



Hafiz al-Assad's Coup, Reaching Power in Syria, and the International Reactions to It (1966-1971)

انقلاب حافظ الأسد ووصوله لحكم سوريا وردود الفعل الدولية تجاهه
(١٩٦٦-١٩٧١)

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Abstract

Hafiz al-Assad's coup, November 13, 1970, is considered a turning point in the Syrian history; it is the last one in a long chain of military coups that threatened Syrian political life from 1949 to 1970. Following this, al-Assad reached Syrian presidency in 1971, which represents a new phase of political, social and economic stability in Syria and continued all over the period of al-Assad's reign (1971-2000) that lasted for about thirty years. Despite the negativities that prevailed in that period, political stability was the most important quality that distinguished al-Assad's era. This research studies and analyses the reasons and circumstances that led Hafiz al-Assad to launch this coup, the means which enabled him to seize power, as well as the Arabic and international reactions towards it. Although a number of studies and articles have been published that have addressed the struggle for power in Syria, this study provides a historical analysis and a new vision of the political circumstances in which Assad came to power in Syria, relying on a variety of recently released British documents and American documents, in addition to many contemporary Arab books and periodicals on these events.

Keywords: Hafiz al-Assad, Salah Jadid, Baath Party, 1970 Coup.

مستخلص

يمثل انقلاب حافظ الأسد ١٣ نوفمبر ١٩٧٠ نقطة فاصلة في تاريخ سوريا الحديث أذ يعد آخر انقلاب عسكري في سلسلة الانقلابات العسكرية الطويلة التي عصفت بالحياة السياسية في سوريا منذ عام ١٩٤٩ وحتى عام ١٩٧٠، وقد أعقب هذا الانقلاب وصول حافظ الأسد إلى رئاسة سوريا عام ١٩٧١ وهو ما مثل بداية مرحلة جديدة من الاستقرار السياسي والاجتماعي والاقتصادي على الساحة السورية استمرت طوال فترة حكم حافظ الأسد (١٩٧١ - ٢٠١١) الذي استمر لما يقرب من ثلاثون عام، ورغم ما شاب هذه الفترة من سلبيات لا يمكن إغفالها أو التغاضي عنها لكن يظل الاستقرار السياسي أهم سمة ميزت عهد الرئيس حافظ الأسد، ويتناول هذا البحث بالدراسة والتحليل الأسباب والملازمات التي دفعت حافظ الأسد للقيام بهذا الانقلاب؟ وكيف وصل إلى الحكم في سوريا؟ وردود الفعل العربية والدولية إزاء هذا الانقلاب، وبرغم صدور عدد من الأبحاث والمقالات التي تناولت الصراع على السلطة في سوريا فأن هذا البحث يعطي تحليل تاريخي ورؤية جديدة للظروف السياسية التي وصل فيها الأسد لحكم سوريا معتمداً في ذلك على مجموعة متنوعة من الوثائق البريطانية المفرج عنها حديثاً والوثائق الأمريكية هذا إلى جانب العديد من الكتب والدوريات العربية المعاصرة لهذه الأحداث.

الكلمات الدالة: حافظ الأسد، صلاح جديد، حزب البعث، انقلاب ١٩٧٠

Throughout its modern history, Syria witnessed approximately 12 military coups⁽¹⁾ launched by Syrian police officers from 1949 to 1970. Some of these successfully led their launchers to seize power, and others ended in a fiasco⁽²⁾, till hafiz al-Assad's coup happening on the 13th of November 1970 came to put an end to this long lasting series of military coups that ravaged the history of Syria, which resulted in Hafiz al-Assad's presidency from 1971 to 2000. This relied on merging both Al-Baath party and the armed forces to rule over civil government organizations⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Of the most prominent coups and rebellion movements from 1949 to 1970, the following can be listed: Husni Za'im's coup (March 1949), Sami Hinnawi's coup (August 1949), Adib Shishakli's first coup (December 1949), Adib Shishakli's second coup (November 1951), the coup against Adib Shishakli (February 1954), Ghassan Jadid and Mohammed Ma'rouf's coup attempt (1956), Baath officers' rebellion (March 1951), disjunction coup (September 1961), the second coup attempt in the era of disjunction led by al-Nahlawi (March 1962), northern cities rebellion (March 1962), Aleppo rebellion (April 1962), Salah Jadid's coup (February 1966), Salim Hatoum's coup attempt (September 1966), hafiz al-Assad's coup (November 1970). See Zain al-Abedin: The Army and Politics in Syria (1918-2000) A Critical Study, 1st ed., Dar al-Jabbiyah, 2008. P 425.

⁽²⁾ CIA Document: Politics in Syria an intelligence Assessment ,1 May 1979 .

⁽³⁾ CIA Document: Syria's rulers and their political environment,7 December 1973.

Hafiz al-Assad's⁽¹⁾ political journey began in Egypt; during the union period; in a secret cell comprising Baathists who refused the

⁽¹⁾ Hafiz al-Assad was born on the 6th of Novemeber 1930 in Qardaha village, east of Lattakia city, north Syria. At the age of nine, he entered the primary school in Lattakia in 1939. (see Kamal al-Dib, Syrian War: Contemporary Syian History 1970-2015 (Beirut, Dar al-Nahar) p.23) He got his bachelor degree in 1951. In 1952, when he was sixteen, he joined al-Baath Party. He was a committed Alawite, full of self confidence and never ashamed of his social class. He joined al-Baath party against the Muslim Brotherhood, surpassing, thus, the communist Party and the Syrian National Party. Al-Baath Party was, for him, non-secular and non-religious at the same time. Then al-Assad joined The Military College in Homs in 1952, and transfers to The Air Force College in Allepo in 1953. After graduation, Pilot Lieutenant Hafiz al-Assad worked at Mezzeh Airport and immersed himself entirely in political work. The assassination of Colonel Adnan al-Maliki at the hands of the Syrian nationalists led to the flight of many of them, which gave way to the Baathists, and Baath officers became the largest bloc in the Syrian army, Which served the future of Hafiz al-Assad and his fellow Baathists. see adb-Allah al-Dahashmeh, Syria: The Farm of al-Assad (Beirut, Dar al-Nawa'ir) p71, 73, 74) Al-Assad received a promotion and training grants, and he was sent on a study mission to Egypt for a period of six months in 1955, and in early 1956 he returned to Damascus to join the Nairab Air Base near Aleppo. In April 1962, al-Assad participated in the failed coup in Aleppo, then fled to Lebanon, which handed him over to the Syrian authorities. In Damascus, he underwent a quick interrogation and spent a few days in Mezze prison, then he was released with a warning. The year 1963 witnessed a major transformation in the life of al-Assad, as he participated in al-Baath coup that

idea of dissolving the party, including Salah Jadid, Hafiz al-Assad, Abd al-Karim al-Jindi, Mohammed Omran and Ahmed al-Mir, that was known as the Military Organization⁽¹⁾.

This organization managed to plan the March 1963 coup⁽²⁾ in partnership with a coalition of forces opposing the separatist regime in Syria. After succeeding in overthrowing the separatist regime, a coalition government was formed of Baathists, Nasserist's, and independents⁽³⁾.

However, as soon as the situation in Syria became stable, al-Baath Party began to get rid of its partners in power. A few months after the coup, a dispute occurred between the Baathists and the Nasserites because of the latter's insistence on restoring unity with Egypt in a way that prioritizes Nasser and gives him power over Syria, while the former seeks a free federation that allows them to rule in Syria. When the negotiations failed in Cairo, a power struggle broke out between the Baathists and the Nasserites, which

year, then became a member in the spring of 1964 in the regional Command participating in its decisions, to participate after that in the 1966 coup to become one of the ruling men in Syria.

⁽¹⁾ CIA Document : The Ba'th party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15;1964-1973 ,Notes on Syrian opposition Groups ,17 June 1968.

ended up with the success of the former in overthrowing the latter in July 1963⁽¹⁾.

This happened after al-Baath Military Committee managed to control the army by getting rid of hundreds of conservative or Nasserite officers whose places were filled by recruitment Baathists. Within a few months, al-Baath succeeded in concentrating power in its hands and excluding all its competitors. Colonel Amin al-Hafiz, a Baathist of Sunni origins, was chosen to be the first Baathist president of Syria; his reign lasted almost two and a half years, from July 27, 1963 to February 23, 1966⁽²⁾. Behind him, the leading members of the Military Committee were consolidating themselves and their positions; Salah Jadid became responsible for the Officers Affairs Department, and later became Chief of Staff, Mohammed Omran became the commander of the main 70th Brigade in Qatana, which is the shield of the regime, Ahmed Al-Suwaidan became head of Military Intelligence, Salim Hatoum was Head of the Commandos Division, and Hafiz al-Assad became Commander of the Air Forces⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15; 1964-1973, research Department Memorandum The Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970, 16 August 1971. see CIA Document: The Ba'ath party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

⁽²⁾ Hashim Othman: Modern Syrian History (Beirut, Riyad al-Rayes for Books and Publications, 2012) p. 381.

⁽³⁾ Raymond Hinnebusch: The Formation of the Totalitarian State in Ba'thist Syria, 1st ed, (Beirut, Riyad al-Rayes for Books and Publications, Nov. 2014) p 201-202.

The year 1963 is considered a turning point in the history of al-Baath Party. Since this year, the party's ideological and sectarian structure, and even its political directions, have changed. A party was founded in 1947 by a group of civilian politicians, led by Zaki Arsuzi, an Alawite, Michel Aflaq, a Christian, and Salah Bitar, a Sunni, most of its members were from the elite landlords and merchants stationed in the major cities of Damascus and Aleppo, who belonged to the Sunni majority. Since its launching, the party has called for freedom, socialism, Arab unity and the secularization of politics⁽¹⁾. After the failure of the Egyptian-Syrian unity in 1961, the party abandoned the idea of unity; a large number of Syrian officers began to adopt the secular and moderate socialist doctrines of al-Baath Party, and since the largest number of Syrian army officers came from rural areas and small villages, especially from minorities like the Alawites⁽²⁾, they found in belonging to the army

⁽¹⁾ CIA Document :The Ba'th party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

⁽²⁾ The Alawites have played a prominent role in Syrian politics since the mid-1960s, even though they make up only 12 percent of the country's population. The Alawites were one of the poorest communities in Syria. Most of them live in the northwestern part of the country in the Nusayri Mountains along the Mediterranean, which provided them with refuge for centuries. They are named after the founder of the Alawite sect in the ninth century, the Islamic mystic Ibn Nusayr. During the French Mandate, the Alawite region enjoyed a great autonomy. The political identity of the Alawites declined after independence. During the early sixties, a number of Alawites entered the army and air force, which is the only way that gave them the opportunity to become

an opportunity to improve their social and economic opportunities as the Sunnis had the utmost power in Syria, as they were the majority. Since 1963, al-Baath Party has attracted the largest number of its members and its leaders from the minorities, which is considered the beginning of a change in the party's ideology and the domination of the sectarian element over it⁽¹⁾. For instance, Salah Jadid, Hafiz al-Assad, Salim Hatoum followed the new generation of Baathist officers (the Neo-Baathists); the majority of them were young, politically inexperienced persons and radically different from the traditional political Command of al-Baath Party (the Old Baathists), in what concerns political visions and sectarian affiliations, especially with regard to issues related to socialism and

representative key figures in the military wing of Al-Baath Party. Among the most prominent Alawite figures were Salah Jadid, Hafiz Al-Assad, and Muhammad Omran. The Alawite community includes several tribal federations; the largest two are the Haddadin and the Khayat, Salah Jadid comes from the Haddadin, Imran from the Khayat, and al-Assad belongs to the smaller Kalbiya tribe. Other sects in Syria include the Sunni majority, which prevailed in the predominant urban areas particularly Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Damascus. In addition to many Christian groups, including the Roman Orthodox, Armenians, and Maronites, who represent about 10% of the population. Other Islamic groups include about 150,000 Druze who live mainly in the Suwayda region in the south, and a few Shiites. The Arab race represents 90% of Syria, and there is a minority Kurdish in al-Hasakah in the northeast. (See CIA Document: Politics in Syria an intelligence Assessment, 1 May 1979.)

⁽¹⁾ CIA Document : The Ba'th party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

relations with the communist world. There have always been differences within the party about the form and the speed with which Arab socialism should be implemented. While the veterans of the party (the National Command)⁽¹⁾, who were distinguished as the oldest and with a wide political experience (the old Baathists), saw the need for a gradual transition to socialism in order to avoid major social unrest and to moderate relations with the Soviet Union⁽²⁾, the Neo-Baathists (the regional command) of the party, who were strongly inclined towards Marxism and favored extreme left-wing policies at home, on the contrary⁽³⁾, saw a radical restructuring of the economy on socialist foundations and increased contacts with communist countries abroad⁽⁴⁾, and they were always

⁽¹⁾ The Command of the Syrian Baath Party is divided into two parts, a national Command that supervises al-Baath Party in the entire Arab world, and a regional one that is responsible for Al-Baath Party within the Syrian country only. Until 1966, there was one national Command for al-Baath Party, but after the 1966 coup and the overthrow of the party's founders from Syria, competing Commands centered in Syria and Iraq, and after the 1970 coup d'état al-Assad became the Secretary General of both the National and Regional Commands in Syria. (See CIA Document: Politics in Syria an intelligence Assessment , 1 May 1979.)

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Syria and communism, 1954-1966, 22 August, 1967 & CIA Document : The Ba'th party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15; 1964-1973, Research Department Memorandum The Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970, 16 August 1971.

⁽⁴⁾ CIA Document : The Ba'th party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

motivated by their sectarian fears. These minorities have always had a feeling of resentment from the Sunni monopoly of power. That is why they always looked at political issues, especially Syria's relationship with Egypt, with a sectarian view, for fear that closer relations between the two countries would lead to Sunni domination, as was the case during the Egyptian-Syrian unity 1958-1961.

Therefore, in the period from 1963-1966, al-Baath Party transformed from a party controlled by a group of seasoned politicians (Aflaq and Al-Bitar), what was known as the National Command of al-Baath Party, and whose members belonged to the Sunni majority and to the class of elite owners and merchants, to a party controlled by a group of Baathist officers (the regional command) who belong to sectarian minorities, especially the Alawite one, and to the rural class. A clash between the two groups had to take place, which is what actually happened.

With the break of 1966, a struggle for power broke out within al-Baath Party between its two wings, the national command embodied by the old moderate founders of the party, represented by Amin al-Hafiz, and the regional command of the party (neo-Baathists), represented by Salah Jadid⁽¹⁾. Each group had its

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Research Department Memorandum The Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970, 16 August 1971 & Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol XVIII, Arab –

supporters within the party and the army. This conflict took on a political, ideological and sectarian aspect, and the sectarian polarization continued between them. Amin Al-Hafiz, the Sunni, took advantage of the Sunnis' dissatisfaction with the dominance of the minority and tried to create a coherent Sunni bloc within the army to oppose the Alawites and the Druze in particular. As for Jadid, the Alawite, he used the Alawite minority to raise their fears of Sunni domination to build his own alliance⁽¹⁾.

In the end, the regional command, led by Salah Jadid, Salim Hatoum, and Hafez al-Assad, settled the conflict by orchestrating a coup on February 23, 1966, against the national command, in which they overthrew the rule of Amin al-Hafiz after a bloody battle in which dozens of people were killed⁽²⁾. This was followed by a complete purge of the army, the party and the government of about 400 officers and employees, most of whom were Sunnis. Amin al-Hafiz, Mohammed Imran, and their followers were taken to Mezzeh prison. Alawite officers replaced a large number of Sunni Baathist officers who were dismissed from the army⁽³⁾. Members of the National Command of al-Baath Party fled to Iraq; among them were

Israeli Dispute & Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Jorda Washington, February 23, 1966, Syrian Coup.

⁽¹⁾ *Nikolaos van Dam: The Struggle for Power in Syria, p. 73-75.*

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15; 1964-1973, Telegram from Damascus to foreign office , 5 March ,1966.

⁽³⁾ Adb-Allah al-Dahashmeh, Syria: The Farm of al-Assad, p 37-38.

Michel Aflaq (the founder of the party), Munif al-Barazi, and Shibli al-Aysami⁽¹⁾.

After the overthrow of Amin al-Hafiz, the regional command of the Syrian Baath Party assumed control⁽²⁾, and Nourredin Atassi⁽³⁾ was chosen as the President and Yusuf Za'ain⁽⁴⁾ as the Prime Minister. In March 1966, the new ministry was formed, and Major General Hafiz al-Assad, Commander of the Air Forces, assumed the functions and powers of the Minister of Defense in addition to his position⁽⁵⁾. Salah Jadid became the Assistant Secretary-General of the Regional Command, so that the actual civilian authority in Syria

⁽¹⁾ CIA Document :The Ba'th party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15; 1964-1973, Telegram from Damascus to foreign office , 5 March ,1966.

⁽³⁾ Nourredin Atassi is a physician who entered public life as the Minister of the Interior Affairs in the government of Salah al-Bitar in August 1963, and worked within al-Baath Party in several positions and came in the same rank with Hafiz al-Assad.(See Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15; 1964-1973, Telegram from Damascus to foreign office , 5 March ,1966.)

⁽⁴⁾ Yusuf Za'ain is a physician who entered politics through al-Baath Party. He was a member of the Parliament, then appointed the Minister of Agrarian Reform in 1963, became a member of the Presidential Council in 1964, then the Prime Minister. (See Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Telegram from Damascus to foreign office, 5 March ,1966.)

⁽⁵⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15; 1964-1973, Research Department Memorandum The Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970, 16 August 1971 & Hashim Othman: Modern Syrian History, p. 388.

was in the hands of Jadid who controls, through his position, the party's apparatus and its military wing and holds several military papers, while military power became in the hands of al-Assad, who was a political official in the party in addition to his military position; thus, al-Assad becomes the second most important figure in the rule of Syria⁽¹⁾.

From the beginning, sectarianism was the main driver of Jadid and al-Assad; this was evident in the concentration of power in their hands as Alawites and the exclusion of their partner in the coup, Salim Hatoum, who belongs to the Druze sect, from the circle of power and not granting him any important political positions, although he and his Druze followers have participated in the coup against Amin al-Hafiz. This angered him greatly and prompted him to launch a coup to overthrow Jadid on September 23, 1966, but it failed⁽²⁾. In the aftermath of this coup, large-scale liquidations were carried out in the Syrian army and al-Baath Party. This included many Druze officers, and the command of the military units that were cleared from the Druze was handed over to Alawite

⁽¹⁾ Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol XX , Arab – Israeli Dispute ,Memorandum From John W. Foster of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant (Rostow)¹, Washington, October 28, 1968, The Situation in Syria & Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, (Beirut, Dar al-Nahar for Publication, 2012) p. 356..

⁽²⁾ Syria Annual Review for 1966, 6 January ,1967 & CIA Document : The Ba'th party of Syria, 8 August 1986.

officers⁽¹⁾.As such, the Alawite sect has become effectively controlling the power and the army in Syria, one of the most important elements of authority that Jadid and al-Assad appealed to, which is relying on the Alawite sect within the army and strengthening it for fear of the control of any other sect over it, especially the Sunnis⁽²⁾.This is because whoever controls the army holds the government in Syria. The army has been the main controller of power in Syria since its independence in 1946; it ruled the country directly or in association with groups of politicians for more than half a century, it had a major role in bringing Syria into unity with Egypt in 1958 and in separating it from Egypt in 1961. Al-Baath Party became the political tool of the Syrian army in the sixties after the participation of a large number of the army's members in the party⁽³⁾. The question that poses itself now is why the dispute broke out among Jadid and al-Assad despite their belonging to the same Alawite sect, and what are the reasons that led to the struggle for power between them?

Power Struggle between Jadid and al-Assad.

The war of June 5, 1967, was the first test for al-Baath Party in Syria. Although it is the Syrian regime that instigated war, it was not ready for it. Hafiz al-Assad, the Syrian Minister of Defense and

(1) Records of Syria 1918-1973,Vol 15;1964-1973, Research Department Memorandum The Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970,16 August 1971.

(2)Ibid.

(3) CIA Document :Syria's rulers and their political environment,7December 197.

Commander of the Air Forces, told the Syrian newspaper Al-Thawra on May 20, 1967, about "the need to implement a disciplinary blow to Israel, that the time has come to wage the battle for the liberation of Palestine, and that the armed forces have become ready and willing, not only to respond to aggression, but to initiate the liberation process and blow up the Zionist presence in the Arab world⁽¹⁾. Despite al-Assad's statements, he did not expect Israel to launch war against Syria because the former knew that the latter did not pose a threat to it at that time. Therefore, he kept the Golan front, before the June 1967 war, without any actual military preparations, supported the Palestinians with some weapons and provision training camps, and made room for military operations against Israel whenever the situation was appropriate. Salah Jadid and those with him believed that popular war is sufficient to convince the Israelis to leave and that in the absence of open war and two armies against one another, commando's actions remained a means to continue the struggle. On the contrary, Israel took advantage of Syria's inability to wage a conventional war and launched a wide confrontation war that it knows, for sure, it will win with its sweeping superiority⁽²⁾.

This was indeed the case on the morning of June 5, 1967; Israel destroyed the Egyptian Air Forces and shortly thereafter struck the

⁽¹⁾ Adb-Allah al-Dahashmeh, Syria: The Farm of Al-Assad, p.48.

⁽²⁾ Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, 357.

Syrian one. Throughout the first four days of the war, Syria's position was negative, as it contented itself with only bombing settlements on the borders. The truth is that the size, extent and speed of the war surprised the Syrian leaders. Al-Assad and his colleagues were not prepared for the Israeli thunderbolt attack; they did not imagine Israel's strength, and the Syrian forces were trained only on defense does not attack⁽¹⁾. On June 9, 1967, Israel focused its efforts on the Syrian front, using all kinds of weapons,

aviation, artillery, and tanks⁽²⁾. Although it is a very fortified front, the Syrian government preferred to withdraw and did not involve basic forces, such as the first or third divisions that were dedicated to guard the regime, in the battle. Rather, a reserve brigade participated in the war, as did the fifth and ninth divisions, which were originally facing the enemy. On June 10, 1967, the defense minister Hafiz al-Assad announced the fall of Quneitra in the hands of Israel, before the Israeli forces actually reached it. The people of Quneitra and the Golan fled to Damascus, and the government left Damascus for Homs in anticipation of its fall⁽³⁾, and thus Israel occupied the Golan.

⁽¹⁾ Adb-Allah al-Dahashmeh, Syria: The Farm of al-Assad, p. 87.

⁽²⁾ Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol XIX , Arab – Israeli Crisis and war 1967, Message From Premier Kosygin to President Johnson ,Moscow, June 10, 1967, Dear President Johnson,

⁽³⁾ Adb-Allah al-Dahashmeh, Syria: The Farm of al-Assad, p.48.

The setback of June 1967 represented a catastrophe for Syria at popular and political levels. Its effects extended for a long period of time, and the Syrian people held the Baathist regime responsible for the war and the loss of the Golan⁽¹⁾. They kept asking, however their political orientations are, about the reasons for the defeat of the Syrian army, which led to the fall of the Syrian front in the hands of the Israeli enemy, despite the strong fortifications in the region, which cost the Syrian army more than 300 million Syrian pounds over a period of more than 17 years.

The Syrian people leveled accusations of high treason against the regime's leadership and of negligence against some officers on the front, especially after the Syrians listened to many statements by international military authorities regarding the immunity of the Syrian front and its strategic location, and that it cannot easily fall except in the face of a very large military force that exceeds Israel's resources. The people accused Salah Jadid and his comrades of collaborating with America and seizing the opportunity of June 5 to implement the surrender of the Syrian army quickly and without a fight to the Israeli enemy in exchange for economic aid. Despite the ugliness of the accusations that reached the ears of the Syrian authorities, they were unable to provide any convincing

⁽¹⁾ Henry Larence: *The Great Game: The Arab Orient and International Ambitions* (Libya, Dar al-Jamahireyah for Publication, 1993) p. 339.

justifications for their negligence or weakness, let alone dismiss the charge of treason⁽¹⁾

This defeat has also cast shadows over the ruling regime, leading to a deep rift in the ranks of its military and civil leaders, which soon turned into a power struggle between the civil leadership, behind which Salah Jadid stands, and the military leadership represented by Hafiz al-Assad and his comrades⁽²⁾. Thus, an exchange of accusations began between the political and military commands about determining who was responsible for the defeat, which turned into a disagreement over essential matters and the political line of the party. Al-Assad accused the political leadership of destroying the army through the continuous purges that deprived it of its best officers, technicians and engineers. As for the political leadership, it accused the army of waging war with outdated methods as well as lacking necessary equipment, weapons, and technical and field readiness, despite the large budget and the number of brigades.

The army leadership considered these accusations as a pretext for the necessity of armament at a level with which the army can defend Syria. Al-Assad demanded that defense expenditures be the

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Telegram from British Embassy, Beirut, 12 March, 1967.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office, Diplomatic report, NO502/70, Syria Annual review for 1969. See "Damascus Announces the Party's Invitation", al-Ahram, 22/10/1970, p.6.

highest priority in the state budget, at the expense of economic development projects, and that the political leadership should stop interfering in military affairs. He also called for keeping the exclusive responsibility of confronting Israel on the Syrian army, that the armed Baath organizations outside the official security force be subject to the supervision of the army and limiting the freedom of commando action because Israel used it as a pretext to attack Syria.

On the level of foreign policy with the Arab countries, al-Assad believed that the Syrian policy towards them must change radically, so that Syria's policy becomes one of building a unified leadership that includes Jordan, Iraq and the Palestinian resistance, in full coordination with the Egyptian front, regardless of who rules in these countries as long as the common enemy of all the Arabs is Israel, on the grounds that no voice is louder than the sound of battle⁽¹⁾. He also demanded the necessity of cooperation with Iraq, especially after al-Baath Party took control of the government in the wake of the July 17, 1968, coup. However, the view of Salah Jadid and his companions was different concerning al-Baath regime in Iraq, because the Iraqi Baath was loyal to the national leadership that was expelled from Syria in February 1966. Aflaq and the former Syrian president, Amin al-Hafiz, moved to Baghdad, which convinced Salah Jadid and his companions that the new Iraqi

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15;1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2December 1970.

regime would seek to conspire against them. Therefore, they were angry at al-Assad's proposals to address the differences with Aflaq and protested against him because his logic brings Syria back to before February 23, 1966, and denies the foundations of the neo-Baath⁽¹⁾.

The dispute extended over the nature of the party, its organization, its role in the country, its relations with Arab countries, and the stance concerning the Palestinian resistance as opposed to reform inside Syria. Al-Assad was urging the leaders of al-Baath Party to open up to other political forces on a progressive front in order to expand the popular base of the regime and fortify the home front, while a Jadid's regime rejected the initiatives of the progressive movements in Syria to cooperate after the 1967 war and did not invest the popular anger to mobilize the country's energies in the face of the most important danger, but rather kept the security system and the state of emergency⁽²⁾.

The political leadership represented by Salah Jadid and his comrades responded to the demands of the military leadership one after the other and emphasized that the army's demand to increase the armaments budget at the expense of economic projects is a flimsy view because Syria cannot be militarily strong without

⁽¹⁾Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p. 364.

⁽²⁾Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p. 362.

developing its economy⁽¹⁾. As for the issue of military organizations outside the official forces, the political leadership has insisted that these are necessary to wage a popular liberation war in the light of the serious imbalance of power between Syria and Israel, and that it believes in the capabilities of the Palestinian resistance movements to unleash their freedom of action and complete the foundation of the "Thunderbolt" organization affiliated with al-Baath Party as well as in the support of the Palestinian "Fatah" movement.

Regarding the issue of the army's independence from the political leadership, Salah Jadid and those with him believed that the party's civilian authority over the army must continue to ensure the pure subordination of the army, especially because experience has revealed the ease of penetrating the army by parties inside Syria and by other Arab countries and the involvement of the military in all coups that occurred in Syria since 1949.

Concerning Arab politics, Salah Jadid saw that it is not possible to cooperate with reactionary Arab countries such as Jordan, but that revolutionary movements and class struggle in those countries must be supported. Likewise, according to them, it is not possible to cooperate closely with Abdel Nasser's regime in Egypt, because it accepted a peaceful solution when it approved the Security Council Resolution no 242. As such, there was a clear contradiction in the

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15;1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2December 1970

policies and directions between the civilian and the military commands of the party⁽¹⁾.

Soon, the dispute between the two commands shifted to the national and regional party conferences that were held in September and October 1967⁽²⁾, especially with the Syrian government exposed to an increasing Soviet pressure to modify its extremist position regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict and the advent of the reformist Baath regime in Iraq. This constituted a threat to the Syrian regime, in addition to the fact that Egypt and the Arab public opinion, in general, were pressing for a greater military coordination between Jordan, Iraq and Syria on the eastern front facing Israel, which raised additional ideological problems⁽³⁾.

In the light of these international pressures, al-Assad launched a direct attack within the party's meetings on the Prime Minister Yusuf Za'ain; he severely criticized him and accused him of being an agent of the Soviet Union. He also criticized the deliberate infiltration of the Communists into key positions and the complete dependence on the Soviet Union for economic aid, which made Syria subject to the Soviet policy that seeks to find a political solution to the problem of Palestine and that the Soviet aid must be

⁽¹⁾ Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p. 360-361.

⁽²⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedine, The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000, p. 417.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Volume 15; 1964-1973, Memorandum, Syrian internal affairs.

rejected. Al-Assad, in addition, called for suspending economic development in favor of military expansion and to prepare for a military solution to the Palestinian issue. On the contrary, the Syrian Prime Minister rejected al-Assad's views, emphasizing that the economic and technological development, which directly resulted from the Soviet aid, was indispensable for the full mobilization of military forces and preparation for military action on the Syrian front. He also clarified that he is against cooperating with Jordan and Iraq, on the external level, and with the progressive nationalist elements, on the internal one, and stated that he endorses the cooperation between al-Baath Party and leftist elements⁽¹⁾.

In the end, Salah Jadid's movement won with an overwhelming majority during the conference; the decisions of the conference came in complete agreement with their direction, and the political leadership rejected al-Assad's strategic proposals that aim to end the isolation of Syria and its regime at home and abroad and to strengthen its army⁽²⁾. Al-Assad did not accept the results of the two-party congresses and refused to attend other meetings. He decided to tighten his control over the armed forces by separating the party's military apparatus from its civilian leadership. He prevented members of the regional leadership or civilian party

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15;1964-1973,Syrian internal affairs , 18October,1968.

⁽²⁾ Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p.346.

officials from visiting the party's military organization or making direct contact with the party's military sector. It also prohibited the officers from establishing any contact with civilians⁽¹⁾. Al-Assad also proceeded to remove Jadid's men from influential positions; he dismissed Ahmed Swaidani, chief of staff, and appointed Mustafa Tlass in his place. He justified this by claiming that Swaidani's performance in the Golan War was not up to the level of responsibility, and this was followed by a direct blow towards Salah Jadid by removing his relative and trusted man, Ilham Izzat Jadid, from the command of the 70th Armored Brigade, the strongest one in Syria⁽²⁾. Likewise, al-Assad dismissed Ahmed al-Mir, who led the Golan Front, from the army. The political leadership responded by selecting al-Mir to be a member of the Regional Command because he was a founding member of the Military Committee, but al-Assad succeeded in removing him from the scene by appointing him to the Syrian embassy in Madrid⁽³⁾.

However, despite al-Assad's efforts to spread his influence within the armed forces, he did not reach the point where he could

⁽¹⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedine, *The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000*, p. 418.

⁽²⁾ *Records of Syria 1918-1973*, Vol 15; 1964-1973, „Memorandum, Syrian internal affairs

See Kamal al-Dib: *Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011*, p. 365.

⁽³⁾ Kamal al-Dib: *Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011*, p. 365.

challenge Jadid or think of his removal⁽¹⁾. Although al-Assad's popularity in the army may be stronger, it seems that the army was not ready to support either of them in a coup against the other⁽²⁾. In addition, the interests of the army have become linked to those of the regime, and the army itself is divided between Jadid and al-Assad camps⁽³⁾. In addition, Salah Jadid remained the first man of the system and the one with the upper hand in the party and the state, as well as in the security services, through his man, Abd al-Karim al-Jindi, whom he had previously appointed to be in charge of the National Security Office in the party in September 1967. With this appointment, Jadid's regime began its transformation into a police state par excellence; Abd al-Karim expanded the state's security apparatus and employed an army of informants and agents who monitored whatever happened in Syria, and al-Jindi became an important pillar of the political leadership in Syria⁽⁴⁾.

In the face of the popular pressure as well as the critical situation of the regime internally and externally due to the repercussions of the defeat of June 1967, Salah Jadid tried to

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Syrian internal affairs, 18 October, 1968.

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2 December 1970.

⁽⁴⁾ Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p.365.

contain the dispute with Hafiz al-Assad and accommodate his growing power⁽¹⁾. He agreed on dismissing Prime Minister Yusuf Za'ain and the Foreign Minister Ibrahim Makhous, while retaining their positions in the regional command on October 29, 1968. This was considered as a new victory for al-Assad in front of Salah Jadid, because Za'ain was one of Jadid's supporters, and he announced the formation of a new government headed by Nourredin Atassi⁽²⁾, in addition to appointing three deputies to the Minister of Defense, all of whom are among al-Assad's men. At the same time, the communist representation in the government was strengthened. Perhaps this does not fully correspond with al-Assad as the new strongman bent on an early second round with Israel and considered as the anti-communist and anti-Soviet leader. However, in general, the formation of the new government in this way is proof of a partial concession again in favor of al-Assad and a compromise to the dispute between them, in which al-Assad gained two main concessions. First, on the personal level, Zwain, his personal enemy, was removed, and second, the appointment of a man loyal to al-Assad in the Ministry of Interior and a commander of the People's Army have given al- Assad an opportunity to control all forms of military and paramilitary organizations, which will be of

(1) Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Syrian internal affairs, 18 October, 1968.

(2) Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XIX, Arab – Israeli Crisis and war 1967, Message From Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Dear President Johnson, Moscow, June 10, 1967.

great importance in the near future. In addition, the appointment of three deputies who were loyal to him in the Ministry of Defense gave evidence of the supremacy of his policy regarding Palestine⁽¹⁾.

In contrast, al-Assad had to give up his main demands related to the relations with the Soviet Union and Iraq⁽²⁾. Thus, he accepted a kind of communist representation in the government, especially in the ministries concerned with disbursing the Soviet economic aid, given Syria's dependence on it⁽³⁾. The political leadership retained the position of the head of the government, which was assumed by the President of the Republic, Nourredin Atassi, who is loyal to Salah Jadid in the party, and non-Baathist personalities close to the Syrian left and trade unions were granted six ministerial portfolios in the new government⁽⁴⁾.

Despite this concession by Jadid to al-Assad, the former remained the strongest because of his great ability to maneuver to reach a temporary settlement with the latter, besides the common interests between Jadid and al-Assad despite the fundamental

Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Memorandum, Syrian internal affairs.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Telegram from British Embassy, Beirut, Syria 2 December 1968.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Memorandum, Syrian internal affairs.

⁽⁴⁾ Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p. 366.

differences between the two men over the issue of Palestine and the relations with Iraq. While Jadid finds that the close cooperation with Iraq will bring him serious political harassment, al-Assad sees it as an opportunity to establish a strong military front against Israel⁽¹⁾. However, both sides were not satisfied with that settlement, and they began preparing for another round of power struggle. Jadid tried to neutralize the supporters of al- Assad in the party organization, while the latter intended to strengthen his faction in the army at their expense and used that to interfere in the party's affairs⁽²⁾.

Both parties were sure of the importance of military force in resolving the conflict for their favour; thus, they both resorted to strengthening their influence militarily. The political leadership tried in the beginning of 1969 to use the (Popular Army) to fight al-Assad, and Jadid's supporters tried in February 1969 to remove the supporters of al-Assad from the party's branch in Lattakia, imposed its control over the public buildings in Aleppo, and deployed members of the People's Army there, but al-Assad quickly thwarted that attempt⁽³⁾. He issued orders to arrest the Secretary of the

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Memorandum, Syrian internal affairs.

⁽²⁾ Raymond Hinnebusch: The Formation of the Totalitarian State in Ba' thist Syria, p. 227.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, Syrian regime facing serious challenge, 2 August 1969.

Alawite Baath Party branch in Lattakia, Adel Naisah, and arrested with him a number of the branch leaders who were replaced by his supporters. Then the forces loyal to him occupied the radio building in Aleppo and Damascus and the offices of al-Baath and al-Thawra newspapers, and imposed military censorship on news bulletins. These measures were like a military coup that caused the regional command to lose most of its influence⁽¹⁾. Intending to strip Jadid and his aides of any influential force, al-Assad's supporters surrounded the headquarters of Colonel Abd al-Karim al-Jindi, Jadid's strong man who was the head of National Security and head of the General Intelligence Department, and it was rumored that he committed suicide in his office, under mysterious circumstances⁽²⁾.

Thus, al-Assad and his military faction achieved a new and decisive victory over the civilian wing of the party, represented by Jadid and his associates. Major General Hafiz al-Assad, the Minister of Defense and Commander of the Air Force, became the most influential and powerful figure in the ruling Baathist regime, and the sensitive balance of power tilted in his favour. However, al-Assad was keen to reach a pragmatic compromise with his rival, and this was evident in the conference that the party's regional

⁽¹⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedine, *The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000*, p. 418.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, *The Arab world weekly*, The Arab scene , cont'd , 2 August 1969.

leadership called for in March 1969⁽¹⁾. Its decisions came out in agreement with the directions of al-Assad and the military wing of the party who called for exerting efforts to establish an eastern front with Iraq and Jordan, and the conference agreed to open the door to alliances with the progressive forces in Syria and to prepare a new interim constitution for the country⁽²⁾. The conference elected a new leadership council for al-Baath Party, consisting of 16 members, in which both sides (military and civil) retained most of their leaders; Atassi remained Secretary General, and Jadid was Assistant Secretary⁽³⁾. However, the most important development that added to al-Assad's power was the conference's decision to form a partisan political bureau composed of nine people⁽⁴⁾ from the national and regional commands of al-Baath Party, which would have the

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2 December 1970. Research Department Memorandum political and economic developments in Syria since 1967.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, Syrian regime facing serious challenge, 2 August 1969.

⁽⁴⁾ The political bureau of the party consisted of Hafiz al-Assad, Nourredin Atassi, Mustafa Tlass, Chief of Staff, the right arm of al-Assad, Muhammad Rabah al-Taweel, Minister of Interior, Habib Haddad, Haditha Murad. As for the non-Syrian members, they are Malik al-Amin, a Lebanese responsible for the media office of the National Command of the party, Mahmoud al-Maaytah, representative of Jordan, Mohammed Ammar al-Rawi, representative of Iraq.

supreme authority in Syria, and it was dominated by al- Assad and his aides, and Jadid failed to obtain a seat in it. This was followed by the adoption of an interim constitution for Syria and the formation of a new government that included, in addition to the Baathists, communists and representatives of the “Socialist Unionist Movement” and the “Arab Socialist Union.” This government expressed the trend sought by Hafiz al-Assad in expanding the popular base of the regime⁽¹⁾

The question that arises now is why al-Assad did not settle his position, seize power completely, get rid of his rivals radically, and rule Syria in 1969 alone? In fact, there are several reasons why Hafiz al-Assad was patient regarding the decision to take a military coup against his rivals in power. Perhaps the most prominent of these reasons is the inadequacy of international conditions for this coup. The continuation of tension in the Middle East and the daily fighting with Israel prevented him from isolating his colleagues in the party from power⁽²⁾, add to this the fear that the liquidation of internal disputes and the struggle for power within the Alawite sect (Jadid and al-Assad are both Alawites), who is a minority in the Syrian society, will lead to dire consequences that may lead to their overthrow from power, a military coup, and the seizure of power by

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly , Syrian regime facing serious challenge, 2 August 1969.

⁽²⁾ FCO 17 / 1587 , Syria Annual Review for Syria 1970, Memorandum by her majesty's embassy , Beirut , 8 April 1971.

another faction from the Sunni majority, and an attendant sectarian massacre or liquidation of Alawite leaders for their failure to support the Arab cause in the war⁽¹⁾. It is these fears that led the ruling regime in Syria since 1966, with its Alawite formation, to resort to resolving disputes between its members through settlement, compromises, and sharing power among them without aiming at to the most common Syrian procedure represented in coups⁽²⁾. This is the mere reason that granted the Syrian regime steadfastness in power for three years and gave Syria a kind of political stability that it had not witnessed since its independence in 1946. In addition, the ruling Alawite Baath Party's keenness on power made it control the armed forces and suppress all its political rivals until the chances of another political force capable of seizing power were extremely diminishing⁽³⁾.

Despite al-Assad's superiority over Jadid in this round of the struggle for power in Syria, Jadid and his associates in the civilian wing of the party still had cards in their hands with which to put pressure on the military wing and continue the struggle, and perhaps

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, Syrian Coup : subsequent political events and reactions to them, 5 January, 1970.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, Syria of 1970, Radicals out Now Ere in the relaxation at home closer cooperation with UAR.

even resolve the conflict in their favor in the end. Among these is their close relationship with the Soviet Union and their reliance on it to support the regime economically and militarily⁽¹⁾, as well as their control over the (Thunderbolt) division, which is a military division that was established since 1968 to become one of the largest commando divisions, which Jadid quickly placed under his auspices, as he saw the possibility of using it as a force against al-Assad. The organization gradually developed to take the shape and characteristics of a private army to be used in the ongoing struggle between the Syrian leaderships for power. Its members wore uniforms similar to those of the regular Syrian army and were strongly influenced by Marxist thought. As a result of being formed by the Syrian Baath Party, it is committed not only to the liberation of Palestine, but also to spreading revolutionary socialism across the Arab world⁽²⁾.

Despite the great political maneuvers in Damascus in 1969, there were no significant changes in the Syrian political affairs, and the regime continued as it is to consolidate its position. Only a slight change occurred in the Syrian political scene during this year,

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Syrian internal Affairs ,3 April 1969 & Developments in Syria 1970, 2 December 1970.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2 December 1970. Research Department Memorandum political and economic developments in Syria since 1967.

as the confrontation between the civil and military wings of al-Baath Party ended with an unstable compromise⁽¹⁾.

At the level of Syria's relationship with its Arab surroundings, no fundamental change occurred. Syria considered the Lebanese political system as a bourgeois and capitalist one and, thus, should be discouraged. The Syrian Thunderbolt Forces intervened in the Lebanese crisis in 1969 with the aim of overthrowing the government in Beirut. Syria closed the borders with Beirut, which represented a very serious threat to the Lebanese economy that could have been fatal had it not been for the intervention of President Abdel Nasser and the Iraqi leaders, and from time to time Syria exerted pressure on Lebanon through a partial closure of the borders, in addition to preferring the Syrian ports over the port of Beirut⁽²⁾. The regime also maintained its tense relationship with Jordan. Since the 1967 war, the Syrian regime has been waging a sharp war of nerves against Jordan. The campaign calmed down after the war, but the Jordanian regime rarely received any praise from the Syrian media⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2 December 1970. Research Department Memorandum political and economic developments in Syria since 1967.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, The Arab scene, cont'd, 2 August 1969.

As for Iraq, the biggest challenge facing the Syrian regime came from the rival Baath Party that ruled Baghdad. In March 1969, the media campaign against Iraq stopped due to pressure exerted by al-Assad⁽¹⁾. A joint defense agreement was concluded between Syria and Iraq, confirming the already existing military arrangements between both countries as part of the eastern front with Jordan and stipulating the deployment of Iraqi forces on the ground⁽²⁾. About 6000 Iraqi soldiers were stationed at the headquarters of the Eastern Command in As-Suwayda, southern Syria. Efforts began to reunite the two factions of al-Baath Party, after which the Iraqi Foreign Minister, Abd al-Karim al-Sheikhali, visited Damascus and met with Lieutenant General al-Assad. Shafiq al-Kamali, the Iraqi Minister of Youth and a member of the leadership of the Iraqi Baath Party, visited Damascus three times and met with Atassi and other Syrian leaders. These efforts aimed at reunifying the party and the establishment of a comprehensive Arab leadership for the party to cover the entire Arab world, but suddenly the partisan contacts among the two sides stopped due to the dispute over the reunification of the party. The old national command of the party considers that the coup that took place against it in Syria in 1966 is illegitimate, and that in order to reunite the party, the Baathists of Damascus must recognize the authority of the old

⁽¹⁾ Ibid.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

national command headed by the founder of the party, Michel Aflaq, who represents the legal authority of the party, a principle that the Baathists in Damascus objected to, considering their refusal to submit to the Baathists in Iraq. This led to the failure of communications to reunite the party, and soon the Baathist leadership in Syria severely attacked the Syrian political exiles in Baghdad, claiming that they plotted against the regime abroad⁽¹⁾, and launched a strong press campaign against the Iraqi regime in mid-February 1969 that maintained its momentum intermittently throughout the year⁽²⁾. As such, the joint defense agreement concluded between The two countries proved to be lacking due importance to the relations between the two countries; the rift widened between the two wings of al-Baath Party in Syria and Iraq during the years 1969 and 1970, and there were no signs of convergence between them⁽³⁾.

As for Syria's relationship with Israel, the escalation along the Syrian-Israeli border in early 1967 was the main reason for the outbreak of the June 1967 war; the war added a heavy burden to Syria as it lost the strategic Golan Heights. Unlike Egypt, Jordan

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly ,The Arab scene , cont'd , 2 August 1969.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world , Syria from 1967.

and Lebanon, Syria refused a peaceful settlement in principle, insisting that the war of popular liberation was the only way to recover the occupied lands and restore Palestine itself⁽¹⁾. Syria became the most stringent Arab country in the confrontation with Israel, although this was only limited to words and not translated into action. Syria refused to attend the Arab summit conference in Khartoum in August 1967, but it adhered to the decision reached by it, "no recognition, no negotiation, no peace", and it did not accept the UN Resolution no 242⁽²⁾. Throughout 1969, Syria maintained its role as the most intransigent Arab country in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and about 5,000 Syrian soldiers continued to be stationed in Jordan, without taking any hostile action against Israel.

In December 1969, Syria withdrew from the Arab Rabat Summit, two days later, in protest at the hesitation of other countries to liberate Palestine, at a time when actual operations between Syria and Israeli forces remained relatively rare⁽³⁾.

Thus, Syria's relationship with the external world was mainly limited to the countries of the Eastern Bloc and the Arab countries. Syria did not have any noteworthy relations with Western countries,

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, The Arab scene, cont'd, 2 August 1969.

87 Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world, Syria from 1967.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

and it did not resume its diplomatic relations with Britain, unlike Egypt and Iraq that resumed theirs with it. Syria's relations remained severed with the United States and West Germany, while Syria joined with other Arab countries to recognize East Germany, and this step came within the framework of improving relations with Moscow⁽¹⁾.

Thus, it can be said that, in general, since the Arab-Israeli war in 1967, interesting political and economic developments took place in Syria. An unstable balance of power arose between the political leaders, which allowed al-Baath Party to remain in power⁽²⁾.

Looking at the political structure, it seemed that there was no alternative to al-Baath Party, which, over the years, suppressed all other political groups except the Syrian Communist Party; when the current Baathists seized power, they sought to establish close relations with the Soviet Union, so they eased the restrictions imposed on the Communist Party, and the party became represented in the Syrian Council of Ministers. As for other political groups, they were not as fortunate as the Communist Party.

Thus, it seems clear that only division from within can bring the regime down and that the only external threat to the regime comes

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2 December, 1970, Research Department Memorandum political and economic developments in Syria since 1967.

from the Baathists in Iraq, because the alternative to the Syrian Baathism could be in al-Baath Party in Iraq⁽¹⁾.

In light of these international conditions and the internal conditions of al-Baath regime, al-Assad began preparing to engage in the last round of the struggle for power with Jadid. His goal was to strip the civilian wing of al-Baath Party of its last pressure cards, which is the support of the Soviet Union and the military forces (Thunderbolt) that it controls. As the Minister of Defense, al-Assad began to contact the Soviet Union on the pretext that Moscow refuses to supply Syria with more effective weapons and filed his military dissatisfaction with the existing Russian equipment as well as the standards and behavior of Russian trainers ⁽²⁾. Al-Assad began to put pressure on the Soviet Union by sending General Tlass to Beijing to buy weapons from China, the competent of the Soviet Union⁽³⁾.

It seemed that the pressure had succeeded. As soon as Tlass returned from China, the Soviets invited Tlass and al-Assad to visit Moscow. The visit took place on July 3, 1969, and they spent 9 days in the Soviet Union, during which a new economic and technical

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, foreign and commonwealth office Diplomatic Report, NO502/70, Syrian internal review for 1969.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Syrian internal Affairs, 3 April 1969.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Syrian internal Affairs, Calendar of events in 1969.

cooperation agreement was signed between the two countries⁽¹⁾. With this visit, al-Assad succeeded in having a direct contact with the Soviet Union and diverting himself from the ongoing struggle with Jadid over authority in Syria.

As for the Thunderbolt Forces, which are controlled by the civilian wing of the party, the golden opportunity came for al-Assad to get rid of and embarrass Jadid and his aides when the Jordan crisis of 1970 began. The traditional hostility shown by the Syrian Baath towards the Hashemite royal regime in Jordan took the form of a Syrian support for the various Palestinian organizations stationed in Jordan in their ongoing battle with the Jordanian authorities⁽²⁾. Syrian support for the *fedayeen* reached its climax when the civil war broke out in Jordan in September 1970, when the Jordanian army attacked the Palestine Liberation Organization camps around Amman in response to an alleged coup attempt against King Hussein. Salah Jadid decided to intervene militarily on the side of the Palestinian *fedayeen* against the Jordanian armed forces. Syrian Thunderbolt forces, tanks and armored vehicles were sent from Syria to northern Jordan to help the Palestinian fighters. This Syrian military intervention led to an escalation of the crisis

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1918-1973, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly ,The Arab scene , cont'd , 2August 1969.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Developments in Syria 1970, 2December, 1970, Reserch Department Memorandum political and economic developments in Syria since 1967.

internationally to the point that it almost led to a direct US military intervention in Jordan⁽¹⁾. The US Army Command moved the Sixth Fleet towards the eastern Mediterranean, and the Iraqi army placed 12,000 soldiers on the border with Jordan⁽²⁾. Salah Jadid asked the Defense Minister, Hafiz Al-Assad, to provide air cover for the Syrian forces in Jordan, but the latter refused to obey these instructions due to his refusal of the Syrian military intervention in Jordan⁽³⁾. The Syrian military forces received painful blows from the Jordanian army; they suffered heavy losses and were forced to retreat in a shameful way, so that they were withdrawn from Jordan only 48 hours after entering the valley of the rapid call-up of the Syrian forces⁽⁴⁾ to put the Syrian regime in an internationally

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, Syria of 1970, Radicals out Now Ere in the relaxation at home closer cooperation with UAR, see Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol XXIII, Arab – Israeli Dispute, 161, Editorial Note .

⁽²⁾ Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol XXIII, Arab – Israeli Dispute, 161, Editorial Note ,see Bashir Zein al-Abidine, The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000, p. 420.

⁽³⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, The Arab world , News and trends cont'd , 7 January 1971, The Arab world weekly , Syria of 1970, Radicals out Now Ere in the relaxation at home closer cooperation with UAR.

⁽⁴⁾ FCO 17 / 1589, Annual Review for Syria 1970, Menorandum by her Majesty's Embassy , Beirut, 8 April 1970, see Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol XXIV, Middle East region and Arabian peninsula 1969-1972, Jordan september 1970 Transcript of a Telephone Conversation Between the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger) and the

embarrassing position, especially because the regime did not consult with any other Arab country in this regard, which angered the Arab countries, led by President Gamal Abdel Nasser⁽¹⁾.

Hafiz al-Assad's Coup on November 13, 1970.

Several factors were the main motive for Hafiz al-Assad to carry out the November 13, 1970 coup;⁽²⁾ top of these was the

Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Sisco),
Washington, September 21

⁽¹⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, The Arab world, Syria of 1970, Radicals out, relation at home, closer corporation with UAR, 14 January 1971.

⁽²⁾ Historians agreed to call Hafez al-Assad's movement a coup because it meets the commonly accepted definition of a military coup. A quick and decisive extra-legal seizure of governmental power by a relatively small but highly organized group of political or military leaders, typically by means of the unexpected arrest or assassination of the incumbent chief executive and his principal supporters within the government. For the coup to be successful, the rank and file of the police and military have to be willing to take orders from the new government leaders once the coup is accomplished, so typically the organizers of successful coups have previously recruited important military and police commanders to their cause prior to going ahead with it. Most frequently, coups are initiated and led by high-ranking military officers. They are most apt to be successful in countries where both the general population's and the government bureaucracy's ideological dedication to upholding established constitutional procedures is relatively weak and consequently there is little danger of massive civilian resistance or non-cooperation by the

change in the situation in the Middle East. The regime's dealings with the Jordanian crisis led to the isolation of Syria in the Arab world, especially with the regime's insistence on opposing the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, its refusal to accept Rogers' peace proposals in the Middle East that Abdel Nasser accepted, and the flagrant interference of the Syrian military forces in the Jordan crisis. All this led the Syrians to enter into disputes with Egypt and Jordan, and ideological differences and the failure of the eastern front led to more tension in the relations with Iraq. The damage to the oil transport lines (the tapeline) and the Syrians' refusal to allow it to be repaired led to a deterioration in relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and caused additional inconvenience to the Jordanians and the Lebanese, who were deprived of the revenues of the passage of oil through their lands. In addition to that, the bad relations with Lebanon continued, and there were no relations at all with Tunisia and Morocco⁽¹⁾. In addition to these external factors, the death of President Gamal Abdel Nasser brought the long struggle for power in Syria to an end⁽²⁾.

rank and file of soldiers and other government employees. see Edward Luttwak, *Coup d'etat: a practical handbook*, p170-173

⁽¹⁾ FCO 17 / 1589, Annual Review for Syria 1970, Memorandum by her Majesty's Embassy, Beirut, 8 April 1970.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Research department memorandum the Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970, 16 August 1971.

In addition to these international conditions, there were other internal factors, top of which was the isolation of the ruling Baath regime at the internal level and its unpopularity inside Syria. Traveling outside Syria, the constant pressure on the private sector at all levels and the economic difficulties caused by a combination of poor harvests and huge demands for the defense budget worked together to create public frustration and anxiety. Under these circumstances, the major confrontation within the ruling Baath regime was inevitable⁽¹⁾.

In light of these circumstances that surrounded the Syrian regime internally and externally, a suitable environment was formed and several direct reasons crystallized, which prompted Hafiz al-Assad to resort to a military coup to get rid of his comrades in power and assume power alone. These reasons were as follows:

- 1- His personal ambition and desire to rule Syria unilaterally.
- 2 - His dissatisfaction with the attacks launched by Salah Jadid and his comrades on the military wing of the party and the Syrian military forces.
- 3- Al-Assad's desire to break Syria's isolation regionally and internationally.
- 4 - His desire to improve the relations between Syria and Iraq after they had reached their lowest levels due to the insistence of

⁽¹⁾ FCO 17 / 1589, Annual Review for Syria 1970, Memorandum by her Majesty's Embassy , Beirut, 8 April 1970.

Salah Jadid and his comrades on their hostility to the existing Baathist regime in Iraq.

- 5- Adopting a more forceful policy against Israel⁽¹⁾.
- 6- The army's dissatisfaction with Syria's role in the eastern front.
- 7- Hafiz al-Assad's personal disputes with Salah Jadid and his associates⁽²⁾.

This is how all the reasons available for the Assad coup were formed, but he was only lacking the ideal time to carry out the coup. In fact, the repercussions of the Jordanian crisis gave him the golden opportunity to carry out his coup. This crisis cast its bleak shadow over al-Baath Party, where the differences within reached a climax, contacts between Jadid and al-Assad were absent, and each party was lying in wait for the other. In light of these conditions, the Prime Minister Nouredine Atassi resigned from his position on October 18, 1970⁽³⁾, and al-Assad asked the Central Committee of the party to stop the membership of the Thunderbolt Organization and began to close the organization's headquarters in Damascus and withdraw weapons from its members and send them to detention

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Internal political situation 1969, The Syrian Army Coup.

⁽²⁾ "Complete Silence in Damascus Regarding the developments in Syria" al-Ahram, 16/11/1970, p.1.

⁽³⁾ See "The Ba'ath Party Conference discusses the resignation of Dr. al-Atassi" al-Defa' 26/10/1970 and see also "The Intensification of Power Struggle in Damascus", Jordan: 20/10/1970, p.1.

centers in northern Syria⁽¹⁾. It was necessary to hold an emergency party conference to resolve the conflict and end the crisis. The conference actually took place from October 30 to November 12, 1970⁽²⁾, under the supervision and organization of Salah Jadid. The meetings of the conference witnessed heated discussions⁽³⁾, and the first action undertaken by the conference was to discuss the future of the "Thunderbolt" divisions, which are subject to the civil wing of the Ba'ath Party⁽⁴⁾.

The members of the conference ordered the Minister of Defense to stop making any transfers in the army during the period of the conference, but al-Assad categorically rejected this matter⁽⁵⁾. Then the political leadership launched a series of accusations against al-Assad and his colleagues, accusing him of creating a "dual power" in Syria, violating the party's system, obstructing the implementation of its decisions, arresting some of its members,

(1) "The Intensification of Power Struggle in Damascus", Jordan: 20/10/1970, p.1, and see also "Great Changes in Syria", al-Ahram, 21/10/1970, p.1.

(2) "An Exceptional Conference for the Ba'ath Party in Damascus", Jordan, 22/10/1970, p.1, see also "Damascus Announces the Party's Invitation", al-Ahram, 22/10/1970, p.1.

(3) Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab world weekly, Syria of 1970, Radicals out Now Ere in the relaxation at home closer cooperation with UAR.

(4) "Al-Atassi Did not Appear at Science Week". Al-Ahram, 25/10/1970, p.1.

(5) Patrick Seale, Asad the Struggle for the Middle East, (Beirut, al-Matbu'at Company for Distribution and Publication, 2007), p. 266.

monitoring party mail, and promoting a defeatist and reactionary line in the conflict with Israel, which constituted an unforgivable crime in al-Baath history. Al-Assad was infuriated by these accusations and responded that "it would have been better for them to refrain from empty harassment of Israel, which took advantage of this to trap our army and drag it into a battle that it did not have an ability to fight."⁽¹⁾

These accusations sparked a whirlwind of protests by Jadid's followers, and since Jadid was still controlling the majority of the party's senior cadres and leaders⁽²⁾, the conference decided to dismiss Major General al-Assad, Minister of Defense, and Major General Mustafa Tlass, Chief of Staff, from their military positions and assign them to partisan jobs⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p. 372.

⁽²⁾ Patrick Seale, *Asad the Struggle for the Middle East*, p. 266.

⁽³⁾ Mustafa Tlass was born in 1932, in the village of Rastan (Homs) to a Sunni family. He held the position of Minister of Defense between 1972 and 2003, and is considered one of the most prominent men of the era of Hafiz al-Assad. He joined al-Baath in 1947 and joined the Military College in 1952. He graduated in the Armored Corps in 1954. He participated in the 1966 coup. After that, he was appointed commander of the central region and the Fifth Armored Brigade. In 1968, he became chief of staff and deputy minister of defense. He participated in the corrective movement in 1970 and was one of the most prominent planners of the October War. See Kamal al-Dib, *Syrian War: Contemporary Syrian History 1970-2015*, p. 23.

Al-Assad had taken precaution and ordered soldiers to surround the conference hall, and a group of intelligence, air force and special forces led by Rifaat al-Assad surrounded the conference hall. In addition, his forces were stationed in strategic points in the capital, Damascus. As soon as the conference adjourned on November 12, 1970, al-Assad did not waste any moment, and on the morning of the next day, November 13, 1970, units of the army occupied the offices of the party and popular organizations and arrested a number of officers and senior politicians⁽¹⁾, the regional Assistant Secretary-General, Salah Jadid, and a number of members of the party's regional leadership and other supporters of Jadid⁽²⁾.

In this way, the military coup took place smoothly, quietly, and without bloodshed⁽³⁾. It was even described as a white coup⁽⁴⁾, as the

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,The Arab world weekly, Syria of 1970, Radicals out Now Ere in the relaxation at home closer cooperation with UAR. See Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p. 372 and “Al-Assad seized power with a steel fist” al-Dustur, 15/11/1970, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,The Arab world, Syria chronology,1970,7 January 1971. See Bashir Zein al-Abedine, The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000, p. 420 and “Al-Assad detains Al-Atassi and arrests Za'in and Jadid” al-Dustur: 14/11/1970, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,Research department memorandum the Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970 , 16 August 1971.

⁽⁴⁾ FCO 17 / 1589,Annual Review for Syria 1970,Memorandum by her Majesty's Embassy , Beirut, 8April 1970.

capital was not disturbed, and there were no signs of any tension. The border with Lebanon remained open, and there were no tanks in the streets. The only noticeable change was that the military police was guarding the buildings of the National Command of al-Baath Party, the party's subcommand, and the radio and television buildings⁽¹⁾. In addition, the official daily newspapers were not issued, and the radio and television stations remained silent about these turbulent events. For three days, the world felt that something was happening in Damascus, and it was watching and investigating the results⁽²⁾.

On November 16, the formation of a new regional leadership for al-Baath Party was announced, which immediately issued a political statement that formed the basis for the policy of the new regime. The regime promised, internally, to establish a national front led by al-Baath Party and to form the People's Assembly whose task would be to exercise legislative authority, draft a permanent constitution for the country, and promote economic development within a maximum period of three months⁽³⁾. Ahmed

⁽¹⁾ "A National Union Government in Syria", *al-Difa'*, 16/11/1970, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ "Patrick Seale, *Asad The Struggle for the Middle East*, p. 268, and "Al-Assad seized power with a steel fist" *al-Dustur*, 15/11/1970, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ The National Archives reference CAB128/47/39, *Military Coup in Syria*, November 1970 see "Al-Assad Dissolved the Party's Leadership and Formed an Interim Leadership", *al-Dustur*, 16/11/1970, p.1, "Dismissing al-Atassi from his Position", *al-Ahram*. 1/11/1970, p.1.

Al-Khatib was appointed as President of the Republic⁽¹⁾ and Hafiz Al-Assad as Prime Minister and Minister of Defense⁽²⁾. On November 20, 1970, a national coalition government was formed consisting of 26 ministers, of which 13 are Ba'athists, two ministers are representing the Socialist Union, 4 from the Socialist Unionist Movement, and

3 are independents and communists⁽³⁾. On November 23, 1970, al-Assad announced that this movement was not a coup, but rather a "corrective movement"⁽⁴⁾.

Al-Assad's main concern after the success of the coup was to strengthen his political position internally and externally. Although

⁽¹⁾ Al-Khatib was a member of the Presidency Council, which was dissolved after the coup of February 23, 1966, and then he was elected the syndicate representative of the teachers. See "Ahmed Al-Khatib Was Chosen as The New President in Syria", al-Ahram, 18/11/1970, p.1; "Ahmed Al-Khatib Was Appointed as the New President of the Syrian Country" Jordan, 19/11/1970, p.1

⁽²⁾ FCO 17 / 1589, Annual Review for Syria 1970, Menorandun by Her Majesty's Embassy, Beirut, 8 April 1970, see "The New Formation of the Government in Syria", al-Dustur, 19/11/1970. P.1.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Foreign and commonwealth office, diplomatic report No, 313/71, Syria Annual Review, 8 April, 1971. See also "The Syrian Ministry is a Transitional Government", Jordan, 22/11/1970 and "The Ministry of National Unity in Syria Began its Work", al-Difa', 22/11/1970, p.1.

⁽⁴⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedine, The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000, p. 421.

the failed policy of Jadid's faction that tarnished Syria's image internationally and weakened the status of al-Baath Party internally made al-Assad's task easier, he had to move with some caution, especially with the need to purify The administrative structure of the party of Jadid's group, which needs more time, as a sudden change in political direction on the part of Assad could endanger the coup. However, he took several quick measures internally to win the Syrian public opinion to his side and restore the popularity of al-Baath Party once again, provided that the main source of political power remains the Baathist faction affiliated with him⁽¹⁾. In general, by February 1971, some progress had already been made on the home front. The People's Assembly was formed in February 1971, and the regime began to take a number of measures aimed at liberating the internal security system to some extent⁽²⁾. General al-Assad released 260 political prisoners held under previous regimes, and martial law was eased⁽³⁾. There was also an easing of economic restrictions, the prices of foodstuffs and basic commodities were reduced by about 15%, and the support provided to Syrian families was increased. A new five-year economic plan was approved in

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,Foreign and commonwealth office, diplomatic report No,313/71, Syria Annual Review , 8April,1971.

⁽²⁾ FCO 17 / 1589,Annual Review for Syria 1970,Memorandum by her Majesty's Embassy , Beirut, 8April 1970.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,Foreign and commonwealth office, diplomatic report No,313/71, Syria Annual Review ,8April,1971, Calendar of events 1n 1970.

January 1971⁽¹⁾. This policy quickly bore its fruits on the internal level, as Syrians expressed their happiness with the new developments, and mass demonstrations took place in support of the new regime all over Syria⁽²⁾.

Regional and International Stances.

Arab Countries Stances

The Arab world watched what was happening on the Syrian political stage with great eagerness, hoping that there would be a change to Salah Jadid's regime that isolated Syria from its Arab brothers. As soon as the news spread about the military coup in Syria on November 13, 1970, and before any political change was officially announced, the Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi made a surprise visit to Syria on November 16, 1970, that is, only two days after the coup to find out the truth about what is happening in Syria. He met Hafiz al-Assad, welcoming the coup he had done⁽³⁾,

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,The Arab world weekly, Special Reports, cont'd ,Syria ,Chronology, 1970 ,7 January 1971.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,Foreign and commonwealth office, diplomatic report No,313/71, Syria Annual Review , 8April,1971, Calendar of events 1n 1970

⁽³⁾Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,The Arab World , Syria of 1970,cont'd ,7 January 1971.

and told him that he had the support of Egypt, Libya and Sudan for his movement, which created a kind of relief for al-Assad⁽¹⁾.

Egypt followed the political developments in Syria with interest and considered them positive⁽²⁾ After the official announcement of the regime change in Syria, on November 21, the Egyptian Minister of War, Muhammad Fawzi, visited Damascus to explore developments there and welcome the new regime. In December, the Lebanese Prime Minister visited Damascus. These quick visits to the new Syrian regime promised tacit recognition by the Arab countries as they wanted to break the isolation of Syria⁽³⁾

In the same line of thought, al-Assad regime in Syria has sought, since the first day of its control of power, to win international support by working to establish close and friendly relations with all Arab countries, with the aim of restoring Syria to its international position as well as launching a new era internally

⁽¹⁾Kamal al-Dib: Contemporary Syrian History from the French Mandate to the Summer of 2011, p.373. See "Gaddafi Visited Damascus and Cairo" al-Dustur : 18/11/1970, n0 1225, p.1.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, British Embassy , Moscow, 30 November 1970. Syria &

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab World , Special Reports, cont'd , Syria , Chronology , 1970 , 7 January 1971 & "National Front in Syria", al-Ahram, 22/11/1970, p.1. See "Fawzi Arrived in Damascus on a Private Visit to Syria" al-Fath, 22/11/1970, p.1; "Lieutenant General Fawzi Returned to Cairo" al-Fath, 23/11/1970; "The Ministry of National Unity in Syria Has Begun its Work", al-Difa', 22/11/1970, p.1.

and in the Arab world⁽¹⁾, and seeking to promote the idea of Arab unity. This policy of the regime, announced at the end of November, resulted in Syria's accession to the tripartite union consisting of Egypt, Sudan and Libya⁽²⁾, after al-Assad's visit to Cairo in November 1970. Soon, the Syrian relations with Libya and Sudan improved after a short visit by the Libyan President Gaddafi to Damascus and al-Assad's visit to Tripoli and then to Khartoum on December 12, 1970⁽³⁾

Relations with other Arab countries have also improved, especially with Lebanon. The Syrian government announced lifting the restrictions imposed on Syrians, and for the first time in 20 years they were allowed to travel to Lebanon without prior permission from the Ministry of Interior. This measure has pleased the Lebanese who, in turn, announced the easing of control measures at the various Syrian-Lebanese central borders to facilitate

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab World , Syria of 1970, cont'd , 7 January 1971. See "An Important Statement Broadcast by Damascus", al-Difa': 17/11/1970, p.1

⁽²⁾ FCO 17 / 1589, Annual Review for Syria 1970, Memorandum by Her Majesty's Embassy , Beirut, 8 April 1970. "Syria Joins Egypt, Sudan and Libya to Establish a Union", al-Ahram 28/11/1970, p.1. see "Syria Joined the Union and It Became a Quartet", al-Dustur, 28/11/1970, p.1; "A Quadripartite Union That Included Syria", al-Difa', 28/11/1970, p. 1.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab World , Syria of 1970, cont'd , 7 January 1971.

the movement between the two countries⁽¹⁾. At the end of December, Syria lifted restrictions on Saudi flights and transit trade that had been imposed earlier in the year due to the Tapeline case. In January 1971, it allowed the tapeline to be repaired and negotiated a new property rights agreement, which helped improve the relations with Saudi Arabia⁽²⁾. With Assad's announcement on March 8, 1972, of Syria's acceptance of Resolution 242 on the condition that it be specified that the withdrawal include all the occupied territories and that it includes the restoration of Palestinian rights, Syria was able to benefit from Saudi financial aid, which it had been previously deprived of. Relations with the rest of the Gulf states were also restored, especially after Syria stopped supporting extremist movements in the Gulf and the Sultanate of Oman⁽³⁾.

Syria also restored diplomatic relations with Tunisia and Morocco in early 1971⁽⁴⁾, while relations remained tense with Iraq, As for the *fedayeen*, the main concern of the new regime was to

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Lebanese / Syrian Relation , December 1970.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Foreign and commonwealth office, diplomatic report No, 313/71, Syria Annual Review , 8 April, 1971, Calendar of events 1n 1970.

⁽³⁾ Larence, H. (1993) The Great Game: The Arab Orient and International Ambitions, p359

⁽⁴⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, Syria 29 March 1971.

purify the Thunderbolt Division from its pro-Jadid elements⁽¹⁾. It was placed under the command of the Syrian army⁽²⁾, but in a broader context, the Syrians continued to advocate for the Palestinian cause and support the guerrilla movements⁽³⁾.

The International Stances .

The new political regime in Syria was preoccupied from the very beginning, in the field of foreign affairs almost entirely, with improving its relations with the Arab countries and Eastern Europe, but it did not take any real steps in any other direction. In particular, it did not show any interest in resuming diplomatic relations with the West⁽⁴⁾.

The Soviet Union was at the forefront of the countries that al-Assad was interested in getting its opinion concerning the coup and maintaining its support for Syria. Especially since the Soviet Union had close relations with the former Baathist regime (Salah Jadid and his associates) on all political, economic and military levels. The regime increased its military and economic dependence on it since 1967, and the regime's isolation in the Arab world led to its increasing dependence on Moscow in the Syrian affairs, until there were an estimated 1,100 Soviet advisors in Syria, the second largest

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Foreign and commonwealth office, diplomatic report No, 313/71, Syria Annual Review , 8 April, 1971.

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

⁽³⁾ Ibid.

⁽⁴⁾ Ibid.

Soviet presence in the Middle East after Egypt. The Soviet Union became the main supplier of military equipment for the Syrian armed forces, and it took Syria as a center to spread its influence in the Middle East⁽¹⁾.

After al-Assad's success in the November 1970 coup, the Soviet government feared that the Assad regime's accession to power would negatively affect the Syrian-Soviet relations, especially with its knowledge of al-Assad's policy and his strong opposition to any peace settlement with Israel and his openness to establishing international relations and not limiting his relations to Eastern Europe only⁽²⁾. This fear was reflected on the official position of the Soviet government regarding the coup. In the immediate aftermath of the coup, Pravda, the official newspaper of the Soviet regime, published on November 19 the details of the formation of the new Syrian government without an official comment from the Soviet government on it. On November 22, the Soviet Union tried to create an impression of satisfaction with the recent Syrian changes; Pravda published news of signing a protocol for scientific and technical cooperation between the Soviet Union and Syria in Damascus, as

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Research department memorandum Political and economic developments in Syria since 1967, 2 December 1970.

⁽²⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, Syria 29 March 1971.

evidence that the Soviet-Syrian relations are still strong and are at the top of the new government's interests⁽¹⁾.

At the same time, al-Assad regime sought from the very beginning to maintain Syria's good relations with the Soviet Union and to obtain Moscow's political support for its new regime. Al-Assad justified this policy by saying "The Soviets do not interfere in the internal affairs of their friends, and they respect the sovereignty and independence of each country." He also said, "Our relationship with the Soviet Union was established on the basis of mutual respect,"⁽²⁾ stressing that the Soviet Union is constantly providing Syria with support in various fields of economic and military assistance⁽³⁾. During 1970, the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe continued to have a large role in the Syrian economic and military fields⁽⁴⁾. Politicians, economists, and commercial and cultural delegations made trips between Syria, the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries⁽⁵⁾, especially East Germany and Bulgaria, and Syria began to be equipped with a modern air defense system and SAM 3 missiles. Thus, the Russian influence in Syria

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,British Embassy , Moscow,26 November 1970.Syria.

⁽²⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, Syria 29 March 1971& More details on Assad's interview with Al Nahar , 16 March ,1971.

⁽³⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, Syria 29 March 1971.

⁽⁴⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,Foreign and commonwealth office, diplomatic report No,313/71, Syria Annual Review ,8April,1971.

⁽⁵⁾ "Specialists in Cooperatives from Syria", Moscow News, 11/12/1971, p. 2.

continued to expand after the coup, and al-Assad visited Moscow in February 1971⁽¹⁾. In his press statements, he praised the precious assistance provided by the Soviets to Syria in the economic and military fields⁽²⁾.

As for the stance of al-Assad regime towards China, which is the enemy and rival of the Soviet Union, he sought to reassure Moscow concerning it and stressed in more than one press interview that Communist China has no influence whatsoever on Syria and that there are some economic relations with China and that Syria obtains weapons from China from time to time, stressing that Syria will not take sides in the Sino-Soviet conflict because it is an internal conflict⁽³⁾. The Syrian-Chinese relations reached their peak in 1964, but they have declined since then. This is partly due to China's inability to match the Soviet supplies of military equipment and advisors, and also to the resentment shown by the Soviet Union towards Syria because of its negotiations with its main rival in the communist world⁽⁴⁾.

⁽¹⁾ FCO 17 / 1589, Annual Review for Syria 1970, Memorandum by Her Majesty's Embassy, Beirut, 8 April 1970.

⁽²⁾ "Al-Assad Supports Cairo's Efforts", al-Etihad, 19/3/1971, p. 6.

⁽³⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab World, More details on Assad's interview with Al Nahar, 16 March, 1971.

⁽⁴⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, Research department memorandum Political and economic developments in Syria since 1967, 2 December 1970, Syrian Relation with the USSR and China.

Undoubtedly, al-Assad's statements and his assertion of Syria's good relationship with Moscow and its distance from China spread a kind of reassurance among the Soviet Union, which began to announce its support for the new regime. This appeared in more than one article by Russian political analysts published in Soviet official newspapers in which they analyzed the Syrian political developments, stressing that al- Assad's seizure of power came smoothly to modify the policy of the previous Syrian leadership, and they called on the new Syrian government to work on solidarity and cooperation between the progressive Arab countries and all anti-imperialism forces in the Arab world to ensure the success of reaching a political settlement to the conflict in the Middle East. On November 30, Pravda published an article in which it supported Syria's new policy and welcomed Syria's decision to join the tripartite union with Egypt, Libya and Sudan⁽¹⁾.

As for the West's stance towards the coup, the ruling Baathist regime in Syria, with its anti-imperialist policy, had severed its relations with Britain and had little relations with Western countries, and generally harmed Western interests in the Middle East⁽²⁾. Therefore, with the fall of Salah Jadid's regime in Syria, it was believed that the new one might be more moderate than its

⁽¹⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,British Embassy,Moscow,30 November 1970.Syria.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973,Research department memorandum the Ba'ath party in Syria and Iraq 1964-1970 , 16 August 1971.

predecessor and that dealing with it would be less difficult⁽¹⁾. Therefore, the British government, through its ambassador in Lebanon, followed the Syrian political developments with great interest and was hopeful that al-Assad would pursue a completely different policy from the previous one, for the party to look for Western friends as an alternative to the Soviets. However, the Western hopes were quickly disappointed in Syria, especially with the announcement of the formation of the new government and its inclusion of communist elements, followed by al-Assad's declaration of his adherence to his relationship with the Soviet Union, the regime's stricter policy towards Israel and its hostility to Britain because of its armaments policy in the Middle East. All this made the British government lose hope of any possible improvement in the Anglo-Syrian⁽²⁾ relations, especially because the new regime did not show any interest in resuming diplomatic relations with Britain. Perhaps the most important change from Britain's perspective under al-Assad is that Syria now seems more concerned with making friends than winning over enemies. It is this difference in attitudes that is hoped to push Syria at the right time towards a more realistic and moderate stance towards the Middle

⁽¹⁾ The National Archives reference CAB128/47/39, Military Coup in Syria ,November 1970.

⁽²⁾ Ibid.

East problem and to give an opportunity for some thawing in Syria's relations with the West⁽¹⁾.

As for the United States of America, its relations with Syria were severed because of its bias in favor of Israel in the Arab Israeli conflict⁽²⁾. Al-Assad has confirmed on more than one occasion Syria's stance towards the United States, stressing that the latter has no influence whatsoever in Syria and that its bias in favor of Israel is not in its interests⁽³⁾. He also stated his belief that America is able to stop Israel at the point it sees appropriate, but it has an interest in keeping it superior to the Arabs and thus keeping Israel on the land it occupied and encourages it to usurp new lands⁽⁴⁾. Therefore, the American administration did not attach much importance, at the official level, to the political changes that took place in Syria. However, it followed what was happening and made a very accurate analysis of the Syrian situation.

The US considered that the military faction's undisputed control of power in Syria is beneficial in general because it is more flexible than the civilian wing in its international relations and is ready to expand and improve its relations with other countries, relying less

⁽¹⁾ FCO 17 / 1589, Annual Review for Syria 1970, Memorandum by Her Majesty's Embassy, Beirut, 8 April 1970, Calendar of events 1n 1970.

⁽²⁾ Records of Syria 1973-1918, Vol 15; 1964-1973, The Arab World, The Arab scene, cont'd, 2 August 1969.

⁽³⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, Syria 29 March 1971.

⁽⁴⁾ "Al-Assad Supports Cairo's Efforts", al-Etihad, 19/3/1971, p. 6.

on the Soviets for external support. Added to these are the measures he took on the internal level, easing the strict restrictions on the economy and his desire to establish a new parliament and constitution, which makes him ready to seriously consider accepting Security Council Resolution 242 of November 22, 1967.

The US administration's only fear of this new regime was the extent of its ability to change Syria's policy at the international level. The US expected that this military faction would not be able to radically change Syrian politics or control power unchallenged for a long time because the military and civilian Baathists are two complementary factions to each other and that they have one goal, which is their desire to perpetuate Baathist supremacy in Syria and to keep the Alawites in control of the rule of Syria. Both Baathists and Alawites are a minority in Syria.

Therefore, the United States does not expect any significant changes in the foreign policy from the recent Syrian developments, because any conflict or disagreement between the two wings of the party may lead to a threat to the status of the party and the Alawites on equal basis. The only adjustment in the Syrian policy that might evolve is the accommodation of its stance towards other Arab states as an alternative to its former isolation.

This is the context in which al-Assad can succeed without risking losing cooperation with the civilian wing of the party, and this policy can be used as a necessary step towards seeking to fill the vacuum created by Nasser's death in the Arab region.

The American administration thought that it was too early to predict whether there would be a change in Syria's policy of supporting the *fedayeen* and opposing the Jordanian government. Although the military faction is suspicious of the Thunderbolt Division, who are the *fedayeen* of the Baathist civil wing, because of the fear of its development as a parallel force to the army, this does not necessarily mean that al-Assad opposes their action per se or that he seeks to place obstacles in the way of their movement. As for Jordan, the US administration expected that Syria would not interfere again in the future in the internal Jordanian affairs⁽¹⁾. In fact, this American analysis of the developments taking place on the Syrian political scene was correct to a large extent.

As for Israel, it followed with great interest the development of the political situation inside Syria because it directly affects the Arab-Israeli conflict⁽²⁾, especially because Israel was the first beneficiary of the turmoil in the Arab region and the prevailing division between its countries, as it took advantage of the existing conditions after the death of President Abdel Nasser, the events in Jordan and the political conflict inside Syria in order to politically

⁽¹⁾ Foreign relation of the United States, 1964-1968, Vol XXIII, Arab – Israeli Dispute, 184. Memorandum From Secretary of State Rogers to President Nixon, Washington, November 19, 1970. SUBJECT An Analysis of Latest Events in Syria.

⁽²⁾ “Israel Is Studying the New Development Militarily and Politically”, al-Ahram, 29/11/1970, p. 1.

maneuver and reject the 1967 resolutions of the United Nations and the Security Council. With the success of Hafez al-Assad in gaining power in Syria and his ability to break Syria's international isolation as well as his declaration of joining the tripartite union with Egypt, Libya and Sudan, Israel studied the new developments in the military and political domains and expressed its concern about the new union because it will support the Arab position against it, and it will have consequences for the development of the Middle East crisis in various directions⁽¹⁾. The Israeli circles in Tel Aviv declared that it must be recognized that Syria has emerged from its former isolation by joining the Cairo Agreement, and that Lieutenant General Hafiz al-Assad has succeeded in that. These have also added that the important issue facing Israel is whether the eastern front will be re-formed against it, and whether the establishment of the Quartet will support the Arab position against it⁽²⁾.

As for the stance of the new regime towards Israel, al-Assad regime maintained its official point of view insisting on rejecting a peaceful settlement with it and declaring that the regime's main goal is to liberate the occupied lands and improve the combat capability

⁽¹⁾Ibid.

⁽²⁾“Gaddafi Announces Other Near Unitary Steps”, al-Dustur, 29/11/1970, p. 1.

of the Syrian army⁽¹⁾. He also announced his support for the establishment of a joint military command with Egypt against Israel. These statements increased Israel's concerns about the new Syrian regime, and Tel Aviv announced that it was looking seriously at his talk about military unity between Cairo and Damascus⁽²⁾.

Hafiz al-Assad as a President.

Al-Assad's success in the November 13, 1970, coup was culminated by his election as President of Syria in March 1971⁽³⁾, to begin a new era in the modern history of Syria, in which al-Assad was able to end the era of military coups in Syria and consolidate his grip on power for three consecutive decades, during which no one contested him.

The personality of Hafiz al-Assad strongly influenced Syrian decision-making, policymaking, and the continuation of his rule. He was strong in character, intelligent, energetic, extremely cautious and sensitive, preferring to take gradual steps rather than dramatic

⁽¹⁾ FCO 17 / 1588, Political Situation in Syria 1971, Syria 29 March 1971, see "Al-Assad Calls for Unifying the Arab Efforts to Resist the Israeli Agression", Jordan, 17/3/1971, p. 1; "Al-Assad", Jordan, 5/3/197, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ "Al-Assad Supports Cairo's Efforts", al-Etihad, 19/3/1971, p. 6,

⁽³⁾ "Hafiz al-Assad Officially Assumes the Presidency of the Syrian Republic", al-Etihad, 16/3/1971, p. 1, "Al-Assad's Nomination for the Presidency", Jordan, 2/3/1971, p. 1.

initiatives. He was very patient⁽¹⁾ and able to learn from mistakes, committed to the Arab cause and preoccupied with the balance of power strategically and militarily in the conflict with Israel. He wanted to be seen as an Arab nationalist leader fit to be an alternative to Gamal Abdel Nasser. Al-Assad was more realistic and practical than ideological. He was cautious in his dealings with his rivals and was always ready to use any means to achieve his goals. He was little influenced by the Western system, showed little interest in political liberalization, and had a keen interest in international relations.

He has turned into a statesman with a status broader than just a local one and has transformed Syria from a country dependent on powerful states into a reliable player in the regional power game in the region⁽²⁾.

Al-Assad established an authoritarian military regime with a weak civilian contribution and political parties that do not have a mature political theory, in the face of a military institution that constitutes the effective balancing element in local administration and security and exerts great influence on the civilian government apparatus⁽³⁾.

⁽¹⁾ CIA Document: Politics in Syria an intelligence Assessment , 1 May 1979.

⁽²⁾Raymond Hinnebusch: The Formation of the Totalitarian State in Ba'thist Syria, p. 238.

⁽³⁾ Bashir Zein al-Abedine, The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000, p. 421.

Al-Assad's control was based on several rules. Among the regime's elite, he enjoys a distinguished popular position and the ability to combine cruelty with conciliatory realism. He controls the three largest institutions of government⁽¹⁾; he leads the party as its general secretary, he is the president of the country, and the supreme commander of the army. He maintained his strength through his alliance with senior army officers from the Sunni community and politicians in the party such as Abdel Halim Khaddam, Hikmat al-Shihabi, Naji Jamil and Mustafa al-Talas. He deliberately included prominent Damascene members in the upper ranks of the party and many of those who did not belong to the party were also included in the government, and he finally created a

⁽¹⁾ The formal government structure in Syria consists of the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the Council of Ministers. The relative strength of these positions differed under the different regimes. From 1966 to 1970, power was exercised by a group of senior military and civilian Baathists, and no one controlled all aspects of power. Al-Assad was one of the members of this ruling group. Since al-Assad has assumed the presidency in March 1971, he became president of the republic and of the party, and he monopolized the rule after he made sure of his firm control over the country by placing the officers loyal to him at the head of the main military and security units, reorganizing the party, and appointing his supporters to the main governmental and party positions. (See CIA Document: Syria's rulers and their political environment, 7 December 1973)

network of Alawite personalities to control the police and army apparatus⁽¹⁾.

This includes a number of special guard teams and intelligence services, which directly controlled the centers of power, which made it difficult for him to have a competitor among the elite surrounding him, which had a distinct share in the survival of the regime. The elite formed a solid shield against coups or revolutions, and al-Assad made the phenomenon of corruption a principle to link all elements of the elite to him and give them a share in the system⁽²⁾. Al-Assad himself makes all the important decisions, especially in defense and foreign affairs

For example, he oversees all officer promotions, appointments, training, and travel, as he has developed an intricate system of checks and balances to tighten his grip on power and did not allow any of his subordinates to wield undue power. He also used them against each other to ensure their ultimate loyalty to him. Al-

⁽¹⁾ Al-Assad appointed Alawites to key leadership positions in the army's armored brigades, air defense command, commandos and paratroopers, and appointed others to positions to monitor the military intelligence services and the diplomatic service. Most of these are fiercely loyal to al-Assad and his sect because they fear the consequences of sectarian violence if he is overthrown. (See CIA Document: Politics in Syria an intelligence Assessment, 1 May 1979)

⁽²⁾ Raymond Hinnebusch: *The Formation of the Totalitarian State in Ba'thist Syria*, p. 239 & Patrick Seale, *Asad The Struggle for the Middle East*, p. 287.

Assad's main companions are the Alawite commanders of the Syrian army and intelligence services. The ruling Baath Party in Syria, which dominates the National Progressive Front coalition, has only a symbolic role in Syrian decision-making⁽¹⁾. Through this authoritarian regime, al-Assad was able to control all aspects of government in Syria and withstand all political changes, internally and externally, for 30 years⁽²⁾.

In general, al-Assad's reign was divided into three phases, each of which took nearly a decade.

In the first decade, the October 1973 war was the most prominent event, followed by economic and social achievements.

As for the second decade, it witnessed a complex series of events including the confrontation with Israel in Lebanon (1981-1984), the war against the Muslim Brotherhood (1980-1982), the Rifaat al-Assad crisis (1983-1984), and the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1987).

⁽¹⁾ CIA Document: Politics in Syria an intelligence Assessment , 1 May 1979.

⁽²⁾ Hafiz Al-Assad was elected as President of the Republic four times. He was elected in February 1978 for a second presidential term, in February 1985 for a third , in February 1992 for a fourth , and in February 1999 for a fifth one. In all of these elections, Hafiz al-Assad was the only candidate, and he got more than 99 percent. (See Bashir Zein al-Abedine, The Army and Politics in Syria 1918-2000, p. 429.)

One of the results of the challenges of the eighties was the rise of the role of the security services in the Syrian state and the shift towards the repressive regime.

As for the last stage in his reign (1990-2000), it was a station of transformations and options for Syria after the fall of the Soviet Union and the second Gulf War, launching peace talks in the Middle East and an attempt to return from the command economy and authoritarian climate, towards liberation and launching individual initiatives⁽¹⁾.

Conclusion

Al-Baath Party ruled Syria from 1963 until now, and its rule passed through three different phases. The first phase lasts from 1963-1966, a phase in which the party's rule was characterized by wisdom in decision-making, when the party's founding Baathist leaders allowed the participation of other national forces of socialists, Nasserist's, and communists in the government and tried to slowly implement the socialist transformation in Syria to maintain political, economic, and social stability . This stage ended with a coup by Jadid, Assad and Imran, who overthrew the f party founders Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Bitar and Amin Hafez, the Sunni president of the republic.

As for the second phase of the Baath's rule in Syria, it extended from 1966-1970, during when the neo-Baathists took control of the

⁽¹⁾See Kamal al-Dib, *Syrian War: Contemporary Syrian History 1970-2015*, p. 49.

Ba'ath Party and ruled Syria. This was characterized by a sharp struggle for power between the civil wing of the party led by Salah Jadid and his companions and the military wing of the party led by Hafiz al-Assad and his companions. All economic, political and military means were used to serve this conflict between al-Assad, who sees the need to change the party's foreign policy, openness to all Arab countries, find alternatives to the Soviet Union in order to obtain economic aid, and break the party's internal isolation by establishing a national front that includes all other political forces, on one hand, and Salah Jadid and his comrades, on the other, who saw the necessity of not cooperating with the reactionary Arab countries and to cooperate only with the progressive ones, and that guerrilla action is the only way to confront Israel in light of the imbalance of military forces between the two countries.

They also saw that the Soviet Union and the countries of Eastern Europe are the only countries that can cooperate with them internationally because they are not colonial countries. As for the internal realm, it is not possible to cooperate except with the Communist Party only, and the interest of Syria came at the end of their concerns, as its status declined in the Arab and international arenas, and it became isolated at all levels. This stage ended with the Assad coup, which is the last military coup in Syria.

The third phase of al-Baath rule extends from 1970 until now; Syria under the rule of al-Assad witnessed, for the first time in its modern history, a kind of political stability. However, in general, it did not differ much from other eras that preceded it, even if al-

Assad has marginalized the role of al-Baath Party, and it became the sole control over power, the party, and the army. He eliminated the opposition forces inside Syria, especially the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood, who represented the greatest threat to it, and it has deprived the Syrian people of practicing any kind of political and democratic freedom and expression of opinion. He marginalized the role of civil institutions, unleashed corruption, and increased reliance on the military and intelligence establishment to suppress freedoms and ensure control over the government as long as possible. As soon as his reign ended, the reign of Bashar al-Assad (2000 to the present) began, his son and successor in the rule of Syria, whose reign did not differ much from that of his father.

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