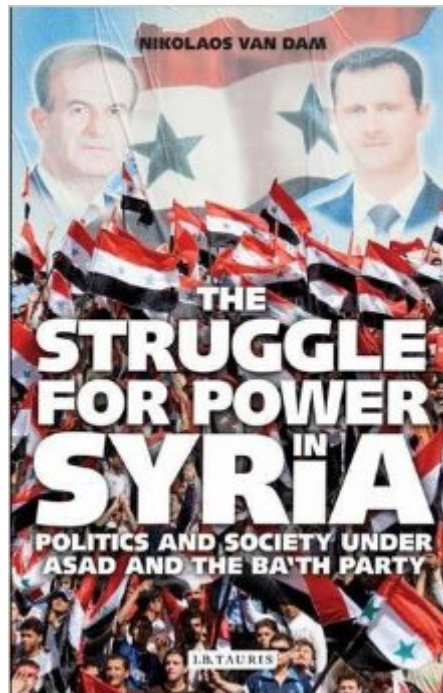


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The Struggle For Power In Syria: Politics And Society Under Asad And The Ba'th Party



Synopsis

In the midst of turmoil in the Middle East, and in the face of protests and demonstrations from Homs to Damascus and other places all over Syria, the Ba'th Party and Bashar al-Asad are truly caught up in a struggle to hold onto power in Syria. In this important book, Nikolaos van Dam explores and explains how the Asad dynasty has come to rule Syria for about half a century and keep the complex patchwork of minorities, factions and opponents securely under control for such an unprecedented long period. Through an in-depth examination of the role of sectarian, regional and tribal loyalties, van Dam traces developments within the Ba'th party and the military and civilian power elite from the 1963 Ba'thist takeover up to the present day.

Book Information

Paperback: 288 pages

Publisher: I.B.Tauris; Revised edition (June 15, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1848857608

ISBN-13: 978-1848857605

Product Dimensions: 4.1 x 0.6 x 11.1 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (6 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #632,353 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #94 in [Books > History > Middle East > Syria](#) #555 in [Books > Textbooks > Humanities > History > Middle East](#) #1227 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Middle Eastern](#)

Customer Reviews

This book is quite short, which is just as well because it is written in a style which seems pedantic, making me think the author was steeped in Syrian politics to a degree that he did not wish or perhaps even feel in his heart to cause any offence to any parties. He works hard not to take sides. Short it may be, but the author has read extensively documentation in several languages including many lengthy sets of memoirs in Arabic. The final chapter summarizes his views of some of these memoirs, and is well worth reading. This book focuses mainly on the rise to power of Hafiz al Asad (Assad senior) and suggests that through the sixties and seventies the power of the Assad dynasty (my word not his) was established at times with great brutality, but Van Dam seems to come to the same conclusion reached by Patrick Seale in his excellent biography of Assad, that if

Assad wanted to stay in power he had no choice. The tale of this book is the rivalry between tribal and religious groups, most especially the Sunni majority and Alawi, Druze and Christian minorities. Interestingly, when the French were in power in the first half of the twentieth century the Sunni elite disdained military careers, they did not want to be French lackeys. Others, like the Alawis from Latakia, on the Mediterranean coast north of Lebanon, were relatively uneducated and from rural areas, and had no choice. So when the French left their military strength was an advantage, and eventually they formed a ruling elite. What Van Dam says, however, was that sectarian politics was to some extent forced on them because the different sociological, religious and tribal groups had different interests, that was just the way it went. This book says very little, except in passing about Syria's relations with Israel, Egypt, the US. If you want to know about all that read Seale's book first.

I found this book to be an invaluable reference explaining the history of the alignment of minorities behind the Alawite regime. However, I was looking for an assessment of tribal influence on modern Syrian society, and information about how the tribes align behind or against the Alawite regime.

Somewhat difficult to read because of the unfamiliar names, the book is worth reading because it provides the reader the background and political history of how Syria came to be the country that it is today. Am able to understand how and why the nonviolent struggle exists today as well as the disparity throughout the country.

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