SHISHAKLI AND THE DRUZES: INTEGRATION AND INTRANSIGENCE

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Introduction

The relationship between the Jabal Druze (Druze Mountains) and Damascus has long been used as the test-case for questions of economic and cultural integration in Syria. Linda Schilcher, in her studies of nineteenth century Syria, argues that the Jabal Druze has been a "proving ground of national integration," and maintains that the economic links which began to connect the Jabal Druze to Damascus during the second half of the century formed the bedrock of later nationalist bonds which were established between the Druzes of the Jabal and the Sunnis of Damascus in the first half of the twentieth century.¹ Philip Khoury similarly uses the relationship between the political elites of the Jabal Druze and Damascus as the center piece of his "reinterpretation" of the nationalist movement during the years of the French Mandate. He concludes that by the end of the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927 the leadership of the Druze rebels, headed by Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, had formed a "new broadly-based" alliance linking together the Druzes and Damascenes, and that it was "committed to a `successful assimilation of the Druze into a Syrian-Arab political community.'"² Based on his analysis of the Druze-Damascene alliance, Khoury proclaims the Great Syrian Revolt to be "a major watershed" in the evolution of national consciousness in Syria, for it signalled the formation of a nationalist


movement which "cut across regional, class, and religious lines."³ In short, he argues, that "modern nationalism," like a powerful acid, began to "corrode loyalties to family, tribe, ethnic and confessional group, neighborhood, and village," replacing them with the "nationalist creed of Syrian unity preached by the nationalist elite in the capital."⁴ Other Syrianists such as Itamar Rabinovich and Yehoshua Porath, though more skeptical than Khoury about the revolutionary impact of the Great Syrian Revolt, likewise conclude that by independence in 1946 the leadership of the Druzes had committed itself to relinquishing regional autonomy and to incorporating the Jabal fully into the Syrian state.⁵ Porath writes:

The leading Atrash family reached the conclusion that the cause of Druze autonomy within Syria, to say nothing of secession and eventual union with Trans-Jordan, was lost. In September 1944 they therefore decided to approach the Syrian National Bloc Government and proposed full incorporation into the Syrian state, which was carried out quite smoothly.⁶

On the contrary, the incorporation of the Jabal Druze into the Syrian state was not carried out smoothly. The Atrash family and other leading tribes of the Jabal resisted the Syrian government's attempts to dismantle the administrative autonomy of the Jabal Druze, just as they fought government attempts to undermine their traditional authority in the Jabal community. The Atrash leaders used both military and moral force in their attempt to preserve the political independence and economic privileges their community had enjoyed under the French, and to resist the encroachment of central authority into Druze politics.

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³Ibid., p. 164,


The four years of `Adib Shishakli's rule in Syria (December 1949 to February 1954) illustrates the extent to which the process of national integration was carried out by force. Shishakli pursued a relentless campaign to integrate the Druze community into Syria and to destroy the independent power of its Druze chieftains. The painful and often violent process of integrating the Jabal into the Syrian state was from its inception political. Hardly a road was paved, administrator appointed, or army unit stationed in the region without both Suwayda', the administrative capital of the Jabal Druze, and Damascus carefully considering its political impact. Shishakli believed that among his many opponents in Syria, the Druzes were the most potentially dangerous, and he was determined to crush them. He frequently proclaimed: "My enemies are like a serpent: the head is the Jabal Druze, the stomach Homs, and the tail Aleppo. If I crush the head the serpent will die."7

The forced integration of the Jabal Druze left an ambiguous legacy. The Druze community suffered a dramatic decline in its economic and political position in Syria as a result of its opposition to Shishakli. Although Syria's military dictator succeeded in breaking the back of traditional Druze particularism, his harsh measures exacerbated Druze feelings that they were a persecuted minority and treated unfairly by the state. A new form of Druze communal consciousness took root among Druze civilian politicians and, most importantly, among Druze military officers as a result of their early experience with the policies of the independent Syrian state. The military revolt which ended Shishakli's rule in February 1954 was due in no small part to the concerted action of disgruntled Druze officers. The ethnopolitics which has characterized

elite competition in modern Syrian politics and complicated the ongoing process of national integration began to take shape well before the emergence of Alawite officers on the national stage in 1963. The particularism and communal loyalties of the Druzes did not simply erode or give way in the face of new national loyalties; rather, they were reshaped by the early efforts of the Syrian government to assert its control over the provinces, and took on new meaning within the context of the nation-state.

The Jabal Druze in Syrian Nationalist History

The Jabal Druze always played a far more important role in Syrian politics than its comparatively small population would suggest. With a community of little more than 100,000 in 1949, or roughly three percent of the Syrian population, the Druzes of Syria's southeastern mountains constituted a potent force in Syrian politics and played a leading role in the nationalist struggle against the French. Under the military leadership of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, the Druzes provided much of the military force behind the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927. In 1945 Amir Hasan al-Atrash, the paramount political leader of the Jabal, led the Druze military units in a successful revolt against the French, making the Jabal Druze the first and only region in Syria to liberate itself without British assistance from French rule. No Syrians played a more heroic role in the struggle against colonialism or shed more blood for independence than the Druzes. At independence the Druzes, made confident by their successes, expected that Damascus would reward them for their many sacrifices on the battle field. They demanded to keep their

autonomous administration and many political privileges accorded them by the French and sought generous economic assistance from the newly independent government.

In contrast to the Druzes, the Alawites of Syria's western mountains had little political clout during the early independence era. Although they constituted twelve percent of Syria's population and its largest compact minority, they did not form a cohesive society as did the Druzes, and their tribal leaders held no weight in nationalist circles because they had refused to participate in the anti-French struggle. Following the suppression of the 1946 Alawite Revolt and the hanging of its leader, Sulayman al-Murshid, local Alawite autonomy was dismantled and the Alawite community all but disappeared from the national stage until the 1960s.\(^9\)

The Kurds, Syria's other important compact minority constituting eight percent of the population in the 1950s, were even less influential than the Alawites. The Director General of Syrian Tribal Affairs in 1948 explained why the Kurdish community situated on Syria's northeast border with Turkey was no threat to Syria. Because the "Kurdish tribes were in reality akin to feudal institutions," he said, the tribal chieftains owned all the land and could control their "serfs." In turn the government had firm control over the tribal leaders, he explained:

Practically without exception the principal Kurdish leaders are under death sentence in Turkey and were they to show signs of asserting too much independence of action or to disregard the wishes of the Syrian Government in any important matter they could be

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\(^{9}\)For a discussion of how the Alawite 'feudal lords' believed they could preserve their autonomy in a unified state, and how difficult life was for the young men who fought them and assisted the Sunni governors of the Alawite Mountains in the 1940s and 50s see: `Abd al-Latif al-Yunis, *Mudhakkirat al-Duktur `Abd al-Latif al-Yunis* [Memoirs of Doctor `Abd al-Latif al-Yunis], Damascus: Dar al-`Ilm, 1992, p. 182. Colonel `Aziz `Abd al-Karim was the only Alawite among the five officers who helped Shishakli organize his coup. He became Assistant to the Chief of Staff in 1951 and continued to exert considerable influence in the Syrian military throughout the 1950s, particularly as a spokesman for other Alawite officers [p. 260].
conveniently disposed of by arranging to have them fall into Turkish hands.\textsuperscript{10}

The Druzes were determined that they would not be humiliated like the Alawites and Kurds. Ably led by the Atrash household and jealous of their reputation as Arab nationalists and proud warriors, the Druze leaders refused to be beaten into submission by Damascus or cowed by threats. When a local paper in 1945 reported that President Quwwatli (1943-1949) had called the Druzes a "dangerous minority," Sultan Pasha al-Atrash flew into a rage and demanded a public retraction. If it were not forthcoming, he announced, the Druzes would indeed become "dangerous," and a force of 4,000 Druze warriors would "occupy the city of Damascus."\textsuperscript{11} Quwwatli could not dismiss Sultan Pasha's threat. The military balance of power in Syria was tilted in favor of the Druzes, at least until the military build up during the 1948 War in Palestine. One advisor to the Syrian Defense Department warned in 1946 that the Syrian army was "useless," and that the Druzes could "take Damascus and capture the present leaders in a breeze."\textsuperscript{12}

President Quwwatli retracted his inflammatory statement about the Druzes being a "dangerous minority," but the bitter recriminations and distrust which marked the earliest relations between the independent Syrian government and the Druze authorities only grew worse with time. Nothing was more symbolic of the differences dividing the two parties than Sultan Pasha's refusal to participate in the great Evacuation Day celebrations of April 17, 1946, the day

\textsuperscript{10}USNA, James H. Keeley (Damascus) to Sec. of State (29 December 1948) "Comments of Fuad Bey al-Halabi, Director General of Syrian Tribal Affairs, Regarding Tribal Control Policy and Certain Special Aspects of the Kurdish Tribal Problem," 890D.00\textbackslash 12-2948. Today it is estimated that over 100,000 Kurds who have lived in Syria since the 1920s and 30s are still denied citizenship presumably because they or their families are considered security risks.

\textsuperscript{11}USNA, William Porter (Damascus) to Sec. of State (20 November 1945) 890D/11-2045.
when the Syrian people were to celebrate their independence and unity. Though Quwwatli offered the Druze leader a house in Damascus and 20,000 lira to attend the parade, Sultan Pasha refused to take part in the festivities unless President Quwwatli agreed to recognize him as the most prominent Syrian nationalist in gratitude for the leading role the Druze community had played in the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927, and to attend a separate independence parade to be held in the Jabal Druze. In setting these conditions for his participation in the Evacuation Day ceremonies, Sultan Pasha put Quwwatli on notice that the Druze leadership expected to be treated with deference by the Syrian government, and that the Jabal Druze be accorded a privileged position within the Syrian state. President Quwwatli could not bow to Druze demands. He had planned the three days of nationalist festivities to exalt his own za`ama, or leadership, and to promote the authority of the central state, and he was not about to dilute either by sharing center stage with the likes of his old competitor Sultan Pasha or by travelling out to the Jabal Druze to participate in a rival ceremony. Rather than develop a relationship of tolerance and compromise, the authorities in Damascus and the Jabal Druze increasingly resorted to a policy of ultimatum and force, one that ended with Shishakli's bombardment of the Jabal Druze in 1954.

**Druze Demands of the Central Government**

What did the Atrashes want from the government in Damascus in exchange for Druze cooperation and loyalty in independent Syria? The answer to this question was most clearly

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1. USNA, Mattison (Damascus) to Sec. of State (10 September 1946) 890D.20/9-1056, No. 500.

2. Farzat Mamlouk, "Al-Tadakhkhul fi Khilafat Jabal al-`Arab [The Interference in the Disputes of the Jabal al-`Arab]." (This article was included among the unpublished papers and memoir of the author, which were kindly provided to me by his son, Ahmad Mamlouk) p. 3; and `Abd al-Latif al-Yunis, *Mudhakkirat*, p. 177.
articulated in 1946 in negotiations between the Syrian Minister of the Interior and Amir Hasan al-Atrash, who was both the official *Muhafiz* (Governor) and unofficial ruler of the Jabal at the time. His demands were two-fold: economic and political. Amir Hasan insisted that an important share of the national budget be spent on agriculture infra-structure, and education in the Jabal.

The rudimentary system of primary schools established in the region under the Mandate had been allowed to languish in the late 1930s, both because the French had become distracted by the growing conflict in Europe, and because they had discovered that education did little to endear the Druzes to French rule. On the contrary, it was creating what local officials called a "dangerous class of unemployed intellectuals;" thus, they sought to restrict the number of educated Druzes to the number of jobs the government could make available.\(^{14}\) Amir Hasan wanted to expand the educational system in the Jabal, and insisted that the Syrian government pay for it. He also asked for the expansion of the irrigation and water purification systems. Few towns in the Jabal had running water, and the wells on which many depended either turned brackish during the summer months or dried up altogether. Amir Hasan also wanted the rudimentary road system extended to link all the major towns of the Jabal to Suwayda', the capital of the *muhafaza*, and for an expansion of electrical and phone lines. Agriculture too had

\(^{14}\) *Rapport à la Société des Nations sur La situation de la Syrie et du Liban (Année 1935)*, Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1936, p. 120-21. By 1938 the French had overseen the establishment of some 38 rudimentary elementary schools and classrooms in the Jabal. The student enrollment in these private and public schools in 1938 was 5534. Of these, 113 sat for the exam for the certificate of primary studies, and only 44 passed (*Rapport à la Société des Nations (Année 1938)*, 1939, p. 115). The civil service, military, and liberal professions were clearly the way out of the Jabal's grinding poverty and into positions that promised security and respect. To their credit the tight-knit and competitive Druze families never shrank from demanding more schools, better facilities, and access to jobs. The 1960 census in Syria showed that the non-Christian population of the Suwayda' (Jabal Druze) governate enjoyed an overall literacy rate of 37%, compared with a countrywide figure of 29.2%. This was the highest non-Christian literacy rate for any governate apart from Damascus and Aleppo (*Robert Betts, *The Druze*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, p. 52).
to be expanded if the Jabal's terrible unemployment and poverty were to be alleviated.\footnote{NARA, Mattison (Damascus) to Sec. of State (26 November 1946) RG84, 1946: 800F-800J, Box 11; Moose (Damascus) to Sec. of State (15 March 1947) RG84, 1947: 120.7-800, Box 16.}

The political leaders of the Druzes were not content to demand only economic benefits from the government in Damascus in exchange for Druze cooperation, they also insisted that the Jabal be permitted most of the political privileges and autonomy it had enjoyed under the French. The Atrashes did not want the government to supplant them or undermine their authority in the name of Arab nationalism, republicanism, or Syrian independence. They had not fought for Syrian independence in order to exchange French meddling in their local affairs for that of the Government in Damascus. The leading families of the Jabal saw themselves as guardians of the Druze way of life and communal traditions which was anchored in the quasi-feudal and tribal institutions, or *mashyakha* system, of the Jabal.\footnote{For the best accounts of the *mashyakha* system see: Birgit Schäbler, *Aufstände im Drusenbergland: Ethnizität und Integration einer ländlichen Gesellschaft Syriens vom Osmanischen Reich bis zur staatlichen Unabhängigkeit*, Gotha: Perthes, 1996; and Kais M. Firro, *A History of the Druzes*, Leiden, 1992. Also see Hasan Amin Ba`ini, *Jabal al-`Arab*, Damascus, 1985.} To ensure the continuation of Atrash leadership and the *mashyakha* system on which it was founded, Amir Hasan demanded that a separate Druze Ministry of Defense be established with a minister chosen from the Jabal Druze.

To President Quwwatli and Prime Minister Jamil Mardam, this proposal symbolized everything that was wrong with the Druzes. Not only were they arrogant, but they neither appreciated the need for political centralization nor the true meaning of Syria's nationalist struggle. The French had tried to divide Syrians by offering regional autonomy and political privileges to Syria's minorities. The principal demand of the nationalist movement had been for the elimination of such privileges and the absolute administrative and political unification of
Syria. The last thing the Syrian government was prepared to offer the Druzes at independence was a political arrangement which smacked of the old system of local autonomy. In particular, it found the notion of a separate Druze Ministry of Defense abhorrent. To make matters worse, Amir Hasan repeatedly threatened that if his demands for economic and political privileges were not met, the Jabal would secede from Syria and attach itself to Jordan. The acrimonious negotiations between Amir Hasan and the Syrian Interior Minister during the first months of independence made it only too clear to the Syrian government that the full integration of the Jabal Druze would be a long and arduous process. There could be little doubt that a showdown between the principles of Druze particularism and Syrian centralization was not far off.

The Druzes during the First Four Years of Independence

During the four years of his presidency, Quwwatli remained locked in a destructive and inconclusive struggle with the Druze chieftains over administrative control of the Jabal, for he did not have the military means to destroy the Atrash family. At the outset of independence the Jabal was, as one observer put it, "ruled absolutely by the Atrash family, whose members, or their nominees, fill all the important posts." The top twenty positions in the local administration, including the head of the 350 Druze gendarmes and the Druze police force were staffed by Atrash; the qa'immaqams (county commissioners) and lessor district administrators were clan leaders appointed by Amir Hasan. Moreover the 850 strong Groupement Druze stationed in the

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17 NARA, Mattison (Damascus) to Sec. of State (26 November 1946) RG84, 1946: 800F-800J, Box 11; Moose (Damascus) to Sec. of State (15 March 1947) RG84, 1947: 120.7-800, Box 16.

18 PRO, Shone (Beirut) to P.M. Bevin, (8 March 1946) FO 371/52889/ E2571.

19 Farzat Mamlouk, "Interference," p. 3.
Jabal had been renamed the Druze Cavalry Battalion by the Amir following its expulsion of the French in 1945. Major Hamid al-Atrash was appointed its commander.

When Hasan al-Atrash was asked to abandon his feudal authority and the monopoly over office-holding in the Jabal enjoyed by his family, he flew into a rage. "The Atrash family by right of conquest and tradition are the natural and historical leaders" of the Druzes, he proclaimed. He ridiculed the notion that anyone but an Atrash could rule the Jabal, and insisted that only the community's traditional rulers could safeguard the interests of the Druzes. The mistrust separating the two sides was profound and precluded either from negotiating seriously over power-sharing arrangements.

The result of these disagreements was that political concerns outweighed all others in matters relating to the Jabal Druze. The President devoted all the government's energy and money spent in the Jabal on activities designed to destroy the power of the Atrashes, rather than to develop the economy and raise the standard of living, which might have alleviated some of the sources of Druze discontent. When national elections held in July 1947 resulted in a stunning victory for the five Atrash candidates in the Jabal districts, the government announced that the voting process in the Jabal had been fraudulent, despite claims to the contrary by its own election supervisor in the region. President Quwwatli insisted that new elections would have to held for

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\(^{20}\)Sulayman 'Ali al-Sabbagh, *Mudhakkirat*, p. 154. The Druze Cavalry Battalion was later named the Second Battalion. Al-Sabbagh writes that all Druzes should be proud of the Druze Battalion because it was the beginning of the Syrian army and suggests it should have been named the First Battalion. I do not know when the Druze character of the battalion was dissolved but suspect it was under 'Adib Shishakli.

\(^{21}\)Report by Colonel H.L. McGrath included in: Memminger (Damascus) to Sec. of State, "Revolt Against Atrash Rule in the Jebel Druze," (20 August 1947) USNA 890D.00/8-2047.
the five Jabal seats. New elections were never held and the Druze seats in the Syrian Parliament remained vacant until the end of Quwwatli's presidency in 1949.

Quwwatli's meddling in Jabal politics and determination to crush the power of Atrash provoked a civil war among the Druzes. To undermine Atrash authority and push for a "victory over treason and plots in the Jabal," the government armed and funded a collection of secondary clan leaders from the northern Jabal who called themselves the Jabha al-Sha`biyya (Peoples' Front) or more simply the Sha`biyyun, or Populars. The Populars had long resented what they described as the "despotism" and "corruption" of the Atrash. They wanted to end the Atrash monopoly over the political system in the Jabal, and sought to exploit the growing battle between the government and the leading tribes of the Jabal in order to catapult themselves into the first rank of Druze society and politics. They festooned their headquarters with Syrian flags and accused the Atrash of being traitors who were conspiring with the Jordanians to invade Syria and establish a throne for King `Abdallah in Damascus. To demonstrate how in tune they were with the new spirit of independence, they characterized their struggle as being "the inevitable clash between the feudal and democratic systems." The conflict between the Populars and Atrashes led to a number of full pitched battles during the Fall of 1947 which served only to harden the animosities dividing, on the one hand,

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[22] USNA, Memminger (Damascus) to Dept. of State, (13 August 1947) 890D.00/8-1347; and W. Leonard Parker (Damascus) to Sec. of State, "Imminent End of Jabal Druze Dispute," (17 November 1948) 890D.00/11-1748;


[24] USNA, Report by Colonel H.L. Mc Grath included in: Memminger (Damascus) to Sec. of State, "Revolt Against Atrash Rule in the Jebel Druze," (20 August 1947) 890D.00/8-2047.
the leading Druze families from the secondary shaykhs, and on the other, the Druze community as a whole from the government. The government-backed Populards enjoyed a number of initial successes. In July a Popular militia overran the town of Salkhad, shooting 20 Atrash supporters and expelling all its Atrash administrators.\textsuperscript{25} In November they shot an additional 20 Atrash troops in an attack on Qraya, Sultan Pasha's village. This time, however, the Atrashes were fully prepared for their enemies. Sultan Pasha and Amir Hasan led their troops in a victorious counter-attack, completely routing the Populards, killing many of their men and capturing their four principal leaders, who were held hostage during the ensuing peace negotiations.\textsuperscript{26} The forces of the Popular Front were unable to rally from this defeat and the Atrashes shut the Jabal off from the rest of Syria by cutting the phone lines, roads, and railway connections to the rest of the country, in order to prevent the Syrian army from intervening on the side of the Populards. At the height of the fighting in the Jabal, the French Minister to Syria exclaimed: "We tried to split the Jabal for 25 years. Is the Syrian Government going to succeed in 18 months?"\textsuperscript{27} He need not have worried. The broader Druze community's faith in and support for its traditional leaders was not to be undermined so easily by the Syrian government.

The Atrashes were able to beat back President Quwwatli's and the Popular Front's challenge to their leadership in the Jabal, but at the cost of becoming ever more isolated in their Jabal stronghold. The growing parliamentary opposition to President Quwwatli was unable to

\textsuperscript{25}USNA, Memminger (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Revolt Against Atrash Rule in the Jabal," (20 August 1947) 890D.00/8-2047; PRO, Scrivener (Damascus) to Eastern Department (25 September 1947) FO 371/62169/E9205.

\textsuperscript{26}PRO, Dundas (Damascus) to Foreign Office (6 November) 1947) FO 371/62169.

\textsuperscript{27}PRO, Chancery (Damascus) to Eastern Dept. (3 November 1947) FO 371/62169/E10483.
help the Atrashs despite valiant attempts to do so. Quwwatli's opponents in Parliament had insisted that the government's policy in the Jabal was unconstitutional and unjust. They demanded a full investigation into the "illegal," secret accounts the President and Prime Minister had established to fund their war in the Jabal, but the Syrian leaders turned them a deaf ear and scuttled all efforts by Parliament to set up a special investigative committee.\textsuperscript{28} The British, historic allies of the Druzes, refused to aid the Atrashs, despite entreaties that they do so. Much more damaging to the Druze position, however, was King `Abdallah's refusal to come to their aid. The Jordanian monarch had promised time and again to send the Arab Legion into the Jabal and annex it to Jordan if the Druzes so requested.\textsuperscript{29} Atrash defiance of the Syrian government depended on the credibility of `Abdallah's threat to move into the Jabal with his army. However, when the Atrashs called on `Abdallah to annex the Jabal during the summer of 1947, the King refused. Preoccupied with the growing conflict in Palestine and warned against exacerbating inter-Arab conflict by the British and Saudis, `Abdallah put off his ambitions in Syria. As a result the Druzes discovered they were alone in their battle with the Syrian government. Their only consistent ally was Kamal Junblat, the leader of the Lebanese Druzes, but he could offer only mediation and a voice of reason, not armed assistance.

The Atrashs had no choice but to patch up relations with the secondary clans of the Jabal and, at least temporarily, with Damascus. This task was made easier by their military success against the Populars in the closing months of 1947, and perhaps more importantly, by President Quwwatli's disastrous mishandling of the 1948 War in Palestine. With his presidency in

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29}PRO, Scivener (Damascus) to E. Bevin (22 December 1947) FO 371/68403/E300; Chancery (Amman) to E. Bevin, (12 February 1948) FO 371/68403/E2001.
shambles by the end of 1948 and his self-confidence broken, Quwwatli ordered a quick resolution to the turmoil in the Jabal. Assistance to the Populars was terminated and government money was again made available to the Atrashes. Gone were Quwwatli's ambitions to destroy the power of the Druze chieftains and to find an alternative leadership for the Jabal. During the last months of his rule President Quwwatli was consumed by the need to end widespread anti-government demonstrations in Syria's major cities and growing insubordination in the ranks of the military.

A final truce between the Populars and Atrashes was signed in December 1948 with considerable fanfare. The press depicted it as a triumph for Sultan Pasha's leadership and wisdom. Opposition members of the Syrian Parliament flocked to the Jabal to be photographed with the great Syrian nationalist, Sultan Pasha. Leaders of the Popular Front, seated next to Amir Hasan, spoke of how the only defense of the Druze community against its enemies lay in its unshakable unity. Even the government-appointed Muhafiz, `Arif al-Nakadi, who had negotiated the truce in the Jabal, saw fit to denounce the government. "False promises and misdirected appropriations," on the part of Jamil Mardam, the Prime Minister, Nakadi announced, had caused long and frustrating delays in resolving the Jabal dispute. Nakadi finished his speech by tendering his resignation. All in all, it was not a proud day for the Syrian government, none of whose members saw fit to attend the ceremonies.

Though Atrash leaders made gestures of good will toward the government as befitted the moment, all was not well between the Jabal Druze and Damascus. A pall of ill will hung over the ceremonies promising future battles between the old world Jabal chieftains still clinging to their

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30USNA, James Keeley (Damascus) to Sec. of State, "Reconciliation of Atrash and Populars in Jabal Druze," (29 December 1948) 890D.00/12-2948.
independence, communal privileges, and multiple loyalties, and the new national government, propelled by the modern logic of centralization and state-building. Perhaps the words of Sultan Pasha's earlier speeches still echoed in Syrian ears. He was a master at claiming the moral high-ground of Arab nationalism as Druze turf, of turning government accusations of Druze treason back on their source, and likening the new rulers in Damascus to the French colonizers they had so recently replaced. In one such speech about an earlier incident in which the government had unsuccessfully tried to stir up confessional animosities, Sultan Pasha warned:

Undoubtedly the... incident stirred our feeling, yet it did not change our principles and shall not obliterate any page of our national struggle and jihad against the cruel colonizer.

We did not make the struggle for the sake of persons, neither did we fight in order that X or Y becomes President of the Republic or a Minister, but we did our fighting for the sake of a true Arab principle and on a steady belief which drove us to act for the expulsion of the foreigner and for obtaining freedom and independence....

We want to know the attitude of the Arab League Governments toward the suspicious attitude which the Government of Damascus has taken regarding this Jabal and its interests....

Some persons have infiltrated into our sacred revolution and have disfigured it and plotted against it. We have serious documents that we will publish when we find it in the public interest, and then the Arab world will judge who is sincere for the Arab cause, the Jabal or the men in power....

In the meantime, we continue to hold to our independence and freedom....

Sultan Pasha, like Hasan al-Atrash, always maintained that he in particular, and the Druze community in general, epitomized the true Arab principles of freedom and independence, the essential values of the nation. Having led the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925-27 along with the Damascene leader, `Abd al-Rahman al-Shahbandar, he believed that Shukri al-Quwwatli and the other leaders of the National Bloc, which was formed after the suppression of the revolt in an

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31USNA, James Moose (Damascus) to Sec. of State, "Sheikh Maskeen Repercussions; Druze Meet at Shahba," (14 May 1947) 890D.00/5-1447.
effort to rest control of the nationalist movement from Shahbandar and Sultan Pasha, had perverted the national cause and plotted against it. This version of nationalist history gained considerable credibility after Shahbandar was assassinated in 1940, apparently on the orders of the National Bloc leaders who feared he would recapture the leadership of Syria's nationalist movement from them. Sultan Pasha remained true to the original Hashimite legacy of Syrian nationalism and to the policies of his murdered colleague by continuing to support King `Abdallah of Jordan as the rightful leader of Syria after independence and by promoting his plan to unify Greater Syria.

Shishakli and the Druze

Independence and freedom were the two things `Adib Shishakli could not and would not permit the Druzes. Though the Atrashes were upstanding Arab nationalists, they refused to abandon their particularism, seeing no contradiction between the two. Shishakli, however, saw minority demands for special privileges as tantamount to treason. His increasingly chauvinistic notions of Arab nationalism were predicated on the denial that "minorities" existed in Syria. He demanded complete conformity from the Druzes, and outlawed any institutional or cultural display of confessionalism in Syria. More important than his use of Arab nationalism in his crackdown on the Druzes, however, were his ambitions for Syria. Shishakli's over-arching goals were to consolidate the authority of his regime and to make Syria the Prussia of the Arab world.

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Neither could be achieved without eliminating the centrifugal forces in Syrian society which were the source of its weakness, forces which had caused the overthrow of past regimes and left Syria prey to the interference and unity schemes of its neighbors. Shishakli sought to make an example of the Druze community in his campaign to crack down on insubordination, illegal activities, and external influence in Syria.

There were numerous reasons for Shishakli to place the Druzes at the head of his serpentine opposition. Druze officers were legendary for their willingness to plot coups, having played crucial roles in overthrowing both Quwwatli and Za`im. Amir Hasan and Sultan Pasha al-Atrash were equally renowned for their querulousness and stubborn refusal to do Damascus' bidding. They led the procession of Syrian dignitaries who raced to the capital to congratulate Colonel Husni al-Za`im on his successful coup in March 1949, and then just as quickly turned on Za`im when he sent strong forces to garrison the Jabal in an open attempt to threaten the Atrash. When Colonel Sami al-Hinnawi overthrew Za`im in August 1949, Amir Hasan al-Atrash and a number of Druze officers were his staunchest supporters. Hinnawi called for the return to power of Syria's traditional politicians, and for the quick unification of Syria and Iraq, both policies the Druzes supported. The Druze leaders had never tried to conceal their disdain for Syria's republican form of government nor their admiration for the old world set-up of the Hashimite monarchies of Jordan and Iraq. Syria came very close to unifying with Iraq during the brief tenure of Hinnawi's regime and the Druze remained among union's most vociferous.

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34Seale, Struggle for Syria, p. 74. According to Fu`ad al-Atrash and Muhammad al-Atrash, Sultan's nephew and an officer in the Syrian army, Za`im tried to have Sultan Pasha assassinated. When Sultan went to Damascus to try and clear matters up with Za`im, several Druze officers worrying that Za`im might arrest Sultan, prepared to bombard the guest palace where the two were meeting if Sultan did not emerge on time. Also see Hasan Amin al-B`ayni, Sultan Basha al-Atrash, Lebanon, 1985, p. 299-300.
advocates.

This made them the natural enemies of Colonel Shishakli's who took power in December 1949 in the name of all Syrians who wanted the unity talks stopped. They saw the combination of Syria and Iraq not as the fulfillment of the Arab nationalist dream, but as a nightmare scenario in which Syria, a young and unformed planet in the new Arab firmament would be sucked into the superior gravitational field of Iraq, lose its independence, gain a Hashimite monarch, and find itself locked into Iraq's pro-British and western orbit. To the northern Syrian notables of Aleppo and Homs, as well as the eastern tribal leaders of the Jazira and Jabal Druze who had been excluded from power under Quwwatli and Za'im, such a prospect seemed inviting if it would bring them to power. How else could they end the Damascene hegemony over Syria if not by using the powerful counterbalance of Baghdad? To the elites of Syria's two great southern cities, Hama and Damascus, who had always used their alliance with Egypt and Saudi Arabia to undergird their commanding role in Syria politics, the Iraqi option could only spell disaster. The radical nationalists of the growing Ba'th Party headquartered in Damascus and Hawrani's Socialist Party centered in Hama equally looked to Egypt for support. For the Syrian left it was the conservatism of the Hashimite monarchy which was anathema. Thus, a shaky strategic alliance emerged in Syria dividing the country along regional rather than socio-economic lines, with the south dominated by Damascus and supported by Egypt, and the north and peripheries dominated by Aleppo and supported by Iraq. Syria's zigzagging foreign policy of the 1950s, in which the country lurched between the gravitational pulls of Iraq and Egypt only to end up careening into the latter's imperial embrace at decade's end to form the United Arab Republic,
has been well told.\textsuperscript{35}

The importance of these dividing lines in Syrian politics for the Jabal is that it placed the Druzes on the wrong side of Shishakli's politics in three important ways. First, the Druze desire to maintain the autonomy of the Jabal flew in the face of Shishakli's need to shore up state authority. Second, Shishakli's alliance with the Syrian left led him to attack the Druze community as a bastion of confessionalism, feudalism, and tribalism, the three marks of social backwardness the left was determined to stamp out. Third, the Atrash family were determined to pursue their own pro-Iraqi foreign policy and acted as a bridgehead for Hashimite influence in Syria.

If Shishakli thought the Druzes would give him time to consolidate his new government, he was sorely disappointed. Within two weeks of his takeover, intelligence reports confirmed that Sultan Pasha, in cahoots with the governor and chief of the gendarmerie in the Jabal, had accepted Iraqi arms and financial aid and was preparing his followers to take part in a fourth coup -- one that was designed to return Aleppo's pro-Iraqi politicians to power and complete the union process with Iraq which Shishakli had interrupted.\textsuperscript{36}

\textbf{The Financial Integration of the Jabal}

Shishakli brought Syrian law and administration to the Jabal Druze with a ferocity and speed which President Quwwatli could only have dreamed of. Before the military build-up


\textsuperscript{36}USNA, McDonald (Tel Aviv) to Sec. or State, (8 January 1950) 783.00/ 1-850; Harrison (Damascus) to Sec. of State (17 January 1950) 783.00/ 1-1750.
spurred by the 1948 War in Palestine, radical political change in Syria had always originated with the tribal levies of the hinterland: such was the case with the Arab Revolt of 1917, the Great Syrian Revolt of 1925, and the mutiny against the French in 1945. During the 1948 War, the military equation in Syria changed for good; no longer could the cavalry forces at the disposal of traditional chieftains, such as the Atrashes, alter the course of Syrian politics or intimidate the central government. The Syrian Army grew exponentially during these years. In mid-1947 the army numbered no more than 7,000 active troops; by the end 1948 it grew to 18,000. Husni Za`im built it up to 31,700 men in 1949, and by the end of 1951 Shishakli had increased its size to 43,000. The military's strength put an end to any possibility of successful civilian resistance to the central state.

Bringing the finances of the Jabal Druze under the control of the government administration was one of the first tasks of the Shishakli regime. Under President Quwwatli, the economy and finances of the Jabal had remained the preserve of its Atrash governors. For much of that time they were in chaos because of the expulsion of the French who had administered Jabal finances under the Mandate, and later because of the civil strife which tore apart the Jabal in 1947 and 1948. The annual economic subsidy of some one million pounds which maintained the Jabal administration under the Mandate was withheld by Quwwatli and a

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38Husni Za`im's personal secretary claimed that one of the twelve greatest achievements of Za`im's short rule was that tax collectors were able to enter Druze villages for the first time without a full escort of gendarmes. Nadhir Fansah, Ayyam Husni al-Za`im, 137 Yawman Hazzat Suriya [The Days of Husni al-Za`im, the 137 Days which Shook Syria], Beirut, 1982, pp. 182-83.
"special fund" was established by the President to finance his anti-Atrash activities.\textsuperscript{39} When locusts and drought ravaged the Jabal's crops in 1946 and 1947, only the distribution of wheat by MIRA, the agency established by the British to control the supply of grain, saved the Druzes from starvation.

"Subsidy, smuggling, and hashish," as one diplomat stated, were the sources of Atrash finances.\textsuperscript{40} Shishakli did his best to root out all three. Subsidies from Jordan ceased following the death of King `Abdallah in 1951. Smuggling of arms and contraband slowed as Shishakli expanded the number of boarder police stationed along Syria's southern and eastern frontiers. Hashish production in the Jabal, which constituted the most important source of Atrash revenues, was also reduced. The farming of hashish in the Jabal was largely controlled by the Atrashes, and Amir Hasan was among its principal cultivators. Though the exact size of the Hashish crop in the Jabal was always in dispute, the Commandant of the Syrian Gendarmerie estimate that some 500 hectares were devoted to it in 1947. Given hashish prices of the time, such a crop was worth 2,500,000 Syrian pounds (roughly $1,000,000), a sizable amount considering the poverty of the Jabal. Under Quwwatli the Syrian government passed legislation prohibiting the planting of hashish, but officials readily admitted they could do nothing to eradicate hashish in the Jabal until the Druzes were "forcibly administered by a non-Druze authority."\textsuperscript{41}

This is precisely what Shishakli did. According to U.S. reports, the ban against the


\textsuperscript{40} USNA, Memminger (Damascus) to Sec. of State (20 August 1947) 890D.00/8-2047.

\textsuperscript{41} USNA, U.S. Legation (Damascus) to Sec. of State (3 September 1947) 890D.114.9-0347.
cultivation of hashish was "in the main consistently enforced" in the Jabal Druze, and its smuggling to Jordan was "sharply curtailed." According to a Lebanese Druze journalist, 'Adib al-Shishakli appointed his brother, Salah, Director of Border Control, a position he exploited to centralize the smuggling of drugs in Syria under his personal command. Border guards and official vehicles were used to transport Turkish opium and Lebanese hashish to Jordan where it was then shipped to Egypt for consumption. According to this account, which seems reliable, Salah al-Shishakli pushed the Druzes out of the drug trade, slashing Atrash finances and harming the Druze community as a whole.

The Declining Importance of the Jabal in Syria's Economy

Much more important to the declining fortunes of the Druze community, however, was the general stagnation of the Jabal economy at a time when Syria was undergoing its most dramatic economic boom. Not a single major development project was carried out in the Jabal during the Shishakli period. Development of Syria's water supply such as the Homs-Hama, Khabur, Sinn, al-Mudiq, and Muzayrib irrigation projects, and the draining of the Ghab and Rawj swamps exhausted the government's development budget and did nothing for the Jabal Druze. By irrigating an additional 195,446 acres they increased Syria's agricultural production and drove down local grain prices, the mainstay of the Druze economy. This process was

"USNA, James S. Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Decline in Influence of the Druze Community under Shishakli Government," (15 August 1953) 783.00/8-1553.

"Nadim Abu Isma`il, Min Asrar al-Shishakli [Some of Shishakli's Secrets], Lebanon, 195(5?), pp. 71-83.

"USNA, Paul Geren (Damascus) to Dept. of State, (28 January 1952) 883.2614/1-2852."
repeated on an even grander scale with the spread of engine-powered irrigation pumps. Indeed, the Shishakli years witnessed, what one observer called, "the great pump expansion" in Syria.\textsuperscript{45} In 1951 alone the number of water pumps in use in Syria doubled from the previous year to a total of 5,068. They opened up a further 837,000 acres of land for irrigation, more than half of which was in the Euphrates and Jazira regions of the Syrian Northeast, followed by Aleppo, Damascus and Hama. According to Syrian Ministry of Agriculture figures, none of these pumps was registered in the Hawran or Jabal Druze area. Of the 1343 agricultural tractors and 694 combine harvesters registered in Syria in 1951, 75 percent were in the Jazira and few if any in the Jabal Druze.\textsuperscript{46} All the available statistics for Syrian agriculture lead to the conclusion that Shishakli's booming economy bypassed the Jabal economy.

By 1953 the Jabal economy was not only in relative decline compared to the rest of Syria, but was declining absolutely. Druze officials in 1953 stated "that wheat and barley originally supplied to Damascus and other cities in southern Syria largely from the Hawran and the Jabal Druze are now being grown more economically in such newly developed areas as the Jazira."\textsuperscript{47} This was true enough. Wheat production in Syria was 357,770 metric tons in 1942, 567,875 metric tons in 1946, 750,000 metric tons in 1950, and 800,000 metric tons in 1953.\textsuperscript{48} It had

\textsuperscript{45}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47}USNA, James S. Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Decline in Influence of the Druze Community under Shishakli Government," (15 August 1953) 783.00/8-1553.

\textsuperscript{48}USNA, Paul Geren (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Social and Political Consequences of the Increase of Farm Machinery in Syria," (15 June 1951) 883.3312/6-1515; and "Quarterly Economic report, First and Second Quarters, 1951," (26 July 1951) 883.00/7-2651; Malcolm Thompson (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Economic and Financial Review of Syria - 1953," (15 March 1954) 883.00/3-1554.
doubled in a decade, and most of the increase was due to the capitalist-entrepreneurs responsible for opening up the Jazira. Druze farmers could not compete with the large mechanized farms of the North which were driving down agricultural prices. "This does not mean that the Druzes are starving," said the Druze officials, "but they no longer have that market for their surplus grain that formerly existed."  

The nationalist and pro-industrial policies of the Shishakli government further squeezed the profits of Druze farmers. Heavy export taxes on grains kept local wheat prices artificially low while import taxes on farm equipment, industrial products, and imports such as textiles and canned goods kept farming costs high. The consumers and industrialists of the cities benefited at the expense of rural farmers. Much of the government's foreign exchange was earned from the tax on grain exports which only encouraged it to raise rates. A further 20 percent of total government revenues was derived from direct agricultural taxes while only a fraction of that was exacted from the industrial sector. Because taxes on income and property were only beginning to take hold in Syria and the government could not count on them for a significant share of its revenues, it had little choice but to rely on the countryside for revenue. Despite constant pleas for tax reform from Syria's agriculturalists, Shishakli had little alternative but to squeeze farmers in order to fill state coffers. Many Druze farmers, unable to compete in such hostile circumstances, were forced off the land and into Syria's urban centers, speeding the process of geographic integration and the creation of a national economy.

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49USNA, James S. Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Decline in Influence of the Druze Community under Shishakli Government," (15 August 1953) 783.00/8-1553. 

50USNA, Paul Geren (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Quarterly Economic report, First and Second Quarters, 1951," (26 July 1951) 883.00/7-2651; Malcolm Thompson (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Economic and Financial Review of Syria - 1953," (15 March 1954) 883.00/3-1554.
Why did Shishakli not earmark any major development projects for the Jabal? Many Druzes believed that he neglected the Jabal out of spite, because, like Shukri al-Quwwatli before him, he believed the Druze community was a "dangerous minority," one that had to be punished, not rewarded.\textsuperscript{51} Syrian officials gave other reasons to explain why the Jabal received less development money than any other \textit{muhafaza}. They claimed that the economic crisis in the Jabal was due not to government neglect but to "overpopulation." Many concluded that the only long-term solution was to resettle as many Druzes as possible in the rich Jazira.\textsuperscript{52} This was a far fetched plan, but one nevertheless regularly considered by government and Druze officials alike. A few Druzes, such as Amir Hasan, did acquire land in the Jazira, but this was a solution that only the richest could afford.\textsuperscript{53} Perhaps the reason that the relocation scheme continued to resurface was that no obvious solution to the Jabal's poverty existed. The hard-scrabble and arid hills of the Jabal had few streams which were suitable for irrigation or the generation of power, and its rocky terraces were ill suited for tractors. Moreover, landownership in the Jabal was more fragmented than in any other region of Syria save the neighboring \textit{muhafaza} of Hawran. Already in 1944, 33 percent of the Jabal's land was held in plots of 10 hectares or less, and a further 53 percent in plots less than 100 hectares. Poverty in the Jabal was not caused by an unequal


\textsuperscript{52}USNA, Memminger (Damascus) to Sec. of State (20 August 1947) 890D.00/8-2047; and (18 February 1948) 890D.00/2-1148; PRO, Gardener (Damascus) to A. Eden (22 March 1954) FO 371/111140/ VY1016/87.

\textsuperscript{53}USNA, James S. Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Decline in Influence of the Druze Community under Shishakli Government," (15 August 1953) 783.00/8-1553.
distribution of land as in some regions of Syria and could not be solved by land redistribution.\textsuperscript{54}

The Administrative Integration of the Jabal Druze

Whether Shishakli's neglect of the Jabal Druze economy was purposeful or benign, there was no doubt about his intention to limit the political authority of the Druzes and to make the community an integral part of the population. The one development project which did attract attention was the construction of an excellent asphalt road running from Suwayda' due north almost as far as Shahba, the second most important town in the Jabal situated in the heart of Atrash territory. The purpose of this road, however, was so that "troops could be moved its entire distance in half an hour if necessary."\textsuperscript{55} As in other aspects of his rule, General Shishakli relied on the Syrian Army to ensure the passivity of the Jabal and its continuing integration into Syrian society. As the U.S. Ambassador wrote:

Though charged with watching Syria's frontiers with Jordan and Israel, the troops stationed in south Syria are disposed in a manner designed to discourage internal unrest. A brigade has its headquarters in Ezra on the edge of the Jebel Druze and one of its three battalions... is stationed in Swayda itself, with a transport company in support a short distance to the west of Ezra on the Swayda-Damascus road.\textsuperscript{56}

Far from being content to watch the Druze economy decline and to station troops where they could easily quell social discontent in the Jabal, Shishakli sought to bring every facet of Druze life into conformity with state law and central authority. It was only the year before

\textsuperscript{54} USNA, Houghton (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Land Tenure in Syria," (5 January 1951) 833.3312/1-551; Malcolm Thompson (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Economic and Financial Review of Syria - 1953," (15 March 1954) 883.00/3-1554.

\textsuperscript{55} USNA, J. Moose (Damascus) to Dept of State, "Decline in Influence of the Druze Community under Shishakli," (15 August 1953) 783.00/8-1553.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
Shishakli took power that Damascus papers had the occasion to trumpet "the introduction of normal Syrian legal processes into the Jabal as a long step forward." The occasion was the sentencing and conviction for the first time in Jabal history of an individual accused of murder according to Syrian civil law rather than Druze tribal law. The full imposition of civil law in the Jabal, however, was only completed under General Shishakli.

Moreover, Shishakli did not hesitate to use his control of the courts to intimidate the Druze population. In one incident in 1951 he had 35 Druze officers and soldiers arrested "for alleged contacts with smuggling and espionage activity for Israel." Several days later the Syrian army surrounded the Druze town of Majdal Shams in the Hawran to search for spies, causing 50 of its inhabitants to flee to Israel. Druze notables travelled to Damascus to protest these actions, but to little avail; several of the officers were executed. In 1953 the Procureur-Général of the Syrian Supreme Court confessed "that no Christian and few Moslems had since 1948 been convicted of espionage, the great bulk of the guilty ones having been Druzes."

No change limited the political power of the Druzes in Syria or integrated the Jabal into

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57 USNA, Memminger (Damascus) to Sec. of State (11 February) 890D.00/2-1148.

58 Druze opponents of the Atrash during Quwwatli’s presidency frequently complained that the judicial process in the Jabal was the private fief of the Atrash. One such complaint was recorded as follows: "Four criminals (Atrash underlings) recently convicted of crimes ranging from robbery to murder and given sentences of from 5 to 20 years at hard labor were released from prison within a few weeks of conviction and are now back at their former occupations and living at home with their families. Prisoners are regularly taken out to work on the farms or in the homes of the Atrash's." Report by Colonel H.L. McGrath included in: USNA, Memminger (Damascus) to Sec. of State, "Revolt Against Atrash Rule in the Jebel Druze," (20 August 1947) 890D.00/8-2047.

59 USNA, Canon (Damascus) to Sec. of State, "Telegraph," (18 July 1951) 783.00/7-1751; J.F. Leonard to Dept. of State, "Spy Trials," (21 September 1951) USNA 783.00/9-2151; "Druze Informing Israelis about Military Capabilities and Statistics," (19 October 1951) 783.00/10-1951.
the civil administration of the country more than Shishakli’s careful attempt to limit the number
of Druzes holding key positions in the Jabal. President Quwwatli earned the distinction of
breaking the Atrash political monopoly over the Jabal when he managed to appoint a Lebanese
Druze as governor in 1948. Shishakli broke with Quwwatli’s more cautious policy of using only
Lebanese Druzes as government emissaries to the Jabal; he routinely appointed non-Druze
governors of the Jabal. Following his second coup in 1951, Shishakli further demonstrated his
destain for Druze sensibilities by appointed to the post a succession of unknown officials whose
only qualifications were their membership in Shishakli’s new Arab Liberation Movement and
their complete loyalty to the President. Officials subordinate to the Muhafiz were likewise
replaced with non-Druzes picked for their loyalty to the Syrian government. In Shahba, where
the ’Amr clan, the second family of the Jabal and close ally of the Atrashes, had traditionally
provided most of the local officials, outsiders were given full control.\textsuperscript{61} At almost every level of
the Jabal’s administration the authority of the great Druze families was eliminated.

Shishakli made no effort to placate Druze opposition to his regime or to recruit members
of the community into his Arab Liberation Movement. Amir Hasan insisted that no self-
respecting Druze would sign up for the state-sponsored party and that very few members of
leading Jabal families had joined. None held high position in the ALM. During the carefully
choreographed elections of July 1953, the government showed its disdain for the Druze
community by making no effort to force Druzes to vote. Following the elections it announced
that 65 percent of the eligible voters in the Jabal had participated, a figure that was 20 percent

\textsuperscript{60}\textsuperscript{PRO, Gardener (Damascus) to A. Eden, (22 March 1954) FO 371/111140/VY1016/87.}

\textsuperscript{61}\textsuperscript{USNA, James S. Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, ”Decline in Influence of the Druze
Community under Shishakli Government,” (15 August 1953) 783.00/8-1553.}
below the announced national average of 85 percent. The actual participation rate among the Druzes, however, was estimated to be less than 5 percent. The publication of a lower voting figure for the *muhafaza* indicated how little disturbed Syrian authorities were by Druze apathy towards the central government. The U.S. Ambassador concluded that,

> there has been a marked decline recently in the political importance of Syria's Druze community. The government in Damascus is, as a result, under increasingly less compulsion to consider the reaction of the Druze community, as distinct from that of Syrians generally, in shaping its policies. In the recent presidential election, the traditional unwillingness of the Druzes to support the central government was again demonstrated, but the government appears unconcerned with the degree of passive opposition which seems now the limit of Druze capabilities. There is no present prospect that this proud but impoverished community will again be in a position to threaten the security of the Syrian State without large-scale outside assistance.  

Even in small matters, Shishakli tried to wipe away symbols of Druze tradition in the hope of "Syrianizing" the Jabal community. Street names were altered to glorify General Shishakli and martyrs who died fighting the French. The Greek amphitheater in Shahba was renamed for General Silu, the nominal head of state in 1952. Members of the Atrash family for whom the French had built houses were forced to vacate them without compensation.  

Not only did Shishakli undertake to reduce the role of Druzes in the administration of the Jabal, but he similarly reduced or circumscribed their participation in the government institutions of the central state. The U.S. Ambassador explained: "Recognizing the clannishness of the Druze community, its secret religion, and social differentiation from the rest of Syria, General Shishakli has appeared to follow a policy of limiting the number of Druzes holding key positions." In the ranks of the foreign service, for example, the only Druze to hold an important post was the  

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62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
Ambassador to Washington, Farid Zayn al-Din, and he was a Lebanese Druze who had officially converted to Sunni Islam. Druze members of the Syrian diplomatic corps complained bitterly that they had abandoned all hope of career advancement because the "authorities would not permit two Druzes to serve at the same foreign service post," presumably because of their traditional unreliability.64

Shishakli weeded Druzes out of the military with even greater care than he did from other branches of the government.65 By 1953 all Syrian Druze officers with the rank of full Colonel had been retired from the service save one, Colonel Amin Abu `Asaf, who was transferred to a remote posting in Dayr al-Zur where Shishakli believed he would be unable to cause trouble. Two Atrasheh, Colonel Hamad and Sultan Pasha's brother, Colonel Zayd, were retired in 1952.66

Shishakli Attacks the Druzes

By the summer of 1953 Shishakli's dictatorial rule had caused widespread discontent in Syria. Believing that he could win back public approval by legalizing political parties and calling for parliamentary elections, Shishakli announced the re-institution of democratic forms of political life. The result of this abrupt reversal of policy was to give legal expression to the universal opposition to his rule and not to win back public support. Syria's political class

64 Ibid.
65 Fadl Allah Abu Mansur, A `asir Dimashq [Damascus Storms], Beirut, 1959, p. 130.
66 Colonel Zayd al-Atrash was later returned to the service and assigned to an inconsequential gendarmerie command. He was arrested in January 1954 following the violent suppression of demonstrations in the Jabal. USNA, James Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Arrest of Opposition Leaders Is Followed by Proclamation of Martial Law in Major Syrian States," (8 February 1954) 783.00/2-854.
exploited their renewed freedom to form the National Front in a rare demonstration of unanimity. It called for an end to Shishakli's "absolute dictatorial administration," and the restoration of constitutional rule. No community in Syria was more outspoken in its opposition to Shishakli than the Druzes. Resentful of the central government for eliminating their special privileges, frustrated by government neglect of the Jabal economy, and convinced that they had been singled out for persecution under Shishakli, the Druzes guided by the Atrash family took the lead in opposing the government at every turn.

Public expression of Druze opposition to Shishakli's regime began following the arrest of two of Sultan Pasha's sons, Mansur and Captain Nasir al-Atrash in May 1953. Both were members of the Ba`th Party and had been involved in a series of small bombings in Damascus. Their arrest spurred Sultan Pasha to join over one hundred Syrian politicians in signing a petition opposing dictatorial rule in Syria. The signers of this petition also secretly pledged to unseat the dictator and "agreed that each province of Syria should prepare for its own liberation, but that the signal for revolt throughout the country would be a rising in the Jabal Druze."67 Despite an attempt by Shishakli to appease Sultan Pasha by releasing Mansur, the Druze chieftain refused to announce his support for Shishakli as the President had anticipated; rather, he proclaimed: "I did not ask Shishakli for the freedom of my son; I asked him for the freedom of the country."68

67 Seale, Struggle for Syria, p. 134.
68 "USNA, James Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, 'June 20 Anti-Shishakli Petition Reveals Nature and Extent Opposition by Old-Line Parties,' (6 July 1953) 783.00/7-653. According to Moose, Sultan Pasha's "signature could be viewed as a somewhat more serious threat to the Government than that of the former politicians" because of his prestige as a national hero and warrior, and because Shishakli believed he was in contact with Colonel Safa's "Free Syria Fighting Force," based in Iraq and had received arms and money from the Iraqi government. For the full speech Sultan made on the release of Mansur, see Sabbagh, Memoirs of an Officer, p. 209.
Real trouble came to the Jabal in January when Mansur was again arrested, this time for handing out Ba`thist tracts in the Jabal condemning Shishakli. Believing that a coordinated attack on his regime had begun, Shishakli moved quickly to nip it in the bud. He arrested Amir Hasan al-Atrash and a delegation of Druze notables then in Damascus. Protests broke out in the Jabal which quickly got out of control when the Syrian army tried to put them down. When a small column of gendarmes was cut down outside of Qraya, the home of Sultan Pasha, where they had been sent to arrest the Druze leader, Shishakli dispatched 10,000 regular troops to occupy the Jabal. Several towns were bombarded with heavy weapons, killing scores of civilians and destroying many houses. According to Druze accounts, Shishakli encouraged neighboring bedouin tribes to plunder the defenseless population and allowed his own troops to run amok.

Moreover, Shishakli launched a brutal campaign to defame the Druzes for their religion and politics. He accused the entire community of treason, at times claiming they were agents of the British and Hashimites, at others that they were fighting for Israel against the Arabs. He even produced a cache of Israeli weapons allegedly discover in the Jabal. Even more painful for the Druze community was his publication of "falsified Druze religious texts" and false testimonials ascribed to leading Druze shaykhs designed to stir up sectarian hatred.69 Egypt, fearful that the British and Hashimites might be behind the unrest in Syria, lent the prestige of their Sawt al-Arab broadcasts to Shishakli's propaganda campaign. A typical Egyptian announcement read:

The Druzes are a sect. They are not Arab; they are not Arab in any way. The Druzes hate the Arabs. The Druzes have their own beliefs. They are servants of the British and Jews in Israel. The Druzes are traitors, enemies of Islam, friends of Israel.70

69 al-Hinnawi, Struggle between Freedom and Dictatorship, pp. 111-12.

70 Quoted in B`ayni, Sultan Pasha, p. 278.
In crushing the Druzes, Shishakli demonstrated the overwhelming power of the central state. The Jabal was pacified in only a few days and its leaders, with the exception of Sultan Pasha who managed to escape to Jordan, were arrested. Demonstrations which spread throughout Syria during and following the fighting in the Jabal were likewise suppressed, and many politicians thrown into prison. The U.S. Ambassador wrote:

Though certainly not cowed, the Druze are believed to be in no position to undertake further serious trouble at present.... Control of the Army and police has enabled (and still enables) [Shishakli] to maintain his authority. It seems evident that he will continue his control over the domestic situation only as long as he controls the security forces.\(^71\)

The Druze Role in the Military Revolt against Shishakli's Regime

In the early morning of 25 February 1954 the Syrian army battalions stationed in the north of the country rose in revolt against Shishakli's regime. By the end of the day Shishakli had fled the country and Syria's traditional politicians were returned to power. Though the colonels who revolted against Shishakli represented every major political movement in Syria, the first plans for the coup were hatched in Dayr al-Zur by disaffected Druze officers who were angered by Shishakli's treatment of them, and of the Druze community at large. Based on statements made by a number of army officers, including Captain Muhammad al-Atrash, the U.S. Ambassador filed the following report.

Available information indicates that the plans for the revolt were originally concocted in Deir-ez-Zor rather than Aleppo. Because of its isolated position, Deir-ez-Zor had become something of a place of exile for Army officers, including a disproportionate number of Druzes.... At the time of the revolt, more than half the officers of the Deir-ez-Zor garrison, including the commanding officer, Colonel Amin

\(^71\)USNA, James Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Arrest of Opposition Leaders Is Followed by Proclamation of Martial Law in Major Syrian States," (8 February 1954) 783.00/2-854.
Abu Asaf, were Druzes. Perhaps General Shishakli enhanced the reliability of other units of his Army by this separation of the Druze element, but by allowing a frustrated minority to concentrate in one place, he created a hothouse for the cultivation of rebellious plans.

The original plot was probably conceived... as early as the summer of 1953, by Colonel Asaf and Captain Mohammed al-Atrash.... Both of these men opposed the Shishakli regime because of its treatment of the Druze minority; in addition, Colonel Asaf has the reputation of being a trouble-maker... Captain al-Atrash was a follower of [the Ba`th Party].... Furthermore, he is a nephew of Sultan Pasha al-Atrash and a first cousin of Mansur al-Atrash.72

The Ambassador continues in his report to detail how and when each of the colonels commanding garrisons in Aleppo, Homs, Hama, and Latakia were induced to join the revolt.

Evidently Muhammad al-Atrash was instrumental in convincing many of the colonels to join, not only because of his connections to the Ba`th Party, which had failed in previous attempts to overthrow Shishakli, but more importantly, because he was a scion of the powerful Atrash family. His family connections, not his party affiliation, won him the trust of the more conservative officers, such as Colonel Faysal al-Atasi who emerged as the titular leader of the "five colonels." Muhammad al-Atrash's influence with Colonel Atasi was based on his relationship to Sultan Pasha, just as the army officers' decision to name Colonel Atasi leader of the coup was based on the fact that he was the nephew of Hashim al-Atasi, the leader of the National Front and agreed upon next President of Syria.73 Once the civilian uprising had been suppressed, Sultan Pasha driven into exile, and Hashim al-Atasi placed under arrest, the two

72 USNA, James S. Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Inception and Execution in Aleppo of the February 25 Coup," (11 March 1954) 783.00/3-1154; "Decline in Influence of the Druze Community under Shishakli Government," (15 August 1953) 783.00/8-1559.

73 Hasan Amin al-B`ayni in his biography of Sultan Pasha argues that in 1954 only Sultan Pasha could lead the Druze community in a revolt and not his Ba`thist son, Mansur [p. 271]. His contention that traditional loyalties remained far stronger among the Druzes than those to parties such as the Ba`th is also true of Syrian society as a whole at the time. Not until the 1960s were Ba`thist officers able to govern Syria on their own.
nephews undoubtedly shared the conviction that it was up to them to depose Shishakli.

**Conclusion**

The army had become the ultimate arbiter in Syrian politics. No observer could help but draw this primary lesson from the success of the military revolt which overthrew 'Adib al-Shishakli in February 1954. Shishakli made a serious attempt to balance the centrifugal forces which made Syria so difficult to govern. The four years of relative prosperity and stability he brought Syria stood as a small island of calm in the turbulent three decades of coups and revolving governments which marked Syria from 1940 to 1970. Moreover, his rule established numerous precedents for state-building in Syria. The swift suppression of the civilian uprising, which began in the Jabal Druze only a month prior to the military revolt which brought him down, confirmed the extent to which army officers had wrested political power from the hands of the traditional civilian elite and demonstrated how impotent they had become in the face of Syria's rapidly centralizing state. So long as the army remained united behind the President, no amount of popular pressure could remove him.

The success of the military putsch, however, revealed that the Syrian army was anything but united. Rent by sectarian, regional, and political factionalism, the officer corps was as deeply divided as the society from which it was recruited. Shishakli's attempt to weed out disloyal officer groups, most notably the Druze officers, and replace them with Sunnis from his hometown of Hama did not go far enough. Though his government had become known as a "Hamawi regime" because he had surrounded himself with fellow Hama officers, his effort to create a homogeneous power elite was a failure -- a fact attested to by the success of colonels
from other parts of Syria in unseating him.\textsuperscript{74}

Shishakli's attempt to consolidate his rule and bring political stability to Syria by eliminating competing political and sectarian factions from the top ranks of the army established a principle of government that out lasted his regime. All successors to Shishakli followed this sound precept, though only Hafiz al-Asad has perfected it, making him the longest Damascus-based ruler of Syria since Mu`awiya Ibn Abi Sufyan, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty.\textsuperscript{75}

The Druzes learned at considerable cost that they could no longer challenge the authority of Damascus openly. Shishakli revolutionized the way in which the central state dealt with the Druzes. He dismantled their autonomous legal, economic, and administrative institutions so jealously defended throughout their history. Rather than be drawn into local Druze affairs by playing one faction off against another as his successors had, Shishakli struck at the community as a whole. He replaced the Atrash and `Amr officials who had monopolized the administrative posts in the Jabal with minor state functionaries who were neither Druze nor knowledgeable about Druze affairs. He stationed large numbers of troops in the Jabal, removed Druze officers from the upper echelons of the army, and brought the full force of Syrian law to bear on the Jabal population.

Shishakli made no effort to develop the Jabal economy. The single infrastructural improvement there, financed by the central state, was the paving of the Suwayda'- Shahba road, a project which won little good will for Shishakli as it was designed for military purposes. Private

\textsuperscript{74}USNA, James S. Moose (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "Inception and Execution in Aleppo of the February 25 Coup," (11 March 1954) 783.00/ 3-1154.

investment, responsible for the lion's share of Syria's impressive economic growth during the early 1950s, was also sadly lacking in the Jabal. The mountainous terrain and small size of farms in the region impeded the use of tractors and water pumps, the two technological advances which spurred agricultural expansion in most other provinces of Syria. Prosperity was further damaged by Shishakli's crackdown on the illicit income many Druzes derived from the cultivation of hashish and smuggling arms and other contraband across the border with Jordan.

As Druze agriculture lost its competitive edge, the financial and political influence of the community also diminished. The marginalization of their economy forced enterprising Druzes to seek employment outside the Jabal, but even this movement toward social integration was seriously hampered by Shishakli's discriminatory policies. He limited Druze employment in the various branches of the state bureaucracy and army. Consequently Druzes found most avenues of economic and political advancement closed to them under Shishakli.

By the end of 1953, hostility to Shishakli had grown among the Druzes such that they were involved in every effort to bring down his regime. This growing cycle of repression and resistance reached its climax in January 1954 when anti-government demonstrations in the Jabal turned violent. Shishakli's response was swift and brutal. The military and propaganda campaign he waged against the Druzes raised the level of violence used in Syrian politics to a new and shocking high. Though it is difficult to assess the damage done to inter-communal relations in Syria by Shishakli's treatment of the Druzes, there is little doubt that its repercussions were enduring and undercut government efforts to promote national integration. Some have suggested that the violence used by Shishakli's Hamawi officers in crushing the Druzes was directly responsible for the equally violent suppression of a popular uprising in Hama by Ba`thist Druze officers in 1964. Nikolaos Van Dam writes: "The harsh suppression of the insurrection in Hama
was attributed by some to a sectarian blood revenge (tha’r) by the prominent Druze Ba’thist Colonel Hamad ‘Ubayd,” who sought to repay the “Sunni Hama officers” for their behavior a decade earlier in the Jabal Druze.\(^7\)

Whether the violence of later Syrian regimes should be blamed on Shishakli or on the natural strategies of state-building in Syria is open to debate. All the same, his highhanded treatment of the Druzes caused many to doubt whether they would ever see a successful integration of their community into Syria. Their paramount tribal leader, Amir Hasan al-Atrash, confessed the doubts his community had on this score to the British Ambassador in Damascus only weeks after the bombing of the Jabal. He said:

> The Druzes, as a religious minority, are doomed to constant persecution in Muslim lands where no foreign power exists to protect them.... Under the spur of Muslim hostility, the clans of the Jabal [are] now united and the young men [are] demanding revenge by force of arms.... The Druze elders would like to emigrate to some land where they would not be subject to religious persecution.\(^7\)

The extent and duration of the damage Shishakli did to the traditional administration of the Jabal can easily be exaggerated. Once Shishakli was deposed, all of the old leaders regained their commanding positions in local politics. Most enjoyed a significant boost to their reputations. When Sultan Pasha returned to Syria from Jordan, where he had taken refuge from Shishakli’s fury, he was feted as a national hero by the country's new leaders; every political party petitioned him to join its ranks. His stature as a fearless defender of Syrian freedom and the nation grew to mythic proportions.\(^7\) Amir Hasan al-Atrash was also wooed by Syria's political

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\(^7\)Ibid., p. 20; Also see Fu’ad al-Atrash, *al-Duruz, Mu’amarat wa Tarikh wa Haqa’iq* [The Druzes, Conspiracies, History, and Facts], Beirut, 1975, p. 374.

\(^7\)PRO, Gardener (Damascus) to A. Eden (22 March 1954) FO 371/111140/VY1016/87.

\(^7\)For a fine discussion of the political contest over Sultan Pasha's legacy as a nationalist leader in
parties. Moreover, he was appointed Minister of Agriculture by the new government in recognition of the leading role the Druzes had played in fighting Shishakli's tyranny. Not since Quwwatli became President of Syria in 1943 had Amir Hasan, or any other Druze, been appointed to a cabinet position. In the parliamentary elections held in October 1954, Amir Hasan, Mansur al-Atrash, Sultan Pasha's son, and Sayyah `Amr, the chieftain of Shahba and ally of the Atrash, all won overwhelming victories. Even if the traditional leaders of the Jabal were no longer the unique mediators between their community and the Damascus government, they continued to represent the Jabal in the central government and play a dominant role in its politics. The Druzes clung to their traditions where they could, and far from abandoning their pride in and loyalty to their community, they discovered a renewed sense of unity in their common struggle against Shishakli.

Though Druze separatism was a thing of the past by 1954, ethnopolitics in Syria were very much alive. Druzes politicians and military officers continued to fight for the interests of their community within the institutions of the state. Shishakli's ham-fisted and often brutal attempts to outlaw communal consciousness and to Syrianize the Jabal failed to convince the Druzes that they could place their faith in the state.


7USNA, W.D. Brewer (Damascus) to Dept. of State, "S.S.N.P. Delegation Visits Jebel Druze," (26 March 1954) 783.0/3-26-54. Amir Hasan's son, Zayd al-Atrash, joined the S.S.N.P.; whereas, Sultan Pasha's sons joined the Ba`th Party.

80 Amir Hasan al-Atrash was condemned to death in absentia by Syria's radical nationalist government in 1957 for his participation, along with many other Syrian politicians, in the failed Iraqi-sponsored coup of 1956, the object of which was to unite the two countries under Iraq's Hashimite king. His sentence was eventually commuted.
The civil war President Quwwatli provoked in the Jabal Druze, the negotiations carried on between the Druzes and King `Abdallah concerning the transfer of the Jabal to Jordanian suzerainty, and the bombardment of Druze towns ordered by Shishakli belie the commonly repeated notion that the Jabal Druze was incorporated into the Syrian state "quite smoothly." But more than just making us question the timing of when the Druzes became "nationalists" or when they committed themselves to a "successful assimilation" into a larger Syrian-Arab community, the halting and often violent incorporation of the Jabal into Syria should make us revise the central metaphor used by Philip Khoury and others for understanding the spread of nationalism in Syria.

He depicts "modern secular nationalism" to have spread like an acid over Syria dissolving primordial identities and "corrod[ing] loyalties to family, tribe, ethnicity and confessional group." The absence of any clear definition of Syrian nationalism or respect for the constitution at independence did little to provide Syrians with a national identity strong enough to replace the time-honored and proven virtues of sectarian, tribal, and regional loyalties. The idea of the nation in Syria following independence did not act as a powerful acid, as many hoped it would, corroding sub-national loyalties such that they retained only a folkloric afterglow in Syrian political life. Instead, nationalism existed as an ideal, but in actuality each community envisioned it in a different way by investing it with their own religious and social values. The long political struggle for power between Syria's sub-national communities was accompanied by an equally hard-fought cultural struggle to construct Syria's national identity such that it resembled their own as closely as possible.

The creation of an independent Syrian state, far from sounding the death knell for traditional loyalties to family, tribe, region, and sect, merely cordoned off a new political arena
in which Syria's traditional communities had to contend for national prominence. The battle to elaborate a common national identity, as often as not, infused new cultural and political meaning into the old loyalties and sacred values which had long defined each Syrian group's sense of who they were and how they should behave with each other.