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SYRIA'S PATH FROM CIVIC UPRISING TO CIVIL WAR

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About the Author

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Summary

Initially, the uprising in Syria was not fueled by sectarianism, but rather by unifying political and social grievances, largely stemming from the failed economic reforms of the Bashar al-Assad regime. Sectarian divisions that were established over five decades of dispersed, authoritarian rule and reinforced by a legacy of violence quickly changed the narrative of the conflict. Unless Syria's longstanding system of rule is changed fundamentally and the unchecked power of the security services is curtailed, political solutions that adopt sectarian power sharing as the cornerstone of a postconflict order will likely cement instability and deep divisions in the polity.

The Divisive Rule of the Assad Regime

- The Syrian uprising's transformation to civil war is a result of the Assads' ruling practices, which embedded sectarianism in social relations.

- A system of dispersed, authoritarian rule allowed successive regimes to wield power through local intermediaries to either co-opt or marginalize groups from all sectarian backgrounds according to political expediency.

- Political violence, which peaked in the 1980s, infused social relations with fear. The anticipation of sectarian violence in 2011—which the regime contributed to with active fearmongering—helped trigger sectarian reactions that unleashed cycles of further violence.

- While the Syrian protest movement initially conveyed a narrative of non-sectarian national unity, violent repression pushed many protesters to adopt a Sunni Islamist idiom and undermined cross-community appeal.

- Postconflict Syria is unlikely to be genuinely pluralistic, let alone democratic. Sectarian representation will likely substitute for genuine reform, facilitating the integration of militia leaderships into the postwar order.

- Without a fundamental change in social relations, in particular curtailing the power of the security agencies, any political solution to the conflict is unlikely to effect change. Conceivably, the dictatorship of one individual or family would be replaced by that of several power centers maintaining a precarious balance.

Moving Toward a Pluralistic Order

- Rebuilding community relations will require replacing existing regime-controlled security structures with fully accountable institutions.

- Civil self-government structures in areas currently not controlled by the regime may help attenuate sectarian tensions, and hence, these areas should be protected from a return of the regime's unreformed security agencies.

- Sectarian fiefdoms are no substitute for democracy. External actors contributing to a new postconflict political order should prioritize mechanisms of bottom-up accountability rather than a "correct" balance of power between sectarian groups and their leaders.

- External actors should work with Syrian exile communities to build up political movements and create space for previously marginalized endeavors and dissenting voices; activists and politicized citizens are potential constituencies for change.

- Excluding from representation those members of Syrian society that subscribe to forms of political Islam will open inroads for extremists. External actors should not fall for the regime's strategy of discrediting such opponents with blanket accusations of extremism and terrorism, and instead insist on the participation of all parties in favor of a pluralist order.

- Nominal sectarian inclusiveness should not be the only criterion external actors use when choosing Syrian partners. For genuine pluralism to take hold, the ability of parties, activists, and nongovernmental organizations to challenge engrained hierarchies is more important.

Introduction

Initially, the Syrian protesters who rose up against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in 2011 adopted a nonsectarian approach. However, sectarian rhetoric and perceptions came to prevail in the ensuing conflict. Within a month following the first wave of protests in mid-March 2011, sectarian identity became an important, often overriding, element in the interpretation and escalation of violence.

This does not mean that Syria is exclusively, or even mainly, experiencing a sectarian civil war, as many analysts have represented it.[1] That a significant portion of Syrian Sunnis still support the regime, or that hundreds of thousands of internally displaced people from Sunni areas have sought refuge in government-controlled areas, illustrates that this is not a struggle between distinct and cohesive groups vying for supremacy and control over territory and institutions or the exclusion or extermination of other sects.

Nor can the Syrian war be attributed solely to "conflicts dating back millennia."[2] There is compelling evidence that the *immediate* reason for the uprising against Assad rule was a mismanaged economic transformation during the preceding decade. This failure exacerbated social inequalities and plunged a significant portion of the Syrian population into grinding poverty.[3]

Hence, the lines dividing rebels from loyalists did not necessarily follow sectarian and ethnic affiliation. Divisions sprung up within sectarian groups, between localities that had been affected differently by social change, and sometimes even within families, setting the marginalized against profiteers, believers against clerical establishments, and youths against elders.

Despite the considerable efforts of early antiregime activists, the narrative of a social and political struggle—pitting impoverished rural masses and migrants, disenfranchised urban-middle and lower-middle classes, liberal intellectuals, and youths with dim prospects against an abusive authoritarian regime and its clientele of parasitic enforcers and crony capitalists—did not prevail. The narrative was soon eclipsed by interpretations that presented the events purely, or mainly, in sectarian terms. The regime and its partisans portrayed the conflict as a defense of Syria's religious pluralism against Sunni religious extremism, which external actors sought to instigate and exploit. The opposition represented it as a struggle against a regime whose sectarian Alawite character had made it implacably hostile to mainstream Sunni Islam.

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As events were narrated and interpreted through sectarian lenses, these representations quickly turned into reality on the ground, thus giving them credence. Attacks on Sunni mosques, which were the only available public sanctuaries for protesters, were perceived as expressions and proof of the regime's sectarian bias rather than as attempts to extinguish centers of dissent. On the other side, assassinations of Alawite security officers were interpreted as evidence of the sectarian hatred of the opposition, not as retaliation against the enforcers of a detested regime who had met unarmed protesters with live ammunition. These perceptions affected and shaped public attitudes and behavior on both sides and fueled self-sustaining cycles of mutual recrimination, fear, and violence.

If the conflict was not caused by age-old sectarian hatreds released by a combination of regime weakness and regional and international interference, then why did the perception of an existential sectarian conflict prevail so quickly? Why did the inclusive rhetoric of the protesters fail to convince enough Syrians—in particular non-Sunnis—that "the Syrian people are one" in their struggle against the regime? Why did so many Syrians instead fall for the fearmongering of a regime that nearly everyone (including its beneficiaries) knew and loathed for its corruption, insincerity, and opportunism?

For many supporters of the uprising, the answer to these questions is clear: it was "the regime's cynical exploitation of sectarianism" that turned the uprising away from its early inclusive and civic orientation.[4] Such a perspective appears intuitively plausible given the advantages that the process of sectarianization offered Syria's rulers. On a domestic level, portraying the uprising as being the result of Sunni sectarianism and extremism could scare religious minorities into siding with the regime. It could also scare liberal segments of the Sunni majority, who feared a turn toward state-imposed religious rigidity and conservatism, as occurred in Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Gulf. On an international level, this concern, in particular when expressed by religious figures in Christian communities, could also influence Western societies, in which Islamophobia is rife and where most observers were unaware that many of these figures had been co-opted by the regime.

Once the regime was seriously challenged, sectarianism served as a tool for mobilization for both sides and as a fuel for violent conflict.

Certain decisions at the regime's highest levels may also be evidence that at least some elements in the Syrian power structure sought to steer the situation toward outright sectarian conflict. Statements that attributed the first wave of protests to a "conspiracy to sow sectarian strife" and conjured up scenarios of "internal conflict" were a sure recipe to fan fears that would hasten the outbreak of the very sectarian conflict the regime was purportedly warning against.[5] Attacking mosques using crack troops—commonly perceived as Alawite-dominated—or irregulars recruited in minority, particularly Alawite, areas,[6] and releasing militant jihadists from prison certainly enhanced the sectarian dimensions of the conflict.[7]

And yet there is no conclusive evidence of a coordinated and coherent regime strategy aimed specifically at igniting sectarian conflict. The regime's responses to protests during the first few weeks were contradictory and haphazard, and sometimes elements of the regime appeared to be working at cross-purposes.[8] While the official rhetoric concerning the sectarian dimension of the contestation certainly qualified as fearmongering, it was essentially the continuation of a longstanding and "deliberately ambiguous" strategy: branding as sectarian anyone who exposed the reality of Alawite preponderance in the composition of the Syrian regime and its security apparatus and the crony-dominated economy it fostered—all this behind a facade of secularism.[9]

> **Absent such change in social relations, and barring a decisive military victory of either side, Syria is liable to end up permanently bedeviled by deep, politicized sectarian rifts.**

On the other hand, already by mid-April 2011, instances of anti-Alawite violence and protest activities bearing an unmistakably Sunni religious imprint occurred in parallel to the nonsectarian, civic rhetoric employed by the protest movement. Long before the contestation transformed into armed conflict, local and regional cycles of sectarian violence had begun. These events fed off a longstanding legacy of violence and fueled fears of the sectarian other, thus reinforcing and escalating the cycle of violence.

Sectarianism had been implanted in Syrian society long before external actors started to play a significant role in the country's current war[10]—and to a greater extent than those who blame the phenomenon on a regime strategy to counter the uprising are prepared to admit.[11] Its origins lay primarily in the ruling practices of the Syrian regime, which have left a legacy of violence, in particular from the conflict with the Muslim Brotherhood during the early 1980s. Rather than an existential condition suppressed by a supposedly secular regime, sectarianism was the product of the political behavior of this regime. Once the regime was seriously challenged, it served as a tool for mobilization for both sides and as a fuel for violent conflict.

This distinction is important for at least two reasons. First, it represents a response to those who argue that no matter how unsavory, authoritarian regimes are necessary to manage divided societies outside the "developed world." Such perspectives merit denunciation because they are culturally deterministic and occasionally racist, but also because they tend to obscure the developed world's propensity to deepen and intensify these conflicts in pursuit of its own strategic interests. To those who defend authoritarian regimes from a realpolitik perspective, it is worth remembering that accommodating dictators is often self-defeating in that it may only delay, and likely amplify, an inevitable revolt.

Second, taking the lingering power of sectarianization seriously and understanding its origins will be necessary once Syria's conflict is over and it comes time to reconcile the society. Blaming the violence on sinister regime manipulation may lead to the simplistic conclusion that once Assad is gone, Syrians will naturally revert to the tradition of multireligious tolerance that purportedly prevailed in the pre-war era.[12] The civic spirit of the early uprising, perhaps

aided by externally led peacebuilding and reconciliation measures, would then allow for the realization of what, according to opposition representatives, is the real ambition of the Syrian people—namely fulfillment of "the right for all Syrians to live in peace and dignity; to freely practice their religious and political beliefs; to be equal citizens before the law."[13] In other words, a textbook definition of a liberal state.

It is understandable that representatives and supporters of the civic opposition would attempt to project such confidence. Yet, the botched state-building projects in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Iraq have demonstrated how identity politics tends to resist technocratic approaches to conflict management and leaves the potential for renewed hostility in the absence of a fundamental change in social relations.

Absent such change, and barring a decisive military victory of either side, Syria is liable to end up permanently bedeviled by deep, politicized sectarian rifts, with institutions, state power, and perhaps territory divided among competing power centers that rely on sectarian mobilization and fear to appear legitimate and maintain power. Such an outcome would represent only a moderate change from (and much continuity with) the system of dispersed domination, structured by sect, clan, region, and other substate identity formations characteristic of the Assad regimes. In other words, the postconflict system in Syria may closely resemble the system that has been in place under the Assads since the 1970s.

Alawite Predominance and the Security State

Syria is often described as having a "minority regime"—that is, a society where the minority Alawite community (some 10 percent of the population) rules over the Sunni Arab majority that accounts for approximately two-thirds of the Syrian population. However, it can be argued that the regime exploited tribal and kinship solidarity and networks to maintain the loyalty of the security sector and that the far-reaching clout of the latter created an image of Alawite supremacy that only partly reflected social reality.

The rise of Syria's Alawites, thanks to French colonial policies, from a marginalized rural community to one that found advancement through the armed forces has been extensively documented and analyzed.[14] One typical interpretation of the Alawite trajectory is that "both [Assad] regimes exploited state resources in order to reinforce Alawi solidarity or *asabiyya*, ensuring that public sector employment was concentrated in the hands of the Alawi community and the regime's supporters were rewarded for their commitment to the state."[15]

At least equally important, however, was the urge to secure the regime by stacking the security agencies and the officer corps with family relations of the ruling clan and its Alawite tribal allies. These preferences at the top level were reproduced among the rank and file. Military and security institutions

represented desirable career opportunities that were especially attractive to hitherto marginalized segments of society, among all sects. However, recruitment and advancement were to a large extent dependent on connections to higher officials, ideally through blood relations. Thus, Alawites related to those sections of the community that dominated the upper ranks were at a significant advantage for upward social mobility, while those with less privileged access still had an advantage when it came to filling the lower ranks. Thus, employment in the military and intelligence services became a primary vehicle for upward social mobility and was "inextricably woven into the fabric of Alawite society."[16]

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Particularly after the conflict of the 1980s against the Muslim Brotherhood, the significant sway these institutions enjoyed meant that a career in the military and security institutions came with considerable social power, further benefiting the larger Alawite community. Statistically, an Alawite was much more likely to have a relative or close friend serving as a higher-ranking officer in the armed forces or security services than members of other communities—and that relative or friend was, in turn, likely to wield more influence and patronage power than counterparts from other sects.

Interviews with Sunni officers who defected from the armed forces after the uprising in 2011 reveal a clear imbalance in enrollment at the military academy, in addition to significant power differentials between branches of the Syrian armed forces. Alawites were overwhelmingly assigned to those branches receiving the best equipment and the highest funding and social prestige. According to these accounts, many Sunni officers felt pressured to overcompensate for their sectarian identity by engaging in conspicuous displays of "secularism" (for example, by consuming alcohol) and being discrete about personal religiosity, even before the uprising.[17] One assumes such tendencies must have applied even more in the opaque world of the security services.

A strong position in the security sector helped provide access to professional and material advantages—first and foremost public employment—and to the benefits of systemic corruption in the public sector. Thus, for many Syrians, their perception of Alawites was inextricably linked to experiences of unfair privilege and quite frequently to abusive practices, such as protection rackets or the extortion of bribes for access to public services.

Systematic and conspicuous discrimination in access to labor and life opportunities effectively leads to a deeper identification with the sect or other particular category on which this discrimination is based.[18] The effect was pronounced in Syria, where the state wielded strong control over much of the economy and the labor market and where formal procedures and institutional rationality were largely supplanted by extensive networks of patronage.

Revealingly, during the first phase of the protests in 2011, protestors in mixed Sunni-Alawite cities, such as Baniyas, Latakia, and Tartus, demanded the rectification of alleged pro-Alawite sectarian biases in employment in state

industries and public administrations.[19] In these cities, perceived communal competition over limited state resources and benefits was also tied closely to rural migration. Migration increased the percentage of Alawites in Latakia from the single digits on the eve of independence in 1945 to around 50 percent in the first decade of this century—as well as from near zero to about 25 percent in Homs, from about 30 percent to 80 percent in Tartus, and from less than 10 percent to around 60 percent in Baniyas during the same period.[20] Such significant demographic shifts caused tensions between the traditional urban population, comprising mostly Sunnis and Christians, and the new arrivals.

> **In mixed cities where sectarian violence first erupted in 2011, relations between Sunnis and Alawites had already been clouded by longstanding social grievances.**

However, these local fractures were compounded in that they appeared to indicate a dramatic reversal of communal fortunes on a national scale, whereby formerly dominant groups—urban Sunnis and Christians—were supplanted to the benefit of onetime rural outcasts. Widespread rejection of intermarriage and incompatible behavioral norms (relating to alcohol consumption, the mingling of genders, and female dress code) further contributed to community divisions. For instance, in Baniyas, the seaside area of Corniche was informally divided between Sunni and Alawite residents even before 2011.[21] Thus, in mixed cities where sectarian violence first erupted in 2011, relations between Sunnis and Alawites had already been clouded by longstanding social grievances.

The post-2000 period of limited economic liberalization, which initiated more competition over dwindling public resources and increased social inequality, only exacerbated these tensions. As in other cases of economic transformation—for instance, in Eastern Europe after the Cold War—the precariousness and exploitative character of the emerging private sector actually made the public sector more attractive. Despite declining benefits and pay, public sector jobs also remained preferable to unemployment, a fate that affected a rising number of those Alawites without access to patronage.

By the middle of the first decade of the twenty-first century, shrinking opportunities for ordinary citizens of all communities contrasted with increasingly ostentatious displays of wealth by a small stratum of extremely wealthy businessmen and their entourage.[22] Connections to those at the center of power, like the protection of high-ranking individuals in the security establishment, were essential to flourish in this environment. The prevalence of kinship ties meant that, among the beneficiaries, Alawites were still prominently represented in the top tier.[23]

However, there was an increasing tendency of this "counter-society standing between the authorities and real society" to seal itself off from the populace.[24] As liberalization proceeded apace, horizontal, crosscutting class interests among the elite—visible through the incorporation of non-Alawite cronies (for example, the Sunni in-laws of Maher al-Assad from the Hamsho family; the Tlass, Shihabi, and, until 2005, Khaddam clans; or the Shia entrepreneur Saeb

Nahhas)—increasingly displaced communal solidarity. As a result, a growing number of Alawites were left outside the circle of communal privilege they purportedly enjoyed. Yet, the influence of larger-than-life Alawite business moguls, such as Bashar al-Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf, ensured that public perceptions did not adjust to these changing sociocommunal realities.

Liberalization also contributed to the exacerbation of sectarianism by diminishing the role of the Baath Party and its affiliated mass organizations. The party's entrenchment in the public sector and its resilient commitment to egalitarian values—however compromised through practices of patronage—were increasingly perceived as a nuisance by the elite. While in the past the party had offered a degree of inclusion and an avenue of influence that potentially transcended the sectarian divide, its decline served to expose the Alawite's domination of the security apparatus even more.[25] Likewise, as faith-based charities and nongovernmental organizations operating under the umbrella of First Lady Asma al-Assad increasingly took charge of social services, the number of people dependent on religious groups or powerful individuals only increased.[26]

Economic restructuring, the state's withdrawal as a provider, and the continued parasitic nature of the security sector served to accentuate existing communal grievances. Yet the effects of securitization on communal relations were not restricted to material issues. The regime's response to the 1980s conflict had turned Syria into a society characterized by ubiquitous surveillance, leading to a common, probably greatly exaggerated, assumption that one in four individuals was an informer.[27] And because of the known recruitment patterns of the security agencies, Alawites were generally suspected of being informers until proven otherwise.[28] The opaque character of these agencies, their propensity for violence, and the absence of any accountability[29] further contributed to an aura of existential suspicion of Alawites, which contributed to popular views of them as a tightly knit, closed-off community with carefully guarded, secret beliefs—or, more unsettling, no beliefs at all.

Above all else, this Alawite aura inspired pervasive fear. For instance, in the early 1990s, rumor had it that on the beaches around Latakia, young women were at risk of being kidnapped by thugs suddenly appearing in speedboats.[30] The implication was that the kidnappers were part of semicriminal smuggling networks related in one way or another to the Assad clan. While such stories may have been partly invented or exaggerated,[31] the rumor was persistently retold and believed, which inarguably deterred numerous Damascenes from vacationing on the coast—and thus expressed, as well as reproduced, the fear that was lurking under the surface of ostensibly harmonious communal relations.

One result of this generalized association of Alawites with power was that individuals with high-ranking positions in the security sector were sometimes widely assumed to be Alawites, such as, for instance, the supposed founder of the all-powerful Air Force Intelligence Directorate and current director of the National Security Bureau, Ali Mamlouk, who is a Sunni.[32]

Even in social milieus where disavowing sectarianism and exposing the insincerity of the regime's professed secularism was common, sectarian affiliation was never entirely forgotten. For example, in 2004, the sculptor Mustafa Ali was able to purchase a 500-year-old home in an area of Damascus coveted by developers of high-end restaurants and boutique hotels and established an art gallery in what became an outlet for nonconformists. His ability to do so was generally attributed to the fact that he was an Alawite and therefore well-connected by default.[33] Thus, throughout the decades preceding the uprising, sect had become a common frame of interpretation for social relations, with one particular sect—Alawites—credited with unpredictable, near magical powers.

> **Throughout the decades preceding the uprising, sect had become a common frame of interpretation for social relations, with one particular sect—Alawites—credited with unpredictable, supreme powers.**

A Dispersed Power Structure

On the surface, the omnipresence and brutality of the security state, the absurd personality cult around the Assads, and the state's ideological posturing and militarism made the Baath Party appear similar to totalitarian parties in North Korea and earlier in former communist Romania.[34] However, as will be discussed in this section, Syrian Baathism in fact relied on a dispersed, localized power structure that allowed the regime to integrate, promote, or marginalize groups belonging to different sects according to their loyalty and their usefulness for the purpose of power maintenance.[35]

This power structure was based on the management of informal networks of power and patronage structured by subnational identities and categories—sect, region, ethnicity, and tribe. At the grassroots level, a combination of official regime representatives, intelligence officers, and prominent members of local society would cooperate in running a specific locality as a fief, sometimes with considerable autonomy. These officials would provide their loyalty and material proceeds to the leadership in return for franchises of authoritarian power. Thus, the main currency in this system of dispersed rule, and the key to accessing privilege and resources, was not so much sectarian affiliation but rather loyalty to the regime and usefulness for its maintenance of power.

In his extensive study of the political economy of the Assad state up to the 1990s, German scholar Volker Perthes described its power structure as a system of "authoritarian corporatist group representation," similar to models found in Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s.[36] According to this view, the holders of political power manage society as an assembly of groups with discrete demands and entitlements, which the leadership, selectively and partially, serves in return for loyalty and also attempts to balance. Power—in the sense of sometimes quasi-autonomous rule and command over resources, security, and more—is distributed from the highest levels of the state and society

(provinces, sectarian communities) to the lowest (neighborhoods, extended families). Those same vertical networks and intermediaries or power brokers, in turn, also serve as conduits for bottom-up interest representation, albeit in a highly selective fashion and within constantly renegotiated limits. Framed as processes of consultation or even participation, demands, grievances, and other concerns are communicated to the leadership level, which responds at its own discretion and according to its own calculations of political and material benefit and cost. In other words, legitimacy and consent are obtained through hierarchical inclusion of the ruled by the rulers rather than through popular suffrage and legal accountability. Just how much power, resources, and influence flow up and down in specific relationships within these networks mostly depends on how reliable and valuable the support is of a particular representative group—in other words, to what extent it contributes to regime maintenance in terms of political resources and support on the popular and elite levels.

Within such a framework, everyday authoritarian rule can be exercised with a comparatively low level of actual coercion, while the permanent presence of the intelligence apparatus serves as a reminder that the potential for coercion still exists. Demands, grievances, and tensions can be communicated and potentially defused at an early stage and in a framework of unequal exchange.[37] Such forms of inclusion serve to confirm and reproduce existing power relations, thus avoiding a buildup of resentment and social tension that may be generated by the absence of meaningful participation and the pronounced inequality that systems of patronage inevitably generate. They also allow for the selective integration of indispensable social and economic actors and specialists, without compromising the monopoly on leadership decisions. And while *bargaining* for resources and influence is conducted vertically and hierarchically (between representatives of regional or sectoral interests and networks on the one hand and the state and party bureaucracy on the other), *competition* will occur horizontally—that is, among networks, regions, and sectors vying for the favor of the leadership or a greater share of resources. Authoritarian domination can thus be framed as the management of and mediation between groups pursuing particularistic agendas rather than different visions of the common good. Broad social alliances are difficult to build under such conditions and can be easily disrupted by policies of divide and rule.

These divisive practices in the maintenance of power stand in perennial tension with the ideological foundation of corporatism and its emphasis on harmony, which imagines social groups as the composite members of an organic national body and the regime as its brain. In this regard, it is interesting how, three months into the uprising, Assad chose to portray his opponents as "germs" or hostile organisms that a healthy body—that is, a harmonious society rallying around *his* vision and leadership—would naturally repel.[38]

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As for the relationship between corporatism and sectarianization, the crucial question is which types of groups would the regime acknowledge as members of the national body and attempt to integrate and accommodate? In its classical form, corporatism proposes a differentiation of society according to functions and roles (peasants, blue- and white-collar workers, industrialists, intellectuals, clerics), which justifies, indeed renders natural, differences in treatment, resource allocation, and access to participation. The Baath Party originally incorporated groups along such functional lines by setting up mass organizations and designating quotas for them in its rubber-stamped bodies, some of which survive even as the party's standing has diminished.[39] The party also successfully co-opted existing institutions of collective interest representation, such as the chambers of commerce.

> **A hidden quota system provided for sectarian balance within the leadership and throughout the Syrian administration.**

As for the religious sects, their supposedly harmonious integration into the state through the co-optation of their clerical leadership served two major purposes. It testified to the regime's professed secularism by placing the sects under state authority and constituted a positive contrast to sectarian mayhem in neighboring Lebanon and later Iraq. It also recruited religious leaders for purposes of mediation, and even more so for the disciplining and surveillance of their flocks,[40] which tended to increase in importance as the intermediary role of the Baath Party's structures receded.[41]

For instance, Sunni clerics such as Grand Mufti Ahmad Badreddin Hassoun or the renowned scholar Muhammad Said Ramadan al-Buti were employed to rally the loyalty of Syrian Sunnis. In return, they sometimes received significant concessions when the support was especially valuable. Thus, on April 5, 2011, a presidential decree revoked the license for the only casino in Syria and overturned an earlier decision that had banned from public schools hundreds of female teachers wearing the full body veil (*niqab*). Both issues had been sharply criticized by al-Buti in late 2010, though he stood by the regime after the uprising began.[42] Ironically, when protesters demanded the teachers' reinstatement during the early phase of the uprising, regime mouthpieces used their demand as evidence of the protesters' alleged Sunni extremism.[43] Even real Sunni extremists were at times tolerated or exploited for political ends, for example, when jihadi networks infiltrated by the Syrian intelligence services facilitated the transit of jihadists to Iraq to fight against the American occupation forces after 2003.[44]

Furthermore, a hidden quota system provided for sectarian balance within the leadership and throughout the Syrian administration.[45] For instance, although the de facto establishment of dynastic rule implied that the president would always be an Alawite, since the conflict in the 1980s, the posts of first vice president and foreign minister have been occupied by Sunnis. In other words, the two executive positions at the head of the state that were beyond criticism, the presidency and vice presidency, and the one minister whose portfolio was so closely tied to the president as to be beyond reproach as well, were

reserved for the two sects most crucial for the regime's survival: the Alawites and Sunnis. Abdul Halim Khaddam, who took over from Hafez al-Assad's brother Rifaat after the latter's failed bid for power, held the post for twenty-one years (1984–2005). After his removal, former foreign minister Farouk al-Sharaa took over the position of vice president, with Walid Al-Muallim, also a Sunni, named as foreign minister. Sharaa remains in office despite rumors of differences with President Assad.[46]

At lower levels of the state, where the leadership would occasionally admit to evident failures and punish scapegoats, there was a rotation of the different communities in posts. Sometimes this mechanism allowed for accommodation or validation of specific sects according to current expediency. For example, the appointment of the Christian Dawoud Rajiha to the position of defense minister on August 8, 2011, was commonly understood as a move to curry the loyalty of the Christian communities.[47] It was perhaps also not a coincidence that in the two cases when Sunni prime ministers turned into public villains (Mahmoud al-Zoubi, who was scapegoated in 1999 during the anticorruption drive that prepared the ground for the presidential succession and ostensibly committed suicide, and Riad Hijab, who defected to the opposition in 2013), their successors would also be Sunni (Muhammad Miro and Wael al-Halqi), as if to dispel the notion that the disgrace of one official could indicate a rift between the regime and community.

Despite these practices of sectarian balancing, focusing on religious sect alone would have been too blunt an instrument for managing a demographically and socially complex society such as Syria's—let alone responding to the dynamic changes after the onset of economic liberalization in the second half of the 1990s. From the perspective of maintaining power, working with and through broad categories based on *passively* acquired group membership (that is, being born into a certain sect) would have made little sense for the purpose of generating and rewarding the *active* loyalty of individuals and groups.

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In particular, it would have been entirely counterproductive to collectively marginalize the majority of Syrians who are Sunnis and thus generate a shared sense of injustice, which opponents could have readily exploited for the purpose of mobilization. The regime, instead, went to great lengths to placate the Sunni clergy. It also worked consciously to downplay and obscure outward signs of Alawite religiosity and encouraged assimilation into the Sunni mainstream. During fifty years of so-called Alawite rule, the Alawite clergy never obtained any form of official recognition or institutionalization that even remotely resembled the status of the Sunnis and the other minorities.[48] Instead, Syria's Alawite presidents performed public prayers in Sunni mosques, flanked by the mufti of the republic. Alawite children, like those of other Muslim minorities, received a Sunni religious education.[49] And Sunni mosques were

built across Alawite-majority areas, even though they remained empty, emulating practices applied by the Ottoman Empire a century ago.

The formation of a coherent Sunni collective opposed to the regime, with a sense of shared purpose under a unified leadership, was made all the more difficult because of other factors. The social and behavioral differences and historical animosities between Sunni agriculturalists in the south, Bedouin tribes in the north and east, bourgeois urban dwellers in Damascus and Aleppo, and the inhabitants of the small and medium towns of the central plain and the coast, ruled out such a development. Throughout their almost five decades of rule, the two Assad regimes instead accommodated and marginalized each of these groups—at different times and on different terms—in response to changing domestic and regional dynamics.

The regime went to great lengths to placate the Sunni clergy.

In contrast, during the early 1980s, the radical wing of the Muslim Brotherhood attempted to generate Sunni solidarity that would cut across Syria's social and regional divides. The Brotherhood sought to mobilize violent confrontation against the "heretical" Alawite regime, but only found a response among the Sunni middle classes of the northern cities of Hama and Aleppo, whose interests had been negatively affected by the Baath Party's economic policies. The Sunni populations of the countryside and the smaller cities, as well as the Bedouin, rewarded the regime's pro-rural development agenda with their loyalty, alongside the Sunni urban elite of Damascus, which the regime had made significant efforts to co-opt.[50]

This geographically differentiated treatment and incorporation of groups pointed to a key element of the Baathist corporatist arrangement, namely the dispersal of power to the local level. This only increased as the grassroots structures of the party wilted away—and with them any effective institutional mechanism to keep local power holders in check. Managed as a "system of regions,"[51] Syria developed "not [as] a nation-state or even a territorial state, but as a state of territories... in which the regime [was] in constant negotiation with local societies."[52]

Regions and localities, in turn, served as proxies for communal affiliation according to sect, clan, ethnicity, and region of origin. In the popular perception, most rural areas, villages, and subregions in Syria tended to be identified with one particular sect and, where this mattered, specific clans and tribes or other defined subgroups. The same held true for most urban areas, where typically only the central commercial and administrative districts were considered neutral spaces. Most residential quarters, in turn, as a result of historical patterns of settlement and migration, were identified with a specific sect, with further differentiations according to region of origin, social status, and other factors.

This structure of dispersed power showed itself to be an efficient insurance policy once the regime was seriously challenged in 2011. It allowed Assad to draw on local allies who would come forward in defense of the status quo and

limit the reach of the insurgency. Syria's northeast, with a mixed Christian, Kurdish, and tribal Arab population, provided an instructive example of this. Having ruled the area by working through intermediaries and treating the groups the intermediaries represented differently,[53] the regime responded to prodemocracy demonstrations in 2011 with the same violent repression as elsewhere in Syria. In contrast, parallel protests demanding Kurdish national and cultural rights were treated leniently.[54] Evidently, Kurdish self-assertion, which had been repressed violently as late as 2004, appeared to be far less of a threat than demands for democratic change. In the summer of 2012, the regime stood by when the Democratic Union Party (PYD) affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) took over most areas with a sizable Kurdish population. This territory became a buffer zone between regime-controlled areas and Turkey, the PKK's mortal enemy, which by that time had emerged as a main sponsor of the Syrian opposition.

The surge of the PYD also served to split the local Arab communities and motivated many to side with the government and even provide manpower for pro-Assad militias. This is because many Arabs were settled on land originally expropriated by the Baath Party from Kurdish owners as part of the regime's "arabization" policies and feared for their property in the event the Kurds took control of their areas. At the same time, the sizable local Christian community established militias that were either co-opted into the PYD structures or allied themselves with the regime.[55] Thus, while large parts of northern and northeastern Syria were removed from the immediate control of the Assad regime, they remained hostile to its opponents and could still be easily incorporated back into the regime's system of indirect rule.[56]

As in the northeast, the regime has been able to exploit local conditions elsewhere and mobilize clients to generate support, or at least ensure neutrality, among many Sunni communities—in addition to the middle and upper classes of large cities. Prior to the revolution, these urban classes had often complained about the excessive greed and privileges of Alawite regime cronies.[57] However, that did not mean that they were ready to risk their privileges by openly joining the rebellion.[58]

Just as the regime's strategies of rule benefitted *some* Sunnis and (belatedly) Kurdish areas and communities, the impact on Alawites was likewise highly differentiated. Pronounced geographical differences existed between the degree to which certain Alawite-populated areas were incorporated into the power structure and benefited from it. In particular, a significant hierarchy exists between Alawites originating from the coast and the coastal mountains and those from the central plain.[59] These regional distinctions partly overlapped with and blurred into tribal origins, with access to power also being a function of family and tribal proximity to the ruling Assad-Makhlouf clans. The extensive field knowledge and long memory of the security services further allowed for precise

Dispersed power showed itself to be an efficient insurance policy once the regime was seriously challenged in 2011.

differentiation between loyal supporters, fence-sitters, and likely opponents, as well as by tribal allegiance and subgroup.

Therefore, in the period preceding the 2011 uprising, social divisions in the much smaller Alawite community were as pronounced as within the Sunni community. Unlike the Sunnis, however, the Alawites lacked a developed clerical hierarchy, institutional structures, or an ideological narrative with unifying potential. This made it doubtful whether, before 2011, it would have made sense to speak of an Alawite community at all. The uprising, however, changed all that by providing a powerful impetus that would galvanize the vast majority of Alawites across Syria—and, to some extent, other minorities—into supporting the regime: fear of potential genocide.

The Legacy and Anticipation of Violence

The transition from peaceful protest to escalating violence between Sunni and Alawite communities was accelerated significantly by a legacy of mutual fear generated by earlier violent conflict, in particular during the uprising of the Muslim Brotherhood against the Assad regime during the late 1970s and early 1980s.

On June 16, 1979, a radical faction of the Muslim Brotherhood attacked the Aleppo Artillery School, killing between thirty-two and eighty-three cadets. According to some accounts, the attackers were selective, executing Alawites and sparing Sunnis.[60] The attack was a landmark in transforming opposition to the regime of Hafez al-Assad, which escalated in the second half of the 1970s into a conflict dominated by sectarian violence.[61] More precisely, it became a confrontation between the regime and parts of the Muslim Brotherhood that had chosen armed struggle over reformism. Driven by a mix of ideology and opportunism, they chose to attack the regime over its sectarian composition rather than its foreign policy, failing economic performance, and authoritarian practices.

The response to Islamist violence was excessive, and mostly extralegal, state violence, culminating in the Hama massacre of February 1982.[62] The regime's retaliatory actions were focused on, but hardly limited to, the Muslim Brotherhood—mere membership became a capital crime.[63] Being identified as an Alawite, in turn, implied being a potential target of lethal violence, regardless of an individual's political preferences and views of the regime. In fact, the conflict of the early 1980s illustrated that politicized identity was not only a *source* of collective violence but could also be *generated,* activated, or hardened by violence.[64] For Syrians who felt they were recognizable as Alawites—whether by name, place of birth, residence, or accent—the possibility of violence being directed against them, as well as the knowledge (typically inflated by rumor and propaganda) of attacks that appeared to be motivated by sectarian antagonism, drove home that their future in Syria was tied to that of the sectarian community to which they belonged, regardless of their own orientations.

Since the Muslim Brotherhood's rhetoric during the 1970s and 1980s explicitly emphasized the heretical character of the regime, the inevitable conclusion was that in a Syria ruled by the Brotherhood, or similar strands of politicized Islam, there would be no place for Alawites. The extreme violence of the conflict (some accounts put the number of victims of the Hama massacre alone at 40,000) instilled in Alawites a pervasive fear that one day equally violent retribution would be exacted against them.[65]

In response, some Alawites sought to hide their identity or that of their loved ones. In one case, the father of an Alawite woman, out of concern over future sectarian violence, used his influence as an intelligence officer to have her place of birth registered as Midan, a predominantly Sunni neighborhood of Damascus, rather than the family's original home in Tartus, commonly regarded as a mainly Alawite city.[66] Fear was kept alive through the taboo surrounding any mention of the conflict against the Muslim Brotherhood during the early 1980s, as well as by occasional, perhaps calculated, exceptions to this taboo.

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However, alarm over possible reprisals was by no means restricted to the Alawite community. In the early 1990s, many Syrian Christians expressed their fear that if a day of reckoning were to come, the massacre of Alawites (which was taken for granted) would quickly spill over to engulf all non-Sunni communities and areas.[67]

Thus, the experience of violence not only remained present in individual and collective memories, but impressed itself on the ways many Syrians imagined their future in the country and their relations to others. Such unaddressed potential for violence lingered under the surface of supposedly harmonious intercommunal relations. That is why in early 2011, though only few instances of apparent intercommunal violence took place—amid considerable violence by regime forces—they were enough to again trigger the drive toward the "dead certainty" of identity politics.[68]

The storming of the Omari Mosque in Daraa on March 23, 2011, where protestors had established a field hospital and a headquarters of sorts, added a sectarian tinge to a contestation that, until that moment, had been exclusively fixated on social issues and the misconduct of the local governor. For many, the assault underlined the regime's disregard for religious sanctuaries, which was widely perceived as disregard for Sunni Islam.[69]

As a consequence, on March 25, demonstrations in solidarity with Daraa found a strong response in many Sunni-populated localities. These included neighborhoods in the mixed Sunni-Alawite city of Latakia. Alongside confrontations between protestors and the security forces, with live fire leaving twelve people dead, sectarian altercations occurred at the edges of Sunni- and Alawite-dominated areas and on the campus of Tishreen University. For a day, the city was abuzz with rumors of an impending, full-fledged sectarian

confrontation. Yet when a motorcade originating in the Alawite heartland above Latakia reached the outskirts of the city with the objective of "saving" the Alawite population, they were stopped by army and police units and eventually turned back.[70] Faced with the prospect of open sectarian warfare, municipal authorities and local community leaders cooperated and eventually succeeded in containing the situation.[71] In the following weeks, a strong security presence confined the protests to the Sunni neighborhoods and finally to the southern periphery of the city, where they were eventually crushed.

Sectarian tensions escalated further two weeks later in Baniyas. On April 9, a cycle of violence between protestors and the security forces—allegedly also involving violent regime supporters—led to several casualties. At nightfall, a bus carrying a group of Alawite soldiers and servicemen was ambushed near the city, killing nine. At the same time, videos of atrocities with an apparent sectarian dimension started to circulate. In one, what appears to be a mixed group of security forces and armed irregulars, identifiable as Alawites by their accent and first names, is shown violently abusing the civilian population of what was supposed to be the Sunni village of Al-Bayda, about 6 miles south of Baniyas.[72] A second video from Baniyas showed the gruesome killing of an Alawite vegetable trader who was allegedly acting as a recruiter for pro-regime militias, or Shabbiha, by what was supposedly a Sunni mob.[73] Negotiations ensued between the notables of Baniyas and Assad himself, helping again to calm the threat of a larger sectarian confrontation. However, the city was stormed by the military on May 7, putting an end to protests for months to come.

In Homs, about 200 protestors had first assembled on March 18 at the Khaled Ibn al-Walid Mosque to denounce not the regime but the local governor. He had acquired a track record for arbitrary land expropriations and shady real estate deals and was attempting to push through a futuristic, urban renewal project named "The Dream of Homs" (*Hilm Homs*).[74] Resistance to the project, led by local businesses fearing for their interests, focused on its alleged hidden purpose of changing the demographic makeup in the Sunni-majority city.[75] A week later, on March 25, police cordoned off the mosque, but protests broke out at several other Sunni mosques around town, before converging on the downtown New Clock Tower Square, where portraits of the president were defaced. A loyalist counterdemonstration, allegedly fomented by the security forces and the Shabbiha,[76] set out from the Alawite quarters of Akrama, Nuzha, and Zahra, leading to clashes that were followed by a large number of arrests and allegations of torture.[77] Over the following three weeks, with New Clock Tower Square barricaded, reciprocal altercations occurred between so-called popular committees organized in Alawite quarters to protect against alleged incursions by Sunni gunmen and protesters congregating in various Sunni mosques, where a rising number of casualties were recorded. In return, Alawite members of the security forces were targeted for assassination, which was extensively covered by official media.[78] Funerals became rallying points for both sides.

Events took a new turn when demonstrations against Assad's address to the new Syrian government on April 16 were answered with gunfire. The ensuing cycle of funerals turning into protests and protests leading to new funerals generated massive rallies on April 18, which overwhelmed the security forces and allowed protesters to reclaim New Clock Tower Square, which they renamed Freedom Square. Once there, they established a leadership committee comprising clerics, local notables, and other prominent personalities. According to participants, a major motivation for the move was the need to keep under control a sizable faction seeking to overrun Alawite quarters and exact retribution against the popular committees.[79] Furthermore, some activists set up tents and a platform specifically dedicated to national unity to underline their inclusive approach to communal relations. According to accounts by activists, a delegation claiming to represent the Christian quarters of Homs reached where the protesters were gathered and expressed its support, while activists identifying themselves as Alawites took to the podium to underline the all-encompassing nature of the protests and alleviate sectarian tensions generated by the earlier violence.[80]

The protesters thus attempted to adopt techniques similar to those applied during the protests at the Pearl Roundabout camp in Bahrain. There, as in Syria, claims by regime-dominated media and partisans that the movement was motivated by sectarianism (in the Bahraini case, Shia sectarianism) were countered by showcasing prominent opposition supporters from the sect supposedly under attack (in the Bahraini case, the Sunni minority, to which the ruling family belongs). This demonstration was accompanied by solemn expressions of cross-sectarian solidarity and unity in the struggle against oppression.[81]

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Given the weeks of slowly mounting sectarian altercations that preceded the April 18 protests in Homs, it remains doubtful whether these attempts at conciliation could have succeeded had the gathering of protesters been allowed to last and develop into a protest camp along the lines of what had happened in Baghdad, Cairo, or Manama. Either way, it was violently dismantled in the early hours of April 19, with a large number of casualties.[82] As in Latakia previously, the protest movement was thus pushed back from a central urban location that could potentially have served as a neutral meeting ground required for bolstering the narrative of "national unity in resistance" that the protestors were trying to propagate. Instead they were forced into neighborhoods identified as Sunni, despite all attempts to sound the national unity theme there as well (including building a wooden effigy of the New Clock Tower). Quite literally, the space for cross-communal solidarity in rebellion against oppression was thus erased. Furthermore, the encouragement of violent counterdemonstrations that blurred into the recruitment of pro-government militiamen was a crucial step that turned the dynamics from a contestation between the protest

movement and the regime into a conflict between social groups largely defined by sect. Over the summer, Homs, dubbed the "Heart of the Revolution," became engulfed in a furious cycle of sectarian violence, killings, and kidnappings that gradually descended into urban civil warfare.[83]

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How would those who place all or most of the blame for the sectarian turn of the Syrian uprising on regime manipulation explain the different trajectories in Latakia and Baniyas, where sectarian conflict was quickly contained, and in Homs, where it was allowed to fester and turn into urban warfare? On the one hand, the differences could be attributed to the regime's use of dissimilar strategies and objectives in different regions and at different times. On the other hand, they could also be attributed to specific local conditions and different institutional and regime actors working at cross-purposes. Among such differences, one may mention the precarious demographic and economic situation of the local Alawite population, which made it a prime recruiting ground for pro-government militias, and the overwhelming Sunni majority in the city and its hinterland—a situation that is reversed on the coast. Bishara also mentions the Bedouin background of a proportion of the protesters and the geographic location, which facilitated access to smuggling networks and the procurement of light weapons.[84]

Either way, events in all three mixed cities and a number of other similar localities underlined that the regime's ruling practices over previous decades had turned social relations into a sectarian time bomb that any serious challenge to the political status quo would set off. With this kind of preparation, there was no need for the Assad regime to actively instigate sectarian conflict. Rather, mediation including community leaders and regime representatives was necessary, and possible, to *prevent* such a development. But the regime's price was submitting to its authority.

While perhaps not expecting that the turn to intercommunal violence would occur so rapidly, many intellectuals who became part of the opposition were clearly aware of the dangers stemming from the existing legacy of violence and fear.[85] Yet despite all explicit disavowals of sectarianism and solemn declarations of national unity on social media outlets and in public demonstrations, the opposition's approach remained ambiguous and contradictory. Over the summer of 2011, young Sunni activists with mostly secular outlooks would often express a wide range of inconsistent positions, swinging between patronizing expressions of tolerance for minorities in general, blanket vilification of Alawites, and proud references to prominent individual Alawites (for example, the writer Samar Yazbek or the actress Fadwa Suleiman) and representatives of other minorities (for example, the Druze or Christians) who openly sided with the uprising.[86] Those advocating inclusiveness were powerless to prevent a turn toward protest practices that adopted Sunni-inflected religious language and

symbolism. The fact that mosques provided the only available meeting places for the opposition, and that the rising number of casualties turned religious rituals of burial and mourning into the centerpiece of the protest repertoire, inevitably colored the public face of the movement.

Another problem was the high visibility of religiously colored forms of expression in public protests. Salafi networks that had been growing over the past decade, in particular in marginalized areas where there had been significant migration to the Gulf, most likely represented only a small proportion of demonstrators. However, calls for martyrdom and the wearing of burial shrouds to express the bearer's readiness to die, which were observed in Baniyas and Jableh in early April, rapidly spread over social media.[87] The resort to nightly renditions of the *takbir*, where entire urban neighborhoods shouted "God is Great" (*Allahu Akbar*) from rooftops—a method borrowed from the 2009 Green Movement in Iran[88]—certainly created a sense of empowerment among Sunni protesters. However, it was hardly suitable to convince members of other communities that the protests were inherently inclusive.

Kheder Khaddour reports the feelings of a young Alawite man after participating in a large and violently repressed protest in Homs in April 2011: "Soon afterwards, he remembers hearing loud appeals to Jihad coming from the minarets of mosques—which to Alawites meant a holy war against them. He says, 'Suddenly I became scared and I changed my mind, as I realized that what was happening was no longer a revolution.'"[89] The increasingly inflammatory rhetoric of Salafi television preachers operating out of the Gulf further fueled such fears. These became more extreme and influential as casualties rose, while those who could have provided a civic-minded, moderate leadership were increasingly neutralized by regime violence.

Whether these mostly young people could have infused the narrative of "national unity in the struggle against repression" with additional credibility and vigor, or whether the protest camp in Homs could have become the nucleus of cross-sectarian solidarity had it been allowed to last, remains unknown. On the other hand, already in June 2011, the Syrian publicist Yassin al-Haj Saleh, one of the intellectual leaders of the uprising, had highlighted the difficult relationship between the "civic" element in the protest movement—made up of young, educated, mostly liberal-minded activists— and the more "traditionalist-communalist" element.[90]

Along similar lines, the Syrian sociologist Mohammed Jamal Barout attributed the vulnerability of disenfranchised youth with regard to "populist Salafism" to the absence or lack of efficiency of any organized Islamist political force (such as the Muslim Brotherhood).[91] In Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen, the downside of the decentralized, leaderless character of the uprisings that received so much praise from foreign observers only became manifest during

Those advocating inclusiveness were powerless to prevent a turn toward protest practices that adopted Sunni-inflected religious language and symbolism.

the post-uprising transitions,[92] while in Syria, the lack of leadership may have been a fatal liability from the beginning.[93]

Conclusion: Plus ça change

As internal conflicts with strong identity components invariably do, the Syrian civil war has led to speculation about resettling communities within political or administrative borders that allow for greater homogeneity. Comparisons with Europe's Thirty Years' War and dramatic projections of a "great sorting out" tend to portray Syria, like Iraq, as a centerpiece of an existential struggle that can only be resolved through a breakup of the countries into sectarian entities.[94] Long-term stability, it is assumed, is conditioned on boundaries that create mostly homogenous communities. Forced population transfers and mass ethnic cleansing are an inevitable part of such a scenario.

Fortunately, the odds that this scenario will come to pass are extremely low. There are few if any local takers for such plans. None of the Syrian parties are pursuing a political project that aims for control over anything less than all of Syria. Territorial division, even federalization, is anathema for most parties except the Kurds, whose declared ambitions are, however, restricted to cultural autonomy within a unified Syrian state. Local proponents of Alawite, Druze, or Sunni statelets could perhaps be found, or built up, if the external actors involved in Syria agreed that this was a viable solution to the conflict. Yet at the present time, no one appears prepared to venture into such unpredictable territory, which risks completely unraveling the regional state order.

Attempts to end the conflict while maintaining Syria's territorial integrity may instead move in the direction of nonterritorial power-sharing schemes that would integrate some elements of the opposition and enhance the representation of the Sunni community.[95] However, tinkering with representation in Syria's political institutions will be meaningless unless the regime agrees to dismantle its sprawling security apparatus, where real power is located. Given the nature of the Syrian power structure, any attempt at gradual or partial reform will be pointless—a basic fact that has remained unchanged since the abortive Damascus Spring in the early 2000s. No opposition representatives with influence and credibility will participate on such terms and put themselves at the mercy of the Assad regime's shadow army.

Syria urgently needs parties with the capacity to represent the multiple forms of politicized Sunni Islam that currently exist among the population.

In all likelihood, then, the current state of fragmentation will endure for the foreseeable future, creating a situation of de facto separation into a number of fiefdoms, as was the case in neighboring Lebanon during its civil war.[96] Five or more areas ruled by authoritarian leaderships of different ideological hues may accommodate each other in an uneasy relationship characterized by a stabilized military balance, while the magnitude of the fighting declines. Over

time, this may give way to the only form of power sharing that could feasibly succeed in formally reintegrating the Syrian state: a confederation of several dictatorships, each claiming a certain sectarian, regional, or ethnic share and preserving its own military and security forces within the formal framework of the Syrian state.

In theory, the operational cooperation between the United States and Russia that was proposed by the agreement between U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in early September 2016 could have initiated such a process of reintegration. An established consensus about which groups should be considered terrorist, and hence be excluded from any ceasefire, and others who may not be attacked by anyone, would have helped the latter to consolidate their military position. In addition, it would have implicitly vetted them as legitimate participants in any further political process. However, the practical difficulties of establishing such a consensus appear nearly insurmountable amid mutual distrust, frequent realignments on the ground, and the blurring and renegotiation of borders among existing and emerging organizations. It also is difficult to see how such a scheme could be implemented as long as there is no external enforcer with troops on the ground to ensure that those excluded from the ceasefire do not spoil the process. Thus, gradual convergence appears more plausible and will likely include actors that are today considered beyond the pale, such as parts of the former Nusra Front (now rebranded as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham).

The Syrian civil war has led to speculation about resettling communities within political or administrative borders that allow for greater homogeneity.

Genuine reform would thus be replaced by the incorporation of a limited number of new actors into the system of dispersed authoritarian rule characteristic of Syrian Baathism, while sectarian representation would substitute for democracy. Thus, for the civic movement that emerged during the first half of 2011 in Syria, and was pushed aside or abroad by the violent turn of the uprising, the real struggle is yet to come, once the guns fall silent.

Given these possible dynamics, Syrian actors and the international community should focus on initiatives that successfully navigate six key conditions. First, the rebuilding of community relations, and any serious political change, will depend on comprehensive security sector reform—in other words, the dissolution of the existing security institutions and their replacement by fully accountable ones. For as long as this condition is not fulfilled, even after a stable ceasefire has been put in place, cooperation with state institutions in areas under the control of the regime (with or without Assad) will only help to consolidate authoritarianism and sectarianism.

Second, in areas not under regime control, structures of civic self-government may help to attenuate sectarian tensions and should be protected and nurtured as much as possible. Any return of the regime's unreformed security agencies to these areas, in any guise and under any pretext whatsoever

(such as fighting terrorism), must be prevented. At the same time, external actors who support and supply armed groups in these areas must weigh in with their clients to preserve local self-governance.

Third, sectarian power sharing is liable to replace the dictatorship of one person with that of several. Such leaders will convert the military status they gained during the conflict into control over institutions and resources in their region, claiming to represent one community or the other. External actors should not fall for the illusion that pacification of the conflict through such means can buy long-term stability. Nor can it amount to a democratic order, even if elections take place that appear genuinely competitive, in the sense that they regulate the power balance among local leaders.

Fourth, despite these dim prospects, the postconflict political order may still allow for margins of dissent that differ from one area to another. External actors should work with Syrian exile communities to build up political parties and movements in preparation for a postconflict order and, as much as possible, with activists in areas outside regime control. Apart from establishing formations that cut across sectarian lines, Syria urgently needs parties with the capacity to represent the multiple forms of politicized Sunni Islam that currently exist among the population.

Fifth, in assisting Syria's postconflict recovery, external actors should not make sectarian inclusiveness the sole criterion for choosing in-country partners. For genuine pluralism to take hold, the potential for parties, activist groups, and nongovernmental organizations to challenge entrenched hierarchies is more important than ensuring their membership accurately reflects Syria's ethno-sectarian mix.

And finally, for future crises, the central lesson from Syria should be that banking on authoritarian regimes to maintain stability in societies threatened by internal ethnic, religious, and sectarian tensions and conflict is fatally misguided. Ultimately, when they are seriously challenged, authoritarian rulers will resort to exploiting, mobilizing, and militarizing these cleavages. In divided societies, today's authoritarian stability begets tomorrow's civil war, or worse, genocide.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Fouad Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2012).

2. Karla Adam, "Obama Ridiculed for Saying Conflicts in the Middle East 'Date Back Millennia.' (Some Don't Date Back a Decade.)," Washington Post, January 13, 2016.

3. Dara Conduit, "The Patterns of Syrian Uprising: Comparing Hama in 1980–1982 and Homs in 2011," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* (May 13, 2016): doi: 10.1080/13530194.2016.1182421; Christopher Phillips, "Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria," *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2015): 357–76.

4. Steven Heydeman, "Syria's Uprising: Sectarianism, Regionalisation, and State Order in the Levant," FRIDE and HIVOS, May 2013, 17.

5. Government spokeswoman Buthaina Shaaban on March 26, 2011; see "Assad Adviser Warns of Sectarian Strife in Syria," Reuters, March 26, 2011; Bashar al-Assad in his televised speech in parliament on March 30, 2011, available at: http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=303&Itemid=469. The address included seventeen evocations of the Arabic term fitna, which carries a strongly religious connotation and is often used to refer to sectarian (Sunni-Shia) conflict, thus prompting the audience to imagine a scenario of sectarian strife.

6. Kheder Khaddour, "The Alawite Dilemma (Homs 2013)," in *Playing the Sectarian Card: Identities and Affiliations of Local Communities in Syria*, ed. Friederike Stolleis (Beirut: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2015), 11–26. An earlier version of this article was published in 2013 under the adopted name Aziz Nakkash. See also Aron Lund, "Chasing Ghosts: The Shabiha Phenomenon," in *The Alawis of Syria: War, Faith and Politics in the Levant*, eds. Michael Kerr and Craig Larkin (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 79–106.

7. Phil Sands, Justin Vela, and Suha Maayeh, "Assad Regime Set Free Extremists From Prison to Fire Up Trouble During Peaceful Uprising," *National*, January 21, 2014.

8. See, for instance, the accounts about events in Latakia and Homs provided in Azmi Bishara, *Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom* (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2013). While clearly supportive of the uprising and based mainly on interviews with Syrian activists, this account of the early phase of the uprising has a balanced narrative that also exposes the shortcomings of the movement and abuses committed by its supporters. For a similar narrative with more detail and historical background, see Mohammed Jamal Barout, *The Last Decade of Syrian History: The Dialectics of Stagnation and Reform* (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2011).

9. Phillips, "Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria," 365.

10. According to Thomas Pierret, foreign actors relied on sectarian mobilization only reluctantly and mostly for lack of alternatives; see Thomas Pierret, "The Reluctant Sectarianism of Foreign States in the Syrian Conflict," PEACEBRIEF 162, U.S. Institute of Peace, November 18, 2013.

11. See, for example, Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, "Stop Trying to Make Syria's War Into a Sectarian Conflict," *Atlantic*, March 15, 2013; or the spokesperson of the Syrian National Council Basma Kodmani in a televised debate on France 24, available at: "Guerre en Syria: un mini-Etat Alaouite serait-il viable ? (Partie 2)" [War in Syria: Would an Alawite mini-state be viable? (Part 2)], France 24, July 24, 2012, http://www.france24.com/fr/07-24-fr-syrie-armee-syrienne-libre-bachar-el-assad-etat-alaouite-debat-partie-2.

12. Oliver Holmes, "Assad's Devious, Cruel Plan to Stay in Power by Dividing Syria—and Why It's Working," *New Republic*, August 15, 2011.

13. Rafif Jouejati, "What Do Syrians Want?," *New Internationalist*, September 1, 2015.

14. Nikolaos Van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria: Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*, 4th ed. (New York: I.B. Tauris, (2011).

15. Fabrice Balanche, "'Go to Damascus, My Son': Alawi Demographic Shifts under Ba'ath Party Rule," in *The Alawis of Syria*, eds. Kerr and Larkin, 92. The narrative of the rural outsiders who capture the city and subjugate or sideline the urban elites through tight community solidarity (asabiyya) has invited interpretations that draw on the work of the fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldun, who conceptualized dynastic turnovers in North Africa (contemporary Morocco) in similar terms. Also see, for instance, Leon Goldsmith, "Syria's Alawites and the Politics of Sectarian Insecurity: A Khaldunian Perspective," Ortadoğu Etütleri 3, no. 1 (July 2011): 33–60; Emile Hokayem, "'Assad or We Burn the Country': Misreading Sectarianism and the Regime in Syria," War on the Rocks, August 24, 2016, http://waron-therocks.com/2016/08/assad-or-we-burn-the-country-misreading-sectarianism-and-the-regime-in-syria/. In the author's opinion, the emphasis on the importance of structural factors for the (trans)formation of such communities that characterizes these neo-Khaldounian approaches offers a helpful corrective to interpretations that assume religious or sectarian groups are immutable historical subjects with autono-mous and cohesive agency. However, such interpretations still tend to overestimate communal solidarity as being a natural and resilient behavioral pattern and a key consideration of those who conquered the heights of power. Yet as Phillips notes, "[W]hile leading Ba'ath Alawis such as Saleh Jadid and Hafez al-Assad utilised sect-based networks to gain power, they were opportunists, not sectarian chauvinists." (Phillips, "Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria," 364).

16. Khaddour, "The Alawite Dilemma," 19.

17. Hicham Bou Nassif, "'Second-Class': The Grievances of Sunni Officers in the Syrian Armed Forces," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (August 2015): 626–49.

18. See, for instance, Donald L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), 141–228.

19. Fabrice Balanche, "Géographie de la révolte syrienne" [Geography of the Syrian revolt], Outre-Terre 29, no. 3 (2011): 445; Balanche, "Damascus," 86.

20. Ibid.; see also Khaddour, "The Alawite Dilemma," 11. While the massive influx turned the Alawite quarters of the coastal cities into integral parts of enlarged urban areas, migration to Damascus was accommodated to a significant extent at the periphery of the city. For a portrayal of one of these new neighborhoods erected for security personnel, see Kheder Khaddour, "Assad's Officer Ghetto: Why the Syrian Army Remains Loyal," Carnegie Middle East Center, November 4, 2015.

21. Ratib Shaabo, "Communal Relations on the Syrian Coast," in *Myths and Realities of Community Relations in Syria: Peaceful Past and Unknown Future*, ed. Rustum Mahmoud (Le Hague: HIVOS, 2013), 14.

22. Khalid Abu-Ismail, Ali Abdel-Gadir, and Heba El-Laithy, "Poverty and Inequality in Syria (1997–2007)," Arab Development Challenges Report Background Paper 2011/15, United Nations Development Program, 2011. The report found that around one third of the Syrian population was living below the poverty line and around 10 percent were living in extreme poverty in 2007, which is before the social effects of the massive three-year drought that hit Syria in 2006 became apparent. See Colin P. Kelley et al., "Climate Change in the Fertile Crescent and Implications of the Recent Syrian Drought," Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 112, no. 11 (March 17, 2015): 3241–6.

23. Bishara quotes a listing of Syria's one hundred most important businessmen published in 2010 by the Syrian Business magazine *Al-Iqtisad wan-Naql* (*Economy & Transport*), which included a relatively small number of Alawites (16 percent), who nevertheless controlled the overwhelming majority of large businesses *(Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom,* 311f). See also Alan George, "Patronage and Clientelism in Bashar's Market Economy," in *The Alawis of Syria*, eds. Kerr and Larkin, 159–79.

24. Hassan Abbas, "Governance of Diversity in Syria," Arab Reform Initiative, June 20, 2012, 13.

25. Thomas Pierret, "La Syrie d'un soulèvement à l'autre. Exacerbation du confessionnalisme, déséquilibres socioéconomiques et ambiguïtés géopolitiques" [Syria, from one uprising to the next: Exacerbation of confessionalism, economic imbalances, and geopolitical ambiguities], in *Les ondes de choc des révolutions arabes*, eds. M'hamed Oualdi, Delphine Pagès-El Karoui, and Chantal Verdeil (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2014), 221–34.

26. Laura Ruiz de Elvira and Tina Zintl, "The End of the Ba'thist Social Contract in Bashar al-Asad's Syria," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 2 (2014): 335.

27. Panagiotis Geros, "Doing Fieldwork Within Fear and Silences," in *Taking Sides: Ethics, Politics, and Fieldwork in Anthropology*, eds. Heidi Armbruster and Anna Lærke (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 98.

28. Torstein Schiøtz Worren, "Fear and Resistance: The Construction of Alawi Identity in Syria" (master's thesis, University of Oslo Department of Sociology and Human Geography, 2007).

29. By presidential decree, intelligence agents are accountable only to the army's chief of staff, not the courts. This decree was renewed and broadened by Bashar al-Assad in 2008. See Leïla Vignal, "Syrie, anatomie d'une révolution" [Syria: Anatomy of a revolution], la Vie des Idées, July 27, 2012, http://www.laviedesidees.fr/IMG/pdf/20120727_syrie.pdf, 4.

30. Author's personal conversations.

31. This particular rumor might have been a case of perceived, communal power differentials, reflected through a narrative that highlights the inability of males to protect females in their group from the aggression of males in another group.

32. This erroneous belief was reproduced, for instance, in the otherwise helpful graphic of the Syrian military-economic elite provided by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. See "Syria Regime Chart," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, May 26, 2015, http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/infographics/SyriaRegimeChart20150526v2.pdf.

33. For a portrayal of Ali, and an insightful narrative on how Syrian intellectuals and artists negotiated the limited and ambiguous margins of dissent that slowly started to open in the second half of the 1990s, see Miriam Cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Art Official* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 69.

34. For an anthropological analysis of the Assad personality cult in the 1990s, see Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). While they were attenuated during the first post-succession years, central notions of the cult lingered on and were reinvigorated after the uprising in 2011.

35. Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria: Revolution From Above* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 85.

36. Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria Under Asad* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 134. For the concept of corporatism, see Howard Wiarda, *Corporatism and Comparative Politics: The Other Great "Ism"* (Armonk, NY: ME Sharpe, 1997).

37. This system of selective inclusion and control was highly efficient for the management of everyday challenges and conflicts, but was neither designed nor equipped to handle the dynamics created by the unprecedented wave of mass mobilization and collapsing regimes in neighboring countries in 2011. During the early phase of the uprising in Daraa, negotiations between local leaders and senior regime officials (in particular, Syria's then national security adviser Hisham Ikhtiyar) yielded compromises that included token regime concessions, but failed to stop the escalation (see Barout, *The Last Decade of Syrian History*, 187). While the reasons for the failure are naturally contested, the examples of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia clearly created a horizon of perceived opportunities for protesters and threats for the regime, which differed fundamentally from earlier instances of local uprisings in Syria and made it impossible to contain the situation.

38. "Kalimat as-sayid ar-rais Bashar al-Assad ala madraj Jamiat Dimashq" [Speech by President Bashar al-Assad in the auditorium of Damascus University], website of President Bashar al-Assad, June 20, 2011, http://www.presidentassad.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1091:20-2011&catid=303&Itemid=469.

39. For instance, even under the most recent electoral law (modified on March 17, 2014), at least 50 percent of parliamentary seats are reserved for "peasants and workers"; see Syrian Ministry of the Interior, Law No. 5, Law for General Elections, § 22 (2014), http://www.syriamoi.gov.sy/FCKBIH/file/Election%20law.pdf.

40. See the accounts of Mazen Ezzi and Rand Sabbagh concerning the highly ambivalent role of the Christian and Druze clergies in the first phase of the uprising in Mazen Ezzi, "A Static Revolution: The Druze Community (Sweida 2013) and Rand Sabbagh, "Attitudes of Christians in the Syrian Capital (Damascus 2013)," in *Playing the Sectarian Card*, 39–70 and 71–89.

41. In an account of sectarian (Sunni-Druze) disturbances in the south of Syria in the fall of 2000, Birgit Schaebler notes that negotiations between the president and the community were conducted through the Druze sectarian elite, cutting out both the governor and the local chapter of the Baath. See Birgit Schaebler, "Constructing an Identity Between Arabism and Islam: The Druzes in Syria," *The Muslim World* 103 (January 2013): 76. Along the same lines, Christopher Phillips notes that "where party or union bosses might previously have mediated local disputes, increasingly tribal, religious or sect leaders played this role." (Phillips, "Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria," 367.)

42. Bishara, *Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom*, 104–5; Thomas Pierret, *Religion and State in Syria: The Sunni Ulama From Coup to Revolution* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 218–21.

43. See, for instance, the discussion between the author and the Berlin correspondent of the Syrian State News Agency SANA, Husam Ismail, on Deutsche Welle TV, "Revolution in Syria? DW Quadriga 29-04-11 (Part 1) (Arabic)," YouTube video, posted by "hw," April 30, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_4_xhy-42HU.

44. Peter Neumann, "Suspects Into Collaborators," *London Review of Books* 36, no. 7 (April 3, 2014).

45. Abbas, "Governance of Diversity in Syria," 10.

46. "Syria VP Beaten Upon Assad's Order: Report," NOW, June 29, 2015, https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/NewsReports/565509-syria-vp-severely-beaten-upon-assads-order-report.

47. Sabbagh, "Attitudes," in Playing the Sectarian Card, 80.

48. "Myth No. 7: Alawie Is Still a Religious Sect," Syria Exposed (blog), March 28, 2005, http://syriaexposed.blogspot.com.eg/2005/03/myth-no-7-alawie-is-still-religious.html; Phillips, "Sectarianism and Conflict in Syria," 365.

49. Joshua M. Landis, "Islamic Education in Syria: Undoing Secularism" (paper prepared for "Constructs of Inclusion and Exclusion: Religion and Identity Formation in Middle Eastern School Curricula," Watson Institute for International Studies, Brown University, November 2003).

50. Brynjar Lia, "The Islamist Uprising in Syria, 1976–82: The History and Legacy of a Failed Revolt," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43 no. 4 (2016): 541–59.

51. Kheder Khaddour and Kevin Mazur, "The Struggle for Syria's Regions," *Middle East Report* 269 (Winter 2013): 2.

52. Balanche, "Géographie de la révolte syrienne," 449.

53. Kevin Mazur, "Local Struggles in Syria's Northeast," Monkey Cage (blog), Washington Post, September 9, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/09/09/local-struggles-in-syrias-northeast/.

54. Khaddour and Mazur, "The Struggle for Syria's Regions," 3.

55. Lund, "Chasing Ghosts," 215–7.

56. Such a system of regional autonomy would appear in perfect accordance with the ideological platform of the PKK since the early 2000s. See Heiko Wimmen and Müzehher Selcuk, "The Rise of Syria's Kurds," Sada (blog), Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2, 2013, http://carnegieendowment.org/sada/?fa=50852.

57. See George, "Patronage and Clientelism in Bashar's Market Economy."

58. Pierret, "La Syrie d'un soulèvement à l'autre."

59. Khaddour, "The Alawi Dilemma"; Leon Goldsmith, "Alawi Diversity and Solidarity: From the Coast to the Interior," in *The Alawis of Syria*, eds. Kerr and Larkin, 141–58.

60. Raphaël Lefevre, "The Muslim Brotherhood's Alawi Conundrum," in *The Alawis of Syria*, eds. Kerry and Larkin, 128. Lefevre puts the number of (Alawite) victims at eighty-three; the official figure was thirty-two.

61. Volker Perthes mentions the broad rejection of the Syrian intervention in Lebanon and names social inequality and corruption as additional reasons; see Perthes, Political Economy, 4.

62. For example, after a narrowly failed attempt on the life of former president Hafez al-Assad on June 26, 1980, several hundred alleged Islamists held in the Palmyra prison were summarily shot in their cells. Patrick Seale, *Asad: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1988), 329.

63. Members of radical but nonviolent leftist groups such as the Communist Action Party were hunted down, severely tortured, and sentenced to long prison terms until the late 1980s, and many were released only a decade or more later.

64. Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006); Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 2.

65. Worren, Fear and Resistance, 91.

66. Khaddour and Mazur, "The Struggle for Syria's Regions," 2.

67. Author's private conversations with Syrian Christians, 1991–1992.

68. Arjun Appadurai, "Dead Certainty: Ethnic Violence in the Era of Globalization," *Development and Change* 29, no. 4, (October 1998): 905–25.

69. Barout, *The Last Decade of Syrian History*, 195.

70. Bishara, *Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom*, 321–2.

71. Barout, *The Last Decade of Syrian History*, 211–3.

72. A video is available at "Quwat al-Amn fi-Suriya tadrub al-muataqalin fil-Bayda Baniyas" [Security forces in Syria beating detainees in Al-Bayda / Baniyas], YouTube video, posted by "syrianagent2011," April 14, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PVPDZji4-f4&skipcontrinter=1&bpctr=1460570945 (graphic content).

73. A video is available at "Qatl ash-shahid Nidal Jannoud" [Killing of the martyr Nidal Jannoud], YouTube video, posted by "SYRIALIFE," April 21, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFHcKm5f41A, (graphic content); see also Bishara, *Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom*, 323.

74. Ibid., 109; Promotional videos for the project are still available, see "Homs Dream," YouTube video, posted by "Mohammed Al-tenawi," February 15, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hcCo-hLAKk0; or "Homs Dream Project, Homs City, Syria," YouTube video, posted by "MsSyriano," October 23, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UOT_GQeIfo.

75. Bishara, *Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom*, 325.

76. According to Khaddour ("The Alawi Dilemma," 14), who quotes a retired Alawite army officer, "the security forces worked to mobilize Alawites, especially the young who were out of work. They mobilized and organised them and sent them to Sunni areas of Homs to lead demonstrations in favour of the regime."

77. According to activists quoted by Bishara (*Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom*, 110–1), the security forces initially tried to convince the protesters to disperse, warning against the danger of sectarian clashes.

78. Khaddour, "The Alawi Dilemma," 14.

79. Bishara, Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom, 114n47.

80. Ibid., 117n54.

81. Heiko Wimmen, "Divisive Rule. Sectarianism and Power Maintenance in the Arab Spring: Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, March 2014.

82. Venetia Rainey, "Evidence of Massacre as Syrians Demand Assad Exit," Week, April 20, 2011, http://www.theweek.co.uk/politics/syria-uprising/6097/evidence-massacre-syrians-demand-assad-exit.

83. For a firsthand account of the atmosphere of sectarian violence and retribution reigning in Homs in early 2012, see Jonathan Littell, *Syrian Notebooks: Inside the Homs Uprising* (London: Verso, 2015).

84. Bishara, *Syria: The Painful Path to Freedom,* 110.

85. Salwa Ismail, "The Syrian Uprising: Imagining and Performing the Nation," *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism* 11, no. 3 (2011): 540. See also the "Covenant Against Sectarianism in Syria," initially signed by more than 600 Syrian intellectuals and published on March 10, 2011, https://www.facebook.com/notes/153001424759618/ (Arabic).

86. Author's private conversations (via Facebook Messenger) with Syrian activists, July–September 2011.

87. Barout, *The Last Decade of Syrian History*, 229.

88. During the early phase of the uprising, Syrian activists were in direct contact with Iranian veterans of the Green Movement, advising them on protest tactics and strategies (author's private conversation on Facebook Messenger with a Syrian student activist based in Aleppo, summer 2011). The technique was also applied in Bahrain, with equally ambiguous effects. During the summer and fall of 2011, the intensity of takbir, as reported on social media, emerged as something of a yardstick for revolutionary activism and support in specific locations (personal observation of activist and opposition Facebook pages by the author).

89. Khaddour, "The Alawi Dilemma," 22.
90. Yassin Hajj Salih, "The Civic and the Traditional Elements in the Syrian Uprising," *Al-Hayat,* June 14, 2011.
91. Mohammed Jamal Barout, "Populist Salafism in Syria and the Revolution of Local Societies," *Al-Hayat*, November 17, 2011.
92. Muriel Asseburg and Heiko Wimmen, "Dynamics of Transformation, Elite Change and New Social Mobilization in the Arab World," *Mediterranean Politics* 21, no. 1 (October 2015): 1–22.
93. Reinoud Leenders, "Master Frames of the Syrian Conflict: Early Violence and Sectarian Response Revisited," Project on Middle East Political Science, June 9, 2016.
94. Richard N. Haass, "The New Thirty Years' War," Council on Foreign Relations, July 21, 2014; "Joshua Landis on ISIS, Syria & the 'Great Sorting Out' in the Middle East," YouTube video, posted by "DU Center for Middle East Studies," October 7, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_-roW5Y7vbw.
95. Isam al Khafaji, "A Bicameral Parliament in Iraq and Syria," Arab Reform Initiative, June 30, 2016; for an early proposal advocating such a solution see Stephan Rosiny, "Syria: Power Sharing as an Alternative to Regional Conflagration," German Institute for Global and Area Studies, 2013.
96. Khaled Yacoub Oweis, "Local Dynamics in the Syrian Conflict," German Institute for International and Security Affairs, July 2016.

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