

Observation no: 89 (Arab Israeli War)

Country-year: Syria - 1947

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

Syria began its process for independence from France after French General Catroux declared the independence of the country in 1941. However, it is only after the total withdrawal of the French forces in 1946 that the country gained its full independence.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

No.²

However, the political and economic weaknesses of Syria during the 1945-1949 parliamentary democracy period and corrupted regime would lead to three military coups in 1949.³

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

No.

Shukri al Quwatli from the Nationalist Bloc was elected President after the 1943 elections.⁴

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

Yes.

The Syrian armed forces, like the Lebanese, developed from the *Troupes Spéciales du Levant* established during the French mandate. The religious and ethnic minorities of Syria were overwhelmingly represented first in the rank and file, and then in the officer corps, as the French encouraged the minorities, such as the Alawis, Druze, Ismailis, Christians, or Kurds, to enlist in a typical "divide and rule" colonialist policy.

¹ Torrey, Gordon H, p. 34.

² Verified in Luttwak, Edward. *Coup d'État. A practical Handbook*. Table II Basic List of Coups and Attempted Coups, 1945-78. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979, p. 205.

³ Torrey, Gordon H, pp. 115-122.

⁴ Torrey, Gordon H. *Syrian Politics And The Military: 1945-1958*. Ohio State University Press, 1964, p. 34.

Moreover, the army represented an opportunity for social advancement for the mainly poor and rural minorities. On the contrary, the urban Sunni Muslim majority preferred to work in the landowning and commercial sectors than to serve in the army as this was seen as serving France's imperialist goals.⁵

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

Although initially the army leadership resembled the previous French *Troupes Spéciales du Levant* composed of French and Syrian officers from the ruling class, sons of peasants and merchants with a more Pan-Arab ideology integrated the officer corps after the war years.⁶

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

The socialist and particularly Pan-Arab ideologies greatly influenced the students of the Homs Military Academy where the officer corps was trained. Colonel Jamal Faysal was an influential instructor at the Academy directly influenced by the Ba'ath Party and Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt.⁷

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited. Moreover, in the first years after the independence, the armed forces remained weak and small.⁸

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

⁵ Van Dam, Nikolaos. *The Struggle for Power in Syria. Politics and Society under Asad and the Ba'th Party*. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1996, pp. 26-27.

⁶ Torrey, Gordon H, pp. 44-45.

⁷ Torrey, Gordon H, pp. 44-45.

⁸ Torrey, Gordon H, p. 44.

No.

The constitution of 1930 established a parliamentary republic in Syria modeled after the French system. The president was elected by the parliament and the ministry nominated by the president.⁹

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

Again, I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited. However, in the early years, the military leaders as well as political leaders initially originated from the same influential families. Nevertheless, the armed forces did not constitute a platform to launch a political career.¹⁰

⁹ Torrey, Gordon H, p. 35.

¹⁰ Torrey, Gordon H, p. 44.