century—in administration and law, in commerce, industry, and agriculture, in the movement of goods, peoples, and ideas, and, above all, in her relations with Europe. Such changes encouraged the development of new, more broadly-based, and better-organized movements of protest and resistance than previously known in Syria.

In the interwar period, rapid population growth, an inflated cost of living, the collapse of traditional industries, and a changing intellectual climate produced tensions and dislocations in urban society which eventually required more sophisticated responses than a narrowly focused nationalism provided. Before the end of the Mandate, the character and instruments of urban politics had changed sufficiently to pose a challenge to the old behavior, style, and aims of the urban political leadership. By the late 1930s patronage had become a fairly sophisticated and complex operation and was no longer able to keep pace with demographic growth in the towns. Increasing numbers of people sought support and services outside the old framework of patronage. They looked to and drew their strength from new social and cultural institutions such as secondary schools, universities, and youth organizations. Similarly, the locus of political life gradually shifted outside the old residential quarters and central

marketplace to newer, modern districts where these new institutions were located.

There, modern ideological parties headed by a rising generation posed a challenge to the old political order and to the National Bloc's monopoly of the nationalist idea. Its leaders belonged to emerging professional classes and organizations, were educated either in the West or locally, and found the Ottoman political legacy alien. Although willing to accept the bourgeois liberal idioms of nationalism as expressed by the National Bloc—constitutionalism, parliamentary forms, and personal freedoms—they emphasized major economic and social reforms, something the old leadership had ignored. Furthermore, unlike the nationalist leadership which had resigned itself to working within the political and administrative framework established by the French Mandate—that of a truncated Syria, separated from Lebanon and from the other Arab neighbors—this ascendant generation adopted pan-Arabism and a more revolutionary strategy for achieving independence and unity.

The National Bloc leadership, however, was schooled in the tactics of survival and met the challenge posed by the rising elites. Indeed, the National Bloc ushered Syria toward her independence and was in control of government when the French finally evacuated the country. But, already by the late 1930s it was clear that the political expertise of the veteran nationalists had lost much of its vitality. New ideological organizations were preparing for the dramatic changes Syria would experience soon after independence. It was independence in 1945 rather than the destruction of the Ottoman order in 1918 that finally broke the mold of the "the politics of notables" characteristic of both the Ottoman and Mandate periods. For with independence, the median position of notables, between distant ruler and local society, suddenly disappeared. The notables themselves became the government and their actions were subject to a new set of rules.