Authoritarian Power and State Formation in Ba'thist Syria

Army, Party, and Peasant

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and government documents and personal accounts by "insiders" such as Razzaz, Safadi, Sayyid, and al-Jundi. A respectable corpus of scholarly literature has accumulated; some of it is by Syrian scholars, including economic analyses (Arudki), political and sociological studies (Hilan, Akhrass, Keilany, Jabbur, Allush, Hanna, Hamide), and village ethnographies (Ismail, Khalaf). I would like, in particular, to acknowledge the village study by Sulayman Najm Khalaf on which this book drew for its analysis of rural change in the Syrian East. The growing body of important works by Western scholars is indicated in the bibliography. I have tried to synthesize these disparate resources, organizing the data according to the concepts developed in the introductory chapter.

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Political Theory and the Syrian Ba'th Case

The Ba'th Party's 1963 seizure of power marked a major watershed in modern Syrian history: the collapse of the "old regime" which had inherited power in the first independent Syrian state and its replacement by a counter-elite which set out to forge an entirely new type of state and development strategy. Whether this amounted to a revolution as the Ba'thists insisted is a matter of controversy. The dominant views hold that it was a mere coup, although there is divergence on the nature of the post-1963 regime. Some hold that the Ba'th regime amounted to unstable praetorian military rule, others that it coalesced into neo-patrimonial rule by sectarian minorities. Some view the regime as a mere petit bourgeois nationalist reaction to imperialism which quickly evolved into a state bourgeoisie isolated from the masses. All these "schools" share the view that the regime, lacking political institutions capable of incorporating significant support, is narrow based and survives chiefly through repression; the mere creature of sectarian, military, or class elites, it is thought to have little advanced state formation in Syria.

Yet, this view seems strangely at odds with the record. The Ba'th Party, far from being rootless and ephemeral, has been entrenched as the dominant political force in Syria for decades and, indeed, became the vehicle of a major system transformation. Syria, historically plagued by a weak unstable state, has been ruled since the early sixties by the same party and since 1970 by the same leader, Hafiz al-Asad. Not only durable, this state also appears "stronger" than its predecessors if this is measured by the centralization of power, the expansion of functions, the density of structures, the ability to contain a more mobilized opposition, and growing capabilities as an international actor. This is not readily explained by the dominant views. Each of them undoubtedly captures a different aspect of Ba'th rule—military, sectarian, class—but to the neglect of other equally crucial dimensions, namely the rural populist roots and the institution-building achievements of the regime.

Authoritarian-Populism

This study will argue that the key concept which gives the most adequate insight into the rise, durability, and nature of the Ba'th is ***authoritarian-***

populism. Authoritarian-populism has been a characteristic feature of the post-colonial world, a particular kind of solution to the challenges facing new states being incorporated as subordinate players in the international state system and dependents of world capitalism. It seeks to establish the authority of a strong state autonomous of the dominant classes and external powers and to launch national economic development aimed at easing dependence and subordinating capitalist forces to populist goals.

Authoritarian-populism is a distinctive subset of authoritarianism. Authoritarian regimes typically start out by concentrating decision-making power in the hands of a small elite, often headed by a personalistic, frequently military leader, and rule with the support of the army, through the bureaucracy, and with little tolerance of political pluralism and few mechanisms of accountability; this is true of the populist variant, too. But the establishment of authoritarian power normally has a specific social rationale: such regimes arise out of social conflicts, and, initially at least, take sides in them, excluding and disadvantaging certain social forces to the benefit of others. Authoritarian regimes must thus be distinguished by the particular social interests which shape their ideological orientation. While conservative authoritarianism originates in a bid of the dominant class to block challenges to privilege from below, the populist variant originates in nationalist struggles against imperialism and revolts by middle class or plebeian elements, often from the periphery, against an upper class order. Populist authoritarianism seeks to exclude the old oligarchy from power and challenges dominant interests in the name of nationalism and equality (Huntington 1968:344–396; Almond and Powell 1978:376–381; Malloy 1977). While authoritarian-populist regimes often originate in military coups, to prevail over the powerful interests they challenge, they must mobilize their potential popular constituency. The personal charisma of a populist leader may temporarily bridge the state-society gap but unless routinized in political institutions, this support mobilization is unlikely to be durable. A regime pursuing a populist course against the dominant classes in the name of deprived groups requires a structure able to close the privileged political access of the former and organize the support of the latter: it is therefore likely to adopt some elements of the Leninist single party system, while stopping well short of forging a communist socio-political order. In the Arab world, this has widely resulted in a mixed military-party state which, though authoritarian, is shaped by its populist roots and develops the political organization to incorporate a certain mass base. But such populist regimes have also widely proven vulnerable to transformation in goals and alteration in structure. As they mature, they normally enter a more conservative *post-populist* phase in which they seek stabilization and accommodation with powerful interests and may abandon limited Leninization for limited liberalization which re-opens political access for the dominant classes.

In the following introduction, the argument of the study will be prefigured and located within the relevant traditions of political development theory. It will focus on two problems: (1) the origins and social base which shape

the populist orientation of the regime; this will draw on the literature on political instability, popular and peasant movements, military intervention in politics and the formation of political identities in developing countries; and (2) the regime's power consolidation strategy and outcome; this will rely on Weber's concepts of authority, functionalist work on institution-building and a critique of conventional authoritarian theory. The discussion will also try to anticipate how the authoritarian-populist interpretation of the Syrian regime can be accommodated to the central but changing roles of sect, army, class, and national struggle in Syrian politics.

Populist Revolt: The Origins of the Authoritarian-Populist State

An authoritarian-populist regime typically originates in a revolt against established elites by relative "outsiders" in the name of subordinate social forces; going well beyond a mere coup from within the establishment, it makes a substantial break with the past, but it also stops far short of mass revolution from below. There are many studies of military intervention and of great revolutions, but little explicit treatment in the literature of this very important intermediate domain of anti-regime revolt.

The intermediate domain itself embraces movements which vary in the level of political mobilization and the extent of change they impose on society. One pole on this continuum could be marked by Huntington's (1962; 1968:198–208) *"reform" or "breakthrough" coup* and Trimberger's (1978) *"revolution from above"* in which a military coup against the old oligarchy opens the political arena to the middle class and to major social structural reform, but in the absence of major mass mobilization. At the other end is what Walton (1984) calls *national revolts*, mass uprisings which, being more uneven and less intense than full scale mass revolutions, do not take on the same anti-system dimensions or end in the same radical transformations, but nevertheless have important consequences. Reality can be yet more complex, mixing elements of these cases. Radical coup-makers could stimulate mass mobilization from above; mass forces could infiltrate and capture part of the state apparatus, and then launch a simultaneous coup and mass revolt; rebellion from below could radicalize the officer corps, precipitating a radical coup. Such cases, combining a radical coup and state-led "revolution from above" with aspects of popular revolt from below will be termed *"populist revolt"* and can be considered a typical road to power of an authoritarian-populist regime. While such a revolt can take place with far less than the massive mobilization of a great revolution, its success requires a wider coalition of forces than a mere faction of the officer corps, small group of urban intellectuals or single primordial group. Some form of anti-oligarchy alliance between a radicalized middle class, including strategic elements of the officer corps, and politicized segments of the peasantry must produce or develop around the populist leadership and this combination depends on a significant incidence of crisis and conflict in a society. This study will argue that the Ba'th's rise to power approximates this phenomenon.

But what are the conditions which make possible the combination of radical military coup, expressive of a middle class "breakthrough," and peasant revolt? Certain generalizations to be found in the literature on these questions have relevance to the Syrian case.

1. Third World revolt almost universally takes place within a context of imperialist domination, dependency, and nationalist reaction to it. National and social crises are interlinked: imperialism may buttress dominant classes but also undermine their traditional legitimacy; and imperialist penetration is a major source of social crisis, typically blocking autonomous national capitalism. National movements need not assume the radical social character of populist revolt; but where the imperialist impact is especially damaging or durable or the nationalist struggle prolonged they are more likely to do so. The intensity of struggle mobilizes ever more plebeian elements and calls forth ever more radical solutions, including the transformation of indigenous society. Leadership, thus, typically passes from the traditional or liberal upper and upper-middle classes into the hands of petit bourgeois radical intellectuals who, lacking a stake in the status quo, view national independence and social transformation as inseparable and the revolutionary mobilization of the masses as a condition of both; this situation may well lead to the radicalization of the officer corps and mobilization of the peasantry. While this reaches its extreme in modern mass revolutions, in the case of populist revolt it takes a lesser but significant form; Syria fits this category.

2. Social conditions for the rise of a radicalized middle class are typical of many Third World countries, but particularly so in the early stages of modernization when a state leadership rooted in the agrarian bourgeoisie still dominates. Modernization undermines traditional authority, creates a salaried new middle class with rising aspirations, and generates an intelligentsia from which counter-elites may be drawn (Halpern 1963:51–78). If, as is common in cases of delayed dependent development, economic expansion fails to keep pace with social mobilization, and especially if economic growth falters after a period of expansion and expectations are frustrated, a sense of relative deprivation feeds middle class political discontent. As, in these conditions, capitalist development enriches the agrarian-commercial bourgeoisie and exacerbates inequality, conflict over the proper course of development may divide the ruling class and the new middle class (Deutsch 1961; Gurr; Walton 204; Huntington 1968:39–59). Syria in the fifties was a classic case of middle class alienation, a condition which propelled the rise of the Ba'th.

3. The military is normally elitist and hostile to mass movements but under special conditions army officers may be radicalized. This is most likely: a) where the military establishment is autonomous of the dominant landed class and lacks a strong tradition of corporate elitism. b) where it is recruited from the new middle class or yet lower strata in a society dominated by a traditional elite; military radicalism is most associated with officers of lower middle class background, of a marginal ethnic group, from the hinterland, with personal experience of economic crisis or deprivation and interaction

with radical civilian associates, and of younger age. c) where the nation faces exceptional pressure from imperialism or a severe external threat and the military, naturally nationalist, embraces radical reform as the key to national power (Wolpin 9–26, 114–116; Berger 361–398; Halpern 1962; 1963: 251–280; Trimberger; Huntington 1962; 1968:192–237). All these conditions existed in Syria.

4. As Moore (1966) and Huntington (1968:292) argue, the peasantry, the decisive mass force in the outcome of political development in agrarian countries, plays a crucial "swing role:" if peasants are radicalized and mobilized, they provide the shock troops of revolution, but if they remain traditional, they are an anchor of conservative regimes. Between the extremes of peasant revolution and traditional passivity there are, however, many middle cases: peasant revolt or mobilization short of revolution can still affect outcomes and, in particular, may, as part of "populist revolt," facilitate the emergence of an authoritarian-populist regime. The study will argue that this is so of Syria.

Peasant revolt takes place in a total societal context, but a specifically *agrarian* crisis provides essential conditions and grievances. This crisis is a function of capitalist penetration of the countryside, making land a commodity, disrupting the village community and issuing in land concentration, tenancy, proletarianization and urban migration. The cash nexus replaces patriarchal or patronage relations. In these conditions, if the landed elite neglects agricultural modernization, while simply extracting a greater surplus from the peasantry, and the growth of population and landlessness generates an intense land hunger, violent landlord-peasant conflict is likely. Smallholders threatened by debt or landlord encroachment may take the lead in peasant mobilization because they possess the necessary independence of landlord control. Share-croppers are likely rebels since this tenure is a zero-sum relation and the landlord dispensable. Peasants threatened with proletarianization have little to lose by anti-system mobilization. A regime which fails to address the agrarian crisis faces, in its peasantry, a permanent reservoir of potential support for system-challenging movements (Russett; Shanin; Wolf; Zagoria; Walton; Paige).

5. Rapid social change and crisis provide conditions for the rise of an anti-system movement, but it takes leadership to translate them into political mobilization. In its early phase, "men of ideas" arise, intellectuals promoting a counter-ideology; critiquing and de-legitimizing the status quo and offering a vision of a better society, they raise the political consciousness of the public. At a later stage the thinkers give way to "men of action" and charismatic leadership may arise to turn ideas into a movement. Militant followers are recruited from the new groups created during, but unsatisfied by, modernization: students and intellectuals, products of the spread of education; the "marginal men" resulting from social atomization—newly- or half-educated persons of modest origins uprooted from traditional communities and insecure, ex-peasants who have recently migrated to the city, the "overeducated" "spiritually underemployed," white collar employees in

dead-end careers. Finally, it takes the party organizers, the technicians of a new political technology, to give broad scale and durability to the movement (Koury). Effective peasant mobilization, in particular, depends on such "outside" leadership which provides the ideology (nationalism, agrarian populism) and organization to break through the local encapsulation of the peasantry and generate broader peasant identifications. Radical intellectuals or "ex-peasant" urban migrants who become students or workers may provide this linkage (Hobsbawm; Walton).

6. The failure of the political system and its legitimacy are important ingredients in populist revolt. Ruling elites which fail to permit evolutionary change and refuse to open existing political institutions to middle class participatory demands are likely to face revolutionary ferment. In the face of radical challenges, they may lose their cohesion and ability to command, or military defeat and nationalist failure may shatter or render unreliable the repressive apparatus. Whether objective grievance-generating conditions actually translate into anti-system peasant mobilization depends on the strength of traditional socio-political structures. If the ruling landed elite enjoys class cohesion and retains strong links to the land and local political functions, it may contain the crisis, but if its local roots are fragile or undermined, the stability of the rural order depends on the coercive capacities of the state apparatus (Moore; Anderson 1974). Middle Eastern countries appear historically distinguished by sharp urban-rural gaps and the vulnerability of the ruling center to periodic revolt and renewal from the periphery; this heritage may make them especially fragile in the face of modern rural discontent (Ibn Khaldun). This study will argue that Syria's pre-Ba'th political order was exceptionally fragile and vulnerable.

7. Although all these ingredients are, more or less, part of "populist revolt," for it to happen they must come together in sufficient degree to overthrow the old regime and yet not lead into revolution. But why should they? First, full scale revolutions are rare, but, as Walton argues, many of the same factors which explain them also commonly give rise to lesser revolts. In the latter cases, the ingredients are less potent or combined in less explosive ways; in particular, peasant mobilization, compared to cases of revolution, is likely to be less intense and more uneven. This may be because of the heterogeneity of society, the unevenness of modernization, and the difficulty of putting together an anti-regime coalition which bridges the urban-rural gap. But if regimes are especially fragile it may not take mass revolution to sweep them away. If the old regime lacks nationalist legitimacy, a strong rural base, and effective political institutions, and if, in particular, its repressive apparatus is radicalized, it may be overthrown by a revolt stopping well short of full scale peasant revolution and, indeed, in the relatively earlier stages of modernization when the middle class has been radicalized but the mass periphery is only partially mobilized. The consolidation of the resulting populist regime, however, depends on subsequent mass mobilization and populist reforms which satisfy middle class and peasant grievances. Under these conditions, populist revolt may be a substitute for revolution. The study will argue that these conditions obtained in Syria.

8. Finally, the road to power taken by a populist regime, particularly the nature of the political mobilization out of which it arises, has important consequences for its capacity to consolidate power and sustain populist revolution from above. While the heights of state power are usually seized in a coup, the more the coup is preceded, accompanied by, or followed by mass mobilization and political conflict, the stronger the regime is likely to be. The greater the depth of social crisis and conflict out of which the regime arises, the higher the levels of mobilization likely to be achieved and the wider the regime's support base is likely to be. The more intense the mobilization and struggle for power, the more likely a strong shared ideological orientation will bind the populist movement's diverse elements, hence the greater the possibility of elite cohesion after the rise to power, and the more durable the regime's populist orientation is likely to be (Huntington 1974; Skocpol). In the Syrian case, the regime seized power in a coup, not mass revolt, but the coup was a delayed outcome of prior system crisis and mobilization which the regime was subsequently able to exploit to build a support base.

Populist Movements and Communalism

But how can the notion of populist revolt as an explanation of the origins of the Ba'thist regime be accommodated to the sectarian dimension of Syrian politics? Clearly populist revolt took place in a special setting, namely a mosaic society without a long-established indigenous national-state, a situation where communalism is likely to be an important factor. Yet, to the extent communal identities channel political mobilization, the grievances of modernization are likely to be diverted into particularistic conflict among a fragmented elite and its clientage networks or into separatism or civil war, precluding the cross-communal class-based coalitions and universalistic ideology necessary for successful populist revolt. Key to understanding populist revolt in a multi-communal setting is how class structure and communalism determine political mobilization.

The "nation-building" literature (Deutsch 1953; Lerner) argues that social mobilization, insofar as it erodes particularistic ties and generates the interaction needed for class and national consciousness, provides the conditions for modern nation-building and secular politics. Yet, it may also merely subsume the most parochial identities (kin, village) in larger but still subnational communal ones which, as self-sufficiency gives way to societal competition for scarce resources, become the vehicles of political conflict (Geertz; Harik 1972b). Whether political mobilization takes such a communal form depends on a variety of factors: it is most likely where communal differences (language, race, religion, etc.) are sharp and reinforcing, where there is no core culture attractive to minorities, where class differences are not developed enough to displace communal ones, where assimilation had not advanced prior to social mobilization, where no secular nationalism develops out of the independence struggle or through national institutions,

and where political elites cultivate "natural" communal constituencies and seek ethnic hegemony instead of constructing cross-communal political bases and satisfying the equity demands of competing communal groups (Deutsch 1953; Anderson et. al. 1967:15–83; Weiner 1965; Coleman).

While analyses of these variables can help in identifying the broad tendencies in a society, actual cases of populist revolt in a mosaic society are likely to be complex ***mixtures*** of class and communal conflict. Where both class and communal identities are important, as in Syria, it is necessary to understand how they ***interact*** and three sorts of observations provide a starting point for understanding this case. First, communal consciousness does not exclude broader identities. Indeed social mobilization tends to engender the ***simultaneous*** development of several new identities—with communal group, occupation, class, and state; individuals are thus likely to have ***multiple identities*** and which takes precedence may depend on the issue or situation. Hence, in most countries, pure communal and class forms of conflict are less likely than mixtures: class and communal mobilization may take place side by side, may overlap, or may alternate in time. Second, while the ***cross-cutting*** of class by communal cleavages may often retard populist mobilization and make class coalitions fragile, where low class status is associated with certain minorities or deprived communal groups, that is, where cleavages ***overlap***, not only will conflict be particularly intense, but communal mobilization may take a radical universalistic form. Deprived communal groups may identify with broader deprived classes and view class revolution as the solution to their particular deprivations. Third, the unevenness of mobilization is likely to result in unbalanced communal representation even in secular class or national movements. In Africa, for example, certain communal groups were disproportionately in the forefront of nationalist movements as a result of uneven change, that is, differences in the degree traditional communities were disrupted by modernization and exposed to education. This was due to accidents of geographical location or the pressure of overpopulation in certain areas or to greater receptivity to innovation in less stratified communities (Coleman 30–34). These three observations point to a certain possibility: that where minority status overlaps with class deprivation, minorities, particularly where uneven mobilization affects them earlier, may appear disproportionately in the vanguard of national or class based populist movements. In this case universalistic ideology may submerge communal identities while, nevertheless, never wholly effacing them. But if a particular minority group acquires, by virtue of its prior mobilization, a dominant political position and uses it to exclude other groups, communal identities are likely to revive and the populist class coalition erode or fragment. The mix of populist revolt and sectarian politics in the Syrian case suggests that it is such a complex case.

The Formation of the Authoritarian-Populist State

If populist revolt is to succeed it must be institutionalized in a state. Perhaps because they are typically products of divided societies lacking consensus where the perceived problem is to ***concentrate*** reformist power in the face of established interests and communal fragmentation, such states, particularly in the Middle East, usually take an authoritarian form. Power is forcibly seized and populist policy imposed. Durable power, however, must be legitimized. While legitimacy ultimately rests in consent, it has, as Weber shows, many sources besides procedural democracy—i.e. personal or primordial loyalties, charismatic leadership, ideological mission, or bureaucratic legality—and all of these are compatible with authoritarian rule. Moreover, as Blau (1964) shows, power can also be generated by some "exchange" of benefits between ruler and ruled. The use of coercion in the concentration of authoritarian power may, thus, be accompanied by a variety of legitimacy sources and "exchanges." The particular mix of these resources is a central key to the very nature of the regime. Nevertheless, to consolidate a new order, a populist regime must go beyond the ***concentration*** of power and ***expand*** it and this requires some institutionalization of participation (Huntington 1968:140–147).

The Concentration and Legitimation of Power

The concentration of power is the first test of regime formation. It begins with the seizure of the state center, often through a military coup; but there is initially little governing power in the system and it is usually fragmented by an intra-elite power struggle between cliques of officers and politicians, perhaps exacerbated by the communal differences typical of mosaic societies. The new regime's challenge to established interests may also unleash a struggle among wider—but normally urban upper and middle class—social forces. A zero-sum struggle is waged with Machiavellian methods—coercion, ruse, divide and rule, by which opponents are eliminated and coalitions of followers, allies, and coopted opponents built and established in command of inherited or newly created levers of bureaucratic command and coercion. This phase of "primitive power accumulation" corresponds to Huntington's "radical praetorian" regime.

To be durable, concentrated power has to be transformed into a system of legitimate leadership and intra-elite decision-making, without which the regime center is vulnerable to fragmentation and paralysis. The initial attempt at authority legitimation in authoritarian-populist regimes usually mixes charisma and ideology. As Weber (1964:358–363; Bendix 298–328) and Ibn Khaldun (1967) argued, a religious-ideological vision is often the force which unites fragmented primordial factions, typically from deprived or peripheral sectors of society, in a state-founding movement; an "ideological revolution" has been, in some sense, the crucible of populist regimes in the modern Middle East, too (Binder 1964). But to the degree ideology is merely "expressive," lacking a programmatic content, it may not provide sufficient consensus for unified decision-making or to cement intra-elite cleavages (Moore 1974). If it is intense, the elite may split between moderates and radicals over doctrinal interpretations or it may overreach itself in challenging the old order and bring on a damaging reaction. Charisma and

ideology soon run up against an intransigent reality and must be moderated and routinized in institutions if the new state is to survive.

Charisma and ideology could, thus, lead into or be mixed with a legal-rational strategy in which the distribution of decision-making power is institutionalized in procedures, offices and assemblies at the center. This is the most stable approach to power concentration but is at odds with the logic of "primitive power accumulation," and presupposes an intra-elite consensus which must normally first be established by ideological or personal leadership: but such leadership militates against impersonal power sharing. Legal-rational rules in a culture without such a tradition may generate insufficient solidarity to bind a multi-communal elite, making the center vulnerable to fragmentation. As Weber (363–373; Bendix 308–328) suggests, however, if the routinization of charisma and ideology in legal-rational institutions fails, charismatic or personal leadership gives way to patrimonial rule.

Indeed, traditionally, as Bill (1984: 74–176) argues, ruling cores in the Middle East have been consolidated though patrimonial methods: the use of personal, kin, and ethnic loyalties—*asabiya*, as Ibn Khaldun puts it—combined with material payoffs for clients. In a mosaic kinship culture where tribal, communal, and sectarian rivalry was historically endemic and interpersonal trust limited to primordial groups, only persons "close" to a leader could be trusted in struggles for power. While loyalties to a universalistic ideology or impersonal institutions must be painstakingly forged, webs of primordial based personal links are "natural" ready-made sinews of association and hence power concentration; power probably cannot be built without some recourse to the basic associative tissue of the culture. In a mosaic society, resort to such a strategy is certain to translate into the use of communalism to cement an elite core. This strategy may create binding ties which muffle elite factionalism, but, as the Ottoman practice of eliminating the Sultan's brothers indicates, the closest primordial proximity is no guarantee of elite solidarity. Moreover, a personalistic elite core is wholly dependent on the personal vigor and competence of the leader. In a multi-communal society, elite core-formation must accommodate some kind of "ethnic arithmetic" or risk a very narrow base and communal counter-mobilization, but a "neo-patrimonial" strategy tends to exclude less trusted groups. It is useful to concentrate power but cannot mobilize enough actors to expand power much beyond the favored in-group. Though elites may initially use *asabiya* as a means rather than an end, followers recruited on this basis may turn the state into a "patrimony" used for the private ends of those with power, stimulating resentments and possibly rebellion by those excluded.

The liabilities inherent in each of the "pure" approaches to authority building typically results in combining universalistic with more exclusionist strategies. Weber himself argued that concrete cases were likely to be mixes, not pure forms, of his legitimacy types. In transitional societies where political association is a mix of particularistic and universalistic ties, state building strategies are likely to mix personal leadership, primordialism, ideology, and

the creation of new formal structures. Indeed, the multiple sources of power developed by mixed strategies may lend greater versatility and adaptability to a regime. There may also be built-in contradictions: if for example, a patrimonial strategy is used to construct the elite core, can effective mass incorporating institutions be built or will they be enervated by clientelism? Between a closed exclusionist regime and wholly open universalistic institutions, there are many middle possibilities and mixed strategies are likely to give rise to such intermediate kinds of outcomes.

The outcome of a successful power concentration has typically been a powerful executive headed by a dominant leader relatively unconstrained by law or custom. The relations between the leader and the military, ruling party, and bureaucratic elites become the sinews of power in the regime. Elite recruitment typically turns on cooptation by incumbents from above. Policy-making is highly centralized, taking the form of personalistic, bureaucratic or ideological factionalism within the elite. But depending on the regime's mix of power building strategies, the leader may be accountable to and share power with the ruling party or parliament, the military may be more or less under legal authority, and the orientation of the regime may be more or less patrimonial, legal-bureaucratic, or ideological. A regime may, of course, fail to successfully concentrate power or get beyond the radical praetorian stage and, if so, it is unlikely to long endure.

In the Syrian case, the outcome is, in fact, typically ambiguous. Despite attaining a certain ideological legitimacy, the failure to establish a cohesive center led to resort to patrimonial techniques resulting in a Presidential monarchy which shares power with military and bureaucratic elites and party institutions. But patrimonialism continually threatens the legitimation of authority and the institutional dimension of rule.

Power, Institution-Building, and Participation

A stable regime depends on the creation of effective structures of power linking state and society. Authoritarian-populist regimes, often initially military, typically attempt some structural development through a strategy of limited Leninization. Power comes to rest on three central institutions, the army, the ruling single party (and its mass auxiliaries), and the bureaucracy. Creating a place for the military in the system capable of subordinating military violence to political procedures is essential to stability and a strong party system is crucial to incorporating a mass constituency.

The Military: The role of the military is typically central, given the importance of force and the absence of consensus in the imposition of authoritarian regimes. Historically, the military has been central to state formation, everywhere initially a function of security imperatives. In fragmented societies the army is often the most organized, national-oriented social force, with the largest stake in the state and best equipped to impose order. In societies lacking a dynamic bourgeoisie it may also be a modernizing force and sufficiently autonomous of the traditional ruling classes to take

the lead in social change (Janowitz 1964:63; Halpern 1963:251–280; Halpern 1962; Horowitz 90–150; Trimberger 1975).

But whether the military has a positive impact on state formation depends on its incorporation into a system of established authority. In authoritarian regimes, its role varies widely. At one extreme is the "praetorian" case in which the military dominates, a politicized officer corps fragments among competing factions, subjecting the state to coups and countercoups or a general establishes a personal dictatorship (Be'eri 1970:463–481; Perlmutter 1981:18–19, 128–135, 147–159). At the other extreme is the Leninist model where the military is the creation and instrument of a strong ruling party; although one of the most powerful interest groups within the regime, it normally pursues its interests through legitimate institutions, excluding the gun from the political process (Wolpin 68–102). A whole range of intermediate cases are possible in which officers play a central political role but avoid the worst features of praetorianism. A dominant military leader may use his authority to create or stabilize political institutions. Or, the military may be a partner in a civil-military coalition, its role constrained by civilian political groups or institutions. While the officers may provide leadership in such regimes—becoming themselves politicians—the military institution, per se, not readily adaptable to political functions such as interest aggregation and mass mobilization, often shares power with a party through which civilian participation is incorporated (Huntington 1968:237–263). It will be argued that Syria falls in the intermediate category. Attempts to establish the Leninist model failed, but the military is partly incorporated into a system in which its role is constrained by a dominant leader and a Leninist-like party; praetorianism is contained but not eliminated.

The Party System: If the military is crucial to the concentration and defense of power, the single or dominant party is the key to its expansion. The party is a framework for the maintenance of elite cohesion and an instrument for mass mobilization and control. According to Perlmutter (1981:2–5), the creation of such a political infrastructure to channel mass participation is the chief feature distinguishing modern from traditional authoritarianism.

Ruling parties obviously vary widely, however, in their power to facilitate the concentration and expansion of power. The Leninist party with its core of ideological militants and mass auxiliaries penetrating society is the prototype of a "strong" party (Huntington 1968:334–343; 1974). To the extent a party approaches this model, it performs crucial functions: policy-making, elite recruitment, interest aggregation, mass mobilization. At the other end of the scale is the very fragile or subordinate party which is a mere facade for clientelism or a purely bureaucratic instrument of control (Harik 1973). Between the Leninist and the weak party are a whole variety of middle cases where parties are central to the political process but fail to attain the hegemony and capabilities of Leninist parties. Regimes seeking radical change require a strong party—an organizational weapon capable of penetrating and mobilizing mass support and smashing opposition—while regimes satisfied with the maintenance of order need much less. Authoritarian-populist regimes start out seeking radical change, but they vary in the extent to which they give priority to party-building; where they enjoy charismatic leadership, they may, in fact, neglect it. Moreover, to forge the strong ideological commitments of the Leninist-like party, it takes a sharp polarization between the party and its enemies and probably a long period of struggle for power from below and populist regimes vary considerably in this regard. It will be argued that Ba'thist Syria developed a fairly strong party.

In summary, authoritarian regimes vary widely in the extent of their institution-building capability. Observers often relegate such regimes to a praetorian or patrimonial category, sharply distinguished from institutionalized regimes, whether communist or democratic. But, in fact, many Third World states, including authoritarian ones which attempt some institution-building, probably fall somewhere in a middle category (Chalmers 23–43) in which *partial institutionalization* is characteristic. Rules, roles, offices, and structures do channel and constrain political action; but because they lack the fixity of constitutional regimes, they are vulnerable to manipulation and bureaucratization by the power elite and because they lack a transformative capacity comparable to totalitarian regimes, they are vulnerable to subversion by traditional culture. To the extent an authoritarian-populist regime subordinates the military and develops a strong party system it can be considered to achieve limited institutionalization.

Mass Incorporation and Power Expansion: The amount of power in a political system depends on the "number and intensity of influence relations" (Huntington 1968:143): the more participants and the more intensely mobilized they are, the more potential power. Expanding power means the mobilization of new actors into legitimate institutions. But can authoritarian regimes so mobilize support? In conventional theory, they are distinguished precisely by their inability to accommodate political participation. But while this is certainly true of their most primitive forms (purely personalistic or military no-party states), is it so of developed ones with reasonably strong parties?

Some argue that a single party, especially where it shares power with the military or is chiefly an elite-created instrument, cannot institutionalize authentic mass participation. Certainly it does not permit the choice needed to make participation fully meaningful for all; tolerance of opposition is so low and political rights so constrained that it can absorb only a limited spectrum of participatory demands. Even party activists usually have no strong mechanisms to punish elite abuse of power. Thus the regime is vulnerable to elite corruption and to participation crises and, to the extent institutional channels are clogged, demands will be expressed through clientelist connections or anti-regime protest (Almond 1966:311–313).

Yet between the democratic *ideal* and a participation *vacuum*, there is a wide middle ground. Huntington argues that an effective single party is uniquely capable of both concentrating power and expanding it through "mobilized" participation and Nelson questions the conventional dismissal of "mobilized" participation as inconsequential. Conflict between the single

party and anti-regime opposition, may, Huntington argues, function as a kind of surrogate for party competition. Skocpol shows that authoritarian states originating in revolutions enjoy a much widened "mass-incorporating" capacity, that is, the ability to stimulate pro-regime activism and absorb wide parts of the previously passive population into their political structures (Huntington 1974; Huntington and Nelson 1976:7–10; Nelson 1987; Skocpol). It is, thus, reasonable to hypothesize that authoritarian regimes with roots in populist revolts which develop strong party structures may have a certain mass-incorporating potential. To survive in the face of the hostility of the previously dominant socio-economic classes they have a particularly strong incentive to mobilize a mass base. The conditions of populist revolt—agrarian crisis, mass alienation from the old order, the breakdown of traditional mass encapsulation, etc.—provide special opportunities to incorporate the peasantry, the majority social force in most Third World societies. Indeed, populist regimes typically attempt, through some combination of ideology, party organization, patronage, and land reform to mobilize the deprived non-participant masses, and thus widen and shift the balance of power in the political arena in their favor. They may thus achieve an institutionalization of ***limited participation.***

Even a regime which starts out with populist ambitions may, of course, neglect institutional links to society, resorting instead to primordial loyalties and clientelism and if a party exists it may be nothing but a facade. But such patrimonialized regimes, unable to implement social reform or modernization, normally end up relying on alliances with local notables for mass linkage, leaving the villages and urban neighborhoods under their influence. Such a "Neo-patrimonial" regime, lacking an incorporated base to expand its power and sustain populism, is likely to end either in stagnation and the corrupt appropriation of the state for private elite ends or as, in time, political mobilization exceeds the modest absorptive capacity of its structures, in praetorian instability (Eisenstadt and Lemarchand 1981; Eisenstadt 1964). Yet, a mix of patrimonialism with institution-building strategies might produce a case where a viable party exists and, though infected by patrimonial traits, retains a certain mass incorporative capacity.

It must also be acknowledged that even a successful institutionalization of limited participation is no guarantee of stability for authoritarian-populist regimes. Given their relatively modest capacity, compared to totalitarian and democratic regimes, to either eradicate or accommodate opposition, it typically becomes a permanent challenge to their legitimacy; and in populist authoritarianism opposition is likely to include groups controlling a significant portion of societal resources. Moreover, modernization tends to create a more diverse and mobilized society harder to control and incorporate. In the face of precarious legitimacy and permanent opposition, the regime typically attempts to maximize its coalition through some combination of ideology, patronage, and populism and to control the opposition through a mix of concession and repression. If it stresses support maximization and inclusion, this tends to keep it responsive to the wider public, but may

strain its resource base at the cost of economic growth. To sustain a strategy of repression, the regime must either have a strong constituency of its own, society be at a low level of mobilization, or the opposition fragmented. And the more a regime must depend on the apparatus of coercion, the more likely the ruler will become its prisoner (Migdal 1987). Thus, while an authoritarian regime may very effectively concentrate power, there may be built-in limits to its capacity to expand it; ultimately, wider power-sharing may be the only way to create a stronger regime.

Power, Public Policy, and Social Reform

The authoritarian-populist state is "modernizing" and reformist in orientation and this is crucial to its consolidation of power. In its early phases, class-shaped populist ideology animates plebeian elites and "revolution from above" is deployed to break the power of foreign interests and of the oligarchy. Attack on the oligarchy's control of the means of production through nationalizations and land reform curbs its social power and with it much mass dependency; power over the economy is also thereby concentrated in the hands of autonomous state elites. The regime may consciously seek an alternative to private capitalist development, either in the form of state capitalism in partnership with a subordinated private sector or through a socialist—public sector, cooperative—alternative. A fluidization of the formerly rigid class structure typically results as property (e.g. land) is more widely distributed and new opportunities (through education, state employment etc.) for upward mobility are opened up. Thus, regime policy spawns or broadens certain social forces—typically the salaried petite bourgeoisie, the small-holding peasantry, and a new "state bourgeoisie." Such re-stratification, the demolition of old distributions of wealth and status and the creation of new regime-sanctioned ones, is crucial to consolidating a new order (Apter 123–133). Thus, the regime uses reform and economic power to forge an alliance of the state-dependent middle class and peasantry which, if institutionalized, typically broadens the class composition of the state and may impart considerable durability to its populist policy thrust.

The ultimate fate of populist states is, however, intimately linked to their longer run ability to foster development and cope with the crises of modernization. But are they "weak" or "strong" states in their capacity to manage development? The concentration of power and exclusion of opposition may initially give authoritarian regimes a greater capacity to impose difficult decisions and major reforms against vested interests. Bureaucratic expansion advances the regulatory, extractive, and entrepreneurial functions of the regime. But the assumption of new functions may outrun the capacity of the bureaucracy. The dictates of power maximization may subvert economic rationality: the extension of state control over the economy, the use of patronage and tolerance of corruption to solidify the elite, and populist distributive policies all put economics in the service of power instead of the opposite; if carried too far, this is self-defeating, turning the "strong" state "soft" and depleting its resource base. Statism reduces the power of

dominant classes but the regime must still tolerate autonomous societal centers—whether "traditional" or private capitalist—which, being naturally hostile, often obstruct its policies. Typically unable to establish full command of the economy through statist or "socialist" economic institutions capable of displacing an often alienated private sector, the regime will in time probably have to make concessions to foreign and private capital at the expense of populism. But the reforms it has carried out and the enhanced autonomy of the state may make the return to capitalism a less inequitable game than hitherto.

The Evolution of the Authoritarian-Populist State

Authoritarian-populist regimes undergo a fairly typical evolution in which four major variations (or mixes of them) may (but need not all) appear, distinguished by their level of institutional development and relative ideological orientation, as indicated in Table 1.1.

1. The ***radical praetorian*** regime denotes the early populist phase of power seizure and concentration when ideology, shaped by the elites' middle class or plebeian origins, drives the pursuit of radical reform. The regime, locked in conflict with the dominant classes, seeks the mobilization of mass support. There is also typically a certain intra-elite struggle for power out of which a dominant leader may emerge. Resting chiefly on charismatic leadership and/or army backing, the regime is unstable. The routinization of ideology and charisma needed for stabilization may proceed in either a legal-rational or patrimonial direction; but the expansion of power needed to consolidate a new order depends on the incorporation of a plebeian class coalition into political structures.

2. The regime may evolve through *limited Leninization* into a consolidated authoritarian-populist regime. Power remains concentrated in a mixed civil–military elite, but new participants, plebeian beneficiaries of radical reforms, are mobilized and organized through an ideological party, expanding power and consolidating the regime against the conservative opposition. A dominant

TABLE 1.1 The Forms of Authoritarian-Populist Development

Ideological Orientation	Level of Structural Development: Low	High
Radical	Radical Praetorian (Charismatic/ Ideological)	Authoritarian-Populist/ Limited Leninization
Conservative	Neo-Patrimonial	Authoritarian-Post-Populist/ Limited Liberalization

Source: Author

executive emerges, resting on the army and a one-party system incorporating some mass participation.

Once the revolution is so institutionalized, and once reforms have redressed the social crisis and achieved social restratification, the regime's orientation toward radical change is gradually displaced by a preoccupation with the management of the new order. The elite begins to identify its interests with the "state" and, seeking to maximize state autonomy, begins to balance rather than take sides between social forces. A "state interest" tends to supersede ideology as the determining factor shaping elite behavior. Just how this state interest is defined depends on what social forces are incorporated into it. It will certainly be expressed as an elite determination to defend the legitimacy, capabilities, resource base, etc. of the state. But in a statist/populist regime, the definition of state interests may also be shaped by a certain institutionalization of populist ideology in the ruling party, and will likely accommodate bureaucratic interests with a stake in the public sector and those of the corporatist syndicates through which the regime is linked to its populist constituency. In the mature stages of this form of authoritarian-populism, the earlier character of the political process as a class conflict over the direction of society is gradually superseded by a bureaucratic politics in which institutions and interest groups compete, inside the regime, over patronage, jurisdictions, and incremental policy change.

3. Alternatively, the regime may seek consolidation through patrimonial strategies. A ***neo-patrimonial*** regime concentrates power but cannot much expand it and lacks modernizing and reformist capability. Alternatively, a regime may begin with institution-building ambitions but regress into patrimonialism, ending in the loss of ideological energy, elite corruption, re-traditionalization of political structures, and mass de-mobilization.

Because pure patrimonial and institution-building strategies each have liabilities, regimes often mix them. The outcome is frequently a mixed Bonapartist/Leninist regime headed by a personalistic leader who presides over a collegial party and military leadership linked to him by clientelist ties. Once radical ideology ceases to play a leading role, the development of such mixed regimes is determined by the contrary pulls of patrimonial and rational-legal forces.

4. In a later ***post-populist*** evolution, the state tends to seek accommodation with the dominant classes at the expense of its populist constituency. The more the following conditions, which seem to drive this change, hold, the sooner and the more completely the regime will enter the mature post-populist phase.

a) *Elite transformation:* A radical elite in time exhausts its ideological energies: ideology and charisma must come to terms with everyday, especially economic, realities (Weber), radicals overreach themselves and are chastened by a conservative reaction (Brinton), and leadership vigor gives way to self-serving corruption (Ibn Khaldun), especially given the lack of accountability mechanisms in authoritarian regimes. The resulting ***embourgeoisement*** of the elite gives it a stake in new inequalities (Michels), inducing a conservative

transformation of its ideology. This elite transformation is likely to advance most rapidly where there is no strong party to institutionalize ideology and replenish the elite with plebeian elements.

b) *Economic constraints:* Populist regimes, as they mobilize previously inactive mass sectors through an "inclusionary" and redistributive policy, foster consumption at the expense of accumulation and alienate the "haves" whose cooperation may be essential to growth (Malloy:3–17, 47–87). Efforts to create alternative socialist-like institutions typically fail: inefficiency, corruption, and politicization enervate use of the public sector as an engine of investment. The strain of populist policies on the resources of the state, economic stagnation, and vulnerability to external pressures, may force an opening to private and foreign investment and a good investment climate requires a certain rollback of populism and statism.

c) *Class formation:* In an statist regime, elite aggrandizement and the corrupt manipulation of state-market interactions tends to generate a new "state bourgeoisie" inside the regime. Under economic liberalization, it may strike alliances with and, in time, even amalgamate with the private bourgeoisie including the remnants of the old oligarchy. This may spell a bourgeois recapture of the state and the deployment of state power in the interest of capitalist development.

In the post-populist phase, authoritarian structures initially persist but are now used for conservative ends (Apter 357–390). This may mean increasing patrimonialization, the more so the stronger the patrimonial component of regime power consolidation, unless limited liberalization gives wider social forces scope to check this decay. Indeed, if a capitalist strategy is adopted in earnest, long run success probably requires accommodating bourgeois demands for access to policymaking through "limited liberalization:" typically, the single party system is dismantled, legal protections (especially of property rights) strengthened, and a revitalized parliament becomes the vehicle for power-sharing with the executive. A certain power diffusion takes place, mostly to the bourgeoisie; policy is thus bound to move in a conservative direction favoring the dominant economic forces in society. Because resistance to this course is likely, the core of authoritarian power is maintained, albeit now directed at radical counter-elites. If resistance is intense, such a regime could evolve into a full-blown authoritarian-conservative one (e.g. Pinochet's Chile) in which state power represses and demobilizes the masses in the service of capitalist interests. Egypt is a pioneer in post-populist evolution, but the seeds of it exist in the Syrian case.

There are also forces which work against post-populist transformation and which may delay this development indefinitely, e.g. leadership preferences, the easing of economic constraints by petro-rent, factors unfavorable to capitalist investment, such as war or instability, or barriers, such as communal cleavages, to the amalgamation of the old and new bourgeoisies, etc. Moreover, insofar as parts of the regime's initial populist ideology become customary legitimacy standards and insofar as incorporation of its populist base is institutionalized, post-populist development is likely to be gradual and the outcome possibly less inegalitarian than that found in pure conservative authoritarianism.

Plan of the Book

In the following pages, the preceding concepts will be brought to bear in an analysis of the rise and formation of the Ba'th state. Chapter 2 explains the crisis of the old regime as a product of Syria's historical development; it analyzes the traditional agrarian structures whose inequalities generated the grievances on which the Ba'th rose and the ***ancien regime*** whose fragility debilitated alternatives to Ba'thism. Chapter 3 looks at the forces of social change which undermined the old order and produced the middle class alienation, agrarian crisis, and peasant politicization from which the populist coalition arose. Chapter 4 examines the vehicles of populist revolt, looking at the radicalization of the army and the formation of the Ba'th Party; it then traces the political mobilization and conflict which brought the Ba'th to power. Chapter 5 examines the post-1963 formation of a new authoritarian-populist state. The initial struggle for power, its concentration and use by radicals to launch a revolution from above, and the consolidation of the new order through limited Leninization and the forging of a Presidential Monarchy, are analyzed. Chapter 6 looks at the structures of power on which this regime rests, army, party, and state bureaucracy, showing how each harnesses the village and contributes to regime power consolidation. Chapter 7 interprets the Ba'th-created peasant union as part of a populist variant of corporatism, linking the regime to its village base. Chapter 8 uses an array of village case studies to illustrate how the regime rooted itself in the countryside and how it affects village politics. Chapter 9 looks at the consequences of the regime's failure to incorporate the urban public: the rise of Islamic opposition. The final chapter relates the evidence in the bulk of the book to the concepts in this introductory chapter and draws some generalizations from the Syrian experience useful in understanding Middle Eastern politics.

3. A similarly named group was separately founded by an Ikhwan leader in Aleppo, but attempts to form them in Damascus were smashed by the regime.

4. On the struggle of regime and opposition see: Rabinovich, 109–145; Petran, 175–179, 197–198; Tibawi, 415–420; Donahue; Kelidar; Kramer, 1980; Drysdale, 1982; Abd-Allah, 108–120; Mayer; Hudson, 1983; Hinnebusch 1982c, 1988.

10

Authoritarian-Populism and State Formation Under the Ba'th

Since 1963 Syria has undergone a political and social transformation of major magnitude. Both the rise of populist forces from below and state building and revolution from above contributed to this outcome.

Populist Revolt: The Roots and Forces of System Transformation

The rise of the Ba'th must be viewed not as a mere manifestation of military praetorianism, communal conflict, or even middle class breakthrough, although all of these elements are ingredients in the complex mixture of forces which produced it. It can only be fully understood as an outcome of societal crisis with roots in both Syria's pre-modern social formation and its incorporation into the modern world system.

The failure of the "traditional" elite, owing to profound liabilities rooted in Syria's long history, opened the door to the Ba'th. Syria, ruled for centuries by imperial elites, never developed an indigenous landed aristocracy able to integrate state and society: the elites of the patrimonial conquest states, in the absence of private property in land, largely failed to establish strong local roots in the countryside, and would not tolerate the rise of independent landed elites from local society. Nor did the traditional elite, oriented to war and extraction in a land with a precarious agrarian base, foster the agricultural revolution or produce the dynamic bourgeoisie needed for capitalist development. Hence, well into modern times, Syria remained a fragmented mosaic society, agriculturally backward, with a great cleavage between the dominant elite of wealth and power in the cities and the mass of peasantry and tribesmen in their patriarchal communities. This unmobilized society was extremely vulnerable to Western imperialism; even when the imperialist tide receded, the local elite would lack the traditions and resources needed to overcome these liabilities.

Almost a century of imperialist penetration and occupation reshaped Syria, simultaneously sweeping it into the world capitalist market and creating new obstacles to its development. Imperialism fostered a parasitic large landowning

class at the expense of the peasants which became the indigenous ruling elite. It dismembered historic Syria, leaving a truncated "little Syrian" state, imposing artificial boundaries and imported liberal institutions. The elite which inherited power at independence was thus of precarious legitimacy, its mass roots shallow, the state fragile. The Palestine disaster and the elite's inability to cut its economic and ideological dependency on the West deprived it of the nationalist legitimacy needed to respond to the challenges it faced. So damaging was the impact of imperialism on Syria that a unusually intense nationalism gave powerful impetus to counter-regime movements.

Social change, driven by capitalist penetration and state formation, accelerated after independence. Some capitalist development did get started, sparking agrarian revival and early industrialization. But it failed to lay the basis for sustained modernization while eroding the self-contained communities and patriarchal authority on which the old regime was erected. State formation was supposed to provide a new order to contain the tensions of capitalist development, but, in promoting the spread of education and state employment, it accelerated social mobilization disruptive of the old regime. Out of these developments grew new classes—a tiny entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, a salaried new middle class, a proletariat—sandwiched between the traditional landed elite and the peasant masses. The new middle class, barely incorporated into the old order and radicalized by its failures, challenged the dominance of the landed elite and sought to mobilize the mass public on its side.

Capitalist penetration disrupted the village and created the conditions of landlord-peasant conflict. At first, land concentration gave rise to great latifundia and a tightened grip of the city over the village surplus, but little agrarian modernization. Landlords were content to live off the harvest extracted from tenants who, impoverished, fatalistic, and resenting their overlords, produced a meager surplus. Even the small-holding peasants were typically indebted and threatened by dispossession. Later, the erosion of traditional tenure, under impact of capitalist farming and population growth, led to proletarianization and urban migration. These changes generated a profound agrarian crisis which the ruling elite, lacking leadership and functions in the village, was ill-equipped to contain.

Agrarian crisis and landlord weakness created conditions for a certain political mobilization of the peasantry as a class. It was, however, a limited, uneven mobilization, with two distinct bases which had to come together before it represented a real threat to the established order. Among the small-holding peasantry, especially in mountainous areas, encroachment by landlords and merchants, sometimes combined with sectarian cleavages, translated into alienation from the established order. The isolation of small-holders, primordial divisions, and small landownership may have retarded overt small-holder revolt; but relative freedom from direct landlord control and minimal village stratification allowed a drive by peasant youth for education and employment outside agriculture which ended in politicization and party recruitment. The plains sharecroppers, despite their intense resentment of the established order,

were initially too powerless for more than sporadic rebellion. Only when the whole fabric of village society began to fray under the forces of proletarianization and after radical middle class leadership—some of it provided by ex-peasant youth—penetrated the village, did the conditions for village mobilization come about. Once organized into a radical party and entrenched in the lower echelons of the state apparatus, ex-peasants provided the leadership, ideology, and organization needed to contest landlord control of the village, broaden peasant mobilization, and concentrate rural grievances against the established order. To be sure, this movement never achieved the breadth or intensity of major peasant revolution or even of large scale revolt; peasant ferment was channeled into party and electoral mobilization which petered out without leading directly into the overthrow of the agrarian order. But the rise of agrarian radicalism shattered the conservative ideology and peasant passivity on which the landlord-led regime rested and decisively discredited the mixed feudal-capitalist model of development over which it presided. It shaped a new rural counterelite dedicated to the overthrow of the old order and was the crucible of the coalition between this elite and the peasantry, without which the post-1963 Ba'th state could not have consolidated itself and would have remained a mere military or middle class regime susceptible to praetorian collapse. Thus, the two separate bases of peasant revolt came together, with explosive consequences. These developments are consistent with empirical generalizations on peasant mobilization elsewhere; indeed, the two groups often considered most susceptible to rural revolt, sharecroppers and small holders under pressure, each contributed to the outcome. But their ultimate political impact issued not so much from peasant revolt as from a rural capture of strategic instruments of political power.

In this mosaic society, peasant mobilization meant mobilization of the peripheral compact minorities. Colonial divide and rule and the territorial concentration of the minorities had at first sharpened their separate identities. But, with social mobilization, traditional sectarian leaders were displaced, minority youth embraced the secular universalistic Arab nationalism of the dominant community, and revolt of the periphery against penetration by the center gave way to a drive for integration of the periphery into the center. Minority mobilization took an assimilationist form in part because little cultural distance separated the minorities and the majority and they shared a common Arab language, culture, and, except for the Christians, a parent religion. The Alawis, in particular, being initially less advanced, sought assimilation into high Arab culture as they acquired education. As Hudson (1977:38–39) argues, the Arabic language and the common culture it shapes are powerful forces for social cohesion in the Arab world. Socialization of the new minority generation took place through national institutions—government schools, the army, and the Ba'th Party, a secular political movement. For minority youth, the career rewards of integration far exceeded those of an economically unviable separatism. That cultural assimilation partly preceded and partly accompanied social mobilization played a crucial role in overcoming the effect of the minorities' territorial concentration.

Though the Syrian state, corresponding to no felt national community, offered no powerful focus for broader loyalties, Arab nationalism, sharpened by a common perception of external threat from imperialism and Israel, came to be shared by most Syrians regardless of sectarian origins. Finally, because their disadvantaged status had more of a class—as peasants and ex-peasants—than a communal origin, Ba'thism's fusion of anti-establishment populism and Arab nationalism was able to channel minority social grievances in a universalistic direction, merging their protest with that of the peasantry and middle class as a whole. Indeed, overlapping cleavages—the minorities' separation from the establishment on sectarian, class, and urban-rural grounds—translated into a particularly intense alienation, making them shocktroops of radical social change, but under the banner of populist anti-feudalism, not anti-Sunni particularism. Communal identities persisted but the national and class mobilization of the fifties submerged them. The prior or more intense mobilization of the small-holding minority peasantry, leading to their disproportionate representation in the two future power institutions—the Ba'th Party and army—would regenerate sectarian conflict and solidarity after 1963. But the fact that these minorities were socialized in the ideological ferment of the fifties imparted a durable Arab nationalist and populist orientation to the post-1963 political elite. Had their mobilization taken a different form—that of separatism or attachment to overtly minority parties—the whole course of modern Syrian history would have been different and probably closer to that of Lebanon.

The contradictions in which Syria's capitalist development snared her propelled the class polarization of society, generating, by the mid-fifties, a system crisis. The agrarian-commercial ruling class seemed incapable of sustaining industrialization, of undertaking agrarian reform, and of leading independent national development able to satisfy the aspirations of the new middle class and the peasantry. The benefits and burdens of capitalist development were so unevenly distributed that growth only accentuated the already substantial inequality of pre-capitalist times, itself de-legitimized by the decline of traditional bonds. A privileged few at the top were further enriched; the expectations of the middle strata, increasing faster than upward mobility, were frustrated when economic growth reached a limit; and the lives of those at the rural base of society were further impoverished and disrupted. Social crisis was intimately linked to the nationalist struggle since, as counterelites like the Ba'thists preached to a whole generation, social revolution and true national independence were mutual requisites. The special circumstance of Israel and the strong Western pressures on Syria in the late fifties gave nationalism a special intensity which, in turn, aggravated social conflict. By the mid-fifties the segmental cleavages of a pre-mobilized era were superseded by a broad struggle aligning Syria into great antagonistic camps, self-described as *yamin* (right) and *yasar* (left), defined by national issues and class interests rather than parochial rivalries. But instead of taking the form of mass uprising, this class-shaped struggle was channeled by the peculiar processes of state formation in Syria. The recruitment of cohorts of middle class and peasant youth into the new state's bureaucracy, military

and educational system, never fully under control of the ruling landed class, led to the partial capture of these institutions by the middle class and then their gradual infiltration from below by rural youth; while the ruling elite retained control of land, wealth, and parliament, their power base in the state apparatus itself was decisively undermined. Once they lost control of the apparatus of coercion, their hold over the streets, campuses, and villages, always precarious, rapidly eroded. Thus, state formation created institutional vehicles through which a middle-class-peasant alliance against the ruling agrarian bourgeoisie took form. In short, the post-independence combination of agrarian crisis, capitalist deadend, national trauma, and system de-legitimation created the conditions for a class conflict which superseded, for a crucial period, the segmental and clientelist politics which perpetuated the status quo and generated an anti-regime movement which would end in its radical transformation. But the gradual capture of the state by this movement obviated the need for mass revolution to overturn it: in the end, a coup would be enough to set off a pent-up transformation directed from above.

Class conflict came to be most concentrated and "institutionalized" in two phenomenon, the radicalization of the army and the rise of anti-system parties. The intensity of politicization and radicalization of the Syrian army has few parallels. The lack of an indigenous military aristocracy and the army's consequent autonomy of the dominant economic classes was a necessary condition of radicalization. But the special pressures of Syria's inter-state environment—above all, the Palestine defeat—were also crucial. The defeat discredited traditional rule in military eyes and led to a continuous expansion of the army under middle class leadership, resulting in the exceptional depth in the stratification system from which the officer corps came to be drawn. Recruitment was indeed from elements most susceptible to radicalization: minorities, the hinterland petite bourgeoisie, many with links to radical civilians, and from the mainstream peasantry. The consequence was the infection of the army with middle class radicalism and agrarian populism. Initially, military politicization translated into instability: military coups, dictatorships, and struggles among civil-military coalitions which split the army into rival blocs. But, ultimately, it ended in the capture of the army from below, turning it from a ruling class shield into a vehicle of system-transformation. Once captured by a radical party—the Ba'th—the army would show an unexpected capacity for imposing revolution from above.

Of the many possible candidates, it was to be the Ba'th Party, in tandem with the ultimately Ba'thized army, which was to be the vehicle of system change. The Ba'th exhibited many of the features of system challenging movements. It began with philosopher-intellectuals who developed an ideology embodying a critique of traditional society and a vision of radical change which raised political consciousness. Its combination of nationalism and populism offered plausible solutions to Syria's crises which proved appealing to a multitude of social forces and shaped the attitudes of a whole generation. Around the founding leaders, gathered a core of "militants," typically drawn from "marginals" alienated from traditional authority and insecure: educated

ex-peasants, students, minorities, etc. In the next stage, politicians began to displace the philosopher-ideologues—thus, the growing dominance of Hawrani and later of the second generation radicals; under them, the Ba'th developed modern party organization, a new "political technology" going well beyond traditional kinds of political cement. Ideology and organization enabled the Ba'th to undertake a broader mobilization than any of its rivals and to partially incorporate a coalition linking important elements of the intelligentsia and the officer corps and substantial sections of the small but mobilized urban working class and of the peasantry. The strength of these ideological and organizational traditions enabled the party to survive the splits among its leaders and the dissolution of the 1958–1963 period and permitted its relatively rapid reconstruction after 1963.

Nevertheless, Ba'thist mobilization was uneven and sporadic. In part, this was due to social structural factors. Uneven mobilization is a universal product of uneven development and Syria's geographical and social heterogeneity only accentuated this. Thus, the independent peasant minorities early produced a radical intelligentsia and the share-croppers of the north-central plains provided the mass base of rural revolt, while many other areas remained quiescent. But the most striking manifestation of unevenness was the relative immunity of Syrian cities to Ba'thism. To be sure, the city—the campus, barracks, streets—was the origin of radical and Ba'thist thought and the ultimate focus of radical action. But it was in the countryside that Ba'thism put down real roots while the city remained a bastion of conservatism. Having failed to produce a dynamic anti-feudal bourgeoisie and with only a small proletariat, Syria's cities long remained under the sway of the landed notability and the clergy, historically concentrated there, not in the countryside; moreover, as its trading wealth declined and the city became parasitic on the agrarian hinterland, the urban petite bourgeoisie and masses developed a certain stake in preserving the status quo, too, and under assault by Westernization, retreated into religious traditionalism. Thus, the Ba'th ended up with a predominately rural and regionally concentrated base. The unevenness of Ba'th mobilization was, however, accentuated by the party's own organizational weaknesses: its structure, a mixture of modern and traditional ties, was incapable of sustaining the organizational incorporation of its mass base. Its failure to recruit cadres uniformly from a broad base meant that the dominant elements of its leadership would come from those rural sectors most advanced in producing an educated leadership and most alienated from the old order—the small holding peasantry of specific areas, much of it minoritarian. The defection of much of the party's luke-warm urban Sunni middle class base to Nasirism and the party's post-1958 dissolution greatly exacerbated the party's uneven composition. Without a broad organized urban-rural base, the party could not come to power through mass revolution or votes and ended up doing so on the back of the army. That the same minorities were being disproportionately recruited into the military meant it was *they* who would combine party and army as the tandem vehicles of system challenge.

The combination of social crisis and political mobilization produced a classic case of a "praetorian state" in post-independence Syria. Even as traditional authority was breaking down, the entrenchment of constitutional institutions capable of absorbing political mobilization was obstructed by the absence of supportive traditions and the failure to open them to new social forces at a satisfactory pace. The resulting military interventions were symptoms of the elite's loss of control over the repressive apparatus and of breakthrough into the political arena by the new middle class. The middle class was at first too fragmented and incapable of mass mobilization to challenge the old elite through electoral channels or popular revolt; but because politics was still limited to a small urban political arena, it could exact a share of power through street protests or occasional coups curbing the upper class elite. By the late fifties, the praetorian crisis deepened as rural forces were mobilized under middle class leadership, shifting the power balance against the establishment. Thus, political conflict moved from being a mere urban tempest in a tea cup to reflect the deeper agrarian crisis agitating the countryside. But the demands of rural forces for agrarian reform, appearing to challenge the very foundations of the old regime, could not be accommodated by the system: thus, the failure of the elite to permit evolutionary reform through established institutions prepared the way for populist revolt against them. Exacerbating class and ideological rivalries, was the intervention of external forces, readily penetrating a weak state. Syria during this period was reckoned one of the most unstable countries in the world, threatening to pass, in Huntington's terms, from radical middle class to mass praetorianism. The ease with which the old regime was swept aside by the UAR and the utter failure of the "separatist" attempt to turn back the political clock exposed the bankruptcy of the old order. But the national-left coalition which in 1958 appeared on the verge of displacing it, collapsed thereafter, and its core, the Ba'th, became a victim of organizational dissolution and de-mobilization under the UAR. Any possibility of system transformation through mass mobilization from below vanished. In the end, however, the very fragmentation of the political arena would aid a determined Ba'thi counter-elite, armed with ideology and guns, to seize power in March 1963.

The Road to Power: The Rise of a New Elite

Thus, the final collapse of the old regime came through military coup, ostensibly yet another episode of radical praetorianism or, at most, the beginning of "revolution from above" on the Turkish or Egyptian models. The seizure of power by coup, unaccompanied by mass revolt or mobilization and without benefit of a cohesive movement which could take over governance, meant state-building would take place "from above." Relying on army officers to take and keep power, the regime would never mobilize the ideological activism of a revolution from below. Moreover, the elite had a minority character, the product of the prior unevenness of mobilization and the splits and dissolution under the UAR which put party reconstruction after 1963

in the hands of the most determined and least de-mobilized elements, minority Ba'thi officers and those civilian branches, notably in Alawite Latakia, which had been informally preserved.

Yet, March 1963 was far more than a mere military coup or sectarian power seizure: it was a delayed outcome, cut short by the 1958–1963 interregnum, of forces generated in a decade and a half of prior political struggle rooted in the profound crises of Syrian society. The coup makers were a product of the forces mobilized by this struggle. They were plebeian elements, junior officers from modest rural backgrounds who had infiltrated and captured parts of the military apparatus, had been purged for their radicalism and—far more than an Ataturk or even a Nasir—were "outsiders" alienated from the establishment. More the products of rural disruption and mobilization than bureaucratic elites identified primarily with the state, their outlook was shaped by intense anti-feudal, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist sentiments. Moreover, they had a potential popular base, for though the middle-class peasant coalition the Ba'th mobilized in the fifties was fragmented and demobilized after 1958, its constituent elements remained in being, some of them available for reconstruction in the post-coup period.

In consequence, the goals of the new regime were far broader than sectarian or military aggrandizement. Its radical nationalist-populist ideology was, indeed, an authentic reflection of its roots in major segments of society. Secular nationalism united the officer corps, intellectuals, peasantry and minorities; populist etatism, reformist but tolerant of small property, expressed the interests of petit bourgeois officials and peasants as well as their hostility toward "feudalists" and "middlemen." The regime would attempt a populist revolution expressing the interests of these social forces. The subsequent incorporation into the new state of an alliance of officers, intellectuals, and peasants would give it formidable assets—the guns, brains, and numbers—to concentrate, direct, and expand the revolutionary power needed for this enterprise. All of this would give the Ba'th a more intense and enduring policy direction than any mere coup could have generated. The consequent transformation of Syria had, indeed, many of the symptoms of revolution: the displacement of an old elite by one of quite different plebeian origin, the transformation of state structure and social composition, a radical change in public policy, social structural reform, decisively altering the balance of class power to the disadvantage of the upper classes, a challenge to the surrounding world order, and the emergence of a stronger state.

The Ba'th case does not fit the model of peasant revolution from below; but it far exceeds the dimensions of a "reform coup." Trimberger's military-bureaucratic revolution from above captures part of the outcome, a forced social transformation led by state elites, but it does not adequately account for the rural mobilization which preceded and precipitated the Ba'th's power seizure. If the anti-regime mobilization of the fifties is considered an organic precondition of the 1963 coup, the case has features of Walton's "national revolt," but because counter-elites gradually captured the state, violent encounter between state and opposition was far milder. The Syrian case thus

appears mixed, combining features of both the Trimberger and Walton types: one in which a radicalized military was captured by—or captured—a populist party with mass roots. The power seizing coup was an outgrowth of revolt from below; the forces generated by this revolt were then incorporated into the regime by the "revolution from above" which followed.

The Ba'th in Power: State Formation

Struggle for Power, Revolution from Above

The Ba'th regime's first challenge, confronted from 1963–1965, was the concentration of power over the command posts of the state and the exclusion of rival elites. Its lack of an organized base and intense opposition in the cities initially forced the regime to rule chiefly by force; establishing control over the army and government apparatus was hence its first priority. The heavy reliance on recruitment of the friends and kin of leading Ba'th officers in the Ba'thization of the military "institutionalized" from the outset the dominance of rural minorities, especially Alawis, over it. They gave a militancy and tenaciousness to the regime in the intense conflicts with the Sunni establishment in the sixties, but they also limited the regime's ability to appeal to the urban masses and broaden its base beyond the village.

The struggle for power was in essence over the "revolution from above" envisioned by the new elites. The opposition was led by a patrician coalition of the notability, merchants and the Ikhwan, defending the interests of traditional urban society in the language of free enterprise and conservative Islam; the inclusion of urban middle class Nasirites in the opposition initially gave the cleavage between it and the regime an urban-rural character. A second struggle inside the regime itself pitted rural radicals who wanted a socialist revolution against urban middle class moderates advocating a reformist model which could secure the cooperation of urban capital. This struggle often had a civil-military and sectarian dimension, but sectarianism and militarism were not ends in themselves but means used in the struggle over the leadership and course of the "revolution." The victories of the radicals in the see-sawing internal power struggle were associated with policy initiatives—radicalized land reform, nationalizations, government controls over the market—which challenged the urban bourgeoisie's control of the means of production and the market. The regime's 1965 assault on the economic bases of opposition power and the 1966 ousting of the old Ba'this were watersheds in the struggle over the concentration and purposes of power.

In a second phase (1965–1970), even as power was more tightly concentrated at the top, the regime began to expand it by widening the scope of conflict, bringing in new actors, and thereby shifting the balance of power in the political arena in its own favor. It set about remobilizing its peasant base, the roots of which persisted in the villages. It decreed radical social reforms and forged Leninist-like political structures from the top down, but

the reforms were responses to long standing demands from below and the formation of new state structures also entailed a building upward from village bases; mobilization and social transformation took place, from both "above" and "below." Thus, in Leninist fashion, the regime narrowed the distribution of power at the center, in the inter-elite arena, while widening it at the base. Ba'th party dominance of the regime, the Ba'thization of the army and bureaucracy, and the incorporation of a rural constituency transformed the social composition of the state, resting it on a "populist coalition"—of radical officers and intellectuals, workers, petty bureaucrats, and peasants—which had its deepest roots in the countryside. The policies of the regime had a corresponding social bias, favoring its plebeian rural constituency at the expense of the notability and the *suq*. A ruralized state took form, ruling over a hostile city. Thus, the historic urban-rural gap, long the most important cleavage in Syrian society, had been turned on its head, putting the previously subordinate "village" on top.

This regime had three clear weaknesses. The center remained barely institutionalized and military praetorianism barely contained. The use of sectarian, regional, and kinship ties in the intra-elite struggle for power had sharpened sectarian identities, making the elite more susceptible to a fragmentation which increasingly narrowed it. Secondly, the regime lacked the power to back its revisionist foreign policy. Thirdly, opposition remained intense among broad cross-class sectors of urban society. The rule of a rural plebeian regime over a higher-status led urban opposition could not be indefinitely sustained without some accommodation of urban forces and in the aftermath of the 1967 war, Syria could no longer afford such internal polarization. General Hafiz al-Asad's demand for a restoration of national unity set off another power struggle inside the Ba'th in which the opposing sides were similar cross-sectarian and civil-military coalitions, but otherwise appealed to differing constituencies: Syria's bourgeoisie and the army high command backed Asad, while leftist intellectuals and trade unionists supported the radicals. With the main levers of military power in his hands by 1970, al-Asad deposed the radicals in an intra-party coup. It is, however, a measure of the success of the radical leadership in consolidating power that no group outside the Ba'th could challenge the party's grip on the state. This compared favorably with the weak unstable regimes of the pre-1963 period.

The Outcome of Regime Consolidation: A Semi-"Bonapartist" State

Regime Center: Presidential Monarchy: Asad set out to remedy the structural weaknesses of the Ba'th state, largely through the creation of a patrimonial core inside the universalistic but fragile Leninist institutions inherited from his predecessors. Collegial leadership gave way to a "Presidential Monarchy" in which power was personalized and concentrated. Asad's intra-elite power rested on a cross-sectarian team of close "comrades-in-arms," and on the formation of a personally loyal Alawi clientelist network at the levers of state

coercion, each cemented by the dispensation of patronage and tolerance of corruption among the elite.

The resulting "patrimonialization" of the regime center was manifest in a number of phenomenon. The personalization of power was, perhaps, a return to the dominant indigenous tradition of leadership. The Alawi military chiefs around the president, a formidable shield against his enemies, abusing their power and favoring their own sect, had analogues in earlier patrimonial states in the area. Alawis in general became a privileged recruitment pool based more on ascriptive criteria than ideological commitment or skills. The Asad elite as a whole used state power to enrich itself in true patrimonial fashion and turned the regime from a command post of revolution into an instrument of more traditional pursuits—war abroad and social stability at home. This patrimonialization appeared, however, to give the center a greater cohesion than heretofore.

But patrimonialization was never complete. The solidarity of the Asad elite rested on more than mere sectarian and personal loyalties: raison d'état was always an important element governing elite behavior, often in conflict, to be sure, with the use of sectarian and class ties for personal or group aggrandizement. Nor was elite politics exclusively a matter of clientelist and sectarian factionalism: ideological issues and debates over the requisites of national security and the proper strategy of development still played a role in the policy process. Intra-elite relations were not exclusively zero-sum ones—Alawis against Sunnis, military against civilian; indeed state structures fostered a certain cooperation serving common elite interests. In short, the level of cohesion attained by the elite, inspite of its sectarian heterogeneity, resulted not exclusively from primordial ties, but also from a certain shared ideology, even some accepted rules of the game embodied in the legal-rational structures of the state. Finally, the power of Asad's team over society rested not simply on minority solidarity and clientelist networks but on its command of the levers of three major state institutions, the army, the state bureaucracy and, not least, the party machine through which the regime incorporated and controlled a mass constituency.

The Structures of Power: The military has played a central role in the Ba'th state, but the military is not simply some new Mamluk class dominating civil society: its role is much more ambiguous. On the one hand, the military advanced state formation in certain important ways: under the radicals populist officers sustained the state's autonomy of the dominant classes without which radical reform would have foundered and backed the use of Leninist techniques in the mobilization of a popular base. Under Asad, the military forged a national security apparatus which turned Syria from a victim of its international environment into a formidable actor. Yet, perhaps a function of the continuing state of war, Syria has little advanced in the "de-militarizing" of the state necessary to bury praetorianism. As a result, the military remains the final arbiter of intra-elite political conflicts and, up to now, the coup is the only leadership succession mechanism of record; the politicized military, reflecting the fragmentations of the society in which

it is rooted, has kept praetorianism alive in the heart of the state. The military constrains even modest political liberalization, while burdening the economy and sometimes encroaching on civilian domains.

But Syria is no mere praetorian regime for military-politicians and military institutions operate within a wider political system which both sustains and constrains their dominant role. The Presidency subordinates and contains military power. The military shares power with civilian "politicos" and "technos," and most elite factions are military-civil coalitions. A certain military professionalism and the functional autonomy of party and bureaucracy are significant obstacles to military aggrandizement. The two leadership succession coups came from within the Ba'th itself, in the name of civil-military ideological factions, not military corporate interest, altering but never effacing the main thrust of Ba'thism; moreover, in the last eighteen years no such military intervention has succeeded. A mixed military-party state has emerged in which praetorianism remains below the surface but is normally contained by the partial institutionalization of the Ba'th political system.

That the Ba'thist political system has achieved a ***partial institutionalization*** is manifest in a number of "indicators" (Huntington 1968:12–32).

1. It is a ***structurally complex*** regime with multiple centers of power—presidency, army command, party politburo, council of ministers—rather than a simple or purely personal one. These power structures, far from being mere facades for clientelism, have many of the rules, roles, and functions of authentic institutions. The party is a real party with a long history, not a mere creation or appendage of leader, army or bureaucracy. It performs crucial political functions, initially those of a vanguard party—elite recruitment, mass mobilization—now increasingly those of a patronage party; presidency and military constrain its role, patrimonialization and bureaucratization enervate it, but they do not negate it. The role of ideology in party recruitment and mobilization is increasingly eroded by careerism and primordial ties, weakening the muscle of political structures and diluting political activism. But specifically political phenomena—ideology, organization, cadres, votes, debates, etc. reached and retain a significant level of development in the party's internal life. It is the party's viability and role which permits the regime to transcend pure patrimonialism and praetorianism. Unlike the Egyptian ASU, which Sadat abolished with ease, the Ba'th party could no more be abolished tomorrow than Stalin could have abolished the Communist Party. The state bureaucracy is a less powerful institution, more an instrument than an autonomous center of power. But it has also achieved a significant measure of legal-rationality: power is based to a great extent on office and control of organizational levers and is channeled by plans, rules, and operating procedures which organize the work of thousands of officials toward publicly defined goals, even if clientelism and the drive for patronage make for a hidden second agenda in conflict with the official one. This gives the state a structural base and a policy-implementing capability which go well beyond those of a merely patrimonial regime.

2. Regime structures enjoy a certain ***autonomy.*** Most obviously, the state enjoys a considerable measure of autonomy from the dominant classes: the leveling of the economic sources of their power, the fluidization of the social structure and the incorporation of a mass base into the state, raised the regime above these forces. The societal resources by which the dominant classes had hitherto virtually colonized the state—wealth, traditional family status—were initially excluded from the political sphere; the doors to wealth have, of course, re-opened but even today these resources cannot be as directly translated into political influence as before.

Nor are regime political institutions simply the tools of particular elites—such as Alawi generals or a "state bourgeoisie." Political elites, to be sure, command, deploy and sometimes privately appropriate the resources of these institutions. But certain interests attach to the roles and offices constituting the state which are distinguishable from those of the elite. Regime structures incorporate the interests of a variety of social forces: rural party apparatchiki, Sunni urban middle class bureaucrats, and through their syndical organizations, masses of peasants, workers, and school-age youth; it strains credibility to think that these elaborate structures can be readily manipulated by elites without accommodating the interests of the thousands of activists and officials who make them up. Moreover, it is possible to identify a "state interest," distinct from the private interests of elites and shared by all these forces, which shapes political behavior within the regime, although this may mean somewhat different things to different actors: to top elites maintenance of regime legitimacy, and of the coercive, resource mobilization, and national security capacities of the state; to a wider officialdom, protection of the state's revenue base and capacity to enforce policies; for party ***apparatchiki,*** maintenance of the organizational and ideological integrity of the party; for the officer corps, advancement of the defense capabilities and professional integrity of the military; and, at the yet wider level of the regime and its constituency, the maintenance of populist policies and defense of Syrian territory and national prestige. One manifestation of a common state interest at work is the tendency of these forces to close ranks when these interests are threatened by outsiders.

3. There are several indicators of a significant measure of regime ***coherence.*** The Ba'thist ideological paradigm, though altered, has continued to give a recognizable and distinct thrust to public policy for over a quarter century. The regime has also shown an ability to adapt and survive in different and difficult environmental conditions and has attained a measure of stability and durability in spite of intense internal opposition and formidable external enemies: this is no longer, as in 1949, a regime which can be overthrown by "the exchange of a few words and a few thousand dollars between a foreign ambassador and some disaffected colonel" (Huntington 1968:21). The state's much increased societal penetration, resource mobilization, and functional responsibilities and its greater ability to better hold its own in the international arena suggest a credible level of policy implementation capability.

The institutionalization of power is, of course, only partial and there are also plenty of indicators of praetorianism and patrimonialism. The dominant role of the military, the manipulation or breaking of the rules of the political game by elites, the lack of effective accountability mechanisms, and the clientelism and primordialism which indisputably infect political structures are all signs of these ills. But the Achilles' heel of the regime lies in the failure to institutionalize leadership succession, each case of which has so far been brokered by military violence and shows every sign of doing so again after Asad.

The mobilizational and mass incorporating capacity of the regime is a similar "mixed" story: it has accommodated *limited participation*, but has failed to "solve" the "crisis of participation." Initially, the regime sharply constrained participation, repressing the urban centered pluralism of the fifties while, at the same time, generating a measure of ideological-oriented pro-regime activism. The regime also penetrated the rural areas in a relatively uniform way, by-passing gatekeepers who kept the peasantry encapsulated, drawing previously inactive peasants into the political arena, opening up new recruitment channels for rurals, and establishing new centers of village leadership, thereby pluralizing power in the *rief*. This mobilization, widening the political arena (and reducing the relative weight of the urban opposition), shifted the balance of power in favor of the Ba'th state. In several respects the Ba'th also enhanced political equality. A more equitable distribution of participatory resources (e.g. literacy, political consciousness) was effected and social structural barriers to mass politicization—rigid stratification, segmental encapsulation—eased. Through the party and mass syndicates, political association on a scale hitherto unknown was fostered. A populist form of corporatism institutionalized access to the political center for the regime's mass constituency. The exclusion of formerly privileged groups from access and this rural incorporation produced much greater elite responsiveness to the rural majority than that under the landlord regime. This contrasts with the more common Third World situation in which the city enjoys some political power while the village does not.

But, subsequently, Asad's power strategy had a contradictory effect on the regime's incorporative capacity. He tried with some success to widen the regime's base through political relaxation, cooptation of opposition and economic rewards—government jobs for the middle class, liberalization and enrichment opportunities for the bourgeoisie. But the economic payoffs to urban interests narrowed responsiveness to the regime's rural constituency and alienated part of the regime's activist support. Moreover, as, after 1970, class conflict and class ideology faded, while Asad used communal ties to consolidate the elite core, the persistence of a strong religious and kinship culture made communal solidarities into "natural" vehicles of political action. In this climate, the Alawis turned from a deprived into a privileged group, narrowing access for all others. Then, as fundamentalist Islam became a vehicle of anti-regime mobilization for those feeling most excluded, the regime, faced with a formidable challenge to its survival, narrowed the

modest scope of participation previously permitted and jettisoned all tolerance of dissent in a burst of repression. Accommodation between state and private sector, city and regime, was set back and the regime's cooptative capability seriously enervated.

On the whole the regime has shown little capacity to politically incorporate urban society. Much of the old upper classes, large segments of the urban middle class, and the masses of the traditional quarters are alienated and feel deprived of political rights. But, unlike totalitarian regimes, the Ba'th has neither the will or capacity to destroy the economic bases of the opposition elites or snap mass links to them. Thus, it faces a permanent opposition coalition joining old money, the *suq*, and youthful militants around a powerful "counter-ideology"—fundamentalist Islam. Virtually excluded from participatory channels, apparently invulnerable to economic appeasement, the opposition periodically resorts to anti-system activities—the riot, demonstration, merchant strike, the black market, the brain drain, assassination, finally, the mass armed uprising; while "anomic" and often costly to those who engage in them, these forms of protest have deterred the regime from certain initiatives, wrested concessions from it, even forced it to change course: they helped de-rail the socialist experiment and forced a muting of secularization.

The participatory efficacy of even the regime's own constituency is currently limited though it is still of some significance. Intra-party politicking through which activists move upward in the political structure, controlled interest group activity, and clientelist access ("individual contacting") remain viable avenues of access for it. In countries like Syria where many societal interests are literally incorporated into the state itself, the informal lobbying of officials themselves is a crucial part of politics. All these forms of politics have, in the aggregate, an effect on outcomes. Moreover, the pro-regime activism of significant numbers of lower-middle and lower class elements in the party bases, often dismissed as a "mobilized," hence meaningless form of participation, has had strategic consequences: it is crucial to the durability of Ba'thism. But even "legitimate" pro-regime participation is tightly constrained. Many of the crucial issues are excluded from intra-party political debate, which takes place largely on terms set by the elite, and participants lack institutionalized mechanisms to keep elites responsive. In their absence, informal mechanisms may operate, notably the need of a regime lacking much customary or procedural legitimacy to satisfy its constituency, especially in periods of sharp opposition challenge. Yet, since the most dangerous threat to regime survival is the prospect of military coup the regime's first priority is satisfying the military, turning the latter into a privileged force sometimes immune from the law and with priority claims on the country's resources.

Politicization has clearly outrun the limited institutionalization of participation in Syria. The middle class praetorianism of the fifties and early sixties was initially superseded as Ba'thist political mobilization expanded the small highly fragmented urban political arena and incorporated a rural

mass base into the state. By the late seventies, the arena was much enlarged and more mobilized, but the declining incorporative capacity of the regime bifurcated it between the Ba'th and a largely Islamic opposition, resulting in sporadic mass praetorianism. But the regime retained enough of a political base to contain this concentrated, intense opposition. The repression of Islamic opposition ended in the uneasy passivity of the eighties. The regime seems to lack the broad legitimacy necessary to defuse the praetorian potential of the now submerged opposition by widening institutionalized participation; hence the "crisis of participation" remains on the political agenda.

Populist Statism and Ba'thist Power

The Ba'th's populist-statist "modernizing strategy"—social leveling, the concentration of economic power in the state—was shaped by its origins in a populist revolt against the old oligarchy. It was in part an instrument for relaunching the socio-economic development which had faltered with the breakdown of Syria's capitalist experiment. But, in responding to the expectations of the constituency the Ba'th was incorporating and in breaking the economic dominance of its rivals, the Ba'th was also deploying development policy as an instrument of regime power consolidation.

The public sector became a lever of state control over the economy, a vehicle for channeling significant investment into infrastructure and industry which sparked a burst of economic expansion, and an instrument of political cooptation, incorporating thousands of middle and working class constituents who thereby acquired a certain stake in a statist regime. In agriculture the regime pursued both populist leveling and bureaucratic expansion. Land reform, in breaking the hold of the great notables over land and peasant, broadened and consolidated a small holding sector beholden to the regime. In deploying the agrarian bureaucracy in a series of rationalizing innovations and forging a state-cooperative agricultural infrastructure, state control replaced commercial dominance over agriculture while fostering a certain peasant security and prosperity. In this way the Ba'th broke through traditional barriers to state penetration, institutionalized linkages to peasants and incorporated a large portion of them into the state. None of this would have been possible without concentrated and populist authoritarian power.

But the "socialist" experiment ultimately reached its limits and the regime exhausted its ideological energies without having created viable economic institutions which could substitute for capitalism. In industry, inefficient management, an undisciplined work force, and the subordination of profit to political goals such as patronage deprived the public sector of the capacity to mobilize the capital for its own reproduction without costly dependence on outside sources. In agriculture, the bureaucracy also failed to extract much surplus and the cooperatives to foster collective investment and cultivation. The regime over-committed its resources—to national defense, welfare, development investment—without attaining a commensurate resource mobilization capability. The internal accommodation with capital under Asad—economic liberalization, social stabilization—was an effort to create

safety valves and stimulate an alternative private economic motor to supplement the public sector; but liberalization chiefly fostered consumption, corruption, and inflation which led to widening trade deficits and inequality. Since this was accompanied by a buttressing of the state sector through which petro rent continued to be funneled, the new strategy did not so much reverse etatism as erode its populist character. Populism persists, however, in the servicing of the regime's plebeian constituency through such instruments as subsidization of popular commodities and cheap credit to peasants and development policy has not been "captured" by the bourgeoisie or put in the service of capitalist resurgence at the expense of the masses. Rather, the state seeks to reconcile and appease the interests of capital and labor, state and merchant, city and peasant. The combination of initial leveling and the renewed inequalities which the Ba'th has fostered amounts to a major re-stratification of society. As the weight of old wealth and family name was curbed, while that of political loyalty and activism, state service, and military power were enhanced, "making it" in Syria came to depend for many on making it in or with the state, a major explanation for the regime's durability. Thus, although its economic rationality is in some respects questionable, the state's development strategy proved an effective instrument of political consolidation for the Ba'th.

The limits of this strategy have, however, been reached and perhaps overreached. The burden of the national security state combined with patronage and corruption dissipate resources needed for investment and under the economic stagnation and inflation which has resulted in the eighties, the mobilization of aspirations and demands is outrunning the capacity to satisfy them; indeed the situation of the plebeian strata seems to be eroding. The regime has no easy way out: it is loath to squeeze its own constituency very far—whether the new bourgeoisie or the masses—for fear of losing its precarious political base and it cannot extract from a private bourgeoisie able to evade its bureaucratic reach and threaten disinvestment. Oil wealth and the exit of the most ambitious have provided safety values but as these narrow, the regime has been forced into an austerity policy which shrinks patronage and populism. In creating or mobilizing whole sets of new interests, then accommodating old ones, the regime had, by the eighties, been caught in a web of its own making, depriving it of capacity for major innovation.

Classifying the Ba'th State and Its Evolution

The evolution of the Ba'th state can be summarized and classified in terms of the categories in the introduction.

1. Immediately after 1963, the regime had all the symptoms of a "radical praetorian" state: seizure of power by coup against a landlord regime, ideological intensity, military rule, little institutional development or organized popular base, reform by decree from above, instability—military factionalism inside the regime and class hostility outside.

2. Subsequently (1965–1970), the regime moved toward the mature "authoritarian-populist" type. Limited Leninization gave rise to a strong

ruling party and mass organizations incorporating a support base and generating the power to implement major reforms. But the regime, only partially institutionalized, never decisively subordinated the military to political leadership and soon abandoned rule through collegial party institutions. In its place an authoritarian presidency emerged (1970–1975), resting on both an elite core forged through *asabiya* and party and bureaucratic structures. The state incorporated a major array of bureaucratic and populist interests and their defense eclipsed radical change as the major goal of policy.

3. Thereafter (1976–1989), patrimonial tendencies began to infect the regime, manifest in the aggrandizement of presidential monarchy and of the Alawi core around it at the expense of party and state institutions, the decline of ideology, the transformation of the party into a patronage machine, the enervation of state rationality and development capacity by corruption and inertia, the compromising of populist-etatist development, and a certain reconciliation with traditional forces in the villages. But patrimonialization has not decisively traditionalized the elite, wholly effaced ideology or gutted prior institutional development.

4. Simultaneously, the regime moved in a conservative direction. Conservatization grew out of the post-1970 halt in "socialist transformation," construction of a national security state, and revival of the private economy. By the mid-seventies, these policies had resulted in embourgeoisement of the plebeian elite, a certain incorporation of bourgeois elements into the regime, a tolerance of new inequalities, and increased repression of leftist as well as rightist dissidents. Patrimonial corruption accelerated these tendencies. The regime, thus, showed the symptoms of post-populist transformation. But state power has yet to be put in the service of a reconstructed bourgeoisie, a return to capitalist development, or the de-mobilization of the masses, and, in the absence of limited liberalization, the access of the bourgeoisie to power remains uninstitutionalized and unreliable.

5. By the mid-eighties, the regime had passed the apex of its institutional development, but neither structural deterioration or policy transformation were advanced enough to move it fully into the neo-patrimonial or post-populist categories. It resembles a "Bonapartist" regime hovering near the center of the matrix of four types depicted in chapter one: structurally, it is headed by a nationalist general turned Presidential Monarch, backed by the army and bureaucracy, and with a mass incorporating populist party; in orientation it is the product of both a leveling revolution and the generation of a new stratification system, including a new "state bourgeoisie," and thus stands "above" rather than taking sides between social classes.

6. Eventually the regime must depart in one direction or the other. It seems incapable of reforming and re-vitalizing itself along populist lines. Yet the conditions of intensified praetorianism and system collapse do not yet exist: disparate counter-elites would have to develop greater unity and mobilizational capacity, notably one able to overcome the urban-rural gap, state institutions would have to crumble, and the Ba'thist elite split along sectarian lines. A succession crisis might result in such a division, but it would take a broader crisis for the state's structures to unravel. The obstacles to a limited political liberalization opening the regime to bourgeois penetration remain formidable, especially the Alawi core of the regime, the party apparatus, the continuing conflict with Israel, and the risks of enhancing the power of the anti-regime city at the expense of the regime's village base. The most likely immediate prospect is therefore continuing neo-patrimonial drift, enervating the regime's institutions and narrowing its base. But the simultaneous crisis of the statist economy and development of capitalist forces in society and within the regime itself, will, in the long run, probably force a certain "liberal" transformation of an exhausted Bonapartist regime: perhaps an opening of the state, as in France's "Liberal Empire" or Sadat's Egypt, to power-sharing with the capitalist bourgeoisie-in-parliament.

Observations on Political Theory from the Syrian Case

1. The origins of authoritarian-populism in Syria, a dominant route of state formation in the Middle East, throws some light on the nature of *political change* there. It is evident that the root explanation for the widespread displacement of traditional by authoritarian-populist regimes must be sought in basic structural variables. Some are fairly specific to the region, in particular, the inherited structure of urban-rural relations which defined the pre-capitalist order. The slim agrarian roots of traditional elites made the old regime very vulnerable to rural revolt, as analysts like Moore and Anderson argued in other "Asian" cases. Others are familiar from analyses of radical change throughout the Third World, namely the disruptions accompanying the incorporation of an agrarian society into the world capitalist system. The impact of imperialism on Syria's fragile traditional order ended in a severe case of regime de-legitimation. Capitalist penetration undermined traditional authority, generated new classes and an agrarian crisis and set off the class conflict which fed anti-regime political mobilization.

The class variable is central to understanding these developments and the nature of politics and the state throughout them. Class structure shaped the nature of the early post-independence state: in an unmobilized society topped by a class of large landed magnates it could be little more than the instrument of dominant class power. But once new classes mobilized, the state was transformed into an arena of ideological struggle over system transformation. Thereafter, the political conflicts of greatest consequence for systemic change pitted actors shaped by class identities in battles over class-related issues: the distribution of wealth and the proper model of development, matters having direct bearing on the mode of production. The Middle East appears, far from being exceptional, to replicate in important ways the role of class in historic regime transformations elsewhere.

But because of the special features of Syrian social structure, the anti-regime coalition grew more out of urban-rural conflict than a straightforward class lineup. The dominant classes were exceptionally concentrated in the city: the landed elite was urban, and it, the merchants and much of their

clients at the bottom of urban society shared, though very unequally, an interest in dominating the village through exploitative relations of production. On the other hand, the radical forces were rooted in the village: rural elements of the middle class made up their vanguard, peasants their most durable base, and agrarian populism the ideological cement of the middle-class–peasant coalition which brought the Ba'th to power. In some respects the Ba'th case appears an instance of Ibn Khaldun's specifically Middle Eastern scenario in which a new state rises out of hinterland revolt against the exaggerated concentration of power and wealth in the city. But the intimate linkage of rural alienation to class relationships arising from the penetration of capitalism is quite different from the traditional syndrome he charts. Thus, in the modern Middle East the inherited urban-rural cleavage is filled with a new class content hitherto lacking.

Under the radical Ba'th, the state again became an instrument of class power—but this time wielded by lower, rural classes. Class origins shaped the populist ideology of political elites who made the state an instrument of war on the dominant classes. In turn, the transformations in class structure issuing from this revolution shaped changes in the state: leveling and restratification cleared the way for a Bonapartist-like state "above" classes.

The Syrian case also gives some clues as to why the factors which produced populist regimes did not generally come together in full scale peasant revolution in the Middle East. The reasons do not appear to be particularly cultural-specific. Neither Islam, sectarianism, or segmentalism were unsurmountable obstacles to anti-regime mobilization; segmentalism may have slowed it but communalism seems to have fed into broader class-based mobilization. The urban-rural cleavage appears to have been decisive: on the one hand, it obstructed the formation of the broad urban-rural mass coalition needed for revolution; on the other hand, the narrow urban base of the *ancien regime* gave it little staying power and allowed a capture of the armed forces by alienated rural plebeians, factors making it possible to topple the regime with much less than a "great" revolution. The subsequent "revolution from above" launched by radical officers preempted and substituted for revolution from below. The later failure of an Islamic form of revolution in Syria can also partly be understood as a outcome of a special social structure. Islam's exaggerated concentration in the city and the solid grounding of the populist regime in the village blocked the construction of the urban-rural coalition needed for such massive upheaval; indeed, despite certain similarities with Islamic movements elsewhere, in Syria the mass base of Islamic revivalism was limited by its roots in formerly privileged rather than deprived social forces.

2. The transformation in the forms of *political association* from the anti-regime mobilization of the fifties to the post regime-consolidation of the seventies gives insights into the complexity of political behavior in the Middle East. Much of the literature on the bases of political solidarity and cleavage there is schizophrenic: it tends to stress either secular (class, universalistic ideologies) or primordial (kinship, sectarian, ethnic) factors to the exclusion

of the other. Whereas it was once expected that communal and religious identities would be superseded by secular ones, it is now common to argue that the former are the natural and culturally specific bases of politics in the Middle East. But if the Syrian case is any indicator, secular and primordial bases of association are not mutually exclusive and complex mixes of associational forms are more typical than pure cases. There are many manifestations of this complexity in the Syrian case.

Just as modernization theorists expected, social mobilization widened the hitherto very limited associative capacity of political life in Syria. Thus, once peasant youth were exposed to education, the segmental barriers to their political mobilization began to give way. Similarly, initially separatist sectarian minorities, once socially mobilized, chose to pursue their interests through integration, embracing the dominant universalistic Arab nationalism and a reformism expressed in class terms. Moreover, as Marxist analysis predicts, capitalist penetration generated class conflict and solidarity, for a time displacing segmental politics, and giving rise to a broad anti-regime coalition. To be sure, social structural complexity gave this anti-regime mobilization its own complexity: a mobilization of the Sunni peasantry on relatively pure class grounds was paralleled by one among the minorities where class and communal cleavages overlapped; the political arena was never blocked off into exclusively class determined political formations and Syria's mosaic society and kinship culture made class alliances vulnerable to fragmentation. But it was essentially class conflict which propelled the rise of the Ba'th and the transformation of the state under the Ba'th was, at base, a transformation in its class composition. The fact that the Ba'th state, despite its heavily minoritarian leadership, incorporated Sunni villages but not Sunni urban quarters shows the essential importance of class-shaped urban-rural conflict in the formation of the new regime. Modernization and class formation did not, however, efface narrower identities and once class conflict receded, they revived.

The consolidation of the new regime can only be explained by a complex interaction between more particularistic and universalistic forms of political association. Sectarianism and clientelism played a pivotal role in forging the elite core. But coexisting or overlapping with such ties were the class and national shaped ideological preferences and career interests through which thousands of Ba'th party activists were mobilized and political organizations of unprecedented scale constructed: this organization-building, indeed, went far to overcome the fragmentation of a historically mosaic, tribal society lacking natural unifying forces. While the use of traditional forms of political cement needs no explanation, the regime's successful institution-building can only be explained by the broadening of loyalties and dilution of primordialism associated with social mobilization combined with the elite's adoption of the modern "political technology" of ideology and party organization.

Then as, after 1970, reform eased class rigidities and state patronage became the focus of social competition, class conflict gave way to group

politics in which reactivated sectarian ties became natural lines of clientelistic access. Alawite sectarianism stimulated a reactive solidarity among Sunnis lacking equal access to the font of state patronage. Yet, even in these conditions of communal conflict, the two sides expressed themselves in universalistic ideologies, Arab nationalism and fundamentalist Islam, and these ideologies expressed less cleavages over community and identity, per se, than over power and distribution: they were vehicles of regime legitimation and anti-regime protest.

Syria is clearly a case where multiple loyalties—personal, communal, class, state, Arab national and Islamic umma—compete, their relative ascendence changing over time according to socio-political conditions. Political ties are a mix of "modern" (class and national ideology) and "traditional" (communal, clientelist). Why this complexity is so seldom recognized is difficult to fathom: it is exactly what should be expected in newly created states where modern political and bureaucratic technology is adapted to "transitional" societies historically built on kinship and segmentalism.

3. The Syrian case throws some light on the nature of the *authoritarian state in the Middle East.* Much of the literature, applying Weberian (neo-patrimonial/legal-rational), or functionalist (praetorian/institutionalized) concepts in a simplistic way, tends to view these states as pure cases—typically praetorian or patrimonial—of these types. A close look at Syrian realities, however, makes clear what Weber himself insisted: that most real regimes are mixes of the ideal types. The Ba'th, relying on a mixed patrimonial/organization-building strategy, produced a mixed state, part-Bonapartist, part-Leninist. Whatever the contradictions introduced into the political system by this fusion, the mixed strategy proved, just as Weber suggested, more effective, durable and flexible than a "pure" one. Leninist organization alone proved incapable of forging a solid elite core while sectarianism and clientelism were irrelevant to the mobilization and incorporation of a mass base. Nor does Syria fit comfortably into Huntington's praetorian/institutionalized dichotomy as regards the role of military violence. The military has played an ambiguous role, a source of praetorianism but also of leadership which forged the institutions to contain praetorianism and give Syria a far more stable state than hitherto. The Syrian experience seems, thus, to show the utility of the intermediate category of *partial institutionalization.*

The Syrian case also calls into question the sharp dichotomy often assumed between democratic regimes, supposedly responsive, participatory and based on consent, and authoritarian ones, supposedly based on coercion and neither responsive or participatory. It is indisputable that the democratic ideal of a conscious citizenry able to make choices among policies and hold leaders accountable is absent in authoritarian regimes (and indeed only more or less approximated in democratic ones); but between this and total mass passivity, there may be a whole range of participatory possibilities. This case suggests that even authoritarian regimes little tolerant of dissent, may, *if they have populist roots and a strong party system,* nevertheless institutionalize a certain *limited* participation which enhances responsiveness, permits them to incorporate a support base under much less than ideal democratic conditions, and reduces their dependence on coercion. Moreover, in contracting the participation of the more urban, educated, and privileged elements which in developing countries take disproportionate benefit from liberal politics (Nelson 1987:139), they may actually expand responsiveness to less privileged strata. And, while protest against authoritarian regimes may be un-institutionalized, it is no less a form of participation, often effective in winning concessions. It is time, as Nelson (1987:104–105) puts it, to "decouple" the concept of participation (and responsiveness, for that matter) from democracy. The growing scope of dissent and repression in Syria does, of course, support the belief that participatory propensities inevitably grow with societal development and that even an authoritarian regime possessing an effective single party will, given the lack of choice, only be able to incorporate a *portion* of society and hence do no more than contain, not "solve" the "crisis of participation." Because of this, military coercion remains central to the survival of such regimes.

Another important question concerning authoritarian states is their relation to society, usually evaluated according to their "strength" in imposing policy on society and their "autonomy" from societal pressures. In regard to "strength," the literature tends to waver between considering such regimes strong, because of their concentration of power and weak because of their supposed lack of legitimacy and institutionalization. The Syrian case shows the complexity of the question of state strength. The Ba'th came to power in a country where the state was, by any measure, very weak and society dominated by plural centers of private power outside its control. The new regime smashed these centers, concentrated and expanded power, acquired some legitimacy, and developed many of the attributes of a "strong" state: autonomy of the dominant landed-commercial classes, a complex organizational structure, widened government function, innovation, regulation, and penetration, and significant state-sponsored re-stratification. The attachment of a much wider array of interests to the state gave it a new weight in society and an increased ability to mobilize and coordinate manpower and resources made it a formidable actor in the international arena. Yet, paradoxically, developing these very capabilities had costs which, as they mounted, began to enervate the state. The autonomy of dominant classes was purchased in part through the liberal use of *asabiya* in the creation of coercive "centers of power" which now threaten to colonize the state and subvert its policies. Government control over society was accompanied by the growth of bureaucracies whose control is itself now a major problem, whose functions exceed their capabilities, and whose regulation is often counterproductive. The populist-etatist policies, patronage, and military buildup which satisfied and incorporated various constituencies resulted in excessive consumption, resource overcommitment, and vested interests which, eroding the extraction capacity of the state and burdening the productive bases of society, have resulted in external dependence and economic stagnation. Thus, it may be typical of populist authoritarianism that the bureaucratization, restratification, and distribution through which the state develops its power undermines its

own resource base and may in time force a certain retreat of the state or even its recapture by powerful societal forces. The Syrian case suggests that little is gained by insisting on either the strength or weakness of authoritarian regimes: not only do these regimes vary widely, but the same state may be "strong" on certain dimensions during certain periods, but at the possible cost of weakness in other respects or in future periods.

The question of "autonomy," largely having to do with the extent of dominant class control over the state, is also complex. Marxist tradition, while viewing the state as normally an instrument of such classes, acknowledges that in certain circumstances the state may attain some autonomy; the Syrian case suggests that authoritarian-populism produces one of those episodes. Certainly, if autonomy means the state is no mere servant of a dominant class (whether old or regime-created), or that it is not dependent on the mediation of traditional notables to link it to the masses, or that raison d'état is a more crucial ingredient in policy-making than the class interest of elites or the pressures of social classes, then the Syrian regime ranks fairly high on autonomy. The Ba'thist state was consolidated in a period conducive to state autonomy: when societal crisis and international threat legitimized the concentration of state power, when an old dominant class was in decline and readily attacked and new forces on the rise could be harnessed. Nevertheless, in the real world state autonomy is only relative: no state, however authoritarian, exists in a vacuum and if autonomy is construed to mean elites are under no constraints from the groups and classes of their own constituency or the pressures of the opposition, or even the demands of their own putative "instruments," then the Syrian state lacks autonomy; indeed the case suggests that autonomy of part of society can only be purchased at the price of dependence on other parts. Moreover, the case supports the Marxist expectation that a high level of autonomy is a temporary, transitional phenomenon, for constraints on the Ba'th state are increasing and economic pressures may soon force it to come to terms with the bourgeoisie. But the decline of autonomy need not mean the state is captured by one social force, even the dominant class. In the Syrian case, declining autonomy so far means that the state is constrained by the demands of a multitude of social forces; it is certainly premature to speak of the restoration of the political power of a capitalist bourgeoisie over it and, in fact, the state is probably entirely too complex and too conscious of distinct interests of its own to be wholly captured by any one social force—sectarian, corporate or class.

The record of strength and autonomy in the Syrian case suggests there may be a certain cycle in state-building: in its effort to create authority and autonomy where it is lacking the state may go too far and after a period the costs of patrimonialization and bureaucratization come to outweigh the benefits. The outcome may be stagnation or, alternatively, rationalizing and democratic reforms which redress the imbalance of state and society. The conflict between these alternatives may be the essence of Syrian politics today.

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