

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ELITES IN THE DEMISE OF
THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC FEBRUARY, 1958-
SEPTEMBER, 1961: A CASE STUDY OF
THE FAILURE OF POLITICAL
INTEGRATION

By

NABIEL JAMIL FAREED

Bachelor of Science

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

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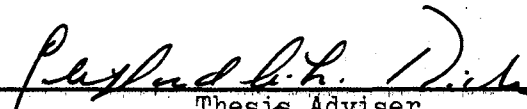
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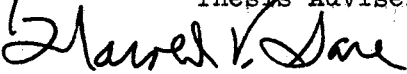
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Thesis Approved:



Thesis Adviser




Dean of the Graduate College

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Dr. Clifford A. L. Rich whose constant encouragement and assistance made it possible for me to pursue graduate studies in political science and to complete this thesis.

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I wish to express my gratitude and appreciation to Professor Clifford A. A. Rich for his constant encouragement and counsel during my two years of graduate study at Oklahoma State University. I also must acknowledge his tireless efforts in reading the manuscript of this thesis and in helping me to improve its contents and style. I wish also to acknowledge my gratitude to Professor Raymond N. Habiby and to Professor Harold V. Sare for the many tireless hours of toil which they contributed to the preparation of this thesis. Their comments and criticism have been an invaluable aid in my intellectual development. My thanks also goes to Adalou Penner for typing this thesis.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The creation of the Arab League in 1945 was the first organized action by the Arab states leading to political, social and economic integration. Following the establishment of this organization, many regional and total Arab unity projects were espoused, particularly the Greater Syria Plan of King Abdullah of Jordan, the Fertile Crescent Plan of Noree al-Saied of Iraq and the Greater Arab Union Plan of Nazim al-Kodsi of Syria. Those plans had their supporters and opponents. None of them actually materialized and, therefore, can not serve as a model of political integration. The first unity project in the Arab world that did materialize was the union of Syria and Egypt which produced the United Arab Republic.

In January, 1958, a group of Syrian military and political elites, including members of the Ba'ath (Resurrection) party, met with President Nasser of Egypt in Cairo and proposed to him the formation of an integrated Egyptian-Syrian state. President Nasser agreed, and on February 22, 1958, Syria and Egypt were joined formally into one state, The United Arab Republic.

Less than four years later, despite such redeeming features as the common language, the charismatic appeal of President Nasser and the common anti-colonial heritage, the union disintegrated when Syria seceded on September 28, 1961, following a successful military coup.

The creation of the UAR and its subsequent demise presents a good case study for analysis by political scientists, particularly those concerned with political integration. There is no doubt that the elites in both Syria and Egypt were responsible for the creation and failure of the UAR, and the role which those elites played is a legitimate subject for study and analysis.

A study of the political elites raises some pertinent questions. What is meant by elites? Who are they, and can one locate them? Why are we interested in elites in the first place? What role do they play, and how crucial is their influence in the integration process?

This is not a simple task. There is as yet no substantial agreement among scholars on the proper identity of elites. Definitions advanced to date vary, depending on the perspective of the authors and the needs of specific studies. The writers to be discussed briefly in this study are, at best, only representative of the principal scholars who have espoused and worked on the elitist concept. I can not, therefore, claim that the listing is in any way complete.

Elites may be few or considerable in number, but they are more mobile and better integrated than the masses. It is they who lead the masses and, in so doing, facilitate, oppose or hinder political change. This is why several scholars have stressed how elites can be a real obstacle to the achievement of national integration.

Pareto and Mosca, the two Italian scholars to whom the term "elite" owes much of its current popularity, were aware of the fact that, in principle, there are as many elites as there are different occupational groups. Both recognized the historical and social importance of political elites and regarded them as a constant and inevitable feature of

society, and not simply a passing aspect in human history as others had argued.¹

Harold Lasswell has defined elites as those persons who enjoy the greatest proportion of values in a society and get the most of what there is to get. Although Lasswell did not indicate whether he was primarily concerned with political elites or with all types of elite, he nevertheless recognized that the claims of the state are more likely to be accepted if they are put forward by elites who can translate them into a language the people can understand, and who are influential enough to sanctify them.²

Suzanne Keller, while emphasizing moral responsibilities in industrial societies, recognizes that political integration must be preceded by the reduction of differences and tensions among the elites and the modification of their political behavior. To Keller, while all elites are important in some social and psychological context, only certain strategic elites have a general and sustained social impact and they comprise mostly political, military and economic leaders, thus representing both the unity and internal diversity of society.³

Claude Ake has suggested that in the integration process elite consensus is invaluable in reducing the political importance of social

¹James H. Meisel, The Myth of the Ruling Class: Gaetano Mosca and the Elite (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1958), pp. 240-382; see also Hans L. Zetterberg, The Rise and Fall of Elites and Pareto Vilfredo (Totowa, New Jersey, 1968), Chapters I, II.

²Harold D. Lasswell, Politics: Who Gets What, When, and How? (New York, 1960, pp. 3-29.

³Suzanne Keller, Beyond the Ruling Class: Strategic Elites in Modern Society (New York, 1963), pp. 4-121.

differences and in taking some of the fierceness out of political competition. Consensus should be sought, not at the grass roots level, but at the leadership level, by enlisting the support of leading personalities from all major social groups. This reduces the chances of having the government appear to be the instrument of special interests and enhances the government's ability to win popular consensus.⁴

Karl Deutsch's Political Community and the North Atlantic Area,⁵ The Nerves of Government,⁶ and his "Social Mobilization and Political Development,"⁷ are perhaps the pivotal works in the field, as there is substantial agreement among authors on the processes which he has related. Deutsch's definition of political integration involves institutions and practices. In order to create a viable nation, one needs to have the masses pass through a complex process which Deutsch has called social mobilization, the process which integrates them into a larger political community. Involving as it does a profound transformation of the social structure, Deutsch has postulated that social mobilization breeds tension, uncertainty and anxiety, which may destroy the political system unless the elites to whom Deutsch gives key

⁴Claude Ake, A Theory of Political Integration (Homewood, Illinois, 1967), pp. 60-80.

⁵Karl W. Deutsch (ed.), Political Community and the North Atlantic Area (Princeton, 1957), pp. 32-38.

⁶Karl W. Deutsch, The Nerves of Government (New York, 1963), pp. 154-160.

⁷Karl W. Deutsch, "Social Mobilization and Political Development," American Political Science Review, Vol. 55, No. 3 (September, 1961), pp. 490-515. Professor Deutsch define social mobilization "...as the process of which major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patterns of socialization and behavior." p. 494.

communications and command functions, maintain the social mobilization process by their cooperative efforts. Deutsch believes that the degree of viability of the state must be measured in terms of elite participation and commitment, through which they give their followers a sense of purpose and help them find coherence in the new system.⁸

Along these same lines of inquiry, Edward Shils prescribes that in developing nations the elites are the agents of national integration and that their support and cooperation has to be secured.⁹ One point that seems to emerge clearly from these studies is that the main instrument of integration in new states are the elites and their commitment to the new system. Their cooperation and participation may do much to influence the outcome.

The major impetus for the union of Syria and Egypt came from the Ba'ath party leaders and the younger army officers. It was the support of these two groups upon which the success of the union had to depend, yet this support failed to materialize. The failure of these elites to support the union was reflected by the number of Syrians who resigned during the first years of the merger. The more President Nasser pressed to get results, the more resistance he encountered from the Syrian elites. In the words of Haykal, the editor of Al-Ahram and a close confidant of President Nasser, "the UAR could not fight against the lack

⁸Karl W. Deutsch (ed.), Germany Rejoins the Powers: Mass Opinion, Interest Groups, and Elites in Contemporary German Foreign Policy (Palo Alto, California, 1959), Chapters II, III.

⁹Edward Shils, "The Concentration and Dispersion of Charisma: Their Bearing on Economic Policy in Underdeveloped Countries," World Politics, Vol. 11, No. 1 (October, 1958), pp. 2-19; see also Edward Shils, "The Intellectual in the Development of the New States," World Politics, Vol. 12, No. 3 (April, 1960), pp. 329-369.

of positive action or effort."¹⁰

The problem which will be the object of this study may be stated in the following questions. Why did the early promise of Syrian elite support for the UAR fail to materialize? Why was it difficult to organize Syrian elite support? The investigator suggests the following hypothesis: The successful integration of developing nations into a viable union requires the active collaboration of the dominant political elites of the merging communities. Given the condition of political fragmentation of the Syrian elites, the differences in political maturity and economic development between Syria and Egypt, and the cleavages within the Egyptian elites, the political integration of Syria and Egypt was not likely to succeed without coordinated action by the national elites. When the Syrian elites failed to support the integration process, the union was doomed. This study will focus primarily on the Syrian Ba'ath party elite.

At the outset of this study there will be brief mention of the political conditions in both Syria and Egypt prior to the union, and a brief description of the various pressures--political, ideological and historical--which influenced and accelerated the formal establishment of the UAR in 1958. Chapter II will try to serve this purpose. Chapter III will deal with the effects of the political integration process, the nature of Ba'athist discontent, the impact which this discontent had on inter-elite unity, and the repercussions on the policy of community integration. Chapter IV will describe and assess the measures

¹⁰Quoted in Monte Palmer, "The UAR: An Assessment of its Failure," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1966), p. 50.

which were taken to integrate the economy and the effects which those measures had on Ba'athist alienation toward the union. Chapter V will examine the efforts made to integrate the Egyptian and the Syrian military establishments and alienation which this produced. The concluding chapter will evaluate the UAR integration attempt, its lessons and possibilities.

This study will follow an analytical and historical approach. The primary sources of this study are the documents published by the Governments of Syria and Egypt such as Mahadir Jalasat Mubahathat al-Wahda (Minutes of the Unity Discussions) (Cairo, 1963); Collected Speeches of President Nasser; and memoirs written by participants in the Union, such as Michel Aflaq's Ma'rakat al-Masir al-Wahid (Struggle of the Common Destiny) (Damascus, 1963), Muhammed Hasanayn Haykal's Ma Ildhi Jara Fi Suriya (What Happened in Syria?) (Cairo, 1962), and Khalil Kallas's Suriya al-Muhattima lil-Istimar Wal-Diktaturiyya (Syria, Crusher of Imperialism and Dictatorship) (Damascus, 1962). The secondary sources to be used come from the various professional journals concerned with the Middle East such as The Arab World, The Middle Eastern Affairs, The Middle East Journal, as well as such newspapers as The New York Times, and Al-Ahram.

The transliteration system applied to the Arabic names used in this study is phonetic. The names are rendered in English as they are pronounced in classical Arabic. This is why Nasser will be used instead of Nasir.

The topic of this study was not a chance selection. It results from the writer's personal acquaintance with the area and years of concern over and study of the developments which have taken place in the

Arab world. There is no doubt that future union attempts in the Arab world will benefit greatly from the UAR experience, as whatever has happened in Syria and Egypt in the past has always had a significant impact on the region as a whole. This thesis is also of special significance now, since Libya and Egypt are working on a new integration design, and Libya, Syria and Egypt are trying to produce a confederation. Finally, this study, it is hoped, will contribute to the general theory of political integration.

CHAPTER II

PRESSURES FOR UNION

While no one has yet determined the exact point in time when the seeds of unity with Egypt were first planted in Syria, it is clear that not until 1955 with the rise to power of the Arab Resurrection (Ba'ath) party in Syria did the idea of union with Egypt become popular.¹

This was clearly expressed at a national conference held in June 1956 and attended by representatives of all the political parties and groups in Syria. At that conference sufficient consensus was reached to adopt a resolution calling for close economic, political, and cultural cooperation with Egypt, so that these agreements might serve as a nucleus for an all-embracing Arab unity.²

In November 1956, the Syrian Parliament passed a resolution calling for union with Egypt.³ The favorable Egyptian response to this resolution paved the way for a joint Egyptian-Syrian parliamentary session, which was held in Damascus in November of the same year, and

¹On October 20, 1955, an Egyptian-Syrian defense pact was signed provided for the setting up of a supreme defense council, a war council, and a joint command. Abdel H. Amer, Egyptian minister of war and commander in chief, was appointed chief of the joint command. Ba'athist Jamal Faysal and Ahmad Abdel Karim were Syrian representatives. See The Middle East Journal, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Winter, 1956), p. 78.

²The scheme at first aimed at federating the two countries. See Fayez A. Sayegh, Arab Unity: Hope and Fulfillment (New York, 1958), p. 189.

³Ibid.

which adopted a resolution calling for the unification of Syria and Egypt.⁴

Negotiations for the union of Syria and Egypt were conducted in Cairo during January of 1958. The Syrians, by that time, had come out clearly in support of a clear union with Egypt and were now agitating for an immediate union.⁵ Such agitation came primarily from the leaders of the Ba'ath party. The political situation in Syria convinced these people that their only hope for power and stability lay in the unification of Syria and Egypt. This feeling was strongly expressed by the Ba'ath leaders Akram Hourani, Michel Aflaq, and Salah Bitar, who played an active role in the unity discussions of 1958.⁶ To fully appreciate the movement towards unity, it will be necessary to examine the various pressures that induced both the Syrian and the Egyptian elites to unite and form the UAR in 1958. This study will proceed to consider these pressures.

Ideological Pressures

In his Philosophy of the Revolution,⁷ President Nasser conceived of Egypt as a member and potential leader of three political groupings--

⁴Ibid., p. 180.

⁵The Ba'ath was confident that unity would start a chain reaction with one Arab state after another joining the union. For more details see Muhammed H. Haykal, Ma Illahi Jara Fi Suriya (What Happened in Syria?) (Cairo, 1962), in Arabic, pp. 16-35.

⁶See "Documents: Mahadir Jalasat Mubahathat Al-Wahda" (Minutes of the Unity Discussions) (Cairo, 1963), in Arabic, pp. 5-12.

⁷Gamal A. Nasser, Philosophy of the Revolution (New York, 1959), pp. 59-62.

the Arab states, the African states and the Muslim states. He had difficulties with two of these groups of states, namely the African and the Muslim, which proved to be opportunistic. This became clear when many Africans and Muslims willingly cooperated with Israel.⁸ President Nasser, therefore, concentrated his efforts on the sphere of Arab unity. The Czechoslovak arms deal in 1955 and the successful nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956 gave President Nasser newly realized power. He had emerged as the new Saladin of the Arab world, and from that time on he began to speak of Arab unity.⁹ In January 1956, Egypt proclaimed a new constitution which stated that Egypt was part of a greater Arab nation and was aware of its obligations and responsibilities in the common Arab struggle.¹⁰ During the same year, Egypt started an extensive radio propaganda campaign calling for Arab unity.¹¹ In 1957, when Syria was facing a threat from Turkey and the West over the regime of Colonel Abdel Hamed Serraj in Syria, Nasser was quick to despatch a contingent of troops to Syria as a sign of solidarity.¹² Nasser also signed a cultural and defense agreement with Syria during the same

⁸Robert S. John, The Boss: The Story of Gamal Abdel Nasser (New York, 1960), pp. 268-280.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Text of the 1956 Egyptian Constitution may be found in "Documents: The New Egyptian Constitution," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Summer, 1956), pp. 300-306.

¹¹For more details see A. Loya, "Radio Propaganda of the UAR: An Analysis," The Middle Eastern Affairs, Vol. 13, No. 4 (April, 1962), pp. 98-109.

¹²Sayegh, Arab Unity, p. 173.

year.¹³

In Syria, the rise to power during 1955-1956 of the Arab Resurrection (Ba'ath) party and its whole-hearted support of Nasser created a strong ideological pressure for unity. According to Ba'athist doctrine, Western democracy, traditional Islam, and Marxist communism had failed to solve adequately the problems of the Arab world, and the only solution left was the Ba'athist philosophy, a fusion of socialism and Arab nationalism. In his book Fi Sabil al-Ba'ath (For the sake of Resurrection), Michel Aflaq described the Ba'ath philosophy as follows:

In its vision of Arab unity Ba'athist socialism envisions bringing together those Arab countries whose progress is obstructed by their lack of capital and natural resources with their better endowed brethren who should share their wealth.¹⁴

Aflaq also emphasized the uniqueness of the Ba'athist message in the preamble of the Ba'ath constitution which reads:

One Arab Nation with an immortal mission, the Arab Resurrection Socialist party, a popular national revolutionary movement striving for Arab unity, freedom and socialism.¹⁵

Doubting the ability of the various national parties in the Arab states and the ability of the Arab League to be equal to the challenge of Arab unity, the Ba'ath leadership saw a way out in President Nasser. To them, Nasser's anti-western policy, his participation in the Bandung conference, the Czechoslovak arms deal in 1955, the successful

¹³Ibid., p. 175.

¹⁴Quoted in Gordon H. Torrey, "The Ba'ath: Ideology and Practice," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Autumn, 1969), p. 451.

¹⁵For Translation of the Ba'ath Constitution see Leonard Binder, "Constitution of the Arab Resurrection (Ba'ath) Socialist part of Syria," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Spring, 1959), pp. 195-200.

nationalization of the Suez Canal, the new Egyptian constitution in 1956, and the Egyptian radio clamor for Arab unity were all indications of Nasser's pan-Arab policy. This is how Aflaq summarized his early thoughts of President Nasser:

It is true that the revolution in Egypt did not follow the same road that the Ba'ath followed...but it was a true and honest revolution.

After some time it became stable and its course became clear. There occurred contact and exchanges between Nasser and the movement of al-Ba'ath directly and indirectly.¹⁶

Contacts developed between the Ba'ath leadership and President Nasser, and the Ba'ath responded with large scale propaganda in 1956 to explain the necessity of union between Syria and Egypt, which served to bring the Ba'ath still closer to President Nasser. In Aflaq's words:

Certain conditions obtained in Egypt...greater political independence, a greater awareness of popular needs and aspirations on the part of the leaders...rendered her better suited to lead the cause.¹⁷

However, had it not been for subsequent developments which occurred in 1957 and early 1958, the union of Syria and Egypt would have probably been delayed for many more years. What were the developments which hastened the union and brought about the declaration of February 1, 1958?

¹⁶Michel Aflaq, Nidal al-Ba'ath Fi Sabil al-Wahda, al-Huriyal wal-Ishtirakiyah (Struggle of the Ba'ath for Unity, Liberty, and Socialism) (Beirut, 1964), p. 12. Writer's verbatim translation.

¹⁷Quoted in P. J. Vatikiotis, "Dilemmas of Political Leadership in the Arab Middle East: The Case of the UAR," The American Political Science Review, Vol. 55, No. 1 (March, 1961), p. 107.

Political Pressures

In Egypt, the military revolution of 1952 dissolved all political parties and established a National Union to perform the functions of the dissolved political parties. The new constitution, promulgated on January 16, 1956, gave major power to President Nasser, with parliament almost wholly subordinated to him.¹⁸

In Syria, power was diffused and no leader was able to win the allegiance of all the members of the militant doctrinal parties who had infiltrated the army. Since independence, Syria had been involved in complicated economic and financial disputes with Lebanon, and in efforts to counter the ambitions of the Hashemite rulers of Iraq and Jordan, who had sought to include Syria in their expansionistic plans.¹⁹ Syria was more inclined towards a union with Saudi Arabia or Egypt because the Iraqi and Jordanian plans had seriously divided political opinion inside Syria.

From the ethnic standpoint, Syria suffered from diversity and fragmentation. The two largest and most important minorities in Syria are the Druze and the Alwais who, because of their geographic location,

¹⁸"Documents: The New Egyptian Constitution," p. 300.

¹⁹Syria's economy is dependent upon the land and nearly three-quarters of the population are engaged in farming. Land ownership, up to 1958, was characterized by large holdings possessed by about fifty families namely, Kuwattli, Asali, Azim, Bitar, and Hourani. They also controlled the political life in the country. Many of these families had strong ties with the neighboring governments, mainly to sell their agricultural goods. This in part explains why political opinion inside Syria when it comes to one of the neighboring countries, was always divided. See Doreen Warriner, Land Reform and Development in the Middle East (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1957), pp. 74-93.

still exercise influence in political life.²⁰ The Kurds and the Christian community also exert a significant role in social and political life, although economic wealth is concentrated in the hands of the urban Sunni.²¹

Other minorities are also to be found in Syria. These include Armenians, Circassians, Kurds, and Assyrians. Most of these groups are Muslims but some adhere to other beliefs. They are generally pro-Russian and suspicious of Arab nationalism. Under the French mandate they were favored minorities. The French recruited a large number of them for the military forces and many rose to high posts in the Syrian army.²² The Sunni Muslims, mostly landowners, derived their power from their early struggle against the French mandate and from their economic standing.

In March, 1949, Syria had its first army coup, which ended the Sunni hegemony and brought the formation of new political parties formed

²⁰ Many of their landlords were Sunni Muslims and Christians. Formal education among members of these two communities is almost lacking and their role on the electoral plane was frequently tipping the scale of votes. See Gordon H. Torrey, Syrian Politics and the Military: 1948-1959 (Columbus, Ohio, 1964), pp. 6-11.

²¹ The Christian community which is about twelve per cent of the total population is made up of mostly merchants and shopkeepers who resides in the cities. See Akram Hourani, Minorities in the Arab World (London, 1947), p. 12.

²² Unlike the Egyptian army, the Syrian army was not considered attractive for many members of the country's leading families who saw better opportunities in trade and professions. As education spread throughout Syria, sons of merchants, peasants, workmen entered the officer corps. While in the Homs military academy many of these officers were influenced by their instructor Colonel Jamal Faysal, Ba'athist. Thus, the seeds of the Ba'ath officers corps were founded among these officers. See Torrey, Syrian Politics, p. 44.

by the younger generation of Syrians, such as the Syrian Socialist Nationalist party (SSNP),²³ the Arab Resurrection (Ba'ath) party,²⁴ and the Communist party.²⁵

Rivalries and the disappointment over the Arab failures against Israel precipitated a series of coups that brought the army into politics and the doctrinal political parties into the national struggle. In September 1953, the Ba'ath and Akram Hourani's Arab Socialist party formally amalgamated to become the Arab Socialist (Ba'ath) Resurrection

²³The SSNP was founded in 1933 by a Lebanese Christian Autun Sa'da. The party called for the unity of the Fertile Crescent, the establishment of a pro-Western state in Syria, the overthrow of the feudal landholding class, the separation of religion and the state, and the end of the influence of the religious leaders over the government. This met with extreme opposition from the Sunni Muslims. After independence in 1946, the party found a real response among students and teachers and its power in Syria greatly increased. See Muhammed Frazat, History of Political Parties in Syria (Damascus, 1955), in Arabic, pp. 18-21.

²⁴Formed by a Christian Arab intellectual, Michel Aflaq, the Ba'ath derived its power from its insistence on Arab nationalism, its call to establish a single Arab state comprising all the Arab states from the Persian Gulf to the Atlantic, and from its resistance to Western influence. Membership in the Ba'ath party has been based on vigorous participation and recruitment, but supporting non-members and sympathizers have also played an important role in strengthening the party. Membership and active support came from the army officer corps, merchants, landowners and teachers. See *Ibid.*, pp. 25-28.

²⁵The Syrian Communist party, whose real strength was among the Kurds, Druzes, and Armenians, was weak for some time because of its association with these minorities which discredited it in Arab eyes. After the Arab defeat in Palestine in 1948, the party gained wider support by promoting Syrian unity, capitalizing on the anti-Western feeling, and by opposing the cession of Alexandretta to Turkey. After 1952, the party concentrated its efforts among the peasants. Peasant committees were formed for carrying out the party objectives of eliminating large landowners. In 1954, the Communist leader Khalid Bakdash was elected to the Syrian parliament. See Walter Z. Laqueur, Communism and Nationalism in the Middle East (New York, 1956), p. 159.

party.²⁶ In 1954, Hourani was successful in influencing several powerful army officers to organize a pro-Ba'ath army grouping under the leadership of Colonel Adnan Malki. With army support, the Ba'ath installed its members in various government positions.²⁷ During the same year a group of Syrian officers, including the chief of staff, were arrested and charged with attempting to bring a pro-Western group to power.²⁸ The group of Ba'athist officers were immediately promoted and Ba'athist influence spread rapidly in the army.²⁹ Army support was of great help in the 1954 elections when the Ba'ath won for the first time twenty five per cent of the seats in parliament. The growing influence of the Ba'ath picked up momentum in the fall of 1955, when Sabri Asali formed a new cabinet and pledged to follow the Ba'athist doctrine in his internal programs.³⁰

²⁶Hourani Socialist were strongest in the Hama and Aleppo areas, while Aflaq Ba'athists drew their strength from Homs and Damascus merchants, students, and intellectuals.

²⁷A Ba'athist school teacher was appointed director of government lands. A Ba'athist, Wahid Ghanim, was appointed minister of health. See Walter Z. Laqueur, "Syria on the Move: Ascendancy of the Left Wing," The World Today, Vol. 13, No. 1 (January, 1957), pp. 17-26.

²⁸Along with the chief of staff, several officers were arrested including the commander of the Aleppo garrison, the commandant of the military academy at Homs, and the commander of the armored brigade at Qatana.

²⁹The army was said to be under the influence of the Ba'athist colonel Jamal Faysal, the intelligence chief Abdel Hamed Serraj, a close friend of Ba'athist leader Akram Hourani, and Akram Duri of the military police. See Haykal, Ma Illdhi, p. 28.

³⁰It is reported that Asali held many cabinet meetings at his home so that Ba'athist leader Hourani, who was not in the cabinet, could attend. For account of the struggle in Syria see Torrey, Syrian Politics, pp. 267-296.

In 1955, the struggle intensified in Syria between the Ba'ath and its Communist allies and the Syrian Socialist Nationalist party (SSNP).³¹ The alliance between the Ba'ath and the Communists was advocated by Akram Hourani as a measure to destroy the pro-Western elements in Syria. Hourani saw in such alliance a great benefit to the Ba'ath, as it could draw on the prestige of the Soviet Union.³² By 1955, both parties were preaching anti-Israeli, anti-Western, and pro-Soviet attitudes.³³ The assassination of Ba'athist Adnan Malki, deputy chief of staff of the Syrian army, in 1955, by a member of the SSNP gave the leftist group their opportunity to liquidate their opponents.³⁴ With support and help from the army, all SSNP members who had not escaped to Lebanon were arrested and accused of conspiring with the West.³⁵ The party was dissolved, which left the Ba'ath and their Communist allies

³¹When the Bagdad pact was approved, the Ba'ath and their Communist allies violently opposed it and demanded more cooperation with the Soviet bloc. The SSNP, on the other hand, favored the pact and supported more cooperation with the West. Haykal, Ma Illidhi, p. 29.

³²Ibid., p. 26.

³³Although the Communist party included about 15,000 members, it was the Ba'ath who made the headway. Ba'athists were distributed throughout the government and many officials became fearful of opposing the Ba'ath, which could rouse the army or the students against them. See The New York Times, May 10, 1954. p. 3.

³⁴Malki was assassinated by an army sergent who was a member of the SSNP at a soccer game at Damascus stadium.

³⁵The leftist group in Syria charged that the American embassy in Damascus was behind the Malki affair. In one of their charges they stated that the wife of the American military attache knew of the plot and that she warned Malki three days prior to his assassination. This charged was later dropped. See Torrey, Syrian Politics, pp. 282-289.

alone to dominate the political situation in Syria.³⁶

After the liquidation of the SSNP, the Ba'ath used every opportunity to show their influence in Syria and proclaim their solidarity with Egypt. On June 2, 1956, President Kuwattli accepted the resignation of the cabinet and announced that Lutfi Haffer was his first choice as prime minister. The Ba'ath opposed the appointment of Haffer on the ground that he was a former SSNP supporter. Haffer was not appointed.³⁷ In 1956, a dispute arose over army matters between the Syrian minister of defense and the chief of staff and the army intelligence chief Abdel Hamed Serraj.

Although the chief of staff was dismissed, the defense minister's attempt to oust Serraj was blocked by Ba'athist officers.³⁸ The Suez war of 1956 gave the Ba'ath a major opportunity to demonstrate their support for Egypt. Syrian troops under the orders of Serraj destroyed many pumping stations of the Iraqi Petroleum Company pipeline. A short time later, the Ba'ath announced it had uncovered an American plot to overthrow the government.³⁹ Eight members of the Syrian parliament, one former deputy, several army officers, and the son of a former

³⁶On June 29, 1955, one hundred and forty SSNP members were indicted by the military court for instigating Malki's assassination, disturbing Syria's relations with Egypt, and establishing contact with the American embassy.

³⁷Asali was appointed to lead an eleven-man cabinet of which the Ba'ath secured two choice ministries--foreign affairs, held by Bitar, and economy, held by Kallas.

³⁸Haykal., Ma Iildhi, p. 85.

³⁹The accused were also charged with planning the assassination of Serraj, Hourani, Kuwattli, and Bakdash.

president were charged with joining in a bond of treason with Iraq and the West. The verdicts, which were pronounced on February, 1957 indicated the strength of the Ba'ath in securing severe punishment against the anti-union element.⁴⁰

With the sentencing of the defendants in the Western plot, four seats of convicted deputies became vacant. When elections were held in March, 1957 to fill these seats, the Ba'ath won three of them. Encouraged by their victory, the Ba'ath, the Communists, and Serraj formed a revolutionary command council, similar to that led by Nasser in Egypt, to strengthen their power within the army.⁴¹

While leftist influence was growing rapidly in Syria, the country was becoming isolated, except for its close ties with Egypt and the Soviet bloc.⁴² Turkey and Iraq, alarmed over the increasing Soviet influence in Syria, concentrated troops in May, 1957 along their borders with Syria. More serious was Hourani's attack on Kings Saud and Hussein in June of the same year for their cooperation with the West. Relations with Lebanon did deteriorate over the latter's refusal to allow

⁴⁰President of the court was the Communist Afif Bizri, assisted by two Ba'athists. Twelve defendants were sentenced to death, including the son of former President Atasi. See The New York Times, December 27, 1947, p. 3.

⁴¹The council leadership included Serraj, Bizri, and Hourani. Their goal was to maneuver their men in the army into strategic positions. See The Times, London, July 22, 1957, p. 4.

⁴²During 1956, following Egypt's example, there was a growing warmth in Syria-Soviet block relations. In addition to the arms and economic agreements, President Kuwattli was the first Arab head of state to pay an official visit to the Soviet Union. In 1956, Syria recognized Red China.

extradition of Syrian escapees in the Iraqi plot.⁴³

On August 13, 1957, radio Damascus announced that the army had uncovered an American plot to overthrow the Syrian government.⁴⁴ The plot provided the Ba'ath and their allies with just the excuse they needed to oust from the army the last remnants of opposition. Many officers were ousted and replaced by leftists.⁴⁵ When the army chief of staff refused to sign these orders, he was dismissed.⁴⁶

What had appeared to be a small plot expanded into a serious international crisis.⁴⁷ Three members of the American embassy at Damascus were expelled and a war-scare crisis developed in the wake of troop

⁴³Saud and Hussain had many sympathizers in Syria, including President Kuwattli. See The Times, London, July 22, 1957, p. 4.

⁴⁴Syria charged that the plot was planned by the American military attache in Damascus, several army officers, and pro-Western elements in Syria. See The International Affairs, Vol. 36, No. 1 (January, 1960), p. 20.

⁴⁵Ba'athist Jamal Faysal was put in command of the gendamerie, among those ousted were the inspector general of the army, the commander of the Homs military academy, and the commander of the Israeli front.

⁴⁶He was replaced by Communist Afif Bizri who was promoted to general. See The Middle East Forum, Vol. 36, No. 8 (October, 1959), p. 40.

⁴⁷On September 9, 1957, Nasser stated that Egypt would give Syria unlimited support. On September 12, Nasser presided over a top-level military conference between Egyptian and Syrian military chiefs in Cairo. The meeting placed the two armies under joint command led by Abdel Makem Amer Egyptian chief of staff. See The Times, London, August 23, 1957, p. 3.

concentrations on the Turkish-Syrian borders.⁴⁸

It was at this point that the Ba'ath leaders realized that to allow the situation to deteriorate further would only lead to a civil war. With Soviet prestige, the Syrian Communist party was gathering adherents so rapidly that the Ba'ath realized it was impossible for them to maintain exclusive control and that the only beneficiary of such conditions was the Communist party. By the end of 1957, dissension arose in the Ba'ath between the resurrection wing, led by Aflaq, and Hourani's followers, the socialist faction, over the latter's alliance with the Communists and their leaders, Khalid Bakdash and Khalid Azim. Aflaq's followers attacked the alliance with the Communists, alleging that it was harmful to the cause of Arab unity. In 1957, after the Communist leader, Afif Bizri, had become chief of staff of the Syrian army and his brother commanded the popular resistance organization, Ba'athist fears of Communist power and penetration ended the dissention that had existed between Hourani and Aflaq. Hourani's followers became convinced that Communist strength was considerable, so they joined Aflaq's followers to stop further Communist penetration. The struggle between the

⁴⁸On August 27, 1957, Secretary of State Dulles declared that Syria's neighbors were alarmed by the large amount of Soviet influence in the area and declared that President Eisenhower had responded with an arms airlift to Jordan and Iraq. A short time later the Turkish army held maneuvers along the Syrian borders. Premier Khrushchev immediately accused the United States of inciting Turkey to attack Syria and warned that his country was prepared to use force, if necessary, to defend its interest in the area. Dulles denied the charge and restated his country's obligation under the Eisenhower doctrine to defend Turkey if attacked by the Soviet Union. Syria took the matter to the Security Council. Later the Council suspended debate on it when king Saud offered his mediation. A short time later, Turkish troops were withdrawn from the disputed area. See The New York Times, September 7, 1957 p. 1.

Ba'athist Hourani and the Communist Azim for the speakership of the parliament in 1957 awakened the Ba'ath further to the growing Communist ascendancy in Syria.⁴⁹ By that time tension within Syria was high following clashes between Ba'athists and Communists in the Hama and Aleppo areas which left one person dead and twenty four injured. Several petitions were sent to President Kuwattli asking him to stop further Communist infiltration. After that, several statements were issued by the Ba'ath leaders attacking the Communists for being opportunistic.⁵⁰

While the Ba'athists were united in the belief that the Communists were the major threat to their ascendancy in Syria, the question was how to strengthen the party against its Communist rivals. While there had been extensive cooperation between the Ba'ath and Serraj against the pro-Western elements, the actual extent of Communist penetration was not really known. The question could only be answered after a final test of strength came about, and then it might be too late. There was also the danger that Serraj might seize full control and weaken the Ba'ath.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the power of the Communist Azim was growing rapidly. He was deputy prime-minister, minister of defense

⁴⁹Hourani won the speakership of parliament with Serraj's support.

⁵⁰Aflaq declared that communism is strange to the Arabs, just as capitalism is strange to them. On September 12, 1957, Hourani declared that the Communist party is insignificant on the Syrian political scene. The Ba'ath charged that Communist party leader Khalid Bakdash gave away secrets to his Israeli comrades when he attended the twentieth communist party congress in Moscow in 1956. See The Christian Science Monitor, September 17, 1957, p. 1.

⁵¹See Charles Gallagher, "UAR: The Syrian Region," American Universities Field Staff, Report, Vol. 8, No. 3, Southwest Asia Series, January 30, 1960, p. 2.

and finance, and chief of the economic development board. Ba'athists were afraid that time was running short, since 1958 was a presidential election year in Syria and the only candidate, Khalid Azim, had allied himself with the Communist army group. Intense competition over the Syrian presidency had existed for many years between Azim and President Kuwattli, and it was well known that Kuwattli was not running again for the presidency in 1958.⁵² This added to the Ba'ath's fears and made a union with Egypt more imperative.

This deep fear of Communist penetration, which the Soviets appeared to be supporting, led the Ba'ath leadership to the conclusion that their potential to remain in power in Syria was weak unless they secured the backing of an outside power. Since many of the neighboring Arab governments were considered by the Ba'ath to be imperialist agents, a union with any of them was out of the question. The Ba'ath officers and leadership saw that their only hope for gaining supremacy was through a union with Egypt. Nasser's pan-Arab ideology and his stand against the Communist party in Egypt, which paralleled the views of the Ba'ath, made the Ba'athist leaders feel confident that a union with Egypt would eliminate the Communists, their major political opponents in Syria, and increase their prestige throughout the Arab world. Ba'athist leaders were confident that their strong pro-Nasser stand and their pan-Arab ideology, which they shared with Nasser, would help them to develop a monolithic Ba'athist political movement in the united country, and that Nasser would provide the material force the party needed. The hopes of the Ba'ath are reflected in the following quotation by

⁵²Haykal, Ma Ildhi, p. 32.

Aflaq:

...The Ba'ath party hoped, with superficial optimism, that unity would result in a decrease of individual rule, and that the interaction between the people of the two united regions... would result in evolution toward democracy and away from the rule of a single individual.⁵³

Nasser was well aware of the situation in Syria and did not immediately welcome the union. He thought that time was needed before the idea of union could be accepted.⁵⁴ In an interview in 1957 with R. K. Karanjia of the Indian journal Blitz, Nasser clearly rejected the idea of unity.

He said:

I'm not thinking in terms of any federation or confederation or such constitutional formulae for the present. They will not help our cause so much as unity of thought and faith in Arab nationalism will. In fact, such constitutional frames can only create antagonisms to the Arab ideal and become weapons in the hands of our enemies to sabotage the ideal. Any study of history will convince you how paramount Arab nationalism and the unity forged by its shining flames is to every Arab people. I feel that once foreign influences are removed Arab unity will follow automatically. All Arab peoples from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf today stand united against the aggressors. That is more important to me than any plans of confederation or federation. I'm afraid I have not thought about any federal or confederal arrangement. I should prefer organizations like the Arab League, for instance, to become strong and formidable links between Arab states.⁵⁵

Yet, Nasser's fear that Syria was being driven dangerously by extremist elements caused him suddenly to change his mind and accept the proposed

⁵³Quoted in Monte Palmer, "The UAR: An Assessment of its Failure," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1966), p. 52.

⁵⁴The New York Times, January 19, 1958, p. 3.

⁵⁵"Interview with R. K. Karjana," April 17, 1959, President Nasser's Speeches and Press Interviews (Cairo, 1959), p. 536.

union.⁵⁶ There were indications that the power of the Communists was growing rapidly. Nasser realized that, should they succeed in controlling Syria, this could be disastrous to the prestige he had built as leader of the pan-Arab movement.⁵⁷

The pressing circumstances under which the Syrian elites found themselves, particularly the Ba'ath leaders and the army officers, who were strongly optimistic that a union with Egypt would be a solution to their problems, undoubtedly were the predominant influence that led a group of Syrian military and political leaders to fly to Cairo in January 1958 and propose an immediate union. President Nasser agreed, and the United Arab Republic was proclaimed on February 1, 1958, subject to a plebiscite which was held in Syria and Egypt on February 21, 1958.⁵⁸

⁵⁶Torrey, Syrian Politics, p. 378.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸The conditions of the union were enunciated by Nasser in a seventeen-point program given to the Egyptian national assembly on February 5. These included the creation of a 400 man legislative assembly appointed by Nasser in which at least half of the members would be from the then existing Syrian and Egyptian legislatures; that existing Syrian and Egyptian laws would be valid until replaced; the organization of a separate executive council for each region; and the holding of a plebiscite on the proposed union on February 21. Nasser was unanimously chosen the union's first president. See The New York Times, May 21, 1957, p. 1.

CHAPTER III

POLITICAL INTEGRATION, THE BA'ATH

STRANGER IN THE UAR

The Syrian Ba'ath party provided the impetus for the union with Egypt, while most of the other parties in Syria opposed the union from the outset. Although Ba'ath support of the union was absolutely essential for its successful institutionalization, discontent grew rapidly among the Ba'athist leaders when they became convinced that their ideas and goals were not in line with the plans of President Nasser.

Ba'athist leaders had hoped that union with Egypt would help them to eliminate the Communists, their major political opponent in Syria, and spur Nasser to unify the Arab states in accordance with their ideology. Aflaq has related that Nasser had expressed his sympathy for the Ba'ath ideology and goals.¹ The Syrian Ba'ath party needed Nasser to provide the political influence to negotiate a union of the Arab states, within which the Ba'ath hoped to become the national unifying party.

To President Nasser it was a completely different story. As he saw it, the Ba'ath had asked him for the union and he had agreed in

¹Michel Aflaq, Ma'rakat al-Masir al-Wahid (Struggle of the Common Destiny) (Damascus, 1963), in Arabic, p. 195.

order to save Syria from a civil war.² In a speech which he delivered soon after the union, Nasser described how the Ba'ath leaders had begged him for an immediate union in 1958. He said:

To those who then spoke about union, ...I said preliminary steps are necessary, as union entails great difficulties and problems. To this they answered: "Where are the objectives you continuously called for, do you now repudiate them?" I said, "I do not repudiate these objectives, but I would like to feel secure about them." They said, "What about Syria, will you leave it torn by hatred till it be lost?" I answered, "to me, Syria is my homeland, my motherland, and part of the Arab world in which I believe."³

On March 12, 1958, President Nasser signed the first decrees that were to apply to both Syria and Egypt. One decree banned all political parties and specified prison sentences and heavy fines should the new law be disobeyed.⁴ Up to that time (the union came into being February 22, 1958), the Ba'ath was the only party that was still active in Syria. The political opponents of the Ba'ath had already been forced to suspend their activities; they, therefore, welcomed the extension of the political ban to the Ba'ath. Articles appeared in various Syrian newspapers asking the central government to put a complete stop to all Ba'ath activities. The Ba'ath appealed to Nasser to censure these papers, but he refused.⁵

²Khalil Kallas, Suriya al-Muhattima lil-Istimar wal-Diktaturiyya (Syria, Crusher of Imperialism and Dictatorship) (Damascus, 1962), in Arabic, p. 45.

³Quoted in Monte Palmer, "The UAR: An Assessment of its Failure," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1966), p. 52.

⁴The New York Times, June 10, 1958, p. 1.

⁵Ibid.

The Ba'ath leaders did not agree to the dissolution of their party and made it clear that they had no intention to comply.⁶ When Nasser signed the anti-party decrees in March, 1958, the Ba'ath leaders became disillusioned with Nasser and withdrew their support of the union.⁷

A second source of discontent among the Ba'ath leaders was their sensitivity to the fact that Egyptians were given the most prestigious positions in the union, while the Syrians were limited to secondary positions which contained neither prestige nor power.⁸

During the first week of March, 1958, President Nasser promulgated the provisional constitution of the UAR, which was based upon the Seventeen Point Program that the parliaments of Syria and Egypt had previously approved.⁹ He also appointed the central cabinet and the two regional councils. Four vice-presidents were appointed, two of them

⁶Ba'ath determination not to submit to dissolution was illustrated in the following account of the union negotiations. The Syrian officers and Bitar Ba'athist leader met with President Nasser at his home. It was at this time, the hour being well past midnight, that Nasser presented the conditions for unity: a plebiscite, the dissolution of parties, and the withdrawal of the army from politics. The terms were met with silence. Nasser asked Bitar if the Ba'ath was ready to dissolve itself. Bitar replied that he would have to check with the Ba'ath leaders in Syria. For more details see Palmer, "The UAR," p. 53.

⁷The Ba'athists felt that the abolition of their party and the cessation of military intervention in politics would destroy political life in Syria. For more details see Muhammed H. Haykal, Ma Illidhi Jara Fi Suriya (What Happened in Syria?) (Cairo, 1962), in Arabic, p. 90.

⁸Kallas, Suriya al-Muhattima, pp. 45-57.

⁹For the text of the UAR Provisional Constitution see Basic Documents of the Unification of the UAR (New York: Arab Information Center, 1958), pp. 10-18. For the text of the Seventeen-Point Program see Fayez A. Sayegh, Arab Unity: Hope and Fulfillment (New York, 1958) pp. 228-230.

Egyptians and the other two Syrians.¹⁰ In the central cabinet there was only one Syrian, Salah Bitar (Ba'athist), as minister of state. Vice-President Hourani was also named the president of the Syrian executive council, which consisted of ten ministers, of which only two were Ba'athists.¹¹

The Ba'ath leaders interpreted Nasser's action as evidence that he was trying to reduce their influence in the administration of Syria. Bitar, who was the Syrian foreign minister at the time of the union, had aspired to become the UAR foreign minister. He was disappointed when he was merely given the lesser job of minister of state.¹²

The dissatisfied Ba'athist leaders sent Aflaq and Bitar to Cairo to discuss their grievances with Nasser. As an alternative to this unacceptable situation, they suggested to the president the formation of a six-member state council to decide all state issues, three from each region. They further suggested that the three Syrian members were to be Aflaq, Bitar and Hourani, all Ba'athists. Nasser turned this down and told the Ba'athists that his policy was to involve all political groups in the government of the UAR. A council limited to one political party, he thought, would only serve to alienate other elements in

¹⁰The Egyptians were Abdel Latif Baghdadi and Abdel Hakem Amer, who was also minister of war, and the Syrian were Akram Hourani and Sabri al-Asali. See The Arab World, New York, March 7, 1958, p. 2.

¹¹The executive council for the Syrian region consisted of Colonel Abdel Hamed Serraj, interior, Captain Mustafa Hamdon, social affairs (Ba'athist), Shawkat Qanawati, municipal and rural affairs, Ahmad al-Hajj Yunis, agriculture, Khalil Kallas, economy (Ba'athist), Abdel Latif Yunis, treasury, General Amin Nafuri, communications, Hasa Jabara, planning, and Abdel Wahhab Hawmad, justice. Ibid.

¹²Haykal, Ma Illidhi Jara, p. 92.

Syria against the union.¹³ The Ba'athists did not break with Nasser at that point.

In September, 1958, Nasser decided to reorganize the government. The Ba'ath leaders gave him a list of twenty names, all Ba'athists, whom they considered qualified for government positions. Nasser rejected the list and again accused the Ba'ath of attempting to provoke other elements in the union.¹⁴

In October, 1958, President Nasser reorganized the governmental structure. In the new cabinet, seven of the twenty ministers were Syrians.¹⁵ Ba'athist leaders were disappointed with the reorganization. Hourani lost his position as chairman of the Syrian executive council, a job which had given him prestige and direct contact with the Ba'athist officers in the Syrian army.¹⁶ As a vice-president of the UAR, Hourani had to stay in Cairo, away from his base of power in Syria.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Arab Political Documents, 1963 (American University of Beirut, 1963), p. 110.

¹⁵The Syrian ministers in the new central cabinet were Hansan Jabara, finance, Faker Kayyali, minister of state, Salah Bitar, national guidance, General Amin Nafuri, communications, Bashir Azma, health, Colonel Ahmad Abdel Karim, municipal and rural affairs, and Akram Hourani, Justice. The new Syrian executive council consisted of Nure Eddin Khalil, president of the council and minister of public works and planning, Abdel Wahhab Hawmad, treasury, Khalil Kallas, economy, Colonel Abdel Hamed Serraj, interior, Captain Mustafa Hamdon, agricultural reform, Nuhad Qassem, justice, Ahmad al-Hajj Yunis, agriculture, To'me Awadallah, rural affairs, Abdel Ghani Kannot, social affairs, Riad Malki, national guidance, Shawkat Qanawati, health, Muhammed Alem, communications, and Wajib Samman, industry. For more details about the reorganization see The Arab World, New York, November 20, 1958, p. 2.

¹⁶The presidency of the Syrian executive council was given to Nure Eddin Khalil, a non-Ba'athist.

A third reason for the discontent of the Syrian Ba'ath leaders was the fact that they had not been consulted in the decision making process and that Cairo had taken over direction of Syrian regional affairs.¹⁷ Toward the end of 1959, Aziz Sidqi the central minister of industry, announced a five year plan for the Syrian Region. Syrian experts were not consulted before the issuance of the plan.¹⁸

A fourth reason for the dissatisfaction of the Ba'ath leaders was the transfer of a large number of their military followers to Egypt. Ba'athist leaders charged that the transfer had been arranged by Abdel Hamed Serraj, Syrian minister of the interior, and Afif Bizri, chief of staff of the Syrian army.¹⁹ Serraj's opposition to the Ba'ath was well known, and Bizri was considered to be a Communist. Bitar and Hourani had earlier asked President Nasser to dismiss Bizri from his post on the ground that he was still in contact with the Communists. Instead, Nasser promoted Bizri to full general and put him in command of the Syrian First Army.²⁰ On April 1, 1958, a mission of Egyptian officers

¹⁷The following example also shows the distrust which developed between the Ba'ath and President Nasser. At one meeting in Syria, Nasser suggested that Syria ban the importation of certain goods. Khalil Kallas, Syrian minister of economy, a Ba'athist, suggested a high tariff on these goods would be more beneficial to the Syrian economy than their exclusion. A short time later Kallas was criticized by an Egyptian paper for the way he handled the imported goods question. Kallas and the Ba'ath leaders then tried to censor that particular issue in Syria, but Kallas was summoned to Cairo, where it was made clear to him that before any decision could be made in Syria, Cairo must be consulted. See The New York Times, June 10, 1958, p. 4.

¹⁸See Palmer, "The UAR," p. 56.

¹⁹"Syria Settles Down," The Economist, Vol. 188, No. 3 (August 16, 1958), p. 538.

²⁰Haykal, Ma Ildhi Jara, pp. 81-83.

arrived in Syria and were given important positions within the Syrian army.²¹ To the Ba'ath leaders, President Nasser was imposing Egyptian control over Syria with the support and cooperation of Serraj and Bizri.

A fifth reason was the Iraqi question. In mid-July, 1958, a revolution occurred in Iraq. Ba'athist leaders in Syria welcomed the Iraqi revolt and invited the Iraqis to join the union. Aflaq, the Syrian Ba'athist leader, flew to Baghdad and met with some of the revolt leaders, who welcomed the idea of Iraq joining the union. Aflaq then flew to Cairo and told President Nasser that the Iraqi leaders were agitating for union. Although Nasser welcomed the idea, he communicated to the Iraqi leaders that more time was needed to study the problem and develop adequate plans to enlarge the union.²² The Syrian Ba'athists resented Nasser's caution. In a speech on July 22, 1959, President Nasser clarified his position:

From the very beginning we announced that our policy toward Iraq was aimed at the establishment of Arab solidarity. We also said that our aircraft belonged to Iraq and Iraqi aircraft belong to us.²³

Strained relations soon developed between Nasser and Premier Abdel Karim Qassem of Iraq, and antagonism between the two leaders came out into the open on March 11, 1959, when Nasser openly charged that Qassem was working against Arab nationalism. He accused Qassem of being a Communist agent who wanted to "separate Iraq from the Arab people in order to annihilate the people in Iraq and trifle with their

²¹The Arab World, New York, May 5, 1958, p. 2.

²²Haykal, Ma Illidhi Jara, p. 93.

²³Quoted in Benjamin Shwadran, "The Power Struggle in Iraq," The Middle Eastern Affairs, Vol. 11, No. 4 (April, 1960), p. 114.

independence and freedom."²⁴

Ba'athist leaders in Syria were extremely critical of Nasser for not having accepted the immediate admission of Iraq into the union. They accused Nasser of having secretly sent Serraj, the Syrian minister of interior, to Baghdad in order to repudiate Aflaq's earlier negotiations with the Iraqi revolt leaders. Nasser blamed the Ba'ath for undermining relations with Qassem, since it was Aflaq who had first visited Baghdad.²⁵

A sixth reason was the National Union question. President Nasser had demanded as a condition for union with Syria the organization of a Syrian National Union similar to that already established in Egypt. Ba'athist leaders opposed the creation of the National Union and succeeded in delaying this until the middle of 1959. When it became clear that the National Union was going to be established, Ba'athist leaders sought to control it through the impending elections. A few weeks before the elections, Nasser issued a decree warning the army not to interfere in politics; violaters were subject to imprisonment from five years to life. Over two hundred officers who were suspected of Ba'athist sympathies were transferred to Egypt, and criticism appeared in the Syrian press of Ba'ath party regional activities.²⁶ Radio Damascus, which had been headed by Riad Malki, a Ba'athist, was put under the direction of an Egyptian. When Malki protested the transfer, he was

²⁴Ibid., p. 110.

²⁵Ibid., p. 114.

²⁶The Arab World, New York, June 22, 1959, p. 3.

asked to resign.²⁷ Later he was dismissed. Hourani and Bitar, who were then in Cairo, asked Nasser for permission to return to Syria to campaign for their friends. Nasser turned down the request and ordered them to stay in Cairo.²⁸ Ba'athist leaders interpreted all of these incidents as a clear sign of Nasser's determination to crush their power in Syria, so they decided to boycott the National Union elections.

As Nasser became more and more unhappy with the Ba'ath, his reliance on Serraj increased. On October 21, 1959, Abdel Hakem Amer, vice-president and chief of staff, was appointed governor of Syria. The same decree transferred the department of news and propaganda in Syria to the administration of Serraj.²⁹

Earlier, in July, 1958, the Ba'athist governors of Damascus, Aleppo, Homs and Jazirah were dismissed and replaced by non-Ba'athist officers following reports of fighting between army units in these areas. Ba'athist leaders charged that Serraj was behind their dismissal and that he had allowed criticism of the Ba'ath to appear in Syrian newspapers.³⁰

As Serraj was given more power and authority in Syria, Ba'athist leaders became convinced that cooperation with Nasser was no longer possible. The final shock to the Ba'athists came when a committee was appointed to investigate the alleged unjust practices of the agrarian

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., June 29, 1959, p. 1.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰The New York Times, July 25, 1958, p. 3.

reform minister, Mustafa Hamdon, a Ba'athist minister, and Abdel Ghani Kannot; both submitted their resignation.³¹ They were told to meet Nasser in Cairo. Hourani and Bitar, who were in Cairo, also submitted their resignations in a letter to President Nasser. Nasser accepted the Ba'athists' resignations. On January, 1960, he also accepted the resignation of Khalil Kallas, the last remaining Ba'athist minister in his government.³²

In their letters to Nasser, the Ba'athist leaders explained that the Ba'ath had struggled for years to bring Syria into the union with Egypt with the understanding that they were not to be expelled from power. They were opposed to many of the decisions which had been taken in Syria, and which had created an atmosphere in which they could no longer cooperate.³³ The Ba'ath tried to control the National Union but failed, while most of the other parties in Syria, which had dissolved themselves in form only, elected delegates to the National Union and succeeded in controlling it. Ba'athist leaders accused Nasser of having personally organized their defeat in the National Union elections. Nasser practically admitted these charges when he declared in October, 1961:

As a popular organization we formed the National Union to act as a frame encircling the conflict between classes. Our mistake was that we allowed reactionary forces not only to join the union but also to lead it. These elements managed to paralyze its revolutionary effectiveness and turned it into an organizational front, not motivated by the real demands

³¹Haykal, Ma Illdhi Jara, pp. 98-100.

³²Ibid.

³³Ibid.

of the people. This mistake is shown by the fact that some who are leading the reactionary secessionist movement in Syria were themselves leading the National Union Organization.³⁴

The resignations of Hourani, Bitar and Kallas, and the dismissal of Malki from the government, made it evident that the Ba'ath had ceased to have any role in the UAR. The Ba'ath leaders were infuriated when Nasser accused them of betraying the union.³⁵

The appointment of Amer as governor of Syria and the extensive authority given to him was a new phase of Nasser's policy of tightening his control over Syria. This produced extreme opposition and discontent on the part of many other political figures in Syria, who felt that the Egyptians were trying to establish their hegemony. The Syrians referred to Amer as the representative of King Nasser in Cairo.³⁶ By the end of 1959, two additional Syrian ministers in the central cabinet had resigned in protest over Amer's interference with their work.³⁷ The two were not Ba'athists, and their resignations were welcomed by the Ba'athists because it clearly showed that discontent had spread among the Syrians. The most discontented personality, however, was Colonel Abdel Hamed Serraj, who had turned over \$8,000,000 to Nasser which King Saud of Saudi Arabia had sent him as a bribe to destroy the union. Serraj had been instrumental in organizing the defeat of the

³⁴Quoted in Palmer, "The UAR," p. 58.

³⁵For more details see The Times, London, January 1, 1960, p. 5.

³⁶Haykal, Ma Illidhi Jara, p. 76.

³⁷The two ministers were Colonel Ahmad Abdel Karim, municipal and rural affairs, and General Amin Nafuri, communications.

Ba'ath in the National Union elections. Serraj felt that he should have been appointed governor of Syria, not Amer, and he openly expressed his displeasure to both Nasser and Amer.³⁸

Serraj objected to many of Amer's decisions in Syria, and as the conflict between the two intensified (more on this conflict will be discussed in Chapter V), President Nasser transferred Serraj to Egypt. Serraj later resigned, and two days after his resignation the coup occurred.

In discussing President Nasser's failure in Syria, Patrick Seale has written:

President Nasser's failure in Syria was in the political sphere, that of statecraft...from first to last, his rule in Syria bore the marks of improvisation and uncertainty. No durable institutions were created and the Syrians were given no clear feeling of participation in the running of their own affairs. ...Nasser, authoritarian by temperament...felt that he could safely rely on none of the pre-union political groups. Indeed, his policy appears to have been to destroy any center of authority in Syria which might have rivalled his own. The result was that he was left to run a country in which all indigenous political leadership had been alienated.³⁹

³⁸The Times, London, February 15, 1960, p. 3.

³⁹Quoted in Patrick Seale, "The Break-Up of the UAR," The World Today, Vol. 17, No. 11 (November, 1961), p. 475.

CHAPTER IV

ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

The union agreement of 1958 between Egypt and Syria contained a significant omission; it did not prescribe how the two countries were to be integrated in the economic field. What is more, after the establishment of the union, both Syria and Egypt retained their own currencies, taxation systems, and custom duties. The budgets remained separate and newly minted coins were merely stamped with the letters UAR.

Customs duties continued to be levied on trade between the two regions, which indicated that the UAR economy was not integrated. President Nasser made an effort to integrate certain sectors of the economy, but his measures failed and he antagonized the Ba'ath and the Syrian public as well.

Nasser's plans and policy for economic integration depended upon the support of the Ba'ath and the other Syrian elites. When this support failed to materialize, economic progress in Syria was stalled. The resulting economic stagnation generated bitter discontent among Syrian businessmen and the masses, which increased Syrian hostility to the union. The year 1957 had been a year of general prosperity in Syria. In 1958, however, Syria experienced the first of three consecutive years of severe drouth, which reduced national income by one

third.¹ The customary annual grain surpluses, which had stood at almost 700,000 tons before the union, disappeared completely after the merger.² Farmers and businessmen in Syria were unhappy and they blamed the UAR, not God or nature.

Economic progress in Syria was inhibited by decisions which were purely political in nature and which sacrificed economic needs for political considerations. President Nasser's decision in 1958 to close Syria's borders with Lebanon, and with Iraq in 1959, severely disrupted all regular trade patterns that had existed between Syria and those countries. A comparison of export income during the years 1957 to 1960 shows the extent of the losses which Syria's economy suffered from this policy. In 1957, Iraq imported £S 28,940,000 of Syrian goods; by 1960 that figure had dropped to £S 2,530,000. Lebanon, which in 1957 had imported £S 120,670,000 of Syrian goods, in 1960 cut Syrian imports to £S 48,840,000.³

This policy of isolating Syria from its neighbors alienated the Syrian merchants, many of whom were Ba'athists or Ba'ath supporters, and increased the illegal export of goods and money. During 1958 and 1959 over £S 120,000,000 are estimated to have been illegally transferred out of Syria and deposited in foreign banks; in 1961 alone, it is estimated that between £S 500,000,000 and £S 600,000,000 were

¹Al-Ahram, Cairo, February 21, 1961, p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 2.

³Year Book of International Trade and Statistics, 1960 (New York: United Nation, 1962), p. 524.

smuggled out of Syria.⁴ All this brought about a serious decline in government revenues and contributed to the failure of the Syrian economy during the years of the union.

Economic development in Syria was also adversely affected by the failure of the administrative machinery to effectively coordinate economic decisions or to explain their need to the public. When Nasser approved a ten-year development plan for the Syrian Region, the lack of coordination necessitated import restrictions which tied up excessive amounts of foreign currency. The plan was doomed.⁵ President Nasser later admitted the failures of his administration.

We have been unable to develop the government machinery to the standard of revolutionary action... In certain cases, the government machinery was incapable of conveying to the people the new feeling that served their interest.⁶

In September, 1958, Nasser promulgated the agrarian reform law,⁷ which was similar to the law adopted in Egypt in 1953. It was conceived as an instrument for social, economic and political change. Land ownership under this law was limited to a maximum of eighty hectares of non-irrigated land. Landless farmers were to receive eight

⁴Monte Palmer, "The UAR: An Assessment of its Failure," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Winter, 1966), p. 61.

⁵President Nasser admitted many times that the Egyptians in general had very little information about Syria and the Syrian economy. This in part explains why it was difficult to coordinate effectively and develop a strong economic organization. See, for example, President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Speeches and Press Interviews, 1958 (Cairo: Department of Information, United Arab Republic, 1959), p. 243.

⁶Quoted in Palmer, "The UAR," p. 62.

⁷For the Text of the Agrarian Reform Law see Eva Garzouzi, "Land Reform in Syria," The Middle East Journal, Vol. 17, No. 1 (Spring, 1963), pp. 84-90.

hectares of irrigated land, or thirty hectares of non-irrigated land. The total area subject to redistribution in accordance with this law was estimated at 1,543,635 hectares, of which only six per cent was irrigated land. By July, 1961, 670,212 hectares had been expropriated, but the area distributed totaled only 175,530 hectares to 7,306 farmers, of which 148,440 hectares came from expropriated land and the rest was state owned land. What is more, of the 175,530 hectares which were distributed, sixty-two per cent was rainfed, six per cent was irrigated land, and the rest was dry farm land. This is important, since the land reform law was promulgated during the years of the severe drouth when the Syrian economy as a whole was severely affected.⁸ This was an ill-conceived and poorly timed program that did not promote economic integration within the UAR.

The Syrian agrarian reform law was similar to the Egyptian law, which the Egyptians had used to crush the power and influence of the landowning class and to achieve a more equitable distribution of income.⁹ Ba'athist leaders opposed its application to Syria because of the vast differences between Syria and Egypt. The Ba'ath charged that the law failed to take into consideration the various degrees of irrigated and non-irrigated land in Syria. They pointed out that the amount of land to be expropriated under the law was much greater in

⁸The Arab World, New York, November 18, 1959, p. 2.

⁹P. J. Vatikiotis, The Egyptian Army in Politics (Bloomington, Indiana, 1962), p. 171.

Syria, almost sixty per cent of the entire agricultural area, compared to only ten per cent in Egypt.¹⁰ A spokesman later noted that:

Much unused state Domain land...could first have been distributed for the benefit of peasant farmers without touching privately owned large estates, and therefore without affecting the level of agricultural productivity for a few years.¹¹

Another unhappy group was the landowners, who complained about the way they were to be compensated for their expropriated land, in forty-year bonds bearing one and one half per cent interest. In discussing the failure of the agrarian reform law in Syria, Eva Garzouzi has written:

In order to achieve its objectives, land reform legislation has had to provide against the reduced production and increased consumption, as well as the higher costs of exploitation, inherent in the splitting up of large estates into small holdings. In Syria, the additional factor which has had to be taken into consideration is the marginal character of some dry farming areas which are not sufficiently productive when rainfall is scanty. However, one should remember that irrigated land in Syria was only about six per cent of the total land distributed... thus, the percentage of the rural population who have really benefited from land reform is [sic] still comparatively small.¹²

The agrarian reform law in Syria and the problems it generated highlighted President Nasser's dilemma. While the President understood that long range economic measures were necessary for the social and economic integration of the UAR, he neither made a thorough examination of

¹⁰They also pointed out that the maximum land holding in Egypt could produce crops worth EL 8,000, while the same area in Syria would produce a quarter of that amount. For more details see The Times, London, January 7, 1959, p. 16.

¹¹Quoted in Vatikiotis, The Egyptian Army, p. 171.

¹²Garzouzi, "Land Reform," p. 89.

the problems involved nor realized the consequences or the magnitude of the Ba'ath hostility. The result was policies which alienated many Syrians.

The same situation was evident in fiscal matters. From the beginning of the union in 1958, Ba'athist leaders had made it clear that it was in Syria's interest to keep the Syrian currency separate from that of Egypt. The value of the Egyptian pound was lower on the black market than its official rate in relation to the Syrian pound, and the Ba'athists felt that the introduction of a common currency would adversely affect the Syrian pound and the Syrian economy.¹³ When it was announced in Cairo on October 18, 1958, that by the end of 1959, Syria and Egypt would soon be integrated financially, the value of the Syrian pound dropped almost forty per cent.¹⁴

President Nasser seems to have operated under the belief that he could capture the loyalty of the Syrian masses and dispense with Ba'ath support. Nasser's long range economic development plans and the introduction of strict economic restrictions only increased resistance and discontent among the Syrians. On September 14, 1959, a delegation of Syrian merchants and businessmen went to Cairo to discuss with President Nasser the deteriorating economic situation in Syria. The delegation told the President that Egypt's nationalization laws and restrictions made sense in Egypt because commerce and industry were in the

¹³Khalil Kallas, Suriya al-Muhattima lil Istimar wal-Diktaturiyya (Syria, Crusher of Imperialism and Dictatorship) (Damascus, 1962), in Arabic, p. 23.

¹⁴The Arab World, New York, June 10, 1959, p. 5.

hands of foreigners. In Syria, commerce and industry were handled by Syrians whom the government should have encouraged instead of trying to destroy.¹⁵ They openly told Nasser that they had lost faith in his policies and warned him that illegal smuggling of money and goods would result. It is reported that Nasser expressed concern to the Syrian delegation and made a promise to resolve their complaints.¹⁶ Yet nothing practical was done. Instead, President Nasser in October, 1959, appointed Abdel Hakem Amer governor of Syria and president of the Syrian executive council. Amer's appointment was a new face in Nasser's policy of tightening his control over Syria, and it brought with it increased opposition and discontent from many Syrians. By the end of 1959, two more Syrian ministers in the central cabinet had resigned in protest over Amer's interference with their work.¹⁷ Since they were not Ba'athists, their resignations clearly indicated the growing discontent among many Syrians other than Ba'athists.

In September, 1960, Nasser decided to use force to integrate the economic and financial systems of Syria and Egypt. Serraj was appointed president of the Syrian executive council while retaining his position

¹⁵It has been recognized that Syria's economy has been flourishing due to private enterprise. See, for example, The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, The Economic Development of Syria (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), p. 23.

¹⁶The Arab World, New York, June 10, 1959, p. 5.

¹⁷The two Syrian ministers were Colonel Ahmad Abdel Karim, Municipal and Rural Affairs, and General Amin Nafuri, Communications. For more details see Muhammed H. Haykal, Ma Illdhi Jara Fi Suriya (What Happened in Syria?) (Cairo, 1962), in Arabic, p. 76.

as Syrian interior minister.¹⁸ Rigid enforcement of the 1958 agrarian reform law by Serraj and his abolition of the special tribal legislation intensified discontent. Several petitions were sent to Nasser demanding the removal of Serraj and condemning his police methods.¹⁹ Serraj continued the policy of restrictions. In February, 1961, he imposed rigid currency and price controls. Merchants and businessmen were ordered to obtain licenses for all imports and to sell goods already imported at prices prevailing in September, 1960, or to face severe punishment.²⁰ Izzat Trabulsi, director of the Syrian Central Bank, resigned in protest, and many Syrian merchants and businessmen sent petitions to the Syrian minister of economy protesting the new import laws and currency regulations.²¹

The protests and the discontent did not impress President Nasser. In a speech of February, 1961, the president publicly supported Serraj's currency policy:

If the foreign currency with which we are building our country is smuggled abroad by those who exploit the fruit of our labor and deposit the funds in foreign banks, how shall we proceed with the construction [of our economy]? Our income must be invested inside the country...this is the reason behind the decree for the reorganization of foreign currency in Northern region [Syria].²²

In July, 1961, (the ninth anniversary of the Egyptian revolution)

¹⁸The Arab World, New York, January 24, 1961, p. 2.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰The Middle East Records, 1961 (American University of Beirut, Beirut, 1961), p. 599.

²¹Ibid., p. 600.

²²Quoted in Palmer, "The UAR," p. 66.

nationalization decrees were issued to complete the process of socialization and concentrate economic power in the hands of the central government. All banks, insurance companies and firms were taken over by the state. The maximum size of land holdings was limited to one hundred acres. Working hours were limited to seven hours a day with no reductions in wages. Maximum individual incomes were limited to 15,000 Egyptian pounds a year, and a quarter of the profits of all businesses were to be distributed to the employees.²³ Although these measures generated enthusiasm among the masses, antagonism and opposition was high among the middle class businessmen, who became the broad base of opposition to the union. In discussing the failure of the nationalization decrees in Syria, Monte Palmer has written:

In Egypt this [nationalization] meant government ownership or participation in all sectors of the economy. In Syria the number of firms nationalized was far less than in Egypt, but the writing was clearly on the wall.²⁴

The alienation of the Ba'ath produced a host of social economic and political problems to President Nasser and jeopardized his policy in Syria. Discontent spread from the Ba'athists to the landowners who were openly criticizing the agrarian reform law and its method of compensation. The unending drought made most of the distributed lands largely unproductive, and the government was forced to spend more than £ S 40,000,000 for relief during the three-year drought.²⁵ Discontent among Syrian businessmen and merchants was running so high over the

²³The Middle East Records, 1961, pp. 600-602.

²⁴Palmer, "The UAR," p. 67.

²⁵Garzouzi, "Land Reform," p. 89.

government's restrictions of their traditional way of trading with neighboring countries that many Syrians left the country and smuggled their financial resources with them. This discontent was intensified when Amer was appointed governor of Syria, and later, the reliance on the strong handed administration of Serraj lost the support of other key groups. This placed the burden of supporting the UAR mainly on Serraj and his supporters in the army, who were themselves unhappy over Amer's appointment as governor of Syria. From that point on the dissolution of the union was simply a matter of time.

CHAPTER V

MILITARY INTEGRATION

The union agreement between Syria and Egypt failed to mention how the two countries were to be militarily integrated. What is more, after the establishment of the union, and as late as 1961, nothing practical had been done to unify and integrate the ranks, regulations and promotional procedures of the two armies. The military budgets remained separate and, although the UAR identification was added to the newly issued army uniforms, the ranks and salaries were not integrated. This indicates that no serious efforts were made to give the Syrian officers a strong sense of identity with the union. In 1958, President Nasser transferred the Syrian military college to Egypt and closed the other military institutions in Syria. No new military institutions were created and the Syrian officers felt that they were being disciplined by Cairo.¹

The Syrian army, from its first intervention in politics in 1949 to the union with Egypt in 1958, was always the final arbiter of the situation in Syria. The army was also divided into clans and groups,

¹The general staff of the combined armies excluded almost entirely Syrian officers. For more details see Muhammed H. Haykal, Ma Illidhi Jara Fi Suriya (What Happened in Syria?) (Cairo, 1961), in Arabic, p. 175. See also The Arab World, New York, April 29, 1958, p. 4.

namely the Communists, Ba'athists, and Serraj's group.² Earlier in the union, Nasser dismissed and transferred a large number of the Syrian Communist officers to areas in Syria where they could do little or no harm to the union.³ When the Communist commander of the Syrian first army, Afif Bizri, objected to these measures and later refused to play the role, he was dismissed.⁴

Discontent grew rapidly among the Ba'athist officers when they became convinced that their ideas and goals had not been fully accepted by President Nasser. The Ba'athist officers believed that the union with Egypt had been founded upon idealistic principles. When Nasser made it clear that he had agreed to the unity treaty only to save Syria from a civil war, the Ba'athist officers resented him and began to feel that unity was being converted into slavery.⁵

During the unity negotiations between Syria and Egypt in January, 1958, President Nasser had demanded the withdrawal of the Syrian army from politics as a condition for unity. In Haykal's published account of the negotiations, the Ba'athists had told the President that Egypt's

²Ibid.

³In May, 1958, forty-three Communist officers were discharged and many were given orders to transfer to Egypt. See Ibid., May 5, 1958, p. 5.

⁴When Bizri was ordered to transfer several Communist officers, he refused to cooperate and flew to Cairo to discuss the matter with President Nasser. He told the President that he would resign before allowing any transfer. Nasser dismissed Bizri from the army for refusal to take orders. A short time later Bizri fled to Iraq and published a manifesto criticizing Nasser for not living up to the union agreement of 1958. See The Arab World, New York, April 29, 1958, p. 4. See also Haykal, Ma Illidhi Jara, p. 81.

⁵Khalil Kallas, Suriya al-Muhattima lil-Istimar wal-Diktaturiyya (Syria, Crusher of Imperialism and Dictatorship) (Damascus, 1962), in Arabic, p. 45.

anti-party laws and restrictions made sense in Egypt because the Egyptian army lacked a loyal and well organized party. In Syria there was a well established and organized Ba'ath party which the government should have encouraged instead of trying to destroy. They openly told Nasser that his policy would destroy their political power in Syria and warned him that this would give the anti-Ba'ath elements an opportunity to group together and destroy the union. It is reported that President Nasser expressed concern to the Syrian Ba'athists. Yet, on March 12, 1958, Nasser extended the political ban to the Ba'ath. The Ba'ath again appealed to Nasser, but he refused to heed their plea. He later admitted that "disbanding all political parties was a big mistake."⁶

Another source of discontent among the Ba'athist officers was their sensitivity to the transfer of a large number of their group to Egypt.⁷ The Ba'athist officers saw in the transfer a plot to undermine their position in Syria.⁸ The transfer of eight hundred Egyptian officers to Syria, during the same period, to take over command positions throughout the Syrian army convinced the Ba'athist officers that the

⁶ Quoted in Arab Political Documents, 1963 (American University of Beirut, Beirut, 1963), p. 101.

⁷ In May, 1958, over two hundred officers were put on pension and many officers from the armored division were given orders to transfer to Egypt. It was reported that many of these officers were known for their attachment to the Ba'ath party. See The Arab World, New York, May 5, 1958, p. 4.

⁸ The morale of the Syrian officers in Egypt deteriorated to a point where they reacted by sealing off the town of Heliopolis, six miles outside of Cairo. For more details see Arab Political Documents, 1963 (American University of Beirut, Beirut, 1963), p. 92.

Egyptians had been sent to subordinate the Syrian forces to Cairo.

This was reflected by the following comments of the Syrian revolutionary command broadcast of October 2, 1961:

From the first day, we wanted unity to be represented by an exchange of officers from both regions. Our youth went, full of vitality and Arabism, to Egypt... What was sent us from Egypt? All the evils and sins committed under the name of unity started from this point. They sent us officers who took up positions in the intelligence machinery... They came to us with the mentality of intelligence officers and not with nationalist spirit with which we faced them, nor with Arab brotherliness which inspires sincerity and confidence. These people began spreading like octopuses into the various affairs and imposing themselves on all occasions. They dominated all the sensitive positions in the first army command and the unit commands, while our officers sent to Egypt were just⁹ filling wooden chairs without authority or power.

Another factor which exacerbated the Syrian officers was the struggle between Abdel Hakem Amer and Abdel Hamed Serraj. As the power of the Ba'ath was weakened by Nasser, he began to rely more and more on Serraj and his security forces.¹⁰ In September 1960, Nasser reorganized the executive council in both regions.¹¹ Serraj was appointed chairman of the Syrian executive council and secretary general of the National Union while retaining the ministries of interior and of state. Abdel Hakem Amer did not approve the appointment and put strong

⁹Quoted in Patrick Seale, "The Break-up of the UAR," The World Today, Vol. 17, No. 11 (November, 1961), p. 472.

¹⁰Serraj advocated a strong central government. He was anxious to unify the regimes of the Syrian and Egyptian regions.

¹¹For more details about the reorganization see The Arab World, New York, September 21, 1960, p. 3.

pressure on Nasser to remove Serraj.¹² Serraj was also critical of Amer. He blamed Amer for delaying the integration of the two regions and openly condemned Amer's interference in National Union matters.¹³ Serraj also felt that Amer's job was rightfully his.

President Nasser seems to have sided with Amer. He decided to transfer Serraj to Cairo and tried to make the move appear to be aimed at appeasing those Syrians who had been complaining of Serraj's police methods. To achieve this, President Nasser, in August, 1960, replaced the three-cabinet system with a unitary cabinet in Cairo in which Serraj was designated vice-president for internal affairs.¹⁴ Serraj soon discovered that this was only an honorary position, and less than three weeks later he returned to Syria where he called a meeting of the National Union. At that meeting, Serraj attacked Amer's policy in Syria and complained of the bad treatment he had received in Cairo.¹⁵ Nasser's reaction was to curtail Serraj's power in Syria. Two days later he issued a decree that united the two committees of the National Union and removed Serraj as secretary general of the Syrian National Union.¹⁶ On September 17, Amer ordered the dismissal of Serraj's

¹²In November, 1960, Amer interrupted a scheduled tour of the Syrian districts and flew to Cairo. It is reported that he told Nasser that he would not return to Syria unless Serraj stopped resisting orders. See Haykal, Ma Ildhi Jara, p. 107.

¹³Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁵In Cairo, Serraj became irritated because many of his subordinates were not referring any work to him. Serraj was further irritated when he was made to wait five days before meeting with Nasser. See Ibid., 109.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 113.

closest intelligence aides and the transfer of many Syrian officers in the armed forces.¹⁷ Cairo then decided to patch up its differences with the Ba'ath; Amer announced that meetings were taking place with the Ba'athists to consolidate the union. However, the Ba'athists refused to cooperate with Amer.¹⁸

On September 20, 1961, Serraj was recalled to Cairo where President Nasser appointed him chairman of the administrative committee of the cabinet.¹⁹ On September 26, Serraj resigned in protest.

Serraj and his supporters had been largely responsible for keeping Syria within the union. With his resignation, the last significant Syrian support for the union was lost, and two days later the coup occurred. The resignation of Serraj gave the Syrian officers, who felt that their jobs and command were in danger, a reason to group together and revolt on September 28, 1961. President Nasser dispatched troops to Syria to crush the revolt, but later recalled them. This marked the end of the union between Syria and Egypt and the beginning of the new Syrian Arab Republic.

¹⁷Serraj was disturbed when Colonel Ahmed Huneidi, head of Amer's office in Damascus, was appointed minister of the agrarian reform laws. He was further disturbed when Nasser united the intelligence services of the two regions and abolished the Syrian service of the special bureau which had been directed by Serraj. Twelve officers who were closely associated with Serraj were ordered to report to Cairo. Marwan Sibai and Abdel Wahhab al-khateb, who had been Serraj's closest aides were dismissed. See Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁹In September, 1961, President Nasser was reported to have accused Serraj of personal ambition in Syria. See Ibid., p. 40.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The hypothesis of this study was that the successful integration of separate and distinct political communities having a history of national independence into a viable union requires the active consensus and loyalty of the dominant political elites of each of the merging communities. Any failure to enlist the total collaboration of the dominant political establishments of merging national communities is likely to doom the union and result in secession and partition. The reason for this is that the masses are accustomed to the rule of their own political elites in whom they have trust and respect or the habit of deference and obedience. The union of distinct national cultures is never easy to impose upon the mass population; when it is attempted without the wholehearted support of the ruling elite, it generally results in serious social and political conflict and turbulence. The integration of distinct national cultures must evolve through the active partnership of the governing elites who anticipate further consolidation of their power and influence from their collaborative roles.

The United Arab Republic, which was established by the merger of Egypt and Syria, aborted because the dominant elite group within Syria, which had conceived of the union as a means to consolidate its power and influence over the Syrian masses, was threatened and revolted to

defend its political power. The measures which were taken by the Cairo authorities to consolidate Egyptian hegemony over the Syrians resulted in the alienation of the dominant political elite group within Syria and spurred its rebellion. All of the rival political factions within Syria, as well as the major socio-economic groups, backed the restoration of Syrian independence by the Ba'athist leadership group. There was universal consensus in the view that the union of Syria and Egypt had been a tragic failure. Even Nasser himself later concurred in this judgment and accepted much of the responsibility for the demise of the union when he admitted that:

We made mistakes. As a result, the national elements split up...and the reactionary elements grouped together...disbanding all political parties in Syria was a big mistake....We should have tried other methods in 1958, namely, to have disbanded all political parties which did not have our own objectives, and then to have organized the rest in a common unity of objectives....¹

The Ba'thists not only had stood initially in the forefront of those working for the union with Egypt, but as Vatikiotis has put it, "they provided the necessary support and political machine in Syria during the first months of the union."² Yet the Ba'athists tended to project the union in terms of their own ideology, that is, in terms of rapid evolution toward parliamentary government and away from the role of a single individual, so the UAR could attract other Arab states to join it and form a union of the Arab states, within which the Ba'ath

¹Arab Political Documents, 1963 (American University of Beirut, Beirut, 1963), p. 101.

²P. J. Vatikiotis, The Egyptian Army in Politics (Bloomington, Indiana, 1961), p. 168.

hoped to become the national unifying party. To achieve these objectives, Ba'athist leaders advocated a weak central government which would allow Syria to conduct her own affairs without interference from Egypt and, in this way, obstructed the political and ideological integration process.

As Nasser saw it, the Ba'ath was only an instrument to be used to govern Syria. When the Ba'athists refused to play their assigned role, he used every possible opportunity to reduce their influence in the administration of Syria. To achieve this, Nasser introduced large scale economic plans that hurt the Ba'ath and its power base in Syria. Nasser believed that by these plans he could curtail the power of the Ba'ath and, at the same time, mobilize more support for the union among the Syrian urban, business and professional class. These economic plans, like the agrarian reform laws, were couched in terms of maximum appeal, but they failed because they were not sufficiently clear in their value or benefit to the Syrians. They were hardly a standard around which loyalty could be rallied, and they served only to add confusion to the already confused Syrians. Nasser seems to have overlooked the fact that the Ba'ath had political power that was already established and recognized, so his programs could hardly serve to generate loyalty without Ba'ath support.

President Nasser was determined to weaken the Ba'ath by transferring a large number of Ba'athist leaders and officers out of key administrative and military positions and out of Syria. The transfers proved to be of limited efficacy, because Nasser failed to destroy the Ba'athist officers corps in Syria. When the coup occurred on September 28, 1961, Ba'athist officers were in the forefront of it.

Nasser seems to have believed that, by cooperating with Serraj's police, army, and intelligence organizations, he would be able to count upon the loyalty of the Syrian masses without the Ba'ath as intermediaries. Serraj was of the opinion that a policy of force would accelerate the rapid integration of Syria and Egypt and would make the union more meaningful, which explains his policy of rigid enforcement of the 1958 agrarian reform laws and the abrogation of the special tribal laws.

Serraj found out that the situation in Syria was unlike that in Egypt, where Nasser could depend on an existing military organization which was in control of the political life of the country. This total political control in Egypt had facilitated the implementation of a large number of Nasser's programs. In Syria, the Ba'ath party continued to influence the thinking of a large number of the Syrian army officers who were politically opposed to Serraj.

The role of the Ba'ath in obstructing the UAR integration process was definitely a significant and critical variable which supports the hypothesis that successful supranational political integration and the union of political communities require the active cooperation of the dominant political elites. In the UAR experience, had the cooperation of the Ba'ath been vigorously promoted, the UAR might be in existence today and the integrative process might have eventually succeeded. When the leadership influence of the Ba'ath party was undermined in Syria, the group which had supported unity with Egypt most vigorously became the most determined opponent of integration. When Nasser, during his disagreement with Serraj a few weeks before the secession, asked Ba'athist leaders to rejoin his government, the latter distrusted him; their link with the union had already been broken.

The first year of the union was crucial in the integration process. When Ba'athist expectations were frustrated, this frustration spread to the masses. Syrian loyalty and confidence in the union collapsed and prospects of wider union to include other Arab states became a sour dream.

Have the people of Syria and Egypt and the Arabs in general learned from this costly lesson? Muhammed H. Haykal, a close confidant of Nasser and the editor of Al-Ahram, in a frank editorial on June 11, 1962, gave an interesting assessment of the UAR experiment. Haykal wrote that future unity attempts must respect the separate national cultures and elites of the Arab states. National autonomy must remain within the union and separate governments should be retained, for "the union must be based on the principles of Arab socialism and democracy."³

The leaders of Syria, Egypt, and Libya have been working out a new integration proposal. Egypt and Libya have already signed an agreement for a union to be completed by September 1973. Having understood the lessons of the UAR, the two governments have been planning more carefully the eventual integration of their laws, economies, and institutions.

This thesis has been written under several limitations. Accurate published information on the inner workings of the United Arab Republic is still lacking. Official documents have not been released, and the thesis had to depend on the diaries and memoirs of participants, whose historical accuracy cannot yet be established. Possibly, oral

³Quoted in Gordon H. Torrey, Syrian Politics and the Military: 1948-1958 (Columbus, Ohio, 1964), p. 401.

interviews with the participants in the union who are still living could have produced more data, but this was limited by the nature of the study and the problem of distance. The fact that most published information is in the Arabic language also presented the problem of proper translation to give the exact meaning of the sources. Quotations which were taken from English texts also proved to be poor translations.

It is hoped that this thesis has made some modest contribution to the study of political integration through this case study of how elites exert a major role in the integration process.

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VITA

Nabiel Jamil Fareed

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: THE ROLE OF POLITICAL ELITES IN THE DEMISE OF THE UNITED ARAB
REPUBLIC FEBRUARY, 1958-SEPTEMBER, 1961: A CASE STUDY OF THE
FAILURE OF POLITICAL INTEGRATION

Major Field: Political Science

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Kafie Rai, Jordan, April 10, 1944, the
son of Mr. and Mrs. Jamil Fareed.

Education: Graduated from Kadoorie School, Tulkarm, Jordan, in
May, 1963; attended Oklahoma State University, from 1968
to 1973; received the Bachelor of Science degree in January,
1971, in Entomology; completed requirements for the Master
of Arts degree in July, 1973, with a major in Political
Science.

Professional Organizations: Member of Pi Sigma Alpha.