Chapter 3

Nationalism in Post Independent Syria

Political Instability in Syria

Syria under Asad

Greater Syria
3.1 Political instability in Syria

The newly independent Syrian state had acquired a certain vitality through the nationalist struggle against the vested interest created by the various political units. But in terms of the dominant ideology there was an aura of uncertainty about it.

Independent Syria had yet to define the nature of its political community and to integrate within it a variety of minorities. These tasks were made all the more difficult by the ambitions of other Arab states and foreign powers in Syria. The doctrine of Pan-Arab nationalism, the frail structure of the new state, and the traditional orientation of certain regions and groups towards neighbouring states facilitated outside interference in Syrian politics. These factors were long to remain below the surface of Syrian politics, though the actual political scene was often dominated or coloured by other, related issues.

The important development in the first period of Syrian independence was the continuous gradual weakening of the political and social power of the old ruling class challenged by younger, more radical groups representing, to some extent, social state that until then had little political power. The change was catalyzed by the three coups that took place in 1949. They brought the military to an active intervention and participation in politics, which
had since remained a major aspect of Syrian political history. Though not necessarily conscious of it the officers who initiated this process in 1949 served to break the political backbone of the traditional ruling class and to transfer a growing share of power to new groups and parties.

These trends were more clearly evident in and accelerated by Adib Shishakli when he held power in December 1949 to February 1954. Among other things, Shishakli introduced a more direct military dictatorship, a policy of centralization and assimilation a state organised single party, and a parliament in which for the first time younger, urban, lower middle class elements were highly represented at the expense of the traditional landowning deputies. Shishakli was closely associated with Akram al-Hawrani who had played a prominent role in all three subsequent coup of 1949. However, the differences arose between the two on the ideological lines which compelled Hawrani to join hands with the radical ideological Ba’th Party to take part in toppling Shishakli in 1954.

The Ba’th Party took a role in the heterogeneous coalition which led the opposition to Shishakli’s regime and then toppled it in a military coup in February 1954. Active in this coalition were also the Druse community and some traditional political circles, most notably the Atari family, based in the central Syrian city of Homs and
affiliated with the peoples party.

Soon after the 1954 coup election took place a civilian regime in Syria. In this election there was an unprecedented achievement for a modern radical party in the Arab World. In the Syrian context the left ward trend was manifested primarily in the domain of foreign relations and threat of the right-wing parties. The combination of left-wing parties the Ba'th and the communists whose rivalry was eclipsed by the period of cooperation brought Syria close enough to the Soviet Union to make it the centre of a minor international crises in 1957.

In Syria, an uneasy alliance of the Ba'th with the communist was derived largely from the support of the army, which after February 1954 chose to exercise its influence from behind the scenes. The army's support however was ambitious and assertive. By the Ba'th communist allies and of the counter pressure applied by the vested interest powers, all alarmed by the growing power of the left. The increasing tensions were mirrored in the army where rival factions were on the verge of clashing. The Ba'th and the large group of Senior Officers who were allied with it or shared its outlook felt that they could not cope with this combined pressure. It seemed to them that the only way to get out of the crises and to stop Syria's disintegration as a political unit was through a federal union with Egypt.
The dissatisfaction of a large section of the Syrian with the Union contributed to its eventual fall by creating an atmosphere for the coup of September 28, 1961, which led to Syria's secession from the UAR. However in the absence of deep changes and sweeping reforms in the country's socio-economic structure, much social and political power still remained in traditional hands. The Process of social change was discernible but Ba'thists were impatient to wait for its results.

The most immediate effect of the failure of this Union on Syrian politics was to reopen the issue of Syria's national identity. As stated by the members of the Ba'th:

The errors of the ruling system in the UAR, however, gave they may be, do not justify secession, for the fact remains that the failure of the experiments in unity is a consequence of certain mistakes and that secession is a consequence of planning, designs and conspiracy.

This vision of a world wide conspiracy against Arab Unity conceded the fact that the union had also failed because of a lack of careful preparation and agreed procedures. New Syria had to go back to governing itself on some workable basis.

In the first place the old conservatives politicians
formed a government and held an election in which they and their colleagues won a majority of seats. They then began to dismantle some of the measures which Nasir had introduced. They had not much positive to offer and a number of cabinets floundered around looking for convincing policies. They could not disavow Arab Unity although Nasir scorned them as an inconsiderable force. The Ba’thi were in no stronger a position. The public welcome which Hawrani gave to the secession embarrased Aflaq and Beytar. They preferred to await the next opportunity for an attempts at Union and announced that they had expelled Hawrani from the party. The army was likewise suffering. There were officers who supported Nasir and others who bitterly resented the Egyptian attempts to dominate them. They quarreled among themselves and with the civilian politician over which policies should be followed. The quarrel between Egypt and Syria continued with each side accusing the other of interference, incitement and of serving the aims of imperialism.7

While the separatist regime led to a new low in Syro-Egyptian relations, it meant normalization, even reapprochement in relations with Iraq. Thus Syria’s relations with Egypt and Iraq continued to follow the old pattern of the struggle for Syria when weak regimes in Damascus sought support from Cairo or Baghdad, normally inverting their predecessor’s choice.
The separatist regime in Syria found itself encircled by radical Arab nationalist advocating Arab Socialism which had considerable appeal within Syria itself.

During the period of 1963-70, there was continued struggles for power and influence among several groups and individuals in Syria. In this situation, it was the Ba'ath party that took control of Syria. The party had been formally dissolved from the beginning of the UAR period until 1962. Though, the Ba'ath Party's prominent founders, Michael Aflaq and Salah-al-Beytar, continued to advocate Arab Nationalism from their respective positions as party leader. But most of the leaders had been turned away from Arab Nationalism by the UAR experiment. They had come to focus their energies and interests on Syria and its immediate environment.

Another far-reaching change was in the composition of the Ba'ath itself. Youngers began to challenge the basic philosophy of Arab Nationalism and joined hands with the members of the military committee in their opportunities to the old guards. Aflaq who had written that 'Nationalism is love before everything else' was ill-fitted to the reigns of political life.

The new left began to get its way. At the Syrian Regional Conference in September 1963 the leftists won a majority and began to introduce a more socialist ideology,
with notions such as class struggle and collective forms which provoked opposition, particularly amongst the bourgeoisie. The crisis was resolved only after the intervention of military in which Beytar was as Prime Minister and Hafiz emerged as a powerful figure to form the new Ba'th. Opposition in the regime continued, now of a different dimension. The Ba'th government, considered by its opponents as both secular and minority led, was denounced as atheistic and non-Arab. In April 1964 a significant event took place. Muslim Brothers (Ikhwan) and others provoked a riot in Hama against the government which responded violently by shelling the town. The unrest, erupted, and continued students, businessmen and others joined together and called for a return to democratic life. Such was the discontent that Hafiz was forced to make some appeasing gestures, bringing back Beytar for a while and relaxing some of his leftist policies. It was a losing battle, for the old Ba'th and for the opponents of the more radical policies. Syria was moving to the left and to a period of outright socialist measures. The 'regionalist' officers (Those who saw Ba'th policies in terms of Syria) consolidated their power by dismissing many Sunni officers and bringing Alawis and Druzes factions into confidence. The conflict continued, ostensibly between the regionalists and nationalists that is roughly between the new Ba'thists of rural origin and old urban-based
leadership. The former included Jadid and Asad and the latter Beytar and others.

The regionalists responded in February 1960 by seizing power in a violent coup that drove the party's founder into exile and split the Arab Nationalist into two, one centered in Syria and other in Iraq. The Syrian group was headed by the Alavi officers, Salah Jadid along with some civilians who dominated Syrian cabinets from 1966-70. It was ideologically committed to a collectivist state to run economy and to support the a national liberation struggle by Palestinians the forward policy of this faction helped the Arab Nationalist in the 1967 war against Israel.

The new Ba'th leaders wanted to retain their ideological 'purity' against the rival faction. Their opponents accused the Ba'th of being responsible for the defeat and called for more democracy and less repression. The Ba'thists reacted with more repression and arrests and refused to compromise and work with others. They were themselves in a conflict which became more intense because of the 1967 defeat. Tensions were caused inside the country by dispute over which military, foreign and socio economic policies should be pursued. The two main trends were represented by Salah Jadid and Hafiz al-Asad made the struggle against each other leading to an ideological differences arised between Jadid and Asad, whether priority should be given to socialist doctrine or to Arab cooperation in the struggle against
Israel. Jadid and his followers managed to obtain a majority for their policies at Ba'th Party congresses in late 1968. Asad refused to accept these decisions and instead turned to the army in order to build up his power. He managed to place his supporters in many of the most influential positions while Jadid failed to utilise his influence in this regard. Asad was particularly keen to ensure his base in his home Alawi area around Latakia. His military supporters virtually seized power there in February 1969 and left the civilians helpless.

The dual system of control between civilians and military continued for another year until September 1970 (Black September). This was the month in which King Hussain of Jordan finally decided that the Palestinians residing in his country are a threat for his regime. They therefore had to be crushed. This was done bloodily in September 1970. Syrian leaders with their commitment to Palestinian felt that they could not stand ideally. On 19th September armored units crossed the Jordanian frontier but withdrew a few days later, having suffered severe casualties. Perhaps surprisingly, Asad had opposed its intervention of Jordan and was strongly criticized by the continuous civilian of Syria. When the civilian tried to depose Asad his military preparations bore fruit and the chief of the staff, Mustafa were able to take counteractions. On 13th November 1970 Asad ordered his military supporters to occupy the offices
of the civilian party sections and to arrest prominent leaders including Salah Jadid and the Sunni President, Nural-Din al-Atasi. Political power was now monopolized by officers, largely Alawi, of Asad’s faction and in February 1971 he became the first Alawi President of Syria. This marked the final stage of the rise of the Alawis from a position of political insignificance to one of national dominance. It was the beginning of a new era in Syrian politics dominated by one man Hafiz al-Asad.

3.2 Syria Under Asad

After coming to power in Syria Hafiz al-Asad exhausted enormous resources and energy in building a powerful army to consolidate his Presidency. Not only this he also provided a dynamic foreign policy which has till date contributed significantly in mobilizing popular support and acquiring legitimacy for his regime. At the same time, Asad did not neglect the internal challenge of rebuilding the Syrian state. His systematic and direct attempts for Nation-Building are based on his new ‘corrective movement’ policies, inaugurated in November 1970, embracing the Ba’th’s tenets of Unity, Freedom and Socialism. Asad’s policies thus, in theory, aims to achieve national unity through the creation of popular democracy. He further laid stress on Ba’thist revolutionary philosophy of socialism to grant civil liberty and socialists reforms.
The core of Asad's success as widely acclaimed is due to his ability to establish a stable regime in Syria. Asad's immediate task following his takeover in November 1970 was to widen his domination to fetch popular support. A series of steps were taken to achieve this goal such as the holding of election for parliament (the Peoples Assembly), lifting over the ban to various leftist parties allowing them to operate alongside the ruling Ba'th Party. The motive behind the induction of the parties was to bring an economic liberalization and change in Syria's foreign policy, thus enabling him to consolidate his regime at a very crucial stage of its existence.

Internally, Asad's coming to power marked a relaxation in the political atmosphere. Some political prisoners were released and he promised restoration of civil liberties. A new Regional Command of the Ba'th was formed by Asad's supporters and the old leaders were removed from their posts. He also got instituted and upgraded people's council the first legislative body since 1966 with 173 members, of which 87 were Ba'thists, 8 Communists and 36 representatives of the formers. Further the amendments introduced in the constitution to facilitate his reform programme gave him enormous power. For many years, Asad had been imbued with the notion of Arab Unity. This notion, although strongly interrelated with the struggle against Israel, went beyond that strategic goal. As a real Syrian leader, Asad
attempted to form an inter-Arab cooperation to help Syria strengthen his military might, political position and economic conditions in his struggle against Israel, (the arch-enemy of the Arabs). Within this process Asad tried to implement his combined personal ambition and national mission to become a Pan-Arab leader like President Nasir in Egypt. Asad’s first political actions after his ascendancy in November 1970 were to join the newly established Federation of Arab Republics (with Egypt Libya, Sudan) and to sign a military pact with Egypt. While considering Egypt as the major and senior partner in the new intra-Arab cooperation, Asad also made great efforts to improve Syria’s relations with all other Arab countries regardless of their domestic regimes and external orientations.

These new Arab solidarity oriented politics of Asad bore fruit during the 1973. Asad succeeded in attracting a wide range of Arab cooperation and assistance. Military forces from Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia were also despatched to the Golan Heights on his requests. Generous financial aid was promised to Syria by wealthy Arab states, and the oil embargo was employed by oil-producing Arab countries to exert diplomatic pressure on the US and West Europe. Yet, this highly impressive demonstration of Arab Solidarity with Syria started to collapse within weeks of Sadat’s unilateral decision to accept the cease-fire with Israel on 22nd October 1973. Syria was subsequently left
alone to fight Israel in the war of attrition. Shocked from this policy move Asad initiated an Arab summit conference in Algeria in late November 1973. With the exception of Iraq, Libya and Jordan, all Arab leaders attended, and endorsed Asad's proposed strategy: to strengthen Arab Solidarity with Syria and Egypt, to liberate all territories occupied by Israel in 1967, including Jerusalem, and not to give up any part of it, to recognise the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian Arab people to continue the oil embargo against the countries which supported Israel.

These decisions, which did not rule out a political settlement, were apparently designed by Asad to link Egypt to Syria in further interim agreements with Israel and to prevent Sadat from taking more unilateral steps towards Israel. This line was pursued by Asad in another Arab summit convened in Algeria in February 1974. Again in late October 1974 the seventh Arab summit meeting was convened in Rabat at the request of Asad and other Arab leaders. In this conference, Asad succeeded in mastering the support of the Arab states for a decision to oppose any Egyptian agreement with Israel, regarding further withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Sinai, but this agreement was not linked to Golan. Further in the next conference in 1975, both Asad and Sadat decided that 'the political action during the next stage requires close cooperation between
Syria and Egypt as a basis for the common Arab action against the common enemy. But Sadat deviated from his alliance with Syria because he was able to convince Israel to withdraw from Sinai. Asad not only criticized Egypt against his separate deal with Israel but he also tried to build an Arab consensus against President Sadat. Who on his own travelled to Jerusalem to meet Israeli leaders and actually to address the Knesset (Parliament). Asad was furious at this betrayal and joined with other states to oppose Egyptian compromise. The Syrians declared, 'We will not attend any conference in the presence of Sadat'. Asad visited Baghdad in October and the two Ba'th parties agreed to bury their differences. The euphoria of rapprochment led to another attempt at Arab Unity. In 1979 moves were announced towards union between Syria and Iraq. With their common Ba'thist ideology the two states agreed to set-up committees to study the project. But rivalry and suspicion proved stronger than brotherhood and all the talks and good will gave nothing. The two leaders Asad of Syria and Saddam Hussein of Iraq, mistrusted each other. The two wings of the Ba'th were led by very different groupings - the Alawis (Shia Sect) in Syria and the Tikritis (a Sunni Sect.) in Iraq. In August there was an attempted coup against Saddam and Asad was immediately suspected. That finally put an end to the unity moves among the two countries.
In the Presidential elections of Feb., 1978, Asad again came as President with a large majority for a second seven year term. But the traditional rivalry among the different groups of the different parts of the country continued and this was intensified by opposition to the Alawi predominance in the government. But during this period of recession the Muslim Brothers stepped up their activities. They were against the secularist policy of the Ba'th Party. At the same time the initial policy in Lebanon for which Syrians seemed to be fighting against Muslims and the PLO added to the anti-Alawi feelings. Finally, the depressed state of the economy, deepened the opposition. Assassination of Alawis became a new problem to President - Asad. In June 1979 gunmen entered into the Aleppo artillery school and massacred over 60 cadets. This act probably proved that the Ikhwan had infiltrated the army. Many activist opponents were arrested and imprisoned. In Paris July 1980 Salan al-din Beytar, was assassinated who represented Syrian opposition forces in Iraq and had just published a series of newspaper articles analyzing the Syrian regime.

Once again, external events conspired to disturb the course of Syrian politics. The Syrian army was stationing in Lebanon when in September 1980 war broke out between Iraq and Iran. Syrian antagonism towards Iraq was strong and Asad surprisingly moved to support the Non-Arab side in the Iran-Iraq war. The official Syrian justification was: We
support the Islamic regime of Iran because it is anti-Israel. We have a pact of unity with Iraq. Let Iraq announce its commitment to this pact and the war will stop immediately because Iran cannot fight Syria and Iraq combined.

The secret of Asad's success laid in the 'Balance' he tried to create between Pan-Arab Nationalism (Qawmiyya) and Syrian nationalism (Wataniyya); he could satisfy strong Syrian aspirations in both directions instead of swaying uncertainly between them. This balance was also expressed pragmatically in implementing Ba'th doctrine internally and in the inter-Arab arena, to the point of distancing himself from Ba'th doctrine itself. Having experienced the Ba'th internal struggles from February 1963, Asad concluded that the Ba'th doctrine could not be implemented in existing Arab and internal Syrian conditions. The attempts to do so by using 'narrow socialistic slogans' created a long-term statement in Syrian political life. The internal instability was liable to burn the bridges between Syria and other Arab States'. Asad described his regime as a 'rectification movements. (TAS-HIH). His regime has been marked by a transition from Party Rule to a personality cult of the leader. Asad has held the highest posts: President, Supreme Commander of the army and secretary general of the Ba'th Party. He has also tried to give his regime a 'democratic' image in order to blur its sectarian
(Alawite) and military character. In short, Asad has tried to be a socialist without resorting the socialist dogmatism, to be democratic without his personal rule being pulled from under his feet.

Asad tried to realize these principles in his conflict with the Jadid faction. His Strategic aim did not differ from that of his predecessor, namely, "the liberation of Palestine and over the Arab occupied territories and the establishment of a single Arab State". These missions were to be realized in three stages:

-- "the complete liberation of the territories occupied in June 1967, liquidation of the Zionist entity and establishment of a Progressive, Secular, democratic Palestinian state on her ruins and the realization of Arab Unity". This entailed the restoration, "of the full rights of the Palestinian people, above all its right to self determination and realization of total sovereignty on all of its national land".

Unlike the previous regime, Asad adopted Nasir's concept of stages and the resolutions of the Khartaum Summit. The distinction between the stage of liberation of the occupied territories and that of "the liberation of Palestinian" gave Syria flexibility and opened a door for itself for settlements in stages, provided it did not go against the strategic goal. For Asad "Israel's withdrawal for Sinai and
the Golan will only settle the problem of the June, 1967 aggression but the essence of the problem remains—the Palestinian people, therefore we shall continue to fight alongside them whether Israel withdraws from the Golan or not. There is no difference between the Golan, Sinai or West Bank. Syria was against any partial or separate settlement with Israel or any of the three fronts. He further added we have no hope in political action, the basic and concrete solution lies in military action.

The principles of Syrian policy were, first the "armed struggle" is the only way of settling the conflict. This became the essence of Syrian Ba’th ideology. The slogan "the popular liberation war" was pushed aside. The regime presented "the armed struggle as the strategic point of departure for the strategy of action in the areas of internal, including economic, Arab and international policy". The existing stage of the conflict was characterized as "the stage of national liberation". Asad followed Nasir’s view that victory in the war required "mobilizing all the states and resources of the Arab Nation— to prepare military and economic strength which will be capable of deciding the struggle in the best way for us".

The second Syrian principle was political action as a supportive factor. Asad did not rule out ‘political action’, as distinct from a ‘political solution’ which he
totally rejected. Already in March 1971 he declared his support for Sadat's political activity, arguing that political activity is an important aspect in the confrontation with Israel, its aim being the violation of Israel in the international arena in order to facilitate the activation of the military option.

Asad's rejection of 242 resolution was conditional "Since it does not include two essential requirements, recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people to return to its homeland and total and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab territories". In other words, for Asad the interpretation of the resolution and its meaning were most important.

Third, that "all differences of opinion between the Arab States should be secondary contrary to the previous regime, Asad acted" to improve the atmosphere between Syria and the other Arab States as an essential prerequisite for the campaign", and "without taking into account the nature of their internal regime". He viewed Arab Unity "as a revolutionary dream which is not realistic", and strove instead to achieve "Arab Solidarity". Since the "armed struggle" was the top priority, "Arab solidarity should be put before the struggle for the realization of socialism". This is the background to Syria's joining the Federation of Arab Republics, its military alliance with Egypt and its attempts to improve relations with other Arab States.
3.3. Greater Syria:

The notion of Greater Syria which directly influenced the Ba'thist leaders in the 1940s, and has continued to influence the LEVANT in general namely the Greater Syria's theory which was propounded Antun Sa'deh. He did not totally invent the Greater Syria theory, which may already be found in the writings of Henri Lammens and others. But it was undoubtedly Sa'deh who organised the party and indeed established the political party to promote it. In 1936 Sa'deh wrote the book NUSHU-AL-UMUL. The Birth of Nations, his best-known work, while he was imprisoned by the French for subversion and his ideas throughout this book were in circulation before Ba'thism was formulated. The foundation of the Party Popular Syrian (FPS) was also laid down because of his personal efforts to promote the cause of Greater Syria in 1934.19

Later the concept of 'Greater Syria' was given by Amir Abdullah during the second world war to promote the Arab unity. The object was the reunification of the four territories.20 Under his leadership, firstly, the problem of the Palestinian Jews should be solved by granting them administrative autonomy. Secondly, an extensive measure should be chalked out by uniting Syria and Transjordan to form a union on the model of the United States of America or the Swiss confederation. As may be seen, the heart of
Abdullah's proposals and their only practical feature was the immediate merger of Transjordan and Syria. This was the plan which he put forward, with minor variants in speeches, official memoranda, and private communications to Syrian politician and instruction on Arab Unity to which Egypt's Prime Minister Mustafa al-Nahhas, invited the Arab states in 1943 and which resulted in the Arab League Charter of 1945\(^2\).

Abdullah got little encouragement from the British Government to which he first advanced his proposals, raised after the fall of France. The question was broached again when Mr. Oliver Lyttelton, Minister of State in the West Asia, visited Amman in 1941 and on a number of subsequent occasions. Abdullah's first concern in the war years was to ensure that the British Government would not invoke its treaty rights in Transjordan to prevent him from discussing the matter with the Syrian and other Arab Governments. The British Government's attitude throughout the war period suppressed to the 'Greater Syria' until the stable condition of the Arab World was restored. Abdullah did, however, secure British agreement for the view that there could be no harm in the project being studied, pending a suitable occasion for it to be put into execution.

On 28 March 1946 Abdullah secured its full independence from Great Britain and felt free to promote his long cherished expansionist plan. Soon after on 11 November this
the idea of Greater Syria was formally proclaimed. According to him there is neither great nor little Syria but there is only a single country bounded to the West by the Sea, to the north by Turkey, to the East by Iraq and to the South by the Hejaz – which constitutes Syria.

In August 1947 Abdullah put his plan before regional Syrian governments in Amman. As in Amman this plan was also rejected by other regional governments, like Cairo, Riyadh, Beirut, and Damascus. Each capital questioned about the guarantee of its independence and expressed surprise at Abdullah’s persistence. President Quwatli of Syria publicly denounced Greater Syria on his re-election in 1947, while the newly elected Syrian Chamber protested against Abdullah’s plan which threaten Syria’s independence, sovereignty and her republican regime’s.

Although rejected by the Ba’th Party which advocated Pan-Arab Unity, the notion of Greater Syria had been revived in a different guise by President Asad. He had apparently adopted a parallel approach to the idea of Greater Syria – that was, the Union of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Palestine. It was no more than a loose union with different regimes, as long as it was under Asad’s leadership. In Asad’s view Greater Syria lies in a geographically strategic area which is at the core of any potential Arab Unity. It should thus serve as the focus of an Arab Political Military network
against Israel, for both defensive and offensive purposes.24.

One can thus conclude that these three interrelated notions of Greater Syria Arab Unity and the struggle against Zionism and imperialism constitute the cornerstone of Asad's political philosophy and strategy.

Asad may well believe that it was his life's mission to achieve those grand, historic goals of the Arab people. At the same time, however, he shrewdly propagated those goals and concepts to broaden his power base as the legitimate ruler of all Syrians by obtaining the consent of the Sunni Muslim majority as well as of his own Alawite group. By extolling Arab unity Asad is trying to erase the image of a sectarian military regime, seized power by Arms Force has damaged and suppressed political institutions, religious feelings, social prestige and economic interests of many fellow Syrians. To diffuse the strong opposition to his regime, Asad simultaneously seeks to build a new order resting on the under privileged rural population, urban workers and younger generations. For this he took support of the above sectors of the population who were linked by a shared passion for Arab Unity for Greater Syria. His primary purpose was to continue ruling his country as a legitimate and popular leader. Hence his aim was to draw his regime as a nationalist, socialist progressive government25.
The notion of Greater Syria again has been revived in a different guise by Asad. In a textbook for the Syrian school system published in early 1980s, the term Bilad Ash-sham (the land of Syria) is cited as a geographical historical term, as a region 'linking the two parts of the Arab homeland'. According to this textbook, Bilad Ash-Sham divided after the First World War into four mini-states (Duwaylat) namely, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine, and in 1967 it lost that territory to Israel. This concept of Greater Syria was openly propagated over Damascus Radio and in the Ba'ath daily Al-Thawra for several months during 1976-77, by Shawqi Khayrallah, a leading figure of the Syrian, Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). The Party's leader, Ihsan Mahayarî, stated in 1984 that Asad's regime is nationalist and that there were no contradictions between this regime and our ideology.  

When Asad came to power late in 1970, he worked more systematically to employ the PLO as an instrument of his domestic and regional policies, notably his Greater Syria Strategy. The shifting of PLO head quarter from Jordan to Lebanon, after September 1970, considerably helped Asad to extend his influence over the Palestinian resistance movement. To achieve this goal Asad also used the remaining PLO base in Syria as well as the Syrian controlled Palestinian organization: the popular front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Asad had consistently
endeavored to demonstrate himself as the great champion for the Palestinian cause among his countrymen and to the other Arab nations. Regarding the Palestinian as an integral part of Syria, Asad said in his speech in March 1974 that Palestinian is not only a part of the homeland but constitutes that major part of southern Syria.

Despite these statements, it is conceivable that Asad, the realistic and cautious politician has been aware of the enormous difficulties involved in unifying the countries of Greater Syria under his leadership. It is more likely that his strategic goal has been (and still is) to achieve a (federal) union of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinians under his leadership. Keeping in mind that Syria would be the biggest and strongest power in such a Union. Damascus could maneuver among her partners and take the predominant role in shaping its political and military strategy. Indeed, it would seem that Asad's more concrete aim would be to establish a political-military structure of Greater Syria to serve his two interrelated goals. He is creating a new regional power centre and other is to extended its influence, which can shade its impact over intra-Arab politics vis-a-vis his two strong Arab rivals, Egypt and Iraq, along with his political struggle against Israel. 27

Hence the 'liberation of Palestine would become integral
parts of the Syrian territory. Asad thought in terms of the Syrian region or Greater Syria encompassing Syria, Jordan Lebanon and Palestine in one political frame work centered on Damascus. Within this framework one could solve the problem of the economic viability of a 'Palestinian State', including the refugee problem, and also the differences between the PLO and Jordan. Asad saw in this region a single defence unit against either Israel or Iraq under the rule of the Ba'th. This unit would also guarantee the security of the Southern and eastern flank. Lebanon was considered part of Syria's defence belt in the West and Jordan in the south, since it is difficult to distinguish between Lebanon's security and Syria's security in the widest sense. In 1976 Fatah (and the other organisations) described the Syrian invasion of Lebanon as "the fulfillment of the Syrian regime's dream to control Lebanon, Jordan and part of Palestine and to establish a confederation. Regarding the conflict, Damascus in this Syrian perception seems as a centre of Power of radical nationalism, as against the political and military strength of Egypt."

References

3. Ibid., p. 11
5. Ibid.p. 15.
7. Ibid., p. 43.
8. Ibid., p. 46.
9. Ibid., p. 52.
14. Ibid., p. 111
16. Ibid., p. 64.
17. Declaration the Ba th 12th National Congress, See Appendix 'B'.
22. Ibid., p. 13.
23. Ibid., p. 13.
25. Ibid., p. 48.
26. Ibid., p. 114.
27. Ibid., p. 114.