Lessons From the Interior: Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Syria

Ethan Corbin

The role of Islam in Syria today is changing and a key instrument behind this change is the President Bashar al-Asad. Hama, Halab, and Homs, the traditional centers of conservative Islam in Syria, are no longer the only arenas for outward civil expression of adherence to the tenets of Islam. Syrian Islamic revival is evident from the city centers of Damascus to Aleppo and from the plains of Al-Hasaka into the mountains of the Jabal ad Druze. Increased sensitivity to the state of the global *umma,*[1] often referred to as re-Islamization, is taking hold large and crosscutting swathes of the Middle East.[2] Re-Islamization is particularly prominent among the large numbers of economically and politically frustrated Arab youths increasingly concentrated in urban centers throughout the region. This fact can be troubling when taken in tandem with regional demographic pressures, from which virtually no Arab state is spared. It is not uncommon in the region for over fifty percent of a state's population to be below the age of twenty.[3] Syria is no exception to these increasingly interconnected trends. What is exceptional about Syria is the fact that the changes are happening under the watchful eyes of the powerful and ardently secular members of the Syrian Ba'th party who have a long history of showing very little tolerance for any forms of expressions of Islam on a grand scale.

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In many ways, however, the Syrian Ba'th party, long the bulwark of regional secularism and champion of the near obsolete notion of pan-Arabism, is beginning to show distinct signs of change under the rule of President Bashar al-Asad. The son of the former dictator Hafiz al-Asad, who ruled Syria with an iron fist from 1970 to 2000, is proving to be a more skilled statesman than many would like to think.[4] President al-Asad's incorporation of a brand of state-sponsored Islam is part of a concerted counter-insurgency effort that is changing the character of Ba'thist Syria and reaffirming the al-Asad family's grip on power.

In the decades following the 1963 Ba'th party coup and the subsequent Corrective Movement of Hafiz al-Asad in 1970, designed to erase the Arab shame of the defeat in the Six Day War by seeking strategic parity with Israel through a massive arms build-up, Damascus tended to have an approach to Islam that bordered on apathetic. The secular Ba'th ruled the day, often citing the adherence to Islam and its inability to embrace modern science and technology as the reason behind the Arabs' lack of success in the war.[5] The embrace of Islam shifted to more of a nod to cultural heritage than societal piety. Nonetheless, fear certainly factored into public expressions of Islam following the brutal crackdown in Hama of the 1976 to 1982 Muslim Brotherhood-led Islamist insurgency that left anywhere from 5,000 to 10,000 dead at the hands of government forces.[6] Today, the streets of Damascus are replete with examples of these changes in the heretofore,

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relatively secular city. The number of restaurants withdrawing alcohol from their offerings is on the rise. Women are increasingly wearing headscarves from the *souks* in the heart of the *medina* to the bourgeois neighborhoods. Previously nonexistent traffic jams are a common affair during the Friday call to prayer.[7] These phenomena in even the most secular and hard-line of states in the Middle East lead many to question not only the stability, but the longevity of the ruling Ba'th party as well.

> **Syria is now the state of Bashar and the manipulation of Islam is one of many tactics in the strategy of regime survival**

Much of the literature today on Syria portends the coming dissolution of the state at the hands of long dormant sub-state pressures such as political Islam. Bashar al-Asad faces a stiff challenge in the face of growing popular support for Islamic expression, but by all indications, the al-Asad regime remains resilient. President al-Asad's real challenge lies in balancing between Islam and his discrete battle against the subversive forces of political Islam. The tendency to speak of a growing chance for civil disorder is often, in part, specious journalistic and government speculation that is easily exacerbated by the closed nature of the regime, and fueled by the warnings of long-exiled members of the scattered Syrian Muslim Brotherhood.[8] Articles on the handful of violent attacks from Mezzah in 2004 to the most recently foiled attempt at the American Embassy on September 12, 2006 reveal the dual nature of these phenomena. In one sense, these attacks signal a potential prelude to the rise of Islamist forces against the Syrian state; in another, they may mark a clear measure of continuity between Hafiz al-Asad and his son Bashar in their effectiveness at waging counter-insurgency campaigns. The gradual shift in the nature of the regime from less Ba'th-focused to a hybrid socialist state caught between gradual political and economic reform, measured acceptance of Islam and continued regional realpolitik underscores the personal effects the leader has upon the Syrian state structure. Syria is now the state of Bashar al-Asad and the manipulation of Islam is one of many tactics in the strategy of regime survival.

A state-led embrace of Islam is in full effect in Syria. It is being used as a preemptive means of countering the threat of renewed radical Islamic elements in the country, elements long dormant in the wake of the 1982 Hama massacre and the subsequent draconian legal and security measures taken against them. Throughout the past decade a vast network of state-sponsored *imams* have appeared delivering a message of tolerant Islam, and hateful speech has always been directed outwards – most often at the United States or Israel. Their continued growth in popularity has led to a new nickname for the state-endorsed clerics, *mushayikh al-sultan* (Sultan's Clergy).[9] Salah Eddin Kuftaro best exemplifies this phenonemon. Kuftaro's mosque, Abu Nour, is the most popular in Damascus, receiving over 10,000 weekly worshipers at his services. Kuftaro is considered the most high profile of Bashar's Clergy.[10] The Syrian state also recently added religious programming on television, is constructing new mosques, and is establishing new religious schools – changes deemed shocking by many Syrians given the virulently secular history of the Ba'thist state.[11]

Still, in an historical review of what constitutes authority and the degree of underlying legitimacy it brings, President al-Asad's increasing tolerance of Islamic expression is a gamble that history shows to be quite dangerous. A study of the waves of pressure upon the state by sub-state Islamic forces reveals not only the strategy and goals of the Islamic insurgent forces but also the general effectiveness of the Syrian state at quelling these forces within its borders.

A HISTORY OF ISLAMIC REBELLION – PRECURSORS TO HAMA

The history of the twentieth century in Syria reveals that Islamic forces challenge the state with surprising regularity. Beginning with the Arab revolt in 1925, a form of an Islamic-led insurgency occurred approximately every twenty years. With this in mind, it is not shocking to see the state so involved in a pre-emptive counter-insurgency campaign. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and during the contentious reorganization of Syrian territorial and ideational identity, Islamic groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood rose up as a force to challenge the state and, until their decimation in 1982 at the hands of Hafiz al-Asad, managed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their campaigns with each successive attempt.

In 1925, the Great Revolt broke out in the remote Jabal ad Druze among a geographically confined religious minority, the Druze, with tenuous ties to the existing nationalist forces clamoring for the establishment of an independent Arab state on the historic bilad al-sham. The bilad al-sham, the 'northern region' in Arabic, but which also encompassed the concept of Suriya al-Kubra or, Greater Syria, in modern day Lebanon, Israel, Jordan as well as parts of Iraq and Turkey, was the Arab nationalist conception of statehood in the region for the post-Ottoman era. Following the

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lead of the Druze, the Turkoman captain in the Syrian Legion, Fawzi al-Qawuqi, led a rebellion out of Hama against the French occupying forces. The French had always been wary of Hama as it was the most religiously conservative and anti-French town of all of their mandate territory. Aiding al-Qawuqi was a newly formed legion of disaffected Hama religious leaders. The group had established contact with an extensive network of nationalist leaders throughout the country, hoping to establish an Islamic state after France's expulsion. They called themselves Hezbollah.[12]

When reinforcements from Damascus and Aleppo arrived, the French counter-insurgency campaign was brutal. The French air force bombed the commercial center of Hama, killing hundreds and devastating the infrastructure of the city's center. The French also used Senegalese *tirailleurs* as colonial troop reinforcements to burn the houses of local notables. Within three days French troops emptied the city of insurgent fighters. Al-Qawuqi fled with his men and Hezbollah separated from the insurgent forces rising up in other regions of the country.[13] Lacking a common political goal, cohesive popular support, and external funding or sanctuary, the Great Revolt was crushed by the following year, never again to challenge the boundaries or structure of the French Mandate.

Less than twenty years later, political Islam emerged in the Syrian Parliament under the elected bloc al-Gharra, the party of the deceived. The bloc was in direct opposition to the secular regime of Syrian president Al-Quwatli and presented a list of demands calling for, among other things, the end to gender mixed public transportation, the prohibition of serving of alcohol, and the elimination other vice establishments – all was to be policed by a moral police force under the aegis of the state.[14] The *Goutte du Lait* ball, where local Damascene politicians and notables' wives would attend unveiled provided the necessary spark for the ensuing violence.

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Animosity was so strong it sparked street rioting, pushing al-Gharra leaders, along with local clerics, to threaten the unleashing of a greater popular uprising.[15] With the nascent Syrian paramilitary forces lacking arms, the methods used by the Quwatli government to quell protests are a clear demonstration that popular support can be used to confront popular resistance.[16] Al-Quwatli sought to turn supporters against the clerics by publicly discrediting them. With most al-Gharra supporters living in the poorer neighborhoods of the city, Quwatli terminated the government hand-out programs (primarily milk and flour). When the people came to collect, they were told to see the sheikhs that were inciting them against the state for their provisions.[17] The popular resistance soon faded as the people no longer saw a reason to support the al-Gharra movement. The first, albeit small, attempts at a form of political Islam in Syria by the al-Gharra bloc are interesting for several reasons. Most important among them was that it was able to penetrate the nascent Syrian governing system and articulate the grievances of the population that felt marginalized by the state's secular policies. Yet al-Gharra ultimately failed to sustain any form of resistance to the Syrian state once drained of its popular support by the state's actions.

A HISTORY OF ISLAMIC REBELLION – THE HAMA DILEMMA

In their two large-scale encounters with the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ba'thist governments of Salah al-Din al-Bitar (1963 to 1970), and Hafiz al-Asad (1970 to 2000), found their regimes mired in violence in the same city – Hama. Though it changed its outward appearance over the years after the armed uprising against the French in 1925, the essential characteristics of Hama remained the same – it was the fourth largest city in Syria, by far the most religiously conservative (Sunni) and a long-standing symbol of the oppression of the rural poor.[18] Hama was the most anti-Ba'th of all regions.

Shortly after the 1963 coup that installed the Ba'th party, the Muslim Brotherhood rose up against what it considered an apostate, and therefore illegitimate, government in Damascus. While the Ba'th was distracted with the events of its affiliate party in Iraq, a campaign of incendiary anti-Ba'th sermons spread across urban centers in Syria, resulting in street riots. External support for the growing Muslim Brotherhood insurgency flowed in from sympathetic regimes in Iraq and Egypt. As a result, splinter cells such as the Islamic Liberation Movement in Aleppo and the Fighting Vanguard (*al-Tali'a al-Muqatila*) in Hama burst onto the fray.[19]

By April 1964, the rioting, now buttressed by an external support network as well as action cells, developed into an ostensible religious war in Hama.[20] Banding together, the extreme elements of the Muslim Brotherhood erected roadblocks and

stockpiled weapons and provisions. Upon encountering stiff military resistance from the Ba'th military, Marwan Hadeed, the leader of the Fighting Vanguard, moved the fighters into the Sultan Mosque where they positioned themselves for a stand-off. Believing that other militias around the country would soon engage the military as well, thereby forcing a government collapse, the Fighting Vanguard unleashed all of their firepower on the government forces.[21] Faced with the prospect of a nationwide insurgency, the Prime Minister, General Amin al-Hafiz, ordered air raids and full-scale shelling of the mosque.[22] The severe measure worked, as the Fighting Vanguard and other fighters surrendered. The government killed over seventy Muslim Brotherhood fighters and captured hundreds more. Though the bombing of the Sultan Mosque sparked outrage throughout the country, it served as a sufficient warning to stymie agitators in other cities. A lack of organization, clarity of message, and popular support throughout Syria crippled the chances of the insurgent forces against the state.

When Hafiz al-Asad assumed power in 1970, his Corrective Movement imbued the country with renewed enthusiasm and bolstered the Ba'th's popular support. The series of elections and economic reforms infused al-Asad's regime with levels of legitimacy unmatched in modern Syrian history.[23] His state building strategies exploited the naturally bifurcated Sunni majority, commanding loyalty from each with either patronage vis-à-vis the urban elites or continued land reforms for the rural poor.[24] Al-Asad further bolstered his legitimacy in the eyes of the Syrian population by his relative successes against Israel in the war of 1973 – not only was he a Syrian hero, but he was an Arab hero as well.

As an 'Alawi, and therefore of a minority ethnicity within Syria, such skilled state consolidation was particularly necessary for al-Asad. Among the Syrian sectarian mosaic, the 'Alawi were particularly disliked by the majority Sunni population. They had been used by the French in the *troupes spéciales du Levant* as a method of calming the interior.[25] Though they claimed to be a Shi'a offshoot, specifically of the Twelver Shi'a branch, the rest of the Syrian Islamic community viewed them as heretics.[26] By issuing a *fatwa* in 1973 declaring the 'Alawis to be a Shi'a derivative of Islam, prominent Lebanese Shi'a cleric Imam Musa al-Sadr eased the tensions between al-Asad and his Sunni critics in general, and the Muslim Brotherhood in particular. Though Sadr's move further aided al-Asad with the continued sectarian claims against his regime, the *fatwa* was of dubious conciliation to those who viewed the 'Alawi as apostates.

As the appeasement of the Sunni radical elements was still far from reach in Syria, the period between 1964 and 1976, therefore, must be looked as a time during which the Muslim Brotherhood opposition sought to reorganize, rearm, and draw upon the lessons learned from their previous defeat. In addition to having recovered materially and morally, four other key precipitants to the renewed Muslim Brotherhood outbreak in 1976 existed. The first was economic. Though al-Asad rode on the shoulders of giants at the beginning of the decade due to genuine economic success, the Corrective Movement, in the words of Patrick Seale, "began to look tarnished."[27] Inflation, unemployment, and a loss of strategic rent sent the Syrian economy into the doldrums. The loss of rent was due to the Gulf States' reluctance to continue to support al-Asad, because of his decision to side with the Maronite Christian Phalangist militia in the confusion of the nascent Lebanese civil war. Second, as the realms of regional realpolitik clashed with the realms of domestic sensitivity, the general Muslim population was outraged at the idea of Syria entering the Lebanese civil war on the side of the Phalangist militia. The third assumes that in the massive waves of Ba'th party recruitment during al-Asad's presidency, significant infiltration by the extremist elements occurred. The fourth is the fact that the Muslim Brotherhood had been very effective at creating a sort of monopoly over the Syrian school system for long enough to have a near generational effect.[28]

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Assassinations and bombings shattered the relative tranquility of Syrian life following the Syrian intervention in the Lebanese civil war. Reminiscent of the Front de Libération nationale's (FLN) tactics in Algeria under the leadership of Ben Bella, in the virtually impenetrable urban terrain of the *medinas* and *casbahs* of the northern cities of Hama and Aleppo, insurgents could execute an attack and then disappear into the warren of the city that had become their sanctuary.

The attacks continued for three years and remained relatively small scale until the June, 1979 attack on the Aleppo Artillery School. Also known as the Aleppo Massacre, the attack on the school, at which a majority of the students were 'Alawi, killed upwards of 83 cadets when a staff member assembled the cadets in the dining-hall and opened the doors to gunmen.[29] This was a declaration of war by the Muslim Brotherhood on the 'Alawi-Ba'th state.

In October 1979, the Muslim Brotherhood moved quickly to rally a support base by sending letters to the *ulama,* or the community of religious scholars, calling for a united front against the state. The letters specifically asked them to support the Syrian *mujahedeen* by serving as a single trench of moral and even material support for them (*al-khanaq al-wahid*). Another plea was sent to the armed forces in the hopes of fracturing military unity.[30] Muslim Brotherhood propaganda eventually reached the whole country through outlets such as *An-Nadhir*, a newspaper containing information about the insurgency's motivations. By March, 1980 the insurgency was able to hone its tactics and apply further pressure on the state by organizing massive urban uprisings that paralyzed cities across the country. Specifically, the riots spread from their center in Hama to Homs, Idlib, Dayr al-Zur, and to the Kurdish region capital, al-Hasaka.[31] By late 1980 the Islamic Front in Syria (*al-Jubhah al-Islamiyya fi Suriyah*) was formed as a broadly based union of diverse Islamic and pro-Islamic secular elements in Syria with the Muslim Brotherhood at its core. In many respects, the Muslim Brotherhood viewed this as a strategic victory over the Ba'thist state. Not only had they broadened their support network, but with the variance of the groups forming the front, they believed they had expanded the breadth and depth of their popular support network in addition to having secured sufficient external support.[32] Still, the leader of the struggle, Abu Nasr al-Bayanouni, remained vague in his demands of the state and his visions of the future. References to Salafist thinkers such as Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb abounded in the proclamations of the Brotherhood, quotes from *Social Justice in Islam* figured among the proclamations that the Brotherhood would emulate the Iranian revolution and establish *Shari'a* law. Yet this rhetoric was not sufficient to convey a clear idea to the masses of what the post- al-Asad regime in Syria would be like.[33]

The Syrian Islamic insurgencies of the 20th century were consistently fractious, regionally contained, and lacking necessary countrywide popular support for strategic depth

At the Seventh Ba'th Regional Conference (December 23, 1979 to January 6, 1980), Hafiz al-Asad's brother, Rifa't, marked the tenor of the government's position vis-à-vis the solidifying insurgency by stating, "He who is not with the Ba'th at this phase is against it."[34] The socialist nature of the Ba'th party, and testimony to the success of their organization, allowed for another extremely effective, but simultaneously dangerous, vehicle for the state counter-insurgency program – Ba'th party civil militias. The arming of local militias forced the people to face the choice of fighting with the government or against it. Fortunately for al-Asad, the majority decided the insurgency had not proven itself enough for the militias to switch sides.[35] On June 26, 1980, an assassination attempt by the Muslim Brotherhood on al-Asad, thwarted only by a swift kick of one grenade by the president and the self-sacrifice of a personal bodyguard as he pounced on the other, added a very personal dimension to the insurgency.[36] A direct result of the attempt on al-Asad's life was the establishment and application of Law 49, whereby membership to the Muslim Brotherhood became a capital offense.

The fighting in Hama reached its peak in February, 1982 when an army unit fell upon the cell of a young fighter named Omar Jawwad, who, in a panic, launched the call for *jihad* against the Ba'th party. Thousands of *jihadi* fighters throughout the city of Hama soon found themselves pitched in a fierce battle with approximately 12,000 government troops. Within a week the fighters were scattered, and for two more weeks those fighters still alive were hunted down and killed. Though some members of the 21st and 47th Brigades deserted to join the insurgent forces, the military remained unified, even in the face of massive indiscriminate killing of civilians.[37] The death toll in the wake of the Hama fighting was estimated between 5,000 and 10,000 – the government forces often lacking discrimination between civilian and insurgent fighters.[38] In the wake of Hama, the membership of the Muslim Brotherhood disbanded into surrounding regional countries, particularly seeking shelter in Jordan and Iraq, after it was decimated.

The insurgent fighters had been formidable opponents for the Ba'thist forces. Their levels of training and foreign support at both the political and financial levels were by far the most advanced of any organized insurgency in the country's history. Their sophisticated communications networks, the size of their arms caches and security of their redoubts were yet another layer of sophistication that the Ba'th

realized later had been built-up under their noses. Yet, despite the advanced character of their organization, size of their arms caches, and depth of their external support, the Muslim Brotherhood revealed themselves to be politically inept. Their campaign of terror had long reached the tipping point by the time of the arming of the Ba'th local militias, thereby generating a paucity of popular will to reject government militias. The levels of violence initiated by the terror campaigns allowed al-Asad to incorporate both a powerful response and message of solidarity in his ruthless campaign against the Muslim Brotherhood. The vague Islamic message, comparisons to Iran, and subsequent alignment with anti-Ba'th secular forces sent mixed messages at best. The popular support they garnered ultimately proved to be insufficient for protracted conflict with the Ba'th. In addition, the campaign remained an urban phenomenon with the rural plains and hills under al-Asad's tight control.

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LESSONS LEARNED AND NOT LEARNED

The Syrian Islamic insurgencies of the 20th century were consistently fractious, regionally contained, and lacking necessary countrywide popular support for strategic depth. The movements were also often deficient in external support due to mixed messages and divided leadership. As such, with a confused overriding political message, the Islamic insurgents found themselves repeatedly unable to protract the conflict. Engaging the state in geographically limited, asymmetric warfare without an external center of gravity for re-supply and sanctuary has shown itself to be an ineffective method of confronting the Syrian state. Yet, there is reason to believe that this is no longer the case. The rationale behind the Syrian state's embrace of Islam may, in part, be due to the realization that the Islamic forces are changing their tactics and are increasingly capable of challenging the state. As one student in Damascus put it, "Since their defeat [in Hama], the Islamists have adopted a strategy of infiltrating society from below."[39]

Today, indications are that there is an amount of truth to this potential for Islamist infiltration in Syrian Society. For example, even government officials now estimate that almost 30 percent of Syrian men regularly attend Friday prayers, up from an almost negligent figure two decades before.[40] The Syrian public and private sectors are only able to channel about 80,000 of the 250,000 to 300,000 new entrants into the work force per year and, as unemployment continues to rise unabated, many young men are turning to the mosque for guidance.[41] The population of unemployed, idle young men in Syria is therefore growing at high rates. One readily available channel for these young men has been the Iraqi insurgency.

Syrian fighters in the Iraqi insurgency, with a tacit degree of complicity on the part of the government, are filtering back into the country.[42] Syrian fighters are reported to be the second highest number among the Arab volunteers in Iraq.[43] These so-called 'third generation' fighters, veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, have been inspired by the teachings and sermons of Abu Mus'ab al-Suri.[44] His book on Syria, *The Syrian Experiment*, underscores two principle reasons for Islamic action against the Syrian state: the perception of the heretical 'Alawi control over a Muslim country; and, the state apparatus as a whole being supported by the West in their regional machinations to maintain the Israeli hegemonic presence.[45] The presence of a growing number of Syrian 'third generation' *jihadists* is inherently destabilizing for the al-Asad regime. Further, a failed state in Iraq could serve as a necessary external sanctuary for a Syrian insurgency.

A well-established Syrian network for foreign fighters flowing into Iraq already exists.[46] External supply networks for the insurgency in Iraq find a safe haven in Syria as it is within reason to believe that a U.S. failure in the region is in the interests of a state like Syria.[47] Once inside Syria, the foreign *jihadis* receive basic training in the use of AK-47s, Rocket Propelled Grenades and Improvised Explosive Devices.[48] One estimate in 2005 cited the arrival of 150 non-Syrian foreign fighters per month. The number of Syrians entering the western regions of Iraq is less clear.[49] Under significant pressure from the U.S., the government has made efforts within the past year to block these movements.

There are two types of Syrian fighters currently flowing into the mêlée of the insurgency in Iraq: tribal members on the eastern Syrian border with Iraq sharing a kinship with Sunni tribes in western Iraq, and young, Salafi-inspired *jihadists*.[50] A key inspirational figure in the recruitment of these young fighters is Abu al-Qaqa, a preacher known for his incendiary, Salafist rhetoric.[51] A U.S. victory in the region would put Syria in an almost impossible regional vice-grip with only Iran to serve as a regional pillar of

support of the country remaining. Iranian relations with Syria have only strengthened since the outbreak of the war in Iraq; in addition to Shi'a kinship, the two countries have a keen strategic relationship with one another in the ongoing struggle against Israel as Iran uses Syria as a funnel for arms to Hezbollah in southern Lebanon. Yet, in another example of the delicate balance of the super and sub-state pressures in Syria, the threat of a Sunni-inspired insurgency in Syria mirroring that of Iraq looms large. If al-Asad is too complicit in his sponsorship of homegrown radicalized, Salafist fighters he faces the internal threat of a significant base of returned *jihadists*.

Such a base of idle, battle-hardened young men would not take long before turning their attention to what they consider to be the illegitimate, apostate regime of the 'Alawi ruling president. An example is the June 2, 2006 failed attack by a cadre of ten armed masked men on Umayyad Square in the heart of Damascus. Surprised in the morning before their planned attack by Syrian security forces, the young men exchanged fire with the guards before surrendering. The young men were said to have been carrying copies of al-Qaqa's sermons.[52] If these were in fact genuine protagonists displaying true signs of Salafi-inspired political violence against the state, then the indicators could point to the existence of radicalizing insurgent cells within Syria. Underscoring the delicate balance inherent to the long-standing indirect approach of Syrian involvement in regional affairs, it would now seem that Bashar faces the challenge of the destabilizing effects of such actions within Syria's borders.

Yet, there are also many indications that the Syrian opposition remains unsure of its direction, organization, and message. A serious internal-external leadership gap remains between the Muslim Brotherhood in exile, led by Ali Sadreddin Bayanouni from its headquarters in London, and its internal counterpart within Syria. Bayanouni admits to having very little real knowledge of the character of Islamic events taking place within Syria.[53] The recent alliance of the Muslim Brotherhood with former Vice President Khaddam's secular – and rather personal – resistance to the al-Asad government, called the National Salvation, Front has mixed a secular message into the Brotherhood's formerly Islamic-only message. Such actions have distanced the exiled Muslim Brotherhood from the nascent internal Islamic networks forming in the wake of Iraq and in the light of the growing government acceptance of an Islamic presence in Syria.[54] The recent handful of attacks from Mezzah in 2004, when two bombs exploded near the Damascene neighborhood's notorious political prison, to the foiled September 12, 2006 attacks on the U.S. embassy bear the hallmark of Mukhabarat orchestration. Mukhabarat, meaning intelligence or intelligence agency in Arabic, has a rather special meaning in Syria. Not only does it signify the internal intelligence agency in Syria, but more specifically its enforcement division. The character of the attacks, and their timely failures, more likely serves as a method of the Mukhabarat demonstrating to the public the climate of terror and fear that any kind of Islamist movement would bring down on the country if allowed to challenge the state.[55] Confusing and potentially terrifying for the Syrian public, these actions further undermine attempts at coordination within the opposition circles both at home in Syria and abroad. A key indicator of this fact is the nebulous character of the group reportedly behind the small numbers of attacks, Jund al-Sham.

From the attacks at Mezzah to the shootout on Mount Qassioun to the most recent failed attack on the U.S. embassy in Damascus, the mysterious Jund al-Sham appears at convenient times for the Syrian government and is foiled in its attempts with uncanny accuracy.[56] Muslim Brotherhood leader Bayanouni stated in a recent interview that he was unaware of the existence of such a group.[57] Government countermeasures, coupled with the political mistakes of the Muslim Brotherhood, bode well for al-Asad but not the Islamists.

President al-Asad is well aware of the popular impression of the moribund character of Arab nationalism and of the ascendancy of extremist Islamic ideology, particularly in the wake of the strategic victory of Hezbollah this past summer against Israel. This is quite significant as probably the primary pillar upon which Ba'thism rests is the pan-Arab nationalist ideal. Yet, much like his father, President Bashar al-Asad adopts a very pragmatic approach to the problems facing Syrian society today. In a 2004 interview, he went so far as to practically negate the importance of the Ba'th in Syria today stating that prosperity was his only goal. In a rebuke to questions of the continued relevance of the Ba'th, he stated, "If it contributes to prosperity in Syria, we can call it socialism."[58]

In the run-up to his accession as president in the

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wake of his older brother's death in 1994, Bashar hurried home from his residency program in London to be groomed to follow in the footsteps of his father. After the requisite year's mourning period, public spaces all across Syria soon became covered with posters of the al-Asad trinity of Hafiz, Basil, and Bashar with captions reading, "*Qa'idna, Mithalna, Amalna*" (Our Leader, Our Ideal, Our Hope).[59] During the remaining years of his father's rule, Bashar remained in the background, showing up at the appropriate Ba'th ceremony when necessary and speaking only of the necessity of party unity and the secular state, the dream of pan-Arab unity and the defeat of Israel. While all of these elements remain today, in a seemingly antithetical twist of fate, Bashar al-Asad has also begun to tout himself as defender of Islam, the new Arab defender in the face of continued aggression and large territorial footprint of the West on Arab lands. By proving himself as the defender of the interests and values of Islam, he is able to coalesce his anti-Western campaign with his state-endorsed Islamification at home.

Bolstering this image is the emergence of a new sort of trinity on view in the omnipresent iconographic salutes to President Bashar al-Asad, Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the image of the rise of the powerful and successful Shi'a crescent.[60] Such images are striking examples of Bashar al-Asad's ability to manipulate popular aggression outward, focusing it toward Lebanon, Israel and the United States – much like his father, but in a way that fits the circumstances of the day. This underscores the remarkable degree, at least by Syrian standards, that Bashar al-Asad is willing to adapt the Syrian state apparatus in order to contribute to regime survival. With the counter-insurgency effort in full swing, and the Islamic face of Syria changing, it remains to be seen how successful Bashar al-Asad's gamble, with historically dangerous forces, ultimately proves to be for long-term regime survival.

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WORK CITED

[1] Arabic for community or nation, the word *umma* is now commonly used to denote either the collective nation of Islamic states or (in the context of pan-Arabism) the whole Arab nation.
[2] Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 19. A major theme of Globalized Islam is the socio-political dynamic of the Arab civil society's attention to the global *umma* and the subsequent disassociation with traditional regional expression of Islam, or *deterritorialization*. This trend is apparent in Syria in several ways. The most obvious being the proliferation of Syrian fighters in Iraq and Afghanistan as a means of 'going to the front' of the global Jihad as well as the high number of Syrians involved in the echelons of Al-Qaeda. Other examples would be the outer expression of traditional Islamic dress in non-traditional places such as Damascus and Latakia.
[3] Ibid, 18-20.
[4] See for example, Eyal Zisser, "Will Bashshar Al-Asad Last?" *Middle East Quarterly* 7, (3) (2000) 3-12, or, "What does the Future Hold for Syria?" *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 10 (2) (June, 2006), 84-107.
[5] Hashim, Ahmed, "Iraq: Profile of a Nuclear Addict," *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 4 (1) (Winter/Spring, 1997), 103-126.
[6] Umar F. Abd-Allah, *The Islamic Struggle in Syria*, (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1983), 191.
[7]Scott Wilson, "Religious Surge Alarms Secular Syrians; Islam's Clout Among Frustrated Youth Challenging Governments Across Mideast," *Washington Post*, January 23, 2005. See also *Agence France Press,* "Islam on rise in Syria 25 Years after revolt crushed," January 31, 2006.
[8] Maham Abedin, "The Battle within Syria: An Interview with Muslim Brotherhood Leader Ali Bayanouni," *Terrorism Monitor* 3, (16) (August 11, 2005): 8-11; and Murad al-Shishani, "Abu Mus'ab al-Suri and the Third Generation of Salafi Jihadists,", *Terrorism Monitor* 3, (16) (August 11, 2005), also Sami Moubayed, "The Islamic Revival in Syria," *Mideast Monitor* 1, (3) (September-October, 2006).
[9] Anthony Shadid, "Syria's Unpredictable Force: The State-Sponsored Clergy," the Washington Post, May 27, 2005.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Wilson.
[12] Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 170-1.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Salma Mardam Bey, *La Syrie et La France: Bilan d'une equivoque*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994), 137-140.
[15] Ibid.
[16] As a means of maintaining a semblance of control over their former possession, the French had been able to control the amount of arms in the country to the point where the Syrian domestic forces were virtually unarmed at the time of the Damascus riots.
[17] Mouibayed, Sami, "The History of Political and Militant Islam in Syria," *Terrorism Monitor* 3 (16) (August 11, 2005.).
[18] Seale, Patrick, *Asad, The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 317.
[19] Moubayed.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Hafiz al-Asad commanded the Air Force in its raids over the Sultan Mosque in 1963, which would serve as an eerie precursor to his actions in the same city during his rule 18 years later.
[23] Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria, Revolution from Above*, (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 147.
[24] Ibid, 53-56.
[25] Khoury, 80-1.
[26] Abd-Allah, 42-48.
[27] Seale, 317.
[28] Moubayed.
[29] Seale, 316.
[30] Abd-Allah, 116.

[31] Seale, 325.
[32] Ibid., 117-18.
[33] See Seale, 336-7, also Abd-Allah, 145.
[34] Moubayed, 2.
[35] Seale, 327
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid, 333.
[38] Abd-Allah, 191.
[39] *Agence France Presse.*
[40] Ibid.
[41] The Economist Intelligence Unit, Country Profile, Syria, November, 2006.
[42] Ahmed Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-Insurgency in Iraq*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 140-1.
[43] Murad Al-Shishani, "Aub Mus'ab al-Suri and the Third Generation of Salafi-jihadists," *The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor* 3, (16) (2005): 1-3.
[44] Al-Suri was captured in Pakistan in November, 2005. Though Pakistani officials deny his capture, U.S. officials have stated that he has been captured. Al-Suri's name has subsequently been taken off of the State Departments list of Most Wanted Terrorists, yet his name has not been added to the capture list.
[45] Al-Shishani.
[46] Abdul Ahad Ghaith, "Outside Iraq, but deep in the fight: A Smuggler of Insurgents Reveals Syria's Influential, Changing Role," *Washington Post*, June 8, 2005.
[47] A good example of this is the 'French Connection' discovered in February of 2005 when the DST (the French equivalent of the FBI) discovered a well-established, *jihadist* recruitment center in the 19th *arrondissement* of Paris that was funneling young, Salafist-inspired recruits into Iraq through Syrian Mosques. See Feurat Alani, "Le réseau de trois français," *Le Point*, February 10, 2005.
[48] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency*, 141.
[49] Richard Beeston, "Following the Trail of Death: How Foreigners Flock to Join Holy War," *The Times*, London, June 25, 2005.
[50] Hashim, *Insurgency and Counter-insurgency*, 141.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Moubayed.
[53] Abedin.
[54] The Open Source Center, *"Syrian Opposition Pushes Forward Despite Division*," Washington, March 29, 2006.
[55] Moubayed.
[56] Ibid.
[57] BBC Worldwide Monitoring, "Syrian Islamist leader, analyst discuss attack on U.S. embassy," September 13, 2006.
[58] Leverett, Flynt, *Inheriting Syria* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 70.
[59] David Lesch, *The New Lion of Damascus: Bashar al-Asad and Modern Syria* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 67.
[60] Leverett, 114.