## Secular Trends in a Sectarian Society: A Special Report
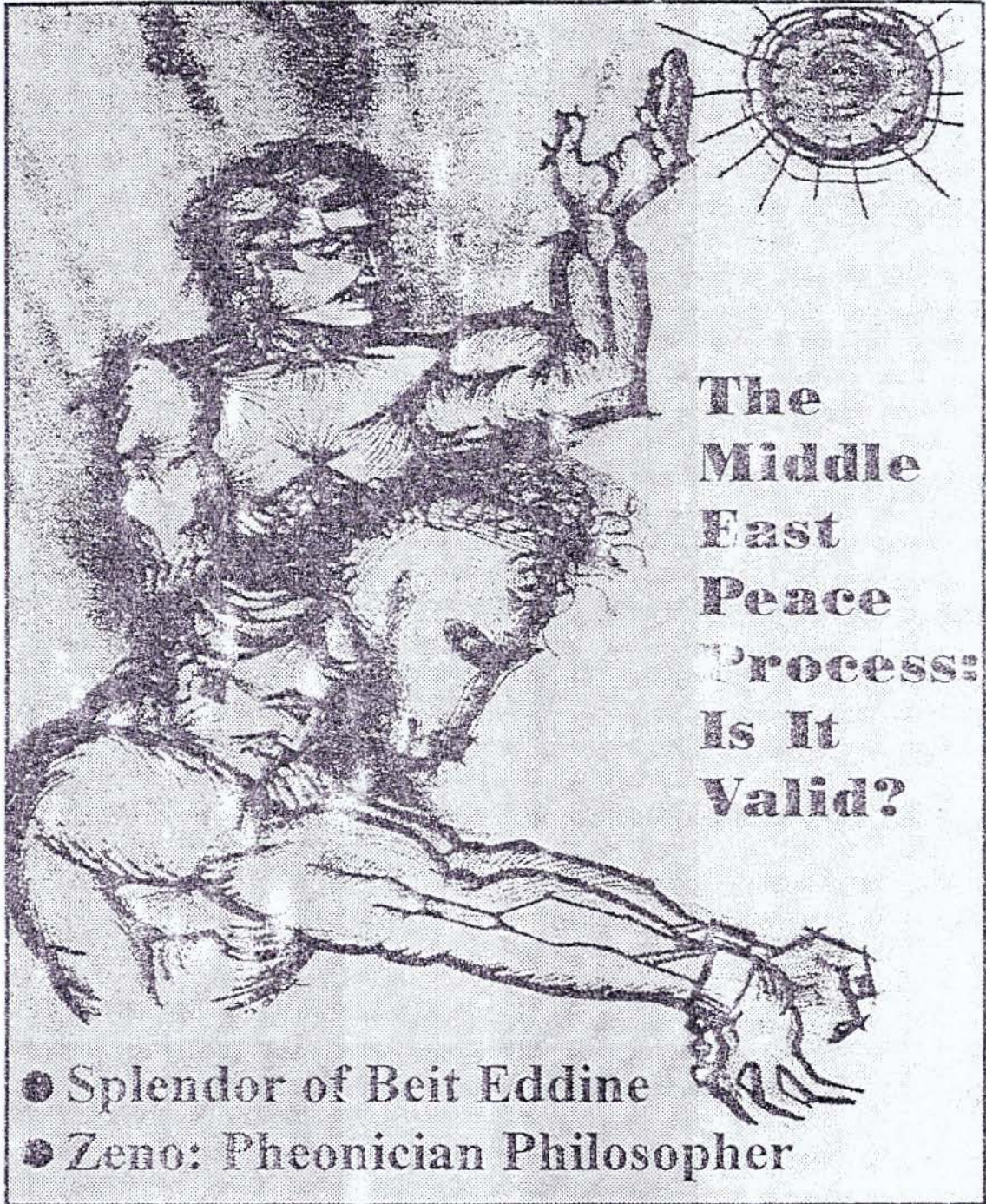


The Middle East Peace Process: Is It Valid?

- Splendor of Beit Eddine
- Zeno: Pheonician Philosopher

Secret 1919 Report Rejected Zionist Demands

## A Reply From Roula Aboud to Daniel Pipes

# Seek Scholarly Truth not Propaganda

### By Roula Aboud

A recent book authored by Dr. Daniel Pipes appeared in the market in 1990 entitled Greater Syria. In the book, Dr. Pipes generally reiterated the same fallacies about the SSNP (as he did in his article published in the International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies in 1988),[1] and particularly the fallacy of confusion regarding the concepts of "Greater Syria" and "Natural Syria."[2] I am astonished that a researcher of Dr. Pipes' calibre has done no genuine research about a party such as the SSNP whose existence is there in Lebanon and Damascus available to any one interested in real knowledge.

Dr.Pipes' method, which should have assumed socio-political characteristics, involves merely some secondary and false papers which he labels 'documents'. It is ridiculous and unfair, in my view, to address the SSNP, (or any party for that matter) in that way instead of a field study and reference to the basic sources, namely, the complete works of Antun Sa'adeh who established the SSNP and was its leader and philosopher. It is high time for Pipes and others to know the real facts about the SSNP.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SSNP

#### A. Sa'adeh's Conception of the Nation

Sa'adeh's philosophy of Social Na-

> "National Syria is an indisputable social, economic, psychological, historical and cultural fact sanctified in many scholarly works of which Mr. Pipes himself is quite aware."

tionalism is unthinkable unless an account of his conception of the 'nation' is firstly outlined. The first formulation of the concept of nation is outlined in Sa'adeh's book, the Rise of Nations (nushu' al-Umam), which he wrote in 1936. During this period, Lebanon was under the French Mandate. In the seventh chapter Sa'adeh defines the nation as the most perfect community.[3] In distinction from the community of village or city, the nation is the community of a whole territory. Sa'adeh's approach to nationalism is neither political nor economic, but fundamentally sociological. To him, the nation is not the state but the civil community of a country.

In the 1930s, Sa'adeh, in a lecture about "National Education" in Damascus, emphasises the idea that the nation is the principle of the race and not the race the principle of the nation,[4] meaning that it is scientifically wrong to define the nation in terms of one race. Every nation, Sa'adeh wrote, is a mixture of many races or ethnic groups. He asserted that the nation is a community of a whole territory (land) regardless of race, origin and religion. A nation,

therefore, may consist of many different religious groups and different ethnic communities with many different languages or antagonistic classes. The USA is a stark example of such a nation.

### B. The Basic Principles of the SSNP

The basic principles of the SSNP are meant to be the minimum factual and moral ideas that every Syrian should equip him/herself with so that a new civic community could emerge answering to the fundamental problems within the Syrian society. Sa'adeh's analysis of Syria, led him to the conclusion that the venue of all social diseases is the individual in the sense that the Syrian individual (whether in Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan or the other entities of geographical Syria) is either sectarian, racist, tribal or politically loyalist.

In Syria, there exists many antagonistic trends which have endangered its very existence. The possibility of the eruption of religious, racial internal violence is always present. These conflicting religious and racial interests are always exploitable by foreign powers, to the disadvantage of the Syrian people as a whole.
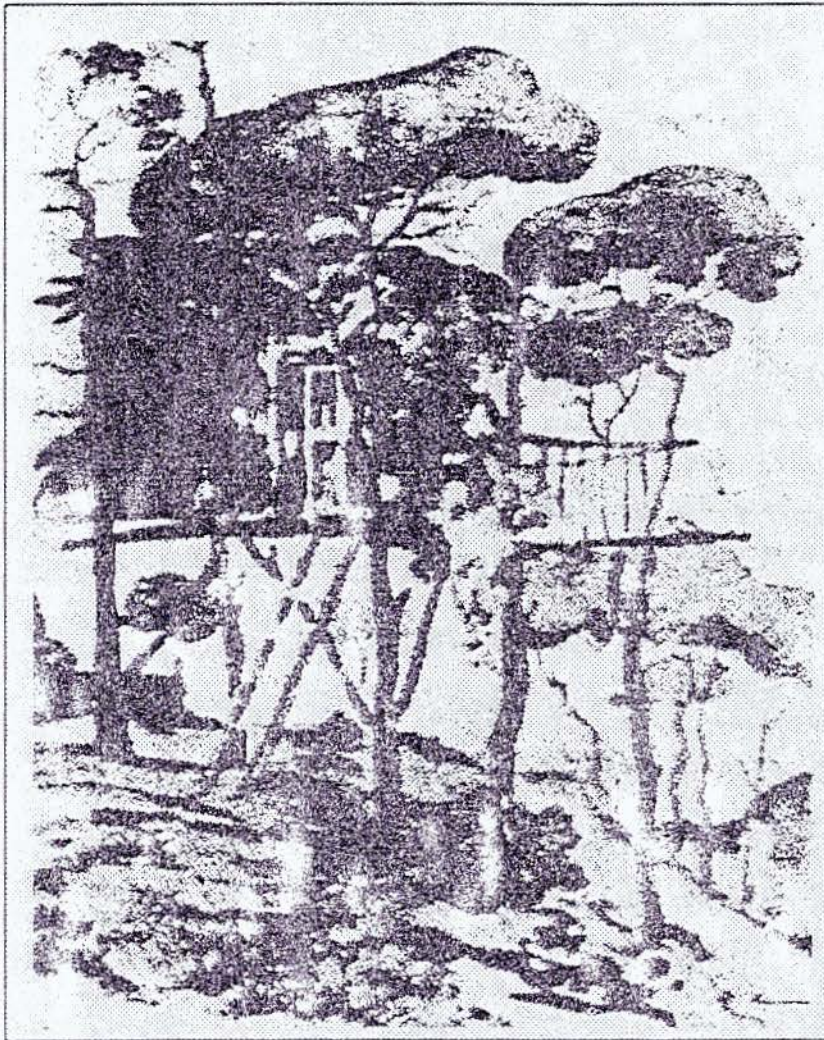
This is why Sa'adeh (a Syrian from Lebanon) declared that the start-

ing point of a fundamentally genuine solution is not political but societal.[5] It is to invite the members of the community to the understanding of their societal problems and the working out of a basically domestic solution in terms of an awareness of some funda-

north-east, the Mediterranean Sea in the west and the Arabian Desert in the south. Also called the Syrian fertile crescent with the Island of Cyprus being its star.
6. The Syrian nation is one community.
7. The Syrian Social National Move-

monwealth in the future, as soon as the Basic Principles are approved by the majority of the Syrians.

## C. Sa'adeh's Conception of the State

Besides the Basic Principles which depict Sa'adeh's conception of civic society, there are reform principles by which Sa'adeh formulated his conception of political society, that is the state. The following are the five reform principles:
1. Separation of the state from religion [the secular state].
2. The prohibition of the clergy from interfering in nationally political and judicial matters [the expert state].
3. The removal of all sectarian barriers [the egalitarian state].
4. The removal of feudalism, and the organisation of the national economy on the basis of production, justice for labor, and the maintenance of the interest of the nation and the national state, the productive state.
5. The establishment of a strong army effective in defending the nation and the national territory, namely the self-defensive state.

To measure the progressiveness of Sa'adeh's intellectuality, let us just mention a few illustrations about the 'state' as conceived in the Middle East:

The Lebanese Republic is based on sectarianism as the President must always be a Christian Maronite, the Prime Minister a Moslem Sunnite, and the Chairman of Parliament a Moslem Shiite.

Israel allows Jews and only Jews into the presidency, Ministry and the different departments of state.

The Hashimite Kingdom of Jordan has the King at the head of state and government.

In Syria and Iraq, Islam is the religion of that state.

Sa'adeh conceives of the state in terms of modern notions such as secularism, specialisation, equality, productiveness and security; noting that this state cannot exist except on the basis that the general trends of public mentality have seen changed customs and ways of thinking consistent with the substance of the Basic

mentally common facts and moral principles. The following are Sa'adeh's proposed basic principles:
1. Syria is the property of all Syrians who constitute one complete nation.
2. The Syrian cause is an independent national cause.
3. The Syrian cause comprises the Syrian people, the Syrian land and their relatedness.
4. The Syrian nation is the unity of the Syrian people which is the outcome of societal intermixture during a long history.
5. The Syrian homeland is the geographic environment in which the Syrian nation has evolved. It extends from the Taurus Range in the north-west, the Zagros Range in the

ment of revival derives its spirit from the Syrian talents and the virtues of its cultural political national history.
8. The interest of the Syrian community is prior to any other interest.

The essence of these principles is their underlying meaning of internal societal peace and external national security with regard to foreign powers.

The democratic direction of the SSNP is evident in the Basic Principle, as they all refer to the people (community, society, or nation). Employing the concept of "commonwealth" we can say that the Basic Principles involve a morally social commonwealth. This is a necessary requirement to a building of a healthy political com-

Principles

## DEFINING TERMS

### A. Social versus Socialism

In the first part of his article, entitled *Radical Politics and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party*, Daniel Pipes cautions us against misnaming the SSNP "National Socialist" (Nazi) but rather "Social Nationalist".[6] In an earlier sentence, however, he maintains that "Saadeh reflected the fascist thinking of the 1930's."[7] Mr Pipes fails to clarify the grave difference the exists here. How is it possible for a party called Social Nationalist to maintain a Nationalist Socialist philosophy with its philosopher reflecting the fascist thinking of the 1930s?

The SSNP has a philosophy definitively called social nationalism. Its very name implies that it is neither political nationalism (fascism), nor racial nationalism, nor religious nationalism, nor national socialism.

Whereas social nationalism emphasises the concept of society, political nationalism dogmatises the concept of the state, racial nationalism asserts the concept of the race, and religious nationalism advocates the concept of the sect (sectarianism).
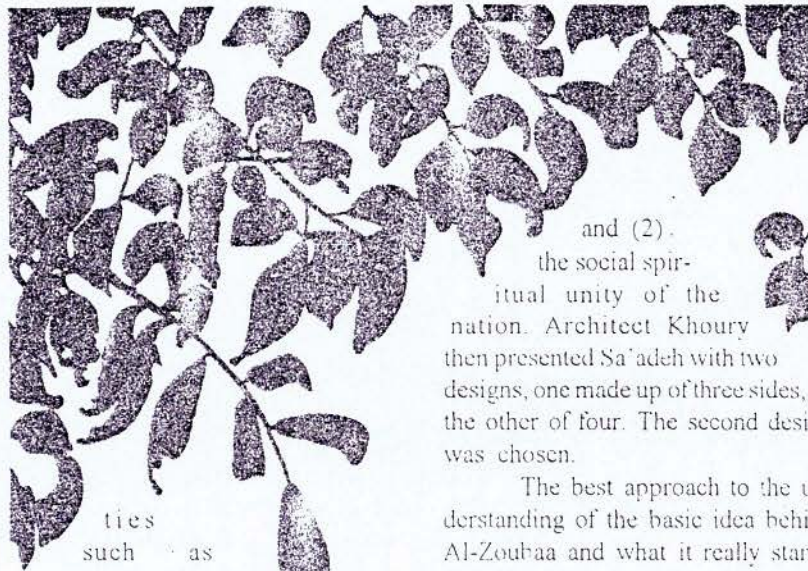
### B. Social versus Political

In 1948, Sa'adeh established a cultural forum whose main aim was to discuss the philosophy and objectives of the SSNP. One essential question raised then was "What is the SSNP"? Sa'adeh's reply was that the SSNP is not a political party in the ordinary and academic senses.[8] It is a social party and its nationalism is Social Nationalism.

The SSNP is not concerned with sheer politics because the real problem in Syria lies not in the state (or mini states) but in the civil society. As long as the civil society is divided along religious and racial lines, fair democratic representation in the sphere of politics is not possible. As long as the national community is divisible, the state is divisible and vulnerable to both domestic and external dangers.

Furthermore, Sa'adeh had described the SSNP as an open party and not a closure.[9] Closed political parties such as Marxist, Nazist and Sectarian parties are such in that they are partisan in representation. In stark contrast, the SSNP is open to all citizens in Syria regardless of religion, race, sex, class, and territory.

Within the membership of the SSNP one can observe and feel the spirit of communality and sociability bringing together into one community members from different races, religions and ethnic groups. In this framework, politics is pushed into the background, as a service in the interest of the people, and the civil society is the essence of the SSNP's democratic direction.

## THE FASCIST/NAZIST LABEL

### A. The First Accusation: Zoubaa versus Swastika

Because of the "similarity" in shape between the German Swastika and the emblem of the SSNP, the Zoubaa (Cyclone), some writers have claimed that the SSNP is Nazist. Actually, this accusation is not new: the first accusation dates back to the early establishing years of the SSNP. Let us take a detailed look at the true meaning of Al-Zoubaa.

Through a symbol, Sa'adeh had wanted to present his people a new emblem they could relate to spiritually. Consequently, he appointed architect and artist Bahij Khoury to design a symbol which would embody (1) the spiritual knowledge of Syria and (2) the social spiritual unity of the nation. Architect Khoury then presented Sa'adeh with two designs, one made up of three sides, the other of four. The second design was chosen.

The best approach to the understanding of the basic idea behind Al-Zoubaa and what it really stands for is to try the following intellectual experiment.

Think of a territory X and think of multi-cultural ethnic groups settled in this territory X. Furthermore, think of the different citizens being tolerant towards each other, so that the daily process of interaction could continue

without any obstacles. The general principle of Al-Zoubaa reflects the process of interaction which in territory X leads to the rise of a single common society.

The structure of Al-Zoubaa consists of an artistic amalgamation of the Crescent, the symbol of the Syrian Mohammadans, and the Cross, the symbol of Christianity. This amalgamation represents the spiritual and social unity of the Syrian people through the intermixture and intermarriage of its two main religious groups giving rise to a tolerant society. The Swastika, on the other hand, is an archaic symbol of the Aryan race and its superiority over other human races.

Red in colour, Al-Zoubaa is located in the middle of the flag inside a white circle surrounded by a black triangle: red symbolising the dawn of national unity emerging with a (white) day whose brightness destroys the (dark black) night of social discrimination and domestic intolerance. Next to the four sides of Al-Zoubaa, we usually find these four words: Freedom, Duty, Discipline, Power. In short, Al-Zoubaa works and asserts its constructiveness, not by social servitude, but by social tolerance.

## B. The Second Accusation: Sa'adeh's leadership qualities

In an interview in 1941, Sa'adeh was quizzed about his position as sole authority of the SSNP. He replied that during the establishing years of the party, Syria was under a foreign mandate, and the divisions and social diseases that surrounded him were very powerful and effective. Taking on sole authority was the only practical way to safeguard the SSNP from these fundamental problems.

Sa'adeh's method was democratic rather than fascist. Each member in the SSNP had the right to debate the ideology and principles of the party prior to joining and once in the party accepted Sa'adeh's undisputed leadership not for its charisma but because it was essential under the circumstances.

Moreover, if the SSNP was in fact a fascist party than other fascist leaders should have taken Sa'adeh's place after his death. In other words, sole authority would have been maintained at least in principle. But that did not happened and instead power was distributed between three governing bodies: the Supreme Council, the Presidency, and the High Court.

## C. The Third Accusation: The SSNP as Anti-Semitic

Before 1948, that is before the establishment of the state of Israel in Palestine, Sa'adeh pre-empted the occurrence. He watched while illegal Jewish immigrants arrived from Europe in fulfilment of the inauspicious Balfour Declaration. In response, he declared: "The greatest enemy that fights us in our homeland is the Jews." What is worth noting here is that Sa'adeh did not say that the greatest enemy that *we must fight* is the Jews. The war was declared from the Jews side and his response was a responsible one by international and national standards.

Sa'adeh's primary concern was the national security of Palestine as part of Syria. If the invasion of Palestine had been performed by a group of people called X, then he would have stood up in defence of the land against group X. In the case of Palestine, Zionism was the intruder.

Unlike Hitler, Sa'adeh showed no racial prejudice toward the Jews. The SSNP, as stated earlier, is not racist nor anti-Semitic. Palestine is part of National Syria and it is now under occupation by the Jews. After Palestine is freed, there will remain no opposition to Jews.

## D. The Fourth Accusation: The Salute

Unlike the Nazi salute where the arm is drawn straight forward to the front of the face, the SSNP salute involves the raising of the arm to form two adjacent right angles, so that a 90 degrees angle is formed between the top part of the arm and the side of the body and another 90 degrees angle between the top part of the arm and the elbow. The

SSNP salute, to be clear, resembles the instrument used in building to measure the straightness of the building to make sure of its ability to hold up.

Symbolically speaking, the SSNP salute depicts an open palm representing societal peace, while the arm represents the struggle for the creation of a strong, dedicated, solid nation.

## E. The Fifth Accusation: An Agent of Nazism/Fascism

Pipes and others like to discredit the party by labelling it as a fascist organisation and by accusing it of being the agent of the Nazi and Fascist governments of Germany and Italy. This is completely unfounded. As one scholar has discovered: "...there was apparently no tangible evidence to prove its [i.e., SSNP] subservience to Germany and Italy.10 That same scholar went on to say that "Were the party really an agent of the German and Italian government, its persecution by the Vichy regime with the approval of the Axis powers would have been quite unlikely."[11]

### GREATER SYRIA versus NATURAL SYRIA

Daniel Pipes writes in his article: "The third key characteristic of the SSNP is Pan-Syrian Nationalism, the goal of building a greater Syrian State." He adds: "Greater Syria is for the Syrians and the Syrians are a complete nation."

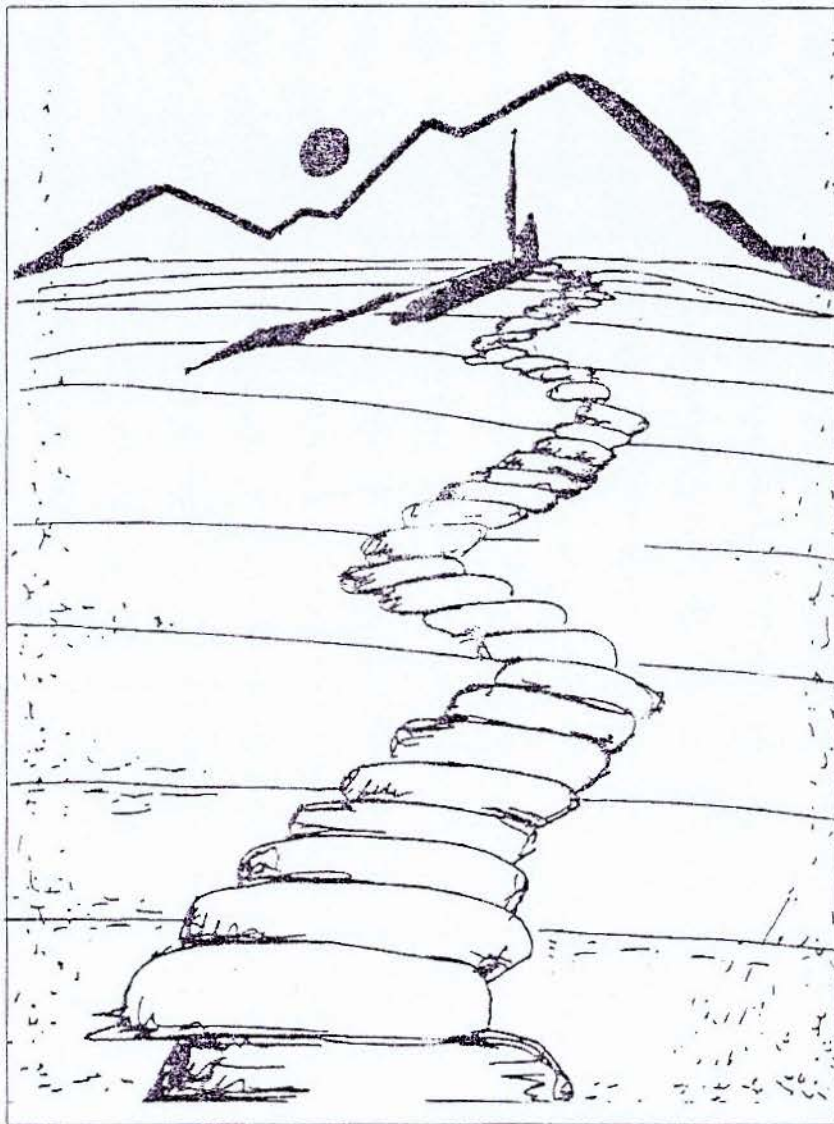I feel that here as well Mr. Pipes has committed three grave errors:[12]
1. Sa'adeh's did not use the term "Greater Syria" in his writings and explanatory notes. The first Basic Principle simply says: Syria [and not Greater Syria] is the property of all Syrians who constitute one complete nation.
2. Mr. Pipes failed to distinguish between Greater Syria as a political plan initiated by King Abdullah of Jordan and Sa'adeh's geographical Syria as a fundamental socio-national reality reflecting the unity of the Syrian people and land.
3. Greater Syria, whether associated with Antun Sa'adeh or King Abdullah.

is depicted by Mr Pipes as an imperial idea symbolising the aggrandisement of present-day Syria. This is a total and unfair representation of the Syrian idea. National Syria is an indisputable social, economic, psychological, historical and cultural fact sanctified in many scholarly works of

tion? In fact, Sa'adeh never claimed that Syria is part of the "Arab nation" but rather of the Arab World.

Pipes also mentions an SSNP leaflet which contained the following two slogans: "Syrian nationalism against Arab nationalism" and "The SSNP supports the Fertile Crescent, a

'Arab Nation' differs from the concept of 'Arab Front'. One may reject the earlier and accept the latter quite easily.[12]

The SSNP regards the idea of Arab nationalism as a form of fictitious Arabism because Natural Syria does not consist solely of 'Arabs'. There exists other ethnic groups like the Kurds, Assyrians and Armenians. To label them 'Arabs' is a denial of their basic human and ethnic rights. This kind of Arabism cannot be successfully applied to Natural Syria while the idea of an Arab Front consisting of all the Arabic countries is a viable one.[13]

## CONCLUSION

In discussing the SSNP, Pipes has failed to distinguish between the ideology of the party and its political history and tactics. Clearly he has interpreted SSNP's overlapping political lines as indicating an ideological transformation and a shift from its central aim. This is simply inaccurate. Parties and groups all over the world, depending on the circumstances, change their policies and tactics but their strategy and aims need not change. Despite Pipes' detailed research on 'Greater Syria', he makes some radical unfounded accusations about the SSNP as, for example, his claim that "the party had a prominent part in the events that led up to the Lebanese Civil War breaking out in 1975." Maybe Mr. Pipes would care enough to tell us How?, What role? and When?



which Mr Pipes himself is quite aware.

### SA'ADEH AND ARABISM

Mr Pipes' interpretation of Sa'adeh's Arabist views is equally deficient. First, he misquotes Sa'adeh when he states that 'the Syrian nation (umma) as part of an Arab nation (umma) doesn't contravene its being a complete nation with right to absolute sovereignty." Now if Sa'adeh did actually say this, then any logical person could see the absurdity of this proposition. How can one nation be part of another na-

historic and geographic reality, as the only valid form of union in the Middle East without rejecting the possibility of an Arab Front."

Pipes regards these two slogans as contradictory to each other when, in fact, there is no contradiction. It is correct that the SSNP rejects the idea of Arab nationalism (forming one nation of all Arabic-speaking countries); and it is also correct that the SSNP supports the idea of the Fertile Crescent (Natural Syria) and the formation of an Arab Front. These two ideas are not identical. The concept of

1 Pipes D. Party Politics in the SSNP. Int. J. of MES
2 Whereas "Natural Syria" is a geo-sociological fact, "Greater Syria" was a sheer political project.
3 Sa'adeh A. The Rise of Nations, p156.
4 Republished in al-Bina', 1973.
5 Al-Nizam al-Jadid, serial 12, Nov. 1950. p18.
6 Pipes D. Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Sa'adeh A. The Ten Lectures, p23.
9 Ibid.
10 Yamak L.Z. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis, p59.
11 Ibid. p60.
12 For a detailed discussion of this issue see Adel Beshara, Syrian Nationalism: An Inquiry Into the Political Philosophy of Antun Sa'adeh. Unpub MA Thesis. University of Melbourne, 1992.
13. Ibid.