This chapter is an attempt to trace the historical origins of Ba‘thism and to give a history of the Ba‘th Party both in and out of power since its foundation in 1944. We begin with a brief description of the origins of Arab nationalism, showing how the idea of the Arabs as a separate ethno-linguistic entity gradually took shape in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the latter part of the 19th century. With the effective division of the Arab Middle East between Britain and France after 1920, Arab nationalism subsequently developed in two different but essentially inter-related directions. First, it took the form of a movement for national liberation, seeking independence from foreign rule or foreign influence. Secondly, a number of writers, most notably Jalal al-Hariri, put forward ideas of pan-Arabism, the notion that the Arabs form a single entity stretching from Morocco to Iraq, which has been divided artificially by colonialism, imperialism, and (since 1948) Zionism.

Ba‘thism developed out of the second strand, pan-Arabism, and the doctrines which still form its basic ideology were elaborated by the Syrian Christian writer Michel Aflaq in the mid 1940s and 1950s. Aflaq and his associates gained considerable influence in Syrian politics until 1958, when the Syrian Ba‘th, founded formally in 1944, agreed to dissolve itself as the price demanded by Nasser for the creation of the union of Syria and Egypt, known as the United Arab Republic. The failure of the union in 1961 precipitated a major and permanent split in the Ba‘th, which has been in some sense institutionalized ever since by the existence of two separate Ba‘th Parties in Syria and Iraq.

In Iraq, where pan-Arab ideas did not really gain a substantial following until the 1950s, the Ba‘th organization developed more slowly, and the Party could only claim some 300 members by the time of the Revolution of July 1958. After the Revolution, the Ba‘th joined forces with the Nasserists in opposition to the government of 'Abd al-Karim Qasim, and managed to organize a coup in 1963 which brought them both to power for a brief period. After a few months the Ba‘th fell out with the Nasserists, and were ousted from power. A series of highly unstable Nasserist-nationalist governments followed until the second Ba‘th coup in 1968; the Ba‘th have been in effective control of Iraq since that time. We shall examine
the nature of their ideology, and in particular the way in which its vagueness and lack of specificity have enabled the present rulers of Iraq to justify and rationalize a whole range of apparently contradictory policies under the slogans of 'Unity, Freedom, and Socialism'.

The Origins of Arab Nationalism

The body of ideas from which Arab nationalism later emerged developed only gradually during the second half of the 19th century. The earliest notion of the Arabs as a separate ethno-linguistic entity was essentially secular, and derives initially from the writings of Syrian and Lebanese intellectuals who were themselves inspired by European nationalism, liberalism and constitutionalism. Many, though not all, were either Christians or had been educated in the schools and colleges founded in Greater Syria during and after the 1830s and 1840s. A little later, again to summarize in very broad terms, Muslim writers like 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi and Rashid Rida, under the inspiration of European liberalism and the ideals of Islamic reform put forward principally by Muhammad 'Abduh, sought to identify the Arabs more closely with Islam, asserting that only the Arabs could purge the Islamic polity of the corruption into which it had fallen during the centuries of Ottoman control. Naturally both these notions were a direct challenge to the "official" ideology of the Ottoman Empire as the universal Islamic state (dawla) ruled over by the Ottoman sultan-caliph, who was in some not quite explicit sense the descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, in which the non-Muslim monolithic communities also lived, as second-class but protected citizens. In this state, religion rather than language or ethnicity was the primary focus and indeed the only means of identity, and 'Abd al-Hamid attempted to encourage the association between pan-Islamism and Ottomanism in the course of his long reign.

In general, therefore, the first manifestation of Arab feeling in the latter years of the 19th century took the form of the belief, on the part of a small but influential number of individuals, that their position within the Empire could only be improved, or in some sense adequately fulfilled, through some recognition by the Ottoman authorities of their separate and specific status as Arabs. These vague notions were gradually transformed into political shape, in the course of the general opposition to 'Abd al-Hamid's autocratic rule, and found expression in the formation of a number of "decentralization" societies, which flourished in various provinces, but particularly in Syria-Lebanon, in the first decade of this century. On the eve of the First World War, therefore, there was a strong tide of opposition to Ottoman rule, although a more general changeover to Arabism only took place when the Ottoman Empire was finally defeated in 1918. Apart from the Arab Revolt there was no generalized anti-Turkish rising by Arabs in the course of the First World War; those Syrians who might have wished to lead one were either hanged in Beirut in 1916 or forced into exile.

Iraqi Ba'athism: Nationalism, Socialism and National Socialism

The experience of the ex-Ottoman provinces in the next two decades was not uniform, which goes some way to explain the different forms which nationalism came to assume in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq the British continued the direct rule which they had been extending over the area since 1914 until 1920, while in Syria an Arab government, admittedly financed and supported by Britain, was actually running the country. However, in July 1920 the French defeated the Arab government by force of arms and introduced a new system of direct control. In Iraq, as in response to the national rising known as the Revolution of 1920, the British introduced a system of indirect rule, under which Arab ministers and provincial governors were backed by British advisors whose advice had to be taken. Those who held office under the monarchy, men like Nuri al-Sa'id, Jaffar al-'Askari and 'Ali Jawdat al-Ayyubi, would have regarded themselves as nationalists in the sense that they had indeed fought to liberate the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire from the Ottomans, and were participating in the government of an Arab country.

However, it gradually became clear, if not to those in office in Iraq and elsewhere in the Arab world, that the price of liberation from the Ottomans was European control. For some, notably the new landed aristocracy, the emerging comprador bourgeoisie, and some of the minorities, particularly the Lebanese Maronites whose historical ties with their French protectorate went back to the 15th century, if not to the Crusades, the change of masters was perfectly acceptable, but for the majority, the introduction of European control became more and more intolerable.

Arab Nationalism after 1918: the Ideas of Sati' al-Husri

In the 1920s and 1930s, therefore, the nationalist movement in the Arab world took on a new complexion. The Ottomans had gone, and the caliphate with them. On the edges of the Arab world, two new states, Turkey and Iran, were taking shape, based essentially on a combination of economic, political and social modernization and militarism. In Iraq in particular, where many still spoke Turkish, the example of Atatürk exerted a powerful attraction. Further away, other new forms of state were also developing.

One of the reasons [says Bassem Tibi] for the rising popularity of Germany among Arab nationalists in the period after the First World War was the hostility which they felt towards British and French colonial rule in the region. Until this time they had been predominantly francophile, and their thinking was in the Western tradition of Natural Law and rationalism. By the 1930s, however, they were turning their attention to the Third Reich, which they believed to have no colonial intentions, and which might free them from British and French colonial rule. Tibi goes on to analyse the role of Sati' al-Husri in this process, in particular his comparison between the divided and scattered German nation, unified
negotiations with the French which had begun in 1936. In general, both believed in ‘Syria for the Syrians’, fiercely opposed the ceding of Alexandretta to Turkey in 1938-39, and sought an independent united Syrian state. This united Syria – with or without Lebanon – might continue to have strong economic and cultural links with France, but would be politically independent under their own rule. As younger men, this generation had opposed the Turks or been part of Faisal’s short-lived Arab government in Damascus in 1920, but had generally been excluded from power ever since. *Hizb al-Sha'b* and *al-Kutla al-Watantiyya* were both ‘conventional’ political organizations which might attract votes at elections in which electoral registration was normally dependent on property qualifications, but had no mass base. Other important parties of a rather different nature were Antun Sa’adeh’s Parti Populaire Syrien and the Syrian Communist Party.

In Iraq, political organizations were far less developed, since formal politics were more a matter of musical chairs with the same fifty or so individuals exchanging the various offices of state. Naturally, there were occasional rivalries within this elite, but there were few differences of principle. The entire apparatus of government, the king, the cabinet, the bicameral legislature, had been imported by the British and the whole edifice was widely seen as an elaborate pretence at an independent political structure. In 1936, for example, on the occasion of the first military coup in the Middle East, the first act of the new Prime Minister, Hikmat Sulaiman, was to assure the British ambassador that the abrupt change of regime would not mean the slightest change in Iraq’s relations with her ally Britain, and even Rashid ‘All’s attempt to break away from British control in 1941 seems in retrospect a somewhat quixotic venture. The only opposition grouping of any importance before the Second World War, Jam‘iyat al-Ahali, enjoyed a very brief period of political access rather than political power in 1936, and although individual members later became influential, the group as such was never a serious challenge to the *status quo*. The Communist Party, founded in 1934, became more widely influential after the Soviet Union broke with Germany in 1941.

The defeat of Germany and Italy left Britain and France, though much weakened, still in political control of the Arab Middle East. In 1946 Syria became formally independent, thus attaining the same status which had been conferred on Iraq 14 years earlier. For both countries the War marked an important watershed, since it raised hopes and expectations of greater political freedom, especially in Iraq, which were not to be fulfilled. Since the political mechanism which existed in Syria and Iraq had no indigenous roots, they had no institutionalized means of ‘regular’ or peaceful reproduction; hence any opposition which did not in some sense adhere to the political rules was seen as a serious challenge.

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Before examining ‘Aflaq’s ideas more specifically, it is useful to try to place the Ba’th in the context of the other ‘nationalist’ political parties and groupings of the 1940s. In Syria, the older generation of nationalists, who had not had the same opportunities for collaboration with the colonial power as their counterparts in Iraq, were organized into two main groupings, *Hizb al-Sha'b* and *al-Kutla al-Watantiyya*. Both these bodies opposed the mandate as constituted, and had been instrumental in conducting the abortive
Saddam's Iraq: Revolution or Reaction?

The Ba'th in Syria 1944–66

The rise of the Ba'th in Syria as a mass political organization dates from the end of the War, and more specifically from the subsequent defeat of the Arab armies in Palestine in 1948. Like its competitors, it had no chance of gaining power by conventional means, by being voted in at elections, although 16 Ba'thists were elected to the Syrian parliament in 1954, and by the mid-1950s, the doctrines which can now be found in the pages of the Baghdad Ba'thist daily al-Thawra had already been articulated. Nationalism, and a 'spiritualized' notion of unity, were the means by which Arab society should be revitalized; Islam was the prime 'moment' of Arabism in which Christians and Muslims alike could and should participate; the Ba'th Party was to be the standard bearer and vanguard of the new Arab nation. Some ideas of 'Aﬂaq's rhetoric may be conveyed by the following quotations from the 1950s:

Our attachment to the Spirit of the nation and its heritage will increase our drive, strengthen our forward march and ensure our orientation; thus we shall not be irresolute for we shall then be confident that everything will be consistent with the spirit of our nation. When our point of departure is strong which is the saturation of the spirit of our nation and the clear understanding of ourselves and our reality, truly sensing our needs, we shall not be susceptible to the assumption of artificial ideas or imitating others.

Our strength therefore is not only the strength of the large number of the Arabs at this time but it is also the strength of Arab history, for we are marching in the direction of the genuine Arab spirit, we are acting according to what our heroic ancestors would want us to do at all times.

Some more specific notions of the future were embodied in the Party's constitution, although this is full of internal contradictions. For example:

Article 26. The Party of the Arab Ba'ath is a socialist party. It believes that the economic wealth of the fatherland belongs to the nation.

Article 34. Property and inheritance are two natural rights. They are protected within the limits of the national interest.

Of course, the party is also anti-imperialist; it believes in land reform, free social, educational and medical services. Its notion of socialism is somewhat vague; here is article 4, the only place in the whole 48 article constitution that it is mentioned specifically:

Article 4. The Party of the Arab Ba'ath is a socialist party. It believes that socialism is a necessity which emanates from the depth of Arab nationalism itself. Socialism constitutes in fact the ideal social order which will allow the Arab people to realize its possibilities and to enable its genius to flourish, and which will ensure for the nation constant progress in its material and moral output. It makes possible a trustful brotherhood among its members.

It is difficult to resist the temptation to quote another thinker writing about a different nation some 30 years earlier:

Whoever is prepared to make the national cause his own to such an extent that he knows no higher ideal than the welfare of his nation, whoever has understood our great national anthem, 'Deutschland Uber Alles' to mean that nothing in the wide world surpasses in his eyes this Germany, people and land — that man is a Socialist.

Devlin summarizes another curious lacuna in early Ba'th ideology: 'Aﬂaq and Bitar had very little to say in their writing about the specifics of the system of government the Ba'thists should strive for.' This is of course a common failing of nationalist writing of this type; there is no indication of how power should be achieved, or how it is to be wielded later.

It is not possible to chronicle the later history of the Ba'th in Syria in any detail here. Very briefly, by 1953, 'Aﬂaq and Bitar and some 200 Ba'thists had joined forces with Akram Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party, and were in exile in Lebanon plotting against the dictatorship of Adib Shishakli, whom they and army associates of Hawrani were able to oust in 1954. By this time, the Ba'th was also gaining adherents in other Arab countries; for example, the Iraqi party was founded in 1951 and had 300 members by 1955. Devlin gives details of the constant infighting and factionalism which plagued the main party at this stage and which was to make the creation of a truly pan-Arab party ultimately impossible.

The Syrian Party, which had managed to capture certain crucial political positions in 1956, agreed to dissolve itself as the price to be paid for entering the United Arab Republic in 1958, since Nasser distrusted parties, and in any case, the Ba'th never made the slightest headway in Egypt. This decision caused a major crisis when, as happened very quickly, the Union began to turn sour and became little more than a mechanism for the exploitation of Syria by Egypt. In the course of this episode, different factions appeared within the Syrian Ba'th, who were deeply critical of what Devlin describes as the 'old guard' (of 'Aﬂaq and Bitar) for having agreed to accept both the unity scheme and the dissolution of the party. In 1963, one of the Ba'th factions seized power in Syria; there was a further intra-Ba'th coup in 1966 and another in 1970, which brought the regime that is now ruling Syria to power. Aﬂaq enjoyed chequered fortunes in these years; when the Iraqi Ba'th came to power briefly in 1963, he acted as an intermediary in the negotiations with their Nasserist partners. By 1966, the Syrian and Iraqi wings of the party had split irrevocably; 'Aﬂaq went to Baghdad in 1968, and, as we have already noted, has been there intermittently ever since.
The Ba'th in Iraq, 1949-58

Originally, Ba'thist ideas were brought to Iraq by a few Syrian teachers late in 1949. By 1951, Fu'ad al-Rikabi (a Shi'i), an engineer from Nasiriyah, had taken control of an organization that numbered about 50 persons. By 1955, according to police records, there were 289 of them. Interestingly, most early Ba'thists were Shi'is, and from generally fairly humble origins. By 1957, the Ba'th had joined the opposition National Front, which consisted of itself, the Communists, the National Democratic Party and the Istiqlal. The heterogeneous nature of this alliance, and the fact that the actual Revolution of July 1958 was carried out by military officers who were largely unconnected with formal political parties, meant that, in Batatu's words, in the months immediately following the Revolution there was no 'indubitable focus of political authority. No one person, force or institution dominated the scene.' In this period of sudden political freedom and fluidity, the Ba'th claimed to have attracted '300 active members, 1200 organized helpers (ansar), 2000 organized supporters and 10,000 unorganized supporters', according to al-Rikabi.18

At the end of July 1958, a few days after the Revolution, Michel 'Aflaq arrived in Baghdad to press the new government to join the recently formed United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria, of which he himself had been a prime mover. This prospect naturally found favour with the Iraqi Ba'th and their associates the Nasserists, a loose political grouping who were attracted by Nasser's achievements but who had no formal organization. Unity, wasada, is generally taken as having been the principal point of difference between the Ba'th-Nasserists and the much larger and more influential Iraqi Communist Party. Here it is useful to clear up some common misconceptions which have unfortunately become the received wisdom of many accounts of this period.

In the first place, what now seems to be the fundamental and irremovable divide between Communist and Pan-Arab Nationalist parties in the Arab world (with the possible and somewhat artificial exception of Syria and the equally singular situation in Lebanon) was not so clear in the 1940s and early 1950s as it is in the 1980s. Here Robinson's article, 'Marxist Communism and Arab Nationalism Compared' is quite suggestive, principally, perhaps, because it does not make specific reference to the Iraqi case. 19

In the Iraqi context, it has already been mentioned that pan-Arab ideas had not gained particularly widespread currency before the Egyptian revolution of 1952. It is quite clear from the accounts of both Dann and Batatu — and a host of examples can be cited — that the only political party to make any major impact between 1945 and 1956 was the ICP. As well as having led the labour movement during and immediately after the war, it had organized the great demonstrations against the British in the late 1940s, and its martyrs, notably Fahd, were self-evidently disinterested, totally committed and sincere individuals of humble origins who had shown great courage and indeed been prepared to sacrifice themselves for beliefs whose general principles, particularly those of anti-imperialism and social reform, were evidently widely shared by the politically conscious. Secondly, the notion of integration or reintegration into the Arab world had naturally found greater resonance in Syria than in Iraq, because of the nature of the recent political struggle in Syria, the divisions which the French had made, and the parcelling out of the whole of greater Syria between France and Britain.

Nevertheless, although pan-Arabism was not a particularly pressing issue in Iraq in the post-war years, the Iraqi Communists themselves were prepared to accommodate to it, and in particular to its anti-imperialist tenets. Thus the Communists, the Ba'th, the National Democrats and the Nationalists of the Istiqlal joined together with the Kurdish Democratic Party in a National Democratic Front in opposition to the monarchy in 1957. With the rise of Nasser, of course, and in particular with the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, the success of pan-Arab nationalism in Egypt brought it many followers in Iraq. In keeping with the spirit of the times, the Communist Party's Second Conference in 1956 took place under the banner 'For a national Arab policy', stressing that the Arabs are one nation with 'a fervent desire for unity.' More cautiously, perhaps, the Party tied the fulfillment of the pan-Arab idea to the 'disappearance of imperialism from the Arab world and the carrying out of democratic reforms'.20

Thus in the quasi-colonial situation which existed in Iraq before 1958, there were possibilities for Communist/Nationalist accommodation and cooperation, particularly from the Communist side, since the Communists were both more numerous and better organized. However, in Egypt since 1952 and in Syria since 1956, countries where Arab nationalists were actually in power, the attitudes of the nationalists towards the Communists did not bode well for future relations between the two groups in Iraq. Thus in Syria in 1956, 'Aflaq and his colleagues, who were nominally in alliance with the Syrian Communist Party, produced a document which emphasized that Communist internationalism was wholly uncongenial to them, and made clear their alarm at the rise of Soviet popularity in Egypt and Syria, which had further increased the appeal of the Syrian Communist Party.21 Furthermore, the Syrian Ba'th was actually disintegrating in 1957 into a number of warring factions, and it seems to have seized on the prospect of a constitutional union with Egypt as a kind of deus ex machina; although the Union required the Ba'th to dissolve, the Party command seems to have believed that their positions would in fact be secured by the distribution of office to senior Party members in Syria, and it had the further advantage that the Egyptian anti-Communist laws would be introduced, forcing the Syrian Communist Party to dissolve itself as well. As far as the Iraqi Communists were concerned, their opposition to wasada, unity, was not so much a matter of opposition to unity as such, but rather the result of their profound suspicion of the motives and good faith of the Ba'th and the Nasserists.

Thus it is hardly surprising that 'Aflaq had hurried to Baghdad at the
end of July 1958 to press the Iraqis to join Egypt and Syria in the Union, and equally unsurprising that the Iraqi Communists were entirely averse to doing so, under, let it be stressed, such circumstances. In particular, as the drive towards unity had the support of the powerful 'Abd al-Salām 'Arif, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, who was profoundly and notoriously anti-Communist, the Iraqi Communists had no illusions about the danger it would bring. The Party organized a massive demonstration in Baghdad on 7 August 1958, calling for a Federal Arab Union and friendship with the Soviet Union, which was equivalent to stressing Iraqi particularism. As we have shown elsewhere, this aversion to Union was also congenial to 'Abd al-Karīm Qasīm, who had no desire to defer to Nasser.

Thus wahda was the symbol rather than the substance of the rift between the ICP and the Nationalists. Even if the Qasim regime decided to maintain the existing social system, there was still a wide range of possible options. For example, how far should land reform, or the nationalization of oil and of industry, actually go? These were important issues which divided the population, particularly the urban middle class, an influential section of society which feared the pressures being exerted from the left. Thus an alliance soon emerged between those forces who believed that their interests were being threatened by Qasim, and those who believed that the Communists would take over and thus exclude them from power. As a result, wahda developed into a rallying cry for the opposition to the left, since for many, union with Egypt was a lesser evil than the radical social and economic changes which they feared the Communists might introduce. Ironically, therefore, those vested interests which had not been swept away in July 1958 now sought and found common cause with the 'Ba'thists and Nationalists. This is an important part of the explanation for the bitter divide between the Communists and the 'Ba'thists-Nationalists after 1958, which continues to bedevil all aspects of political life in Iraq.

Although Qasim was identified with the Communists, he never threw his whole weight behind them. Only two Communists ever held ministerial portfolios, those of National Guidance and Municipalities, for a few months in 1958 and 1959. In spite of 'Arif's attempt on his life in October 1958, the abortive nationalist coup in Mosul in March 1959, and the second attempt at assassination which involved Saddam Hussein and other 'Ba'thists in November 1959, Qasim became gradually convinced that he should dissociate himself from the Communists at all costs. In the autumn of 1959 he began to dismiss Communists from all senior positions in the civil service and the armed forces. Eventually, his policies had the effect of cutting the ground from under his own feet, since although he purged the left, which was generally well-disposed towards him, he allowed his rightist opponents to continue to hold positions of power. By 1961, therefore, when the fruitless and expensive war against the Kurds began, he found himself almost completely isolated.

Meanwhile, the 'Ba'th had suffered a serious, if temporary setback in the failure of the attempt to assassinate Qasim in November 1959. After al-Rikabi's flight to Syria, the party organization was taken over by 'All Salih al-Sa'di, who had somehow managed to escape arrest at the time. The party was further weakened by arrests and al-Rikabi's founding a rival body in 1961, but by 1962 it had forged a broad alliance with nationalist officers in the armed forces and was planning a military coup. This coup actually took place in February 1963, and a 'Ba'th-Nationalist coalition came to power. As is well known, thousands of Communists and leftists were rounded up and arrested, and many were subsequently tortured to death or executed in prison. It is true that the Nationalists and 'Ba'thists had some old scores to settle; a number of Nationalists had been killed in the course of the failed coup attempt in Mosul in 1959, and in the course of the Turkoman-Kurdish race riot in Kirkuk the same year, but the scale of the atrocities committed by the regime, and its militias were out of all proportion to the offences against them. This is amply illustrated by a 1964 government publication, al-Munharifun. 'Aflaq himself wrote a few months later that 'our differences with the Communists cannot possibly justify such means... How was it possible to give free rein to... elements who had a basic interest in the killing of Communists?'

The 'Ba'th/Nationalist Coalition, February-November 1963

As far as it is possible to ascertain, there were about 15,000 'Ba'thist supporters in February 1963, and some 850 full members. There were very few 'Ba'thists in important positions in the armed forces, with the exception of Salih Mahdi 'Am mash, Hardan al-Takriti and Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr. This led the 'Ba'th to rely on the paramilitary National Guard, a highly undisciplined body, 'which, by its vindictiveness towards its political enemies and its considerable cruelty succeeded in making itself generally hated and severely damaged the image of the party in the public mind'. Of course the new regime was totally unprepared for power and had no idea how to carry on the actual business of government. There was in any case no detailed Ba'th analysis of the situation in Iraq for them to consult. Competing groups soon began to struggle for power, both within the 'Ba'th and between the 'Ba'th and their Nationalist allies. In October 1963, at a 'Ba'th conference in Syria, al-Sa'di suddenly declared himself a leftist, and branded his rivals as right wing deviationists, a tactic we shall see frequently employed in the future to demonstrate ideological purity. On November 13 the 'Ba'th faction in the government was ousted, unceremoniously but bloodlessly, and sent into exile. The eighth political report of the party in 1974 says of this period:

The 1963 experiment did not fail because of too much so-called left or too much so-called right. The main reason for failure was the leadership's failure to achieve a balance between the ideal and the possible and
its consequent inability to make accurate calculations of stages and possibilities and a graduated practical programme to achieve essential targets. The leadership of the 1963 revolution failed to practice its role as a leadership of a revolutionary Party. The party machine was left without precise and comprehensive central guidance. The Party consequently was unable to act as a vanguard revolutionary institution leading the Revolution as it should.27

The Return of the Ba’th, July 1968

The main problem facing the Iraqi Ba’th on its return to power in 1968 was its extremely narrow social and political base in the country. They were largely remembered for the brutality and ruthlessness of the few months that they had been in power in 1963, and were generally distrusted by the other major political groupings in the country, including the Communists and the Nasserists. The policies which they pursued immediately after 1968 did not give the lie to this image. After they had taken power through the army and the National Guard, and had managed to out-manoeuvre their Nationalist accomplices Generals Nayif and Da’ud, they made clear that they would brook no opposition. There followed numerous arrests among Nasserists, Communists and ‘Zionist and Imperialist agents’; in 1969, 53 ‘spies’ were officially executed, and a further 41 opponents were executed in 1970. This continuing reign of terror was accompanied by campaigns of arbitrary imprisonment and torture of political opponents.

Gradually, however, a different form of emphasis appeared at the same time. Although the kinds of activity we have just described are evidence of the Party’s determination to make its return to power felt, sections within the Party realized that it was necessary to end its almost total political isolation and to make some sort of accommodation with its former enemies. Furthermore, it needed to produce positive economic policies which would be both popular and effective. Thus in 1969 and 1970 the Ba’th began to make official overtures to the Communist Party and the Kurdistan Democratic Party and other ‘progressive forces’, calling upon them to participate with it in the ‘national struggle’ against Imperialism and Zionism, and in the construction of an independent Iraq and a free and prosperous Arab nation. Thus the Ba’th alternately cajoled and pressurized the Communists and the anti-Barzani Kurds to join them in a National Front early in 1972. This coalition, which came into being in 1973, enabled them to broaden their power base substantially. For their part, the KDP and the Communists were permitted a certain degree of political freedom, and in particular were allowed to publish their own newspapers and magazines. These journals adopted a considerable degree of self-censorship, implying generally that the Ba’th Party could never be seriously at fault, or Ba’th rule questioned or doubted. At the same time, the Ba’th began to make overtures to the socialist countries, which bore fruit in the Iraqi-Soviet Friendship Treaty of 1972, a vital precondition for the oil nationalization of the summer of that year. Naturally the Friendship Treaty was another important reason for the Communists joining the National Front. Quite fortuitously, the nationalization was shortly followed by the war of 1973, and the subsequent oil embargo, which led to unparalleled rises in oil prices. The Ba’th were able to use the increased revenues from oil to buy popularity, or at least acquiescence, through increases in wages and salaries, infrastructural and industrial projects, and by extending health, welfare and educational services.

Alongside these displays of largesse, the Party was quietly tightening its hold on the main instruments of control, the army and the security services. By mid-1973 another ‘plot’ against the government was discovered, led by the secret police chief Kazzar, who was executed with 36 of his followers. The security services were expanded to the extent that in 1978 125,000 people, some 20% of all public employees, were working for them. All non-Ba’th officers were gradually purged from the armed forces, which are now only open to loyal Ba’thists, a development whose effects have been particularly apparent during the present war with Iran. Further consolidation was made possible through the regime’s alliance with the anti-Barzani Kurds and the various manoeuvres leading up to the Algiers Agreement with the Shah in 1975, which stilled effective opposition from that quarter for several years.

For their part, the Communists made use of the relatively liberal atmosphere of the National Patriotic Front to strengthen and widen the support for their Party and to consolidate their positions within the framework permitted to them. Although continuing to be guarded and moderate in their criticism of Ba’th ‘socialist’ policies, the Communists gradually came to be viewed less as allies by the Ba’th and more as a general impediment and threat to its claim to be the ‘leader of the nation’. Moreover, the vast oil wealth which the Ba’th now controlled meant that they were no longer dependent upon Communist support.

Thus, from 1976 onwards, the Ba’th leadership began to clamp down on the Communists and the more radical left, and intense persecution became the order of the day. By this time the Ba’th had organized an elaborate security system in which the Party organization was an active participant: individual members were made responsible for their street or quarter and had to report on their families and neighbours. Over the next few years the Communists were depicted as the supreme traitors to the umma ‘arabiyya (Arab people): Saddam Husain accused them of electrocuting their opponents and burying them alive, crimes of which he and his own followers were guilty – tactics reminiscent of the aftermath of the Reichstag fire in 1933. Anyone associating with these ‘foreign agents’ and ‘traitors’ was declared to be ‘a traitor to the Iraqi homeland, a traitor to the air and soil of Iraq and to the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates’.29 At the same time, the Ba’th were building up a series of mass organizations, of youth, women, children, peasants, workers and so on whose main task was to propagate the superiority and legitimacy of the Party’s rule.
Towards an Understanding of Ba'thist Ideology

Before attempting to piece Ba'thist ideology together, certain preliminary remarks may be useful. Having quarrelled with their colleagues on the National (that is, pan-Arab) Command in Syria in 1966, the Iraqi Ba'th had to establish themselves as the only true manifestation of the Party. They did this by inviting 'Aflaq, who had left Syria in 1966, to become secretary general of the 'sole legitimate Ba'th Party'. It is also important to differentiate between the Iraqi Ba'th as an organization and Ba'th thought as articulated by 'Aflaq, Bitar, Arsuza, al-Atasi, Razzaz and other Ba'th writers. Since, as we have stressed, the Ba'th had an extremely narrow base and a relatively small number of active supporters both in 1963 and 1968, it is inconceivable that it would ever have gained power through the ballot box, and on both occasions it took power through a military coup. Hence the real point at issue is the seizure and consolidation of political power; when individuals within the Party succeed in achieving power they immediately attempt to legitimize their right to govern within the broad framework of Ba'thist doctrine. It is this fact which makes any systematic analysis of Ba'thist ideology in Iraq in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s a somewhat daunting task.

When the Ba'th seized power in 1968 it had no definite or developed plan of action, and thus had to fall back on the generalities of doctrine elaborated by 'Aflaq. In the beginning it tended to justify its own position almost entirely within the framework of Arab unity, the issue on which it had been fighting the left since 1958. Thus a report written in 1970 reads:

Our party is characterized by its insistence, from the beginning, on the reality of the nation and its unity and the rejection of the present state of division... The national struggle is a complete and original whole and not a mere grouping of local strategies...

Despite the fact that there is no indication in this or any other of the Party's contemporary publications of how such unity could be brought about, the Ba'th chose to make unity its main point of departure, and the feature which differentiated it from any other political force or organization in Iraq, or, indeed, elsewhere. By denying Arab unity, it is claimed, the Communist Party has found itself 'in the camp of the petite bourgeoisie, both left and right', and in that of the reactionaries, 'all fighting the unionist tide'. Similarly guilty are the Nasserists, 'who placed the interests of a single nation above the interests of the (Arab) nation'. The following passage gives some flavour of the general tenor of this sort of writing, and above all of its extreme vagueness:

The party's task is to undertake serious and speedy work to change the features of Arab realities with the object of attaining the objective conditions necessary to confront the Zionist-Imperialist alliance. This is to be achieved by tireless endeavours to realize unity in its progressive form.

Our view of the structure of the Arab condition is to be totally revised, and we must make the mental and psychological preparation to link up Arab life fully with the exigencies of long term confrontation. Economy, politics and everyday life must all be directed towards leading the Arab struggle towards the battlefields.

Apart from the issue of Arab unity, which was particularly prominent in the first few years after 1968, the overall ideological framework of the Party in Iraq has essentially remained within the original mystical notion of the Arab nation, the Arab homeland, al-watan al-'arabi, and the Arab masses-al-jamahir— who wage a fierce and bold struggle against the imperialist and Zionist enemy and its local reactionary hirelings. Thus 'The political strategy of the Party aims, in a scientific and practical way, at developing Arab trends and tendencies towards the higher national aspirations of the Arab nation in its present stage of historical development.' The general ideological position assumed at the Eighth Party Congress of 1974 is still presented as the line pursued today and extracts from this conference appear on almost every front page of al-Thawra. A study of the terminology of these documents shows that this degree of continuity is possible because of the extreme vagueness and generality of the concepts used. Words like socialism, democracy, the masses, the toiling masses and so forth are constantly used and can of course be made to fit almost any day to day contingency. Nevertheless, a certain inner logic may be discerned, as we shall now try to show.

In the first place, this inner logic derives from 'Aflaq's original view of the nation as a harmonious whole. Thus, the Eighth Congress of 1974 defines socialism as 'a vital prerequisite for the liberation, unity and renaissance of the Arab nation', and the Arab masses as the main participants and objects of socialism. The working class is part of the Arab nation, whose priority is the struggle with Zionism and Imperialism, whose continued strength requires the national and the class struggle to be balanced in such a way that the energies of the nation can be directed against the main enemy. This is later summarized in a statement that the main contradictions in the Arab world today are those between the Arab masses on the one hand and Zionism and Imperialism on the other. Despite some occasional lip-service to notions of class struggle and the working class, the emphasis on the fundamental unity of the people and the nation remains the basis of all other definitions. Thus, on 28 February 1980, in a discussion of the socialist state, al-dawla al-'ishiratikya, al-Thawra says: 'The actual producer is the foundation of the socialist process and the working class has a historical (tarikhi) and national (qawmi) role to play within society.' The article goes on to emphasize that above everything: 'The worker is a citizen (muwatanun) because he is a son of the people (ibn al-tha'b); the relationship which defines his rights and duties. Thus his class, tabahi, is secondary to his role as a citizen. As the role of the citizen is defined by his role in the struggle as a son of the people, the people will therefore define...
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his rights and duties. As the socialist state is the state of the people, there can be no class conflict. It goes without saying that the relationship between the working class and the Ba'th is equally harmonious, since the Ba'th is the Party of the toiling masses!

Also in February 1980, when visiting a state factory, Saddam Hussein gave the following statement of his views. Having emphasized the importance of the 1968 revolution, he assures the workers that man (al-insan) lies at the centre of Ba'thist concern. Radical change must take place not only in society, but also in man. This transformation of man will be accomplished by his continued participation in the struggle, and his assuming an optimistic attitude towards the aims of the nation (ghdafa 'al-umma). The new man that will arise is al-insan al-Ba'thi, of whom Saddam Hussein is the shining example. The quintessence of the jamahir and the sha'b is of course the Ba'th Party itself. Thus Saddam says: 'Why do we consider the Ba'th to be the Party of every one of you, whether you are actual members of the Party or not? This is because the Ba'th expresses the conscience (damir) of the people and its ideological aspirations in its struggle for the realization of its principles.' Elsewhere, al-Thawra says that it is obvious that the party is in its essence an expression of the will of the masses, iradat al-jamahir. Such a party can only come into existence when society reaches a certain degree of consciousness and will for change. Thus 'the Ba'th has not fallen from the sky and has not been imported and has not been created by nature, and is not the result of the will of an individual' (10 January 1980). In a similar discussion about democracy, we learn that 'democracy is not the relationship between the leading party (al-hizb al-qadid) and the citizens; the leading party itself is the basic pillar of democracy'. Thus 'democracy is the extension of the bond between the vanguard party, the state (al-sult) and the masses', another expression of the concept of harmony noted earlier (10 January 1980).

As liberal democracy in capitalist societies serves primarily to maintain the capitalist system and man 'is not free to elect those who serve him, although he is free to go to the ballot box every four or five years', the Ba'th believes that socialism is necessary for freedom. Only socialism will make man really free by freeing him from his material needs and guaranteeing his future, and giving him education to enable him to enjoy his freedom. Such a system leads to popular democracy (dimuqrasiya shabiya) in which the Ba'th is the central element. Apart from such references to an ideal socialist society, readers of al-Thawra are only given occasional glimpses of the 'precise' nature of al-islam伝n biya (socialism). Thus al-Thawra quotes the following statements of Saddam Hussein:

We have chosen socialism and shall not depart from it. We want a living and a better socialism, which is the road to happiness (al-izza'da), constructive development, which will enable us to face the enemy (al-adu).

Socialism does not mean the equal distribution of wealth between the deprived poor and the exploiting rich; this would be too inflexible. Socialism is a means (wasfi 'a) to raise and improve productivity.

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In recent years such generalizations have undergone a certain modification. As the abstractions become vaguer and vaguer Saddam Husain moves more prominently to the centre of the stage. At the same time Iraq, rather than the Arab nation, becomes the principal focus of attention. In a speech on the seventeenth anniversary of the 'revolution' of February 1963, Saddam Hussein assures his audience that Iraq will continue to be the faithful guardian (haris) of the soil of the Arab nation, and that the Ba'th Party is the knight (faris) which has restored honour to the Iraqi people and the Arab nation. In the same speech he says:

Western journalists say that Saddam Husain is a Takriti. I say to them with pity: Saddam Husain was born in a village in the southern part of Takrit province; Takrit province is a part of the muhafaza of Salah al-Din, and he is an Iraqi. Saddam Husain was born in the muhafaza of Salah al-Din but he is not (only) a son of the muhafaza of Salah al-Din because he is a son of the province of Arbil, of Sulaimaniya, he is a son of Anbar, a son of the Tigris and Euphrates, a son of Bagdad, and of Jordan, and of the Nile, of Damascus and Amman, Cairo and Casablanca, and a son of every Iraqi city and a son of the Iraqi people, of the Iraqi soil and of the Iraqi air and of the Arab homeland and of the Arab nation.'

Ideology, in fact, has become the cult of personality.

References

3. See here Z.N. Zienc, The Emergence of Arab Nationalism, (Khayats, Beirut, 1966) and Albert Hourani, op. cit.
6. There is considerable dispute about the relative primacy of the early leadership. Thus in Kamal Abu Jaber's The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party (Syracuse UP, Syracuse, 1966) al-Asruci is not mentioned at all, and J.F. Devlin's The Ba'ath Party: a History from its Origins to 1966, (Hoover Institute, Stanford, 1976) contains only a few references. However, perhaps because of their Iraqi rivals' close association with 'Aflaq, the present Syrian Ba'th leadership claims al-Asruci as the source of its ideology. For 'Aflaq, see N.S. Babikian, 'Michel 'Aflaq: A Biographic Outline', Arab Studies Quarterly, vol. 2, no. 3, (Spring 1980), pp. 162-179.
7. See the useful article by H.H. Kopietz, 'The Use of German and
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8. Devlin, op. cit., p. 68.
9. See the Constitution of the Ba'th Party in ibid., p. 28.
10. 'L'islam est cette pulsion vitale qui a mis en branle les forces latentes de la nation arabe ... Muhammad fut l'incarnation de tous les Arabes, que chaque Arabe soit donc aujourd'hui Muhammad! ... Les Chrétiens arabes ... lorsqu'ils retrouveront leur caractère original, reconnaîtront que l'islam est pour eux une culture nationale au sein de laquelle ils doivent s'immerger et de laquelle ils se rassasieront, afin de la comprendre et de l'aimer au point d'être attachés à l'islam comme à l'événement de plus précieux de leur arabisme,' Michel 'Aflaq, 'Fi dhikri al-rasul al-'arabî' (1943), trans. J. Viennot, Orient 9, no. 35 (1965), pp. 147-158.
11. 'The relation between Arabism and the movement of overthrow' (1950); 'The Arab Ba'th is the will of life' (1950) in Michel 'Aflaq, Choice of Texts from the Ba'th Party Founder's Thought, (Florence, 1977) pp. 59, 60.
17. See Devlin, op. cit., passim.
24. For details see Batatu, op. cit., pp. 866-889, 912-921.
25. Ibid., p. 991.
26. Ibid., p. 1012.

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(Baghdad, 1974) pp. 59-60.
29. al-Thawra (Baghdad), 9 February 1980.
31. Ibid., pp. 24-25.
32. Ibid., p. 12.
33. Ibid., p. 9.
34. Ibid., p. 75.
35. Ibid., p. 89.