

## KING ABDULAZIZ IBN SAUD'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS SYRIAN MILITARY COUPS (1949-1952)

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### ABSTRACT

*Syria suffered three consecutive military coups in less than nine months in 1949, followed by a fourth coup in the late 1951. These coups took place in a critical phase in the history of the Arab nation, in the aftermath of 1948 war. Undoubtedly, this series of coups has unbalanced Syria politically, economically and even militarily. The military coups did not stop at this point, but they extended to the late 60s. However, this paper focuses mainly on the coups during the time of King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud.*

*This paper reviews King Ibn Saud's attitude towards these coups, with the aim of unveiling the extent of the national awareness of King Ibn Saud. It also seeks to answer the following questions: Was there a Saudi awareness of the importance of Syria as an Arab strategic power? Did the unity project, especially the 'Fertile Crescent' Project and the Great Syria, have apart in such coups, especially in the light of the Saudi- Hashemite enmity? Did 'Tabline Pipeline' Project to transfer Saudi oil to the United States through Syrian territories play a role in these coups? The paper hypothesizes that there are foreign efforts behind such series of coups, to divert such a pivotal country and the whole Arab region away from the newborn Israel. This paper is, then, an attempt to prove or deny such hypothesis.*

*The present paper basically depends on the documents of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, the documents of the American Department of State, as well as coeval Saudi and Egyptian newspapers. For a wider perspective, the researcher has to shed light on Syrian interior affairs, and the attitude of international powers towards the coups. Finally, the paper consists of an introduction and four main components, following a historical-analytical approach.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Syrian coups, Fertile Crescent Project, The Great Syria, King Abdulaziz, Ibn Saud*

**Table 1: List of Abbreviation**

The Term	The Abbreviation
Deputy Foreign Minister	Dep. F.M.
Egyptian Commissioner/Egyptian Commission	E. Com.
Egyptian Foreign Ministry Undersecretary	E.F.M. Undersecretary
Egyptian Foreign Ministry's Documents	E.F.M. Doc.
Foreign Office	FO
Foreign Relations of United States of America	F. R. of USA
Member of Parliament	MP
Memorandum	Mem.
National Archive of United States of America	N.A. of USA

## INTRODUCTION

French colonialism has left Syria in 1943. Shukri al-Quwatli has been the first president of the Syrian Arab Republic at this time. He was re-elected in 1948, and, hence, Syrian coups came successively. However, the biggest problem that confronted the Syrian-Arab relations was the two projects of the 'Great Syria' and the 'Fertile Crescent'.<sup>(1)</sup> The idea of unity in the Contemporary Arab History traces back to the fall of the Ottoman Empire, in 1924, at the hands of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. After that, Arab countries aspired to the Caliphate and began to pave the way for it through projects of regional unity. There was disagreement among such governments and nations on the types of such projects, and how they could be achieved. Hashemite dynasty coveted Syria after its independence. On the other hand, in Iraq, King Faisal bin Hussein has attempted to conjoin Syria to form the 'Fertile Crescent' project, while his brother Abdullah, in Trans-Jordan, desired to join Syria to his throne under the name of "Great Syria". (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1244, File 37/31/5 C4, Mem. of Egyptian Embassy, Damascus 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1954)

Not only Saudi Arabia alarmed by the unity projects, but also Egypt and Lebanon, until it reached the international circle. The Soviet Union also feared such projects, and considered it a British plot to disintegrate the Arab union in the face of imperialism and Zionism (Ibid, Article in Moscow Newspaper, 10<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1948). It may be a conspiracy thinking based on keen interests, yet it is not far from reality, and meets up with the results.

King Abdullah Ibn Hussein of Jordan has sent to Shukri al-Quwatli asking about his opinion on 'Great Syria', explaining the importance of the unity in the face of Zionism. He further stated that the current situation leaves only weak states incapable of counterfeiting dangers, and that unity is a national duty for the sake of the Arab nation. (Ibid, C3, Abdulla Ibn Al-Husain to Shoukry Alqutly, 14<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1947)

Al-Quwatli presented the project to the parliament, which decided unanimously to reject it. Even MP Mounir Al-Aglany, best known for his endorsement of the Great Syria Project, said: "We think that Trans-Jordan is a doomed organization that should be contained to protect ourselves from the doom of colonialism and Zionism". (Ibid, E. Com. in Damascus to E. F. M. Undersecretary, 1<sup>st</sup> Feb. 1947)

King Abdullah's vision of the advantages of the unity could be true, if it is devoid of personal interests. If so, would he agree that the union be under a free democratic leadership chosen by the Syrian and Jordanian peoples? Or is it only a matter of combining both powers in his hand?

The 'Fertile Crescent' Project (Iraq-Syria) has been the most appropriate for implementation. US Department of State has studied the matter and said: "Since 1949, the question of unity has become the greatest issue that preoccupies the peoples and governments of the Near East in terms of the desire of unity, its pattern, and its relation to further states. The project has been affected by a series of matters: (1) the desire of the peoples and governments of Iraq and Syria to unity, (2) the impact of that matter on peace in the Near East, (3) the British interests in Iraq and the continuity of French interests in Syria, (4) the friendly relation between USA and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and (5) the attitude of Egypt and Saudi Arabia towards that unity; as for Egypt, that wants to restore its leadership of the Arab world, it opposed the Syrian unity projects, and has adopted an alternative proposal to guarantee security among the Arab countries and empowering the Arab League. Along the same line, Saudi Arabia, the traditional competitor of the Hashemite, has supported the Egyptian

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(1) In Arabic it is called: Alhelal Al-Khaseeb projects

opinion, while Israel has been in variance with all Arab unity projects, thinking that such projects are directed against it in the first place and affected the situation in Palestine." (The Political Union of Syria and Iraq, Washington, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1950, F. R. of USA, 1950. Vol. V, pp. 1206- 1208)

Concerning the most important features of the international situation on the Fertile Crescent Project, Britain has supported and powerfully enhanced it to expand the authority of its traditional ally—the Hashemite government in Iraq. On the other hand, France opposed such project, to keep the current situation in the Near East, since it feared the expansion of the British sovereignty over Syria, which is considered a part of France's sovereignty. The US has been neutral between the British and the French attitudes; it preferred foreign non-interference, and did not support such projects. (Ibid, p. 1209)

The two projects of the Syrian unity with both Jordan and Iraq have spoiled the relations among the Arab nations. Based on personal interests of the Hashemite dynasty, they caused divisions among the Arab peoples and governments. On the national level, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Lebanon opposed the projects, while on the international level, France, US, and the newborn Zionist Entity opposed the Syrian unity projects for different reasons. Britain supported the two projects for its own reasons.

### **The First Coup**

At the dawn of 30 March 1949, units of the Syrian army occupied governmental departments, on top of which were the Presidential Palace, the House of government, and Parliament, and imposed a curfew. The coup has been led by a group of Syrian officers headed by Hosni Az-Zaeem<sup>(1)</sup> who issued three military statements, in which he called on the Syrian People to remain in discipline. He explained that the mission of the army is limited to creating a proper democratic rule in the country, which is only a temporary task. He promised that the rule would be handed over to a constitutional government of known Syrian names. There has been no bloodshed or violent actions during that process, which has been limited to Damascus. The coup leaders immediately arrested President Al-Quwatli, Prime Minister Khaled al-Azem and a number of ministers. They were all soon freed except Al-Quwatli and Khalid al-Azem (Albelad As-Saudia, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1949, p. 1). Curfews and arms prevention reports were issued, while merchants were restricted from exploiting the situation and raising prices. Az-Zaeem issued a decision to dissolve the Syrian Parliament and announced his intention to form a committee to draft a new constitution and hold early elections. (Mem. of Secretary of State to the President, Washington, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1949, F.R. of USA, 1949. Vol. VI, p. 1630).

The Syrian events casted doubt and mistrust amongst Arab capitals. Was there a foreign hand behind the coup? The Syrian Commission in Cairo held a press conference, in which it declared that what occurred in Syria is only an internal action guaranteed by the interest of the country, and no foreign hand has to do with it, and that the Syrian policy towards its Arab counterparts, especially Egypt and Saudi Arabia that would never change. (Almuqatam, 6 April 1949, p. 2)

Mahmoud Azmi, the Arab League Commissioner to Damascus, has confirmed that orientation. He asserted that the coup was an internal action and was not a result of external motives. The main reason was attributed to a personal motive of the army commander, Hosni Az-Zaeem, as a preemptive strike against the decision deposing him at the hands of

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(1) Hosni Az-Zaeem had born of Kurdish origins in 1894. He received military education in Aleppo and Istanbul, and then joined the Ottoman army, and later joined the French army during the French Mandate. During World War II, he joined Vichy forces against the French Free Forces. He was then arrested and imprisoned. He was transferred to Beirut under house arrest until he returned to Syria in 1946, where he was appointed a police chief. He was appointed commander of the Syrian army upon 1984 War. (Nagy Bezy, 1996, p. 515)

the Syrian parliament, in which he was accused of betrayal by one of the MPs, which assured that he had evidence, by which the government was convinced of the charges and planned to depose him. Hence, the leader did it quickly. The Arab League Commissioner pointed out that there are countries trying to exploit the situation in Syria to achieve their own interests (Albelad As- Saudia, 17 April 1949, p.1).

On the other hand, the American writer, Noam Chomsky, confirmed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) held talks with Hosni Az-Zaeem, in 1948, to discuss the possibility of supporting a military junta in Syria. Several months later, a coup that brought the leader to power there took place. The leader agreed to the concession of the Aramco pipeline (Tabline), in order to achieve the desire of the US. This was based on the desire of economic benefits that would, in turn, lead the development of the Syrian economy, which would help in the implementation of economic reform programs that it aspires to. On the road to peace talks with Israel, he offered a proposal to settle 250,000 Palestinian refugees in Syria, but Israel did not follow up quickly enough, and then he was overthrown upon another coup after several months (Chomsky, 1996, pp.199, 200).

Maarouf Ad-Doualibi, an official in Al-Quwatli's government, confirmed the involvement of the CIA in the coup led by Az-Zaeem, arguing that the intelligence services benefited from the Syrians' wrath over their rulers after the 1948 defeat against Israel, especially that the economic committee in parliament headed by Ad-Doualibi himself has rejected the 'Tabline' agreement to transfer the Saudi petroleum to the shores of the Mediterranean through Syrian territories in protest against the establishment of Israel. He confirmed that the concerned agreement was signed directly on the sixth day of the coup, and the government gave up the Dan River to Israel, the one that feeds the Jordan River, confirming the existence of a relationship between the coup leaders and the United States, and that the coup was planned to support Israel. (Abu Saleh & Alhashmy, 2005, pp. 129- 131)

The US foreign documents did not, naturally, mention a word about the said alliance with the leaders of the coup. The first reference to the coup has been upon a request of recognition submitted by Az-Zaeem's government to the US government, which welcomed the foreign leader's declaration of his respect for Syria's international commitments, and his pledge to negotiate a truce with Israel. Department of State has negotiated with Britain and France to recognize the new Syrian government. (Mem. of Secretary of State to the President, Washington, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1949, F.R. of USA, 1949. Vol. VI, pp. 1630, 1631)

The Saudi and Egyptian mistrust stemmed not merely from the fact that there is a foreign hand in the coup, but rather from the position of Az-Zaeem's government on Syria's two major projects; the Fertile Crescent and the Great Syria. The Egyptian Foreign Minister said in New York: "the Great Syria Project has been made to destroy the Arab unity. Egypt and Saudi Arabia opposed the projects of the Great Syria and the Fertile Crescent due to colonial purposes" (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1244, File 37/31/5 C4, Article in Al-Ahd Iraqi Newspaper, 21 May 1949).

US documents also indicated that the Saudi government feared that if Great Syria is established under the rule of a Hashemite King, who had plans against Saudi Arabia and would seek to re-establish Hijaz under the Hashemite monarch, then this unity would make it difficult to transfer (Tabline) Pipelines through the Syrian territories, which would affect the revenues of the economy of Saudi Arabia from Oil. (N.A. of USA, Washington D.C. 890G.6363\10-549(4) Confidential Mem. on the unification of Syria And Iraq, 5<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1949)

The Saudi press did not indulge in the legitimacy of the Syrian coup, but considered it as an internal action. It hoped that no Arab or foreign state would intervene in the coup. It also hoped that the situation would stabilize as soon as possible, and that the army would return to its barracks. The Saudi press only followed the news of the coup in international radio and newspapers. (Albelad As- Saudia, 8<sup>th</sup> Jun 1949, p.1)

Az-Zaeem tried to send a message to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, in particular, while, in general and indirectly to the royal regime in the Arab world. He sent a special message to Abdel Rahman Azzam, the Arab League Secretary-General, inviting him to visit Syria, and pledged to preserve the republican system and the good treatment of Shukri Al-Quwatli, as requested to mediate with Egypt and Saudi Arabia to recognize the new regime in Syria. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C1, Report on the visit of Secretary-General of the Arab League to Syria, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1949)

From the very beginning, Az-Zaeem realized the importance of the Egyptian and Saudi recognition of the new situation in Syria, and hoped much on them. He asked the Egyptian Commissioned Minister in Damascus to contact his government in this regard, stressing that the recognition of Egypt and Saudi Arabia would lead to the recognition by other Arab and foreign countries. He cited the statement of the French Foreign Minister that his country had suspended its recognition of the new Syrian government over Egypt's recognition. Az-Zaeem added that he would not hold a treaty or an alliance until presenting his articles to Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the Arab League. He further stressed the safety of Mr. Shukri Al-Quwatli and treating him as appropriate to his past, confirming that his future should be defined by the new parliament. (Ibid, E. Com. in Damascus to E. F. M. Undersecretary, 13<sup>th</sup> April 1949)

Saudi Arabia is concerned about the past of Az-Zaeem, who, under the French occupation, advocated the integration of Syria with Iraq under the rule of King Faisal, who is known to belong to the Hashemite dynasty, of long dispute with Al Saud. Az-Zaeem denied this orientation saying: "I called for unity, when Syria was under occupation, and now after independence, there is no way to give up". (Al-Ahram, 15<sup>th</sup> July 1949, p. 1)

In early April 1949, Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Said, visited Syria, offering Iraq political, military and economic assistance, if exposed to any dangers. The visit undoubtedly paved the way for the Fertile Crescent project. (Al-Balagh. 18<sup>th</sup> April 1949, p. 1)

The Saudi Commissioner met with Hosni Az-Zaeem in the presence of the Egyptian Commissioner in Damascus to inquire about the new government's attitude towards the projects of the Great Syria and the Fertile Crescent. Az-Zaeem has repeatedly sworn that he would never let any of these projects to be held, and that he and his soldiers would die for the independence of Syria and its republican regime. He added: "The Syrian people detest any of such thinking and considers King Abdullah as an ally to the British. Syria should not be joined to two hundred thousand people, who originally affiliated with Syria. If this project is to be established, then the people of East Jordan has to join Syria, but without its king or crown. It is not reasonable that the coup could deteriorate Syria. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 26 Syria, File 9, the Egyptian Embassy in Damascus to the Undersecretary of state in Cairo, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1949)

The Saudi commissioner and his Egyptian counterpart explored the views of senior Syrian politicians. Fares Al-Khoury said: "The coup has turned into a reality that cannot now be denied. Wisdom is much required to end the military rule and restore the parliamentary life". He assured that he would not participate in an authority that came after an illegal movement, since the justifications of coups were always unacceptable, and that he is ready to give advice. As for Prince Adel Arslan, he doubted remaining the situation for Az-Zaeem, because he depended only on the strength of the army. He

described Az-Zaeem as hasty and ignorant, and added that he cooperated with him just for fear of his oppression. In an interview with Muhsin Al-Barazi, the first advisor to Shukri Al-Quwatli in the previous era, he admitted that he cooperated with Az-Zaeem as a Prime Minister, he admitted the mistakes of the previous era, but he regrets what happened to him. He described Az-Zaeem as arrogant, juvenile, ill-mannered, restoring to oppression, and minor to educated politicians. However, he asked Egypt and Saudi Arabia to show their sympathy to Az-Zaeem so that he would not restore to the Hashemite, and that they should wait to recognize him, and it would be good to find a middle land for his recognition that he would keep Syria an independent republic. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C1, Report of the Egyptian Embassy in Damascus to FO in Cairo, 17<sup>th</sup> April. 1949)

On April 21<sup>st</sup>, Husni Az-Zaeem decided to visit Egypt, during which he met with King Farouk at the Royal Farms in Anshas, reassuring him that he was against the unity projects. Az-Zaeem chose Muhsin al-Barazi as his commissioner in Cairo, and at the same time Syrian press has been optimistic concerning the mild relations between both countries. (Um Al-qura, 10<sup>th</sup> June 1949, p. 1)

The visit has paid off, and, hence, the Egyptian Cabinet decided to recognize the new Syrian government, and the acting Egyptian Commissioner in Damascus went to the headquarters of the Syrian government and handed Az-Zaeem the official Egyptian recognition and announced the news on the Egyptian radio, which is (An-Naser, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1949) followed by the announcement of the Saudi government (Um Alqura, 29<sup>th</sup> April 1949, p.1). On April 29<sup>th</sup>, Az-Zaeem announced, through Damascus Radio, that he does not accept the Great Syria or the Fertile Crescent Projects. (Fathalla Saqal, pp. 47, 48)

The visit of Az-Zaeem to Egypt came at a time when he refused to meet King Abdullah Ibn Al-Hussein and Prince Abdul-Elah on the border, which was considered by the politicians of Egypt and Saudi Arabia as a victory for their policy in the East, because they pushed the specter of unity projects from the region. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C1, The Egyptian Commission in Damascus to FO in Cairo, 23<sup>rd</sup> April. 1949)

There is no doubt that Az-Zaeem's assertions that he did not accept the unity projects have had an impact on the escalation of tension on both sides of the Syrian border with Jordan and Iraq. Jordanian statements have been issued that the king is determined to implement the Great Syria project, even by force. Nuri Al-Said made a political maneuver to mobilize Iraqi forces on the Syrian border. (Al-Akhbar, 30<sup>th</sup> April 1949, p. 2)

Az-Zaeem outlined the challenges with each of the two countries, saying: "We would not accept anyone's challenge whoever he is. It is known that Trans-Jordan is a small part of Syria, if they want to return, then they are welcome. Our ties with the Iraqi people are characterized by unrelenting ties and brotherhood. No one could cause division and mistrust between the two brotherly peoples. Then, he mobilized his forces along the Jordanian border. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C1, Article in Al-Ayam Newspaper, 28<sup>th</sup> April 1949)

The relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia were negatively affected by Jordan and Iraq. Iraq said that King Farouk is responsible for hostility between Syria and both Iraq and Jordan. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C1, Report of E. Com. in Baghdad about the new situation in Syria and its effect in Iraq, 23<sup>rd</sup> April. 1949) King Abdul Aziz has not been recognized, and remained lurking behind the Egyptian position, satisfied enough with the assurances from the new Syrian regime through Egypt.

The situation on the Syrian-Iraqi boundaries has strained relations between the two countries. Egypt played a role in calming that situation. Egypt has commissioned Tawfik Doos, President of the Arab Union for mediation between both sides. The Egyptian commissioner managed to obtain implicit recognition from the Iraqi Foreign Minister, and took such recognition to the Syrian side, to take a positive step on his part. (Az-Zaman, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1949, pp.1, 2)

After the situation in Syria calmed down, the Council of Ministers decided to abolish martial law, on 18 May 1949, but approved a decree imposing house arrest on people who violated security. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, the government issued a decree dissolving all parties, accusing it of taking parliamentary power as a tool for unrest and creating obstacles to the coup government that is aimed at progress and reform. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C2, The E. Com. in Damascus to FO in Cairo, 1<sup>st</sup> Jun. 1949)

These procedures have disturbed the Syrian people and caused disturbances within Syria against the government of Husni Az-Zaeem. However, the government tried to express its intention to reform. The government issued some decrees, in order to restore constitutional life. The first was to elect the president of the republic by a public secret ballot. The second was that the cabinet authorizes the President to form a new constitution, approved by a direct referendum by the people or by the Parliament within four months of the election of the president. The third is the election of the president of the republic on 25 June 1949. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C2, The E. Com. in Damascus to FO in Cairo about the situation in Syria, 1<sup>st</sup> Jun 1949)

No one applied to run for presidency against Az-Zaeem, and hence, the people took part in a referendum on Az-Zaeem. This step did not satisfy most of the Syrian citizens. The president of the Egyptian delegation to the International Conciliation Commission on the question of Palestine said: "Some Syrians told me about the situation in Syria after the coup of Az-Zaeem. They said that he has no established policy, and it is fixed in the minds of the Syrians that his movement would not have been successful without the efforts of Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and that the Syrian people blame the two countries. (Um Alqura, 1<sup>st</sup> July 1949, p.3)

Az-Zaeem could not benefit from this opportunity; he did not maintain the support of the parties, and he did not seek to win the favor of the independents, such as Fares Al-Khoury. He also dismissed a large number of the army and the employees for financial and personal reasons. He deducted about 10% of the salaries of the employees, imposed exceptional procedures that have led to the restriction of the freedom of individuals and the press and arrested all those who are suspected. The members of his entourage lacked integrity. Az-Zaeem himself was in a hurry to carry out reforms without former experience. Hence, he lost the support of minorities through the abolition of texts that preserve their rights in the draft constitution. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C2, The E. Com. in Damascus to FO in Cairo about the Syrian second coup, 16<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949)

Az-Zaeem has adopted a financial policy that weighed heavily on the Syrian citizen. From the beginning, he refuted the policy of the previous governments, which left him a quasi-empty treasury, at a time the Syrian army needed to be updated on all tracks. Az-Zaeem has announced his intention to update and strengthen the army, and send military missions abroad. He asked the rich to contribute to this national duty, and imposed progressive taxes on income that burdened the merchants, businessmen, and the simple Syrian citizen. (Al-Balagh. 12th April 1949, p. 1)

After King Abdul Aziz has been assured about the situation in Syria and the position of Hosni Az-Zaeem on Great Syria project, he tended to make closer international relations between the two countries and helping Syria to raise the

economic level. He agreed to Az-Zaeem's request and promised to give him a loan of six million US dollars that Syria repaid with annual shipments of wheat. (N.A. of USA, Washington D.C.890F.5151\7-2649, A secret cable about the situation in Syria,26 July1949)

But King Abdulaziz Ibn Saud sensed that the government of Az-Zaeem in Syria would not stay for long, fearing a new coup would restore the obsession of the Fertile Crescent. He explained that the best solution for the Arabs would be to establish an Arab military alliance and that the decisions of the Arab League would be binding on all members. The Egyptian Foreign Ministry shared him the same feeling, and hence provided to the Arab League on 12Aug. 1949- in the eve of the second coup- a request to take a decision on the question of Fertile Crescent, and considered it a closed question, in which there is no right for Iraq or Syria to speak about, as it issued a decision before considering the 'Great Syria' a closed question. (Az-Zaman, 13<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949, p.1)

The rule of Husni Az-Zaeem lasted only for five months and a few days, during which he could not succeed in healing the rift caused by the coup, internally or externally. Hence, he angered many and burdened the Syrian citizen with taxes and muddled in his reforms. On the level of foreign relations, he satisfied Egypt and Saudi Arabia at the expense of his neighbors. As for the position of King Abdulaziz, he took care and caution until the coup leader proved that he hates unity projects, recognized and approached with him. The first coup was considered a peaceful coup d'état, in which there was no blood and no killings.

### **The Second Coup**

The second coup took place in the early hours of 14Aug. 1949. Husni Az-Zaeem was worried about secret plots against him, but he did not imagine to be killed at the hands of his comrades, who had struggled with him for many years, and shared him the first coup. Samy Al-Hennawi, Bahij Kallas and AlamEd-Din Qawas, in addition to 15 other officers broke into the house of Hosni Az-Zaeem and Mohsen al-Barazi arrested and imprisoned them in al-Mazza Prison. They both were executed by fire at 5 am. on the day of the coup, after a superficial trial that lasted only a few minutes, after being charged with treason, without letting them to be defended. Syria woke up to several consecutive official reports broadcast by Damascus Radio in this regard. (Albelad As- Saudia, 17<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949, p.1)

Samy Al-Hennawi<sup>(1)</sup> leader of the new coup justified his behavior by pointing out that the actions of Husni Az-Zaeem was cruel in punishing his enemies, used French advisers, brought a Turkish security team to protect him, and besieged the Iraqi Commission for his belief that they were spying against him, which provoked Iraq against him, and also worked secretly to remove him and annex Syria to Iraq.( E.F.M. Doc.,Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C2, The E. Com. in Damascus to the Egyptian Dep. F.M about the Syrian second coup, 16<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949)

Maarouf Ad-Dwalebi said that Al-Hennawi was driven by Iraq. US documents confirmed the arrival of a secret message from Britain on 29Sep. 1949, stating that it received a message from the Iraqi government and the Syrian government (the government of Al-Hennawi) to carry out a plan to establish a unity between the two countries under the mandate of the Hashemite ruler in Iraq, suggesting that there are Iraqi hands behind the second coup. (Mem. of the Dep. Of State about the Political Union of Syria and Iraq, Washington, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1950, F.R. of USA, 1950. Vol. V,p. 1208)

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(1)Sami Al-Hennawi was born in Aleppo in 1898, graduated from the teachers' school, then joined the military academy, graduated in 1919, served in the Syrian army and was promoted to colonel.(Albelad As- Saudia, 17<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949, p.1)



The leader of the new coup was known for his weak personality and was unable to express his ideas. He made the coup for fear that he would be discharged from the army. The Egyptian Commission in Jeddah said that the actual mastermind of the coup was Colonel Brigadier General Bahij Kallas. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C2, The E. Com. in Jeddah to the Egyptian Dep. F.M. about the Syrian events, 17<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949)

The new coup was supported by Civil Categories within Syria, especially those that suffered from Az-Zaeem's policy. Some of them joined the coup, including Prince Hasan Al-Atrash, leader of Jabal Druze, Akram al-Hourani, leader of the Patriots, Nabih Al-Azmeh, leader of the National Party, and Rushdi Al-Kakhia, leader of People Party. (Al-Balagh. 20<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949, p. 1)

The Syrian people quietly received the news of the second coup, that the military council did not declare a state of emergency and did not impose curfew. There were no army units on the streets, as was the case in the first coup. All the detainees from the previous era were released, except for those accused in civil cases, as they were referred to competent courts. This is due to the fact that the army itself did not participate in events that were closer to treason than the coup; treason among the allies of yesterday, and the second coup- if acknowledged as a coup- did not have anything new, as it is a new military coup planned in the narrowest between senior army commanders. Al-Hennawi stressed that the coup had nothing to do with a foreign state, and that it would take over an interim government until the return of the constitution and parliamentary life. Some of the detainees were released; the newspapers that stopped under Az-Zaeem were allowed to return. He also assured the respect for all international commitments made by the country with foreign relations based on the principles of the United Nations and in line with the plan established by the Charter of the Arab League, and maintaining the brotherly relationship with Saudi Arabia. (Um Al-qura, 9<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1949, p.3)

As for the international reaction to the coup and its actions, there was general discontent over the brutality with which the coup leaders dealt with the former president and his prime minister. There was concern and tension in Washington over the fate of the pipeline agreement with Az-Zaeem's government. The British Authority considered the incident as a mere aspiration of a senior officer who, was at odds with his former boss. Both Moscow and Paris considered that there was a foreign hand behind the coup, which enabled him to act brutally, in reference to Britain. The British Foreign Office was angered by its French counterpart, accusing the broad Le Monde newspaper. The French Foreign Ministry replied that it had no reason to believe this trend. (Al-Balagh. 16<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949, p. 1)

The US State Department confirmed that there is no evidence of a foreign hand behind the coup directly or indirectly, and explained to them that the officials were self-motivated against Az-Zaeem, in order to put an end to his tyranny. (Mem. of Secretary of State to the President, Washington, 19<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1949, F. R. of USA, 1949. Vol. VI, p. 1635) It seems that the US State Department did not read the British foreign letter sent to them on 29 Sep. 1949, which carried a unity plan between Iraq and Syria (Mem. of the Dep. Of State about the Political Union of Syria and Iraq, Washington, 25th Apr. 1950, F. R. of USA, 1950. Vol. V, p.1208) under the assumption of an Iraqi hand behind the coup, unless it meant that Iraq is not a foreign party.

With the formation of the new Coalition government, the specter of the Fertile Crescent reappeared. The new government included supporters of such projects, most notably Nadhim Al-Qudsi, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Rushdi Al-Kakhia, Minister of Interior, justified by King Abdullah's acceptance of the coup. He expressed his regret over the fate of Az-Zaeem, saying that it was expected, because Az-Zaeem's ruling was based on unsound foundations, and hoped that the

leaders of the new coup learn from the mistakes of the past, indirectly referring to Az-Zaeem's relationship with Egypt and Saudi Arabia. (Al-Ahram, 18<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1949, p. 1)

The events of the second Syrian coup resaved in Iraq and Jordan were greeted. King Abdullah said that the Syrian-Jordanian unity would be achieved and the Hashemite would rule the unified state, a matter that worried both Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Egyptian Prime Minister Hussein Serri called on the Jordanian minister in Cairo and asked him about the truth of the statement, reflecting the Egyptian government's concern ( N.A. of USA, Washington D.C.711, 90F \12-249 (3) A secret Mem. on the unity of Syria and Iraq after the second Coup, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 1949)

Al-Hennawi seeks to satisfy Saudi Arabia and Egypt. He explained that the second coup was a continuation of the first coup, and aimed at solving the problems that the first coup failed to solve. As for the unity projects, Al-Hennawi said that the new government is not ready to follow King Abdullah's policies, especially that it is an interim government and cannot make any decisions regarding the country's foreign policy without consulting the people. It is considered a balanced discourse that formally satisfied Saudi and Egyptian policies. (Al-Ahram, 21<sup>st</sup> Aug. 1949, p. 1)

The Saudi government asked the Egyptian government to coordinate their policy toward Syria, in accordance with the policies of the two countries on Arab and international issues. The Egyptian prime minister summoned his commissioned minister in Syria, on 20Aug. 1949, to Alexandria, where he presented a detailed report on the second coup in a lengthy meeting. The Egyptian government requested the postponement of the meeting of the Political Committee of Arab Foreign Ministers at the Arab League, until it is assured that the Syrian government has disassociated itself from the unity projects. (Al-Mesry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Sep. 1949, p. 3)

The documents of the US State Department indicated that Nuri Al-Said wanted the United States and Britain to persuade the Saudi and Egyptian governments to accept a political unity between Syria and Iraq under the leadership of the Hashemite government. They also stated his desire that the US and Britain intervene to persuade France and Turkey to accept the unity between Syria and Iraq. (N.A. of USA, Washington D.C 890F00\10-1149(1) from the US Department of state, Washington to the US Embassy in Jeddah,17<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1949)

Britain has been keen on the draft project of the unity between Syria and Iraq, and tried to obtain US approval, but the latter confirmed that it is not comfortable with any project that changes the status of the countries of the Near East, either by force or with the support of some authorities to extend its influence. It also pointed out that it would not oppose the projects of unity based on the desire of the people. The US refused to adopt a clear position of the draft, either negatively or favorably, but preferred to let things go without its interference; so that the Iraqi and Syrian peoples could determine their fate. It waited to see the fate of their agreement with Az-Zaeem on the transfer of oil through Syrian territories. (Mem. of Dep. Of State about the Political Union of Syria and Iraq, Washington, 25<sup>th</sup> Apr. 1950, F. R. of USA, 1950. Vol. V, pp.1208- 1210)

The new Syrian government confirmed its democracy and civic character and announced its intention to hold new legislative elections in the near future. It gave an oral pledge that it would respect Syria's international commitments and that it stood on the same line with the West in the face of communism. The US recognized the new Syrian government, and hence, the US State Department negotiated with Britain and France, as the recognition of the major powers of the new government would consolidate its position, and therefore, recommended the Secretary of State to recognize the new Syrian

regime. (Mem. of Secretary of State to the President, Washington, 19<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1949, F. R. of USA, 1949. Vol. VI, pp. 1635, 1636)

Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt were satisfied with the new Syrian government through the statement made by Al-Hennawi regarding the unity projects and considered it a positive one. The Egyptian government recognized the new Syrian government and informed the Arab League and foreign countries, followed by Saudi Arabia. (N. A. of USA, Washington, D.C 890G.9111RR\10-849(3) A telegram from the American charge d' Affaires in Baghdad to the US Secretary of State)

King Abdul Aziz, then, sent a letter to King Farouk explaining the critical situation in Syria and the need to work by all means to contact the Syrian government to bring them closer to the danger they face. King Farouk chose a reliable person to contact them and to accelerate the meeting of the Arab League to achieve this aim. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1244, File 37/31/5 C4, Telegram from King Ibn Saud to King Farouq, 19<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1949)

The People's Party won the Syrian elections by a majority of members of the Constituent Assembly, and then maintained the status quo. The observers believed that there is no hope of the success of the "Fertile Crescent" or "Great Syria" projects, and that Syria would not join any of Iraq or Jordan. The People's Party made its decision in this case, and the majority of the Syrian army was against the idea of union. (Al-Balagh. 24<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1949, p. 1)

Maarouf Ad-Dwalebi explained the position of Iraq during the drafting of the Syrian constitution, that the delegations were mutually between Iraq and Syria, in an attempt to pressure on the Constituent Assembly to include unity in constitution, but they refused to submit to pressure, and put the first article of the Constitution, stating that Syria is a republic and conducted the same vote alone to avoid unity with Iraq, and it was approved. (Abdulqudous Abou Saleh, 2005, p. 133)

Thus, the second coup also came from inside of the army, under the instigation of Iraq and then Britain, or at least according to their wishes. But unfortunately, the Coup leader could not achieve what Iraq had desired, thanks to the policy of Saudi Arabia and Egypt, and also the People's Party achievement to put the constitution on the table of the Constituent Assembly. Perhaps the most prominent feature of the second Coup was not too bloody.

### **The Third Coup**

At 8:00 am on 19 December 1949, Damascus Radio broadcasted a statement issued by the Ministry of Defense to the people, stating that it was proven to the army that the Chief of General Staff, Major General Sami Al-Hennawi and his deputy, Asaad Tlass, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and some of the country's political experts, conspired to maintain the integrity of the army, and that the leaders of the second coup agreed with the Iraqi authorities to annex Syria to Iraq. The army besieged Damascus and prevented access to or exit from it. The soldiers and officers occupied the offices of the ministries and institutions as well as the telegraph and telephone buildings. They surrounded the Presidential Palace with Hashem al-Atasi, the newly elected president. The movement stopped at al-Mezzeh airport in Damascus and the rebels clashed with Sami Al-Hennawi's guard. Before the surrender of Al-Hennawi, Colonel Adib Al-Shisheqli<sup>(1)</sup>, the new coup leader, assured that this is not a coup in the sense of the concept, but a movement dealing with events in Syria, where the

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(1) Colonel Adib Al-Shisheqli was born in 1909. He joined the army in 1930 and deserted it in 1945. He participated in the revolution against the French and against the Jewish settlements in 1948. He participated in the Coup of Hosni Az-Zaem and led the battalion that overthrew Shukri al-Quwatli. (M. S. Bany Ayash, pp. 165, 166)

army decided to face Colonel Al-Hennawi, who conspired in the interest of Syria. Al-Shishekli assured his commitment to the independence of Syria. (Um Alqura, 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec. 1949, p.4)

The Egyptian Commission in Baghdad monitored that there was a great confusion and resentment in all Iraqi circles regarding the third coup that overthrew Hanawi, and considered the coup was against the unity project between Syria and Iraq. The Iraqi Prime Minister said that these incidents complicated the situation in Syria and was harmful to the Arab countries. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1244, File 37/31/5 C4, the E. Com. in Baghdad to the FO in Cairo, about the effect of Syrian events in Iraq, 26<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1949)

Syrian forces were ordered to move towards its borders with Iraq and eastern Jordan, in response to the Iraqi-Jordanian crowds on the Syrian border, and prevented cross-border movement between the three countries. The tension between Syria and both Iraq and Jordan indicates from a hidden point to the existence of a relationship between the two countries and the government of the second coup. (Albelad As- Saudia, 21<sup>st</sup> Dec. 1949, p.1)

The British minister in Damascus expressed his country's concern over the recent military coup to the Syrian Prime Minister, saying that it was a coup against an elected civilian government. The US State Department also expressed its concern about the phenomenon of frequent coups in Syria in the short term, which constitutes a dangerous precedent that could overshadow the countries of the region. It could create violence against the existing governments. (Secretary of State to the Legation in Syria, Washington, 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1950, F. R. of USA, 1950. Vol. V, p.1201)

Al-Shishekli kept Hashim Al-Atasi-who was elected as president of the Republic- and began looking for a suitable man for the stage to form the government. There was a great conflict between Al-Shishekli and Al-Atasi concerning the search for a new prime minister. The latter wanted to choose him amongst famous Syrian men, while Al-Shishekli preferred him to be easily wielded. Khaled Al-Azem was finally chosen, but he failed to unify the various political parties. He apologized to Atassi for not forming the government for several reasons, of which he only mentioned the lack of cooperation from the side of the parties. (Al-Balagh. 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec. 1949, p. 1)

The new Syrian government deposed the leaders of the second coup, but they were better off than their predecessors. When Al-Qudsi formed a constitutional government, he started with releasing them. He, then, was asked to leave the country to Lebanon and each of them was given a sum of money. Al-Qodsi has served as foreign minister for a time in the second coup government. But Al-Hennawi was shot dead three years later by the cousin of former Syrian prime minister, Mohsen al-Barazi, who was executed by Sami Al-Hennawi after the second coup. The murderer admitted that he had assassinated Al-Hennawi, taking revenge on his cousin, in the tribal way. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C2, the E. Com. in Beirut to the Egyptian Dep. F.M., about the murder of Colonel Al-Hennawy, 31<sup>st</sup> Oct. 1950)

As for Saudi Arabia's attitude towards the third coup, it considered it as an internal action that did not require intervention. Its political and strategic interests were concentrated in preserving its northern border. On the one hand, it was concerned about Syria's procrastination in extending the Tabline project through the Syrian territories. This pipeline would duplicate the production of Aramco from 350 to 700 thousand barrels. The problem for Saudi Arabia is in the transfer of the oil and not in its production, which means duplicating the income and privileges of King Abdulaziz. Therefore, King Abdulaziz approved to loan Syria 6 million \$ for the purpose of reconstruction, which in reality was a lure to Aramco to complete the pipeline in the Syrian territories. Saudi Arabia was keen on the independence of Syria and all

Arab countries, both internally and externally. The enemies of the Arab countries were also enemies of Saudi Arabia. (NO235/1/2751 Een rapport van de Nederlandse consul in Jeddah, 21 december 1949)

Saudi Arabia also detested the policy of aggression and intervention in any Arab country's affairs, and that its intervention in the events of Syria would not be except a matter of reform, without exceeding the scope of this intervention in any way. The policy of Saudi Arabia was based on an unshakeable basis; that is, to preserve the independence of every Arab country. Saudi Arabia also admitted that it could not stay on the sidelines if any state seeks intervention in Syria's affairs or to exert any type of pressure on its politicians; however, it would take a positive attitude towards it, preserving the integrity of Arab unity and the security of the Arab East. (Um Alqura, 30<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1949, p.1)

Syria witnessed governmental crises upon the third coup, where Khaled Al-Azem gave up on the formation of the government after Hashem Al-Atasi ordered him, and then assigned Nazem Al-Qudsi to form the government. The latter chose most of the members of the People's Party, and quickly Al-Qudsi and members of his government submitted resignation before the government officially began its work protesting against the state of military strangulation exercised by the army against government institutions. (Albelad As- Saudia, 26<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1949, p.1)

Syria was generally far from stability, and the repetition of coups in Syria was something that ridiculed the people themselves. Even the ordinary Syrian would expect a group of the army to meet overnight, making another coup, not finally. The people are talking about disappointment, hoping that successive coups would result in welfare or prosperity or even a recovery in the methods of governance or the country's reform. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1244, File 37/31/5 C4, the E. Com. in Damascus to the FO in Cairo, 16<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1950)

Al-Shishaki and Al-Atasi agreed that Khaled Al-Azm forms the government. The Saudi press monitored the continued tension in Syria, fearing a repetition of the governmental crisis, especially after some members of the Constituent Assembly objected to Al-Atasi's constitutional oath based on that it had nothing to do with keeping the republican system of the country. Al-Shishaki attempted to get out of the atmosphere of tension. So, he traveled to Egypt in a mission to strengthen military relations within the framework of collective Arab security, and discuss sending a Syrian military mission to study in the Egyptian institutes. (Albelad As- Saudia, 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1950, p.1)

The events of Syria beckon Egypt and Saudi Arabia to return Shukri Al-Quwatli to Syria. The Egyptian minister commissioned to Jeddah met King Abdulaziz and handed him a letter from the Prime Minister of Egypt. Talks discussed the Syrian situation. King Abdulaziz said that Shukri Al-Quwatli should return. The Egyptian Prime Minister agreed with him on the importance of exploiting the opportunity of the unrest and the people's dissatisfaction towards the situation to call for the return of Shukri Al-Quwatli, especially since the Syrians have tried the bad conditions after him. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1244, File 37/31/5 C4, the E. Com. in Jeddah to the Egyptian Dep. F.M., 27<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1949) But the leaders of the coup quickly seized control of the situation, and Shishaki made a sudden visit to Saudi Arabia, during which he met King Abdulaziz and assured him that the whole army opposed the unity between Syria and Iraq. (Ibid, 15<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1950)

King Abdulaziz considered the necessity of recognizing the new Syrian government and providing political and economic support to it, in order to preserve the stability of Syria. He concluded an agreement with the Syrian government that included a commercial agreement in addition to a loan contract on the following conditions: Saudi Arabia grants the Syrian government a good loan of 6 million \$ in three installments, the first payment, of which is due within four weeks of the signing of the agreement, the second payment is due within four months and the final payment is due within six months. The

Syrian government shall repay the loan in the period from 1955 to 1958 in three installments of two million dollars annually paid in the form of Syrian products at the international market price at the time of payment, provided that the Syrian government does not impose any tax to raise the price of the products from the world price. The two parties agreed on a list of these products, namely grains, flour, fruits, sugar, textiles and leather. The Saudi government would have the right to act upon those products by consumption or exportation to another state. (Um Alqura, 10<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1950, pp.1, 2)

The Saudi government pledged to assist the Syrian government in establishing Lattakia Port with some equipment and tools used by the Saudi government to build Jeddah Port, as well as one of the consultants hired by the Saudi government to establish the Jeddah Port. The Syrian government also pledged to supply the Saudi government with the necessary clothing of the armed forces. The economic ministers of the two sides reached a trade agreement between the two countries to facilitate the exchange of all products and give priority to the trade exchange between the two parties and to apply each other to the most privileged or the most favored state. (Albelad As- Saudia, 5<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1950, p.9)

The specter of unrest reappeared in Syria with the assassination of Colonel Muhammad Nasser, commander of the air force of the Syrian army. The assassination was carried out by the Syrian Army Intelligence Service. Colonel Muhammad Nasser was a Shi'ite Alawi, who tended to Egypt and showed sympathy towards it, and believed that it is useful to cooperate with it. He was one of the supporters of the military control over Syria. But he admitted that the military had failed in their mission and had to return to their barracks and bring all things to what they were before the first coup. According to the Egyptian commission, Mohammad Nasser's opinion disturbed the coup leaders; so, they decided to get rid of him. An Alawimember of the Constituent Assembly said: "Syria is now ruled by a terrorist regime. We are the nation's deputies who see the sword of terrorism on the necks, and each of us is threatened to death if talked openly". (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1241, File 37/31/12 C2, the E. Com. in Damascus to the Egyptian Dep. F.M., about the murder of Commander of the Air Force, 5<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1950)

In an atmosphere of tension, the Constituent Assembly became a parliamentary council on the beginning of September. Hashim Al-Atassi was elected President of the Republic. He was appointed to form the first constitutional government. When he saw the lack of cooperation from the side of the parties and bodies represented in the parliament, he formed the government from the People's Party and enjoined three of the independents; Hussein Al-Hakeem, Fawzi Sllow, and Zaki Al-Khatib. The first was a proponent of King Abdullah in Syria and the second was an army man. The government was fiercely attacked in the parliament by coalition parties and the Islamic Front, which was described by Mustafa As-Sibai, leader of the Muslim Brothers in Syria, as weak and inconsistent, and accused it of tilting the Hashemite. The new government received confidence, winning a majority of 62 votes, including ministers, while 49 abstained from attending and voting, which is a negative opposition that does not serve the cause. (Ibid, the E. Com. in Damascus to the Egyptian Dep. F.M., 12<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1950)

The unrest continued to threaten Syria. Only few days after the release of the arrested officers, the General Staff arrested Colonel Bahij Kallas and a number of military officers and placed them in Al-Mezzeh prison on charges of plotting with King Abdullah, which is a false accusation, simply because Colonel Kallas is a Christian. Christians are afraid from the idea of the unity of Arab states, because they believe that such unity is in favor of Islamic countries, while the Christian communities in that country belong to European countries uniting with them in faith or sect. In addition, the concerned Colonel was ready to travel to Washington to take up his post as a military attaché there. Thus, the charge of

treason and conspiracy against the independence of the country and the promotion of this project is used by the authority against the opponents. (Ibid, the E. Com. in Baghdad to the FO in Cairo, 12<sup>th</sup> Sep. 1950)

Meanwhile, Abdul Rahman Azzam, Secretary-General of the Arab League, received an anonymous message confirming that Syria witnesses an unstoppable movement since the third coup aiming at annexing Syria to Iraq. The members of the Iraqi Commission were seeking to acquire prominent figures in the People's Party for the idea of unity. These figures sought to overthrow the ministry of Al-Azm. Al-Shishekli negotiated with Mohsen Al-Barazi, the most loyal of the Hashemite, to form a government. This unknown confirmed that he has evidence that the number of officers loyal to the unity is on the rise constantly, and most of the orders are being issued by the Foreign Ministry in Iraq for implementation in Syria. In this regard, King Abdullah did not stay on the sideline, but was working to revive the 'Great Syria' project. The message stated that the Hashemite were working to isolate Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and to strengthen their authority over the rest of the Arab countries. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1559, File 37/31/12 C2, Ignoble letter from Cyprus to the Secretary-General of the Arab League, 5<sup>th</sup> Aug. 1950)

The sender of this message may be from the Israeli intelligence, although there have been Egyptian-Saudi fears of the Syrian unity projects, for the following reasons: First, the message is a direct incitement to the division between the Hashemite and the opponents of the unity projects, to ensure the continuation of Arab differences, and this is in the interest of only Israel. Second, the sender claimed that he was an Egyptian working for the British intelligence, and that his work allowed him to read many of the secrets, documents, and news related to the region. He believes that working with Britain does not harm the Arab cause, which contradicts with the subject of the message. (Ibid) Third, the message is from Cyprus, which is a field of work for Israeli intelligence. Fourth, the message contradicted the position of the army of the Union of Syria and Iraq. The Egyptian Commission stressed that the army is unanimous to reject the idea of unity with Iraq, yet it is still divided in terms of internal conditions. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1244, File 37/31/5 C4, Report of the E. Com. in Damascus, 16<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1950) Fifth, among the reasons stated for the third coup was the plot made by Al-Hennawi and the leaders of Iraq to enjoin Syria in a unity under Hashemite. This means that the leaders of the coup denounce the unity; hence, it is not reasonable to promote it later, and this may be what Saudi Arabia based its policy on towards the leaders of the third coup.

Thus, the third coup came from the inside of the army as well and overthrew the government of the second coup without bloodshed, but it was a coup against an elected civilian government, which raised global concern and mistrust towards the group of colonels who led the coup. Although they announced that they came to eliminate the draft unity with Iraq adopted secretly by Al-Hennawi, they did not provide concrete evidence of their opposition to the project after their arrival to power. The specter of unity was still a concern for the Egyptian government, while the Saudi government was convinced of the position of the Al-Shishekli and his comrades on the unity. King Abdulaziz recognized them and then helped them. This marked the first dispute between the Saudi and Egyptian policies concerning the Syrian issue. The most important characteristic of the third coup was that it was a cradle of a military dictatorship, and all those who stood against it, even members of the army, were either killed, imprisoned or deported.

#### **The Fourth Coup**

On 29 Oct. 1951, Syria witnessed a new peaceful coup led by Colonel Adib Al-Shishekli in secret. Hashim Al-Atassi was forced to resign from the presidency. His government also resigned and entrusted the executive and legislative powers to

the leader Fawzi Slow, assisted by the Trusteeship Council working on behalf of the ministers. The Foreign Ministry issued a letter on the new conditions to the foreign missions in Damascus. The British, French, Turkish, Italian, Saudi, Jordanian and Lebanese delegations responded by recognizing what happened in Syria as an internal action. Egypt remained unreserved. (Um Alqura, 30<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1951, p. 4)

Recognizing the third and fourth coups, it becomes clear that the fourth coup was the completion of the third one, where it was supposed to get rid of Shishekly's men of the second coup, either militants and politicians, after the third coup, but he got rid of the militants and feared to get rid of Hashim Atassi, who arrived to the presidency by popular electoral will just before the third coup. It was difficult to overthrow him at this time; so, Shishakli kept Atassi as President, until he had the chance to get rid of him by a fourth coup.

Upon the fourth coup, the Syrian regime became predominantly military, because Shishakli got rid of civilian politicians from the field, and chose Fawzi Sallo a president of the Republic and assigned to the presidency of the Council of Ministers also, Colonel Alshishkli appointed himself Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State and the Chief of General Staff, but he remained the true ruler of the country. The Egyptian Commission evaluated the situation, considering that Syria is under the weight of a military dictatorship. Many of the country's leaders were in prison. The newspapers were subjected to harsh censorship. They issued according to the army's orders. When the police learned of the students' attempt to sign a petition demanding the release of the detainees, the tanks surrounded the university and warned that any attempt to interfere in politics would mean putting them in prison and closing the university. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1559, File 37/31/13, the E. Com. in Damascus to the Egyptian Dep. F.M., 18<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1952)

Iraq took a hostile position towards the leaders of the fourth coup, while Saudi Arabia took a supportive position, considering what happened as an internal action; it should not interfere, but took a neutral position. Despite the Egyptian Commissioner complain against the leaders of the coup, he said in a report: "the militants are a scourge, no doubt, and they are like a disobeying son whom you cannot deny or renounce. Therefore, I advise against cutting the link completely with the military, because staying close to them would allow us to monitor their actions and advise them when necessary. This link would hold them to appreciate our presence in case of any danger. I am not afraid of the military as much as I fear the machinations of foreign countries, from which the military may not find escape from their arms if they found themselves in the field alone. Political parties are hostile to them and the Arab countries abandoned them as well." (Ibid, the E. Com. in Damascus to the Egyptian Dep. F.M., 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan. 1952)

Concerning the relationship of Adib Al-Shishekli (the fourth coup leader) to the foreign countries, Chomsky mentioned that Al-Shishekli came by a coup and established a new military dictatorship in 1951, secretly supported by the US government. (N. Chomsky, 1996, p. 200) No wonder that the US was impressed by the strong personality of Al-Shishekli and his ability to remain in power for two years in a volatile country that witnessed three coups in the nine months preceding the Al-Shishekli third coup. Hence the US Commission recommended the positive support and encouragement of Al-Shishekli and the government, and providing limited military support and advice to ensure its continuation, which would strengthen the US position in Syria and the Near East. (The Minister in Syria to the Secretary of State, Damascus, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 1950, F R of USA, 1950. Vol. V, pp.1215- 1217)

On 20 Jan. 1952, Syria witnessed the first antagonist action against the army, following the fourth coup. Demonstrations were held in Damascus by high school and university students. The demonstrators chanted slogans against



the army and called for the fall of Al-Shishekli, the tyrant, and his followers. They also threw stones at the soldiers, who responded by shooting the students and beating them hard, even the female students. The demonstrators moved to the cities of Aleppo and Homs. Many were arrested and schools and universities closed. The Muslim Brothers organized a demonstration in Al-Hamidiya Market and chanted against the common defense and foreign colonization, which upset the military. Al-Shishekli accused the Muslim Brothers of orchestrating all these demonstrations, with the aim of challenging the authority of the army and spreading chaos. (E.F.M. Doc., Portfolio 1559, File 37/31/13, the E. Com. in Damascus to the Egyptian Dep. F.M., 22<sup>th</sup> Jan. 1952)

With the rise of oppositions against the military rule in Syria, the coup leaders said that the army is a national body that had the right to guide its policy, and it included a number of educated people who were able to manage the country. Al-Shishekli justified the military rule in festival of armament support saying: "The task of the army after the Palestinian crisis became a national duty... The Syrian army made the greatest sacrifice and fought without weapons and took away the few fortified positions from the hands of the Zionist usurpers and gifted martyrs as well... These leaders are responsible for the independence and security of this country... The army has the right and duty to not to allow anyone to put obstacles in their way to progress. The Egyptian commissioned Minister, then, commented that Al-Shishekli mentioned the names of the martyrs and forgot to mention the names of the fortified sites that his army had stolen as if he was fabricating. (Ibid, 24<sup>th</sup> Feb. 1952)

Responding to Egypt's continued disregard to recognize the new Syrian regime, Al-Shishekli turned to Saudi Arabia, which recognized him and offered him a loan. Al-Shishekli declared that his coup aims to prevent the annexation of Syria to Iraq and the elimination of the axis that works to achieve the idea of unity. Egypt considered the Saudi Arabian policy as to support the military tyranny in Syria with the aim of creating an anti-Iraq bloc, in favor of the personal interest over the public interest, a policy that leads to the division of the Arabs and is in the interest of only Israel. (Ibid, 31<sup>st</sup> March. 1952)

It is noteworthy that the policy pursued by Saudi Arabia and criticized by Egypt was the same as the Egyptian-Saudi policy towards the three previous Syrian coups. However, it appears that the fear from military coups began to dominate the Egyptian political leadership at the time.

On 6 April 1952, a legislative decree was issued to dissolve the political parties in Syria, while a new legislation was issued on the organization of political parties and organizations. Al-Shishekli did what he wanted, being so confident that the parties' leaders would not move a finger. In addition, he humiliated them, and insisted on seizing their properties and giving it to charities. In his memorandum, the Egyptian Commissioner mentioned that the military leaders in Syria have been stubborn and spoke openly about Franco's success in Spain and Ataturk's in Turkey, and that the one-party government had achieved what the multi-party government did not. Therefore, Syria was ready for a one party to be formed by the military, and the country may be governed by a small parliamentary council. It is not excluded that the president and the prime minister may be military. The temporary dictatorship, resulted from a military coup could turn into a permanent one. (Ibid, 7<sup>th</sup> April. 1952)

The Egyptian Commission in Damascus also monitored the praise of the great countries, especially the US and France, for the new policy of Al-Shishekli. (Ibid, 19<sup>th</sup> April. 1952) It is a strange behavior on the part of Western democratic countries, which may be justified by the fact that the ideas of some of the dissolved Syrian parties tend to be side by side with the Soviet Union, but this is not a sufficient justification, the most convincing justification is that

democracy in Syria and its counterparts might deprive western countries of gains that were easy to achieve under unpopular dictatorial regimes.

Al-Shishkeli continued to control secretly, putting Fawzi Sllow in the face, and thought of appointing a civilian prime minister who would accept cooperation with the military, by directing him according to their interests. All major figures rejected this position, foremost among them former Prime Minister Khaled al-Azm. Faced with this refusal, Al-Shishkeli found that Fawzi Sllow would retain the post of prime minister alongside the presidency pending an agreement with a person who would accept the post according to military conditions. The Egyptian commissioned minister said that the change is ostensibly intended to inspire people that the country is on the road to returning to civilian rule. He expected Al-Shishkeli to continue his policy of running the government behind the curtain. He said: "If Fawzi Sllow is regarded as a nominal ledgerthe, Al-Shishkeli became the actual person, despite his pretense of asceticism and announcing his desire to remain as Chief of Staff. His ambitions know no limits, and he often forgets his humility and faced Fawzi Sllow, the peaceful man who managed to bend to the storm". (Ibid, 8<sup>th</sup> June. 1952)

There is no doubt that the pattern referred to ensures that Al-Shishkeli controlled the events secretly, which ensures his survival. If public anger from the government emerges, he would make a new coup, in which he changes President Fawzi Sllow and continues to control things secretly.

In this way, Al-Shishkeli overthrew the civilian politicians and continued to control things secretly, putting Fawzi Sllow in the face, but he was often forced to rule a blatant individual military rule, which made him bear the negatives of the existing government. The Saudi government adopted a policy consistent with its policy of the three previous Syrian coups, although more positive than before, which strengthened the position of Al-Shishkeli.

## CONCLUSIONS

The successive military coups of Syria overshadowed the Arabian East in a critical period of its contemporary history. The Saudi official and press positions were characterized by moderation towards Syria's coups, and did not contest its legitimacy as internal actions, though it indulged to face the 'Fertile Crescent' and the 'Great Syria' projects. However, the realization of the strategic dimension of Syria and the importance of uniting the Arabs has not been fully clarified, and hence the idea of placing the Zionist entity between a hammer and anvil did not come clear.

As for the hypothesis of the presence of a foreign hand in the coups of Syria, the study suggests that there is an American hand behind the coup of Husni Az-Zaeem and Al-Shishkeli (the fourth coup). Both are a model of a military dictatorship that completely contradicts the Western democratic model. It may seem odd that the United States supported such dictatorial models. Syria and its counterparts could deprive the United States of gains that are easy to achieve under unpopular dictatorships. Iraq and Britain left a clear imprint on the Sami Al-Hennawi's coup. The third coup was a blow to the Iraqi-Syrian unity project. However, the obsession of unity remained in Saudi-Syrian relations. The Saudi policy followed a more positive one towards Al-Shishkeli's coup and extended a helping hand to prevent unity projects with the Hashemite family in Iraq and Jordan.

It turned out that Syria's successive coups were accompanied by the absence of national awareness, on the one hand, and the preference of personal interests of the royal thrones, on the other, which led to the creation of cold Arab conflicts between the Hashemite, on the one hand, and the Egyptian and Saudi, on the other. The treachery on the

Palestinian cause was a ready-made charge that the parties would acquit at the expense of one party at the expense of another. This is still a raging example among the Arab brethren, so Israel has enjoyed a good life in which it has built its internal affairs, having secured the side of its enemies by engaging in useless side-by-side disputes.

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