Chapter I

Contemporary Political Ideologues

Michael Aflaq

Abul Rahman Al-Bazzaz

Jamal Abdul Nasir
1.1 Michael Aflaq:

Virtually no independent school of Arab political thought existed until nationalism emerged as an ideological force towards the end of the nineteenth century. Muslim liberal thinkers who advocated the idea of nationalism did neither demand that Arab lands be detached from the Ottoman Empire nor indeed that religion be separated from the state. 'Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi (1849-1903)\(^1\), the most radical thinker who attacked Ottoman rule, called for the restoration of the Caliphate from Turkish to Arab hands, but not for a break in Ottoman unity. He failed, however, to define his frequent references to the Arab nation in clear nationalist terms, and his idea of nationalism represented but a transition from the ecumenical to the national stage.

To the Arabs, Islam came into being in Arabia, the cradle of the Arab race, and Muhammad (PBUH) was an Arab Prophet and a national hero. The Qur'an was not only revealed in Arabic language but all believers, Arabs as well as non-Arabs, had it as their obligation to recite it in Arabic. The Arabs were the first believers of Islam and they struggled to spread it and establish the Islamic Empire. Perhaps the representative thinker whose primary loyalty was to Islam but who accepted nationalism as a basis for the Islamic state was the reformer Rashid Rida (1865-1935)\(^2\). Infused with the Arab nationalism Rashid Rida often
showed more concern about Arab problems than those of other Islamic countries.

Arab Nationalism certainly meant something different to Christian than to Muslims. Some West Asian Christians see nationalism as a secular movement. Arab nationalism does not mean Arab Unity or Pan-Arabism to most Christians. They accept the Islamic background as part of a civilization in which they have participated since immemorial times, speaking the same language, living as separate millets in the same framework of laws. In fact Christians have played an enormous role in the initial stages of the birth of Arab nationalism and some Christians, like Michael Aflaq, are still recognized as the leader of nationalist movement.3

The idea of nationalism had begun among Christian intellectuals before it did among Muslims. The Christians had been more strongly exposed to Western cultural influence, and they had read Arab history through the lenses of modern Western Scholarship4. The impact of the Ba'th ideology in the political thought of the Arab world is enormous and Michael Aflaq deserves much credit for the compelling way in which he placed his beliefs before the citizenry and attracted many to his cause5. Michael Aflaq was a co-founder (with Salah al-din Beytar) of the Ba'th movement. As both a theory and a political organization, the Ba'th has played a crucial part in the
contemporary politics of the Arab world, particularly in Syria, and Iraq.

Aflaq was born in Damascus in 1910 or 1912 and died in 1989, to a Greek Orthodox Arab family that dealt in grain. He studied in Paris, and got inspired by the ideology of communism. After his return he began his career as a Secondary School teacher in Syria. Unlike most other Arab politicians, Aflaq was an ineffective public speaker, yet he early achieved great popularity among Arab intellectuals. Aflaq's early success, and that of the Ba'th generally stemmed chiefly from the timing of the movement and its ability to place within an ideological framework the major problems facing Syria and the Arab World.

In 1939, Aflaq founded with Beytar a group i.e. Arab renaissance whose political and theoretical debates on Arab Nationalism provided a forum for Aflaq's revolutionary ideas. He denounced both the anti-national character of communism and the softs stand taken by the national government against French domination.

The Ba'th movement was launched in 1940. It emerged into the open in 1943, when Syria gained formal independence, began publishing the journal al-Ba'th in 1946, and held its first congress in 1947. Those years corresponded to Syrias gaining of independence and attempts to devise for itself a new role and a new identity within
the Arab World. The nationalist currents that had developed in Syria since the turn of the century made it clear that Syria would become a fountainhead of the Arab renaissance and a natural leader in future developments.

The Ba'ath, therefore, provided the Arab national movement with a dynamic, full grown ideology and with specific moral and political aspirations at a time when it was beguiled by other creeds. In Syria the Ba'ath faced a tough competition with two other ideological parties, the communists and the Peoples party of Syria (PPS). The first was thinly disguised agents of a foreign power, the second dictated a mystical Syrian Nationalism, fiercely opposed to the claims and assumptions of Arab Nationalism. The Ba'ath had also declared war on the national and people's parties, which it considered the entrenched forces of conservatism and stagnation. Its achievement was to join radical ideas of social justice and democratic political procedures only through which dream of Arab Unity could be realized. Aflaq declared in noble and eloquent terms that this was the main stream of Arab Nationalism a claim which, whatever the party's setbacks, is probably still true today.

Later the Ba'th administration launched a series of development measures and worked closely for a time with Akram Howrani and his Socialist Party, which was founded in 1950. Private enterprise was still, recognized as the chief
element of the economy. The Baʿth’s ideology closely followed these developments. The Nationalism dictated by Aflaq adopted social goals which were generally defined as socialism.

In fact, Aflaq in early fifties, went so far at one point as to equate it with Nationalism. “The Arab nationalists are the socialists, hence there is neither in compatibility nor contradiction nor war between Nationalists and socialists. Further Aflaq wrote in 1950, Socialism in the Arab Baʿth is limited to economic organization that aims to reconsider the distribution of wealth in the Arab fatherland and to layout economic bases which would guarantee equality and economic justice among the citizens. Again in 1955 after explaining that socialism could be defined as a doctrine or a system with specific origins, he wrote that all of these were reducable to the simple statement that socialism is the sharing of the resources of the country by its citizens.”

In his writings Aflaq defined Arab Socialism as a indigenous movement based on an Arab heritage which rejected both the communist and western philosophies. The communist ideology was found unacceptable because, among other things, it negated Arab Nationalism, dictated an economic theory and presented a threat to individual. Western socialism, according to Aflaq, not only turns against capitalism, but
against its allies Arab Nationalism and religion.  

Meanwhile, "Aflaq had overcome the most difficult ideological hurdle of the place and role of Islam in his Nationalist theory. As early as 1943 Aflaq had described Islam as part of the foundation of Arab nationalism and a response to the Arab soul's permanent search for noble and higher spiritual pursuits. Consequently, the relation of Arab Nationalism to Islam was unique and Islam could be considered, even by Christian Arabs, a National culture. This interesting view was in part a preparation for further identifying Islam with Arab Nationalism and thus removing the popular distrust shown by the masses, towards secular nationalism and Secular Socialism. The distrust—naturally was toward socialist theory itself and not towards its fruit. In expressing his views on socialism, however, "Aflaq seemed to be far more secularist than he might have intended."

Aflaq adopted the motto, 'one Arab Nation with an eternal mission' as the central slogan of his ideology. A strong dose of metaphysics was injected into his three objectives of Unity, Freedom and Socialism. The struggle for unity is not conceived simply in straightforward Pan-Arab terms as the elimination of divisive political boundaries, it is seen as a regenerative process leading to the reform of Arab character and society. This can only come about when Arabs
free themselves from all regional, religious and communal loyalties, liberate themselves from all "ambivalence", and submit to the eternal values of mankind. Unity therefore, is not merely a clear cut political objective, it is a search for the treasure of hidden vitality the moral and spiritual founts of Nationalism.12

The Arab Nationalist doctrine dictated by Aflaq had at its hearts a call for revitalization of Arab Society. This was the essence of the sacred mission of the ideology and is what Aflaq intended to convey when he used the word INQILAB. Thus in a talk given to a party branch in February 1950 he said:

Revolution (INQILAB), then, before being a political and social programme is that Prime propelling power, that powerful psychic current, that mandatory struggle, without which the re-awakening of the nation is not to be understood. This is what we understand by revolution.13

Thus, to Michael Aflaq INQILAB means orientation of the masses rather than of the system. Since the change in the system would allow automatically with the change in the interior transformation of the masses. This interpretation of INQILAB as transformation brought a considerable influence on the Ba'th party in the forties. The draft
constitution of Ba'th party in its article 6 states: 'The Arab Ba'th party is a revolutionary party; it believes that its chief aims of resurrecting Arab Nationalism and building socialism can only be achieved by transformation and struggle.... Hence the party decides in favour of ....... the transformation of the present rotten situation, a transformation which is to include all sections of life, intellectual, economic, social and political'.

Aflaq's ideal of Arab unity made the Ba'th appear as its natural instrument and Syria as its centre. The Union with Egypt in 1958 collapsed in 1961, and the second union undertaken with Iraq and Egypt in 1963 remains so far on paper. The chief cause for the failure of the Union was Ba'th's insistence on preserving its organization and freedom of activity and its implicit refusal to surrender completely to Egypt, Syria's potential leadership of the Arab world, even though Egypt seemed to be politically more capable of achieving unity.

Aflaq's popularity came in 1963, when the Ba'thist wing of the military in Iraq acquired power. But the Ba'thist National command, established over parties in both Syria and Iraq, was torn apart by successive coups led by officers in each country. The records of Union talk with Egypt in 1963 reflect a rather dismal picture of Aflaq and of the Ba'th's intellectual theories. Soon after the popularity of both
Aflaq and the Ba'th seemed to be declining rapidly. Their ideas failed to meet the test of time and of practicality. In the later years as an old guard Michael Aflaq was no longer insisted to consult on important matters although the group in power in Syria was Ba'thist but in reality it had come to be confined by the domination of the military. It might be turned that the Ba'th era was over.

Thus, Aflaq and his party have helped speed up the social and political synthesis in the Fertile Crescent. They have mobilized the masses for Nationalism, Socialism and Unity.

According to Aflaq Society is a living organic being and not a dead mechanical he wrote, thus it defies abstract analysis. Aflaq attacked abstract thinking and theoretical definition as stripping reality of its essence. The true "idealist is not the opposite of the realist. For the realist is not the one who surrenders to the present but who understands it". The true idealist then, in Aflaq's thinking, is the one who understands his surroundings and attempts to change them. Aflaq asserts that Arab nationalism is not the product of thought but gives rise to thought. "It is not the slave of art, but its mainspring and spirit. There is no contradiction between it and liberty, for it is liberty if it pursues its natural course and fulfills its capabilities."16
1.2 Abdul Rahman al-Bazzaz:

Perhaps the most forceful expression of this blend of Islam and nationalism by Muslim thinkers is to be found in the writings of Abdul Rahman al-Bazzaz. In his distinguished career first as a teacher and scholar and later as a diplomat and statesman, al-Bazzaz remained faithful to his fundamental conception of Arab nationalism in terms of a humanistic perspective of individual emancipation within the framework of revolutionary social progress.

Abdul-Rahman al-Bazzaz was born in 1913 in al-Karkh, a Sunni section of Baghdad, of a family well known for its attachment to religion and Islamic learning. Like other young Iraqi leaders, he studied in Government school and graduated from the Baghdad Law college in 1934. While still a student, he became an advocate of Arab Nationalist, but did not abandon the religion and ethical values of his early upbringing. He grew up to be a young man imbued with lofty ideas combining religious and nationalism although most of his classmates adopted nationalism and rejected religious values. He spent the next four years in England where he received a sound education in law at King's College, University of London. Moderate in life and temperament, education in England added depth to his views on public affairs and prompted him to combine what he
considered the best in Islamic and European traditions. Upon his return to Baghdad in 1939 he immediately became active with other young men in nationalist circles.

Bazzaz received the first-check from his participation in nationalist activities when Pan-Arabs supported the Rashid Ali uprising in 1941. After the war, he worked in the Department of justice for a shortwhile before becoming Dean of the law college, which enhanced his stature in nationalist circles. For almost a decade he wrote and lectured on Arab Nationalism. The main purpose of his writings was to interpret Arab Nationalism on an Islamic basis. Islam, as a cultural heritage, he asserted, was not opposed to Arab Nationalism, but on the contrary, it was a component of nationalism.

According to him, the apparent contradiction between Islam and Arab Nationalism which is still present in the minds of many people, is in the first place, due to misunderstanding, misrepresentation and misinterpretation, involving both Islam and Arab Nationalism.

This misunderstanding of Islam is due to the wrong significance attributed to the word "religion". We are influenced here - as a result of the intellectual imperialism under which a group of Us still labour - by the Western concepts which restrict religion within narrow
limits not extending beyond worship, ritual, and the spiritual beliefs which govern a man in his behaviour, in relation to his God and to his brother man, in his capacity of an individual independent of society. Islam does not admit this narrow view of religion, but opposes it and the purpose it serves to the utmost.

Thus one may argue, that there is absolutely no contradiction between Arabism and Islam. The two converge on many points, yet Islam can not be included as a 'necessary' element in the formation of Arab Nationalism. What is interesting in Bazzaz's view that:

"If we equate religion and nationalism we would exclude one tenth of the Egyptian population, and one fifths of Syria, and about one half of the population of Lebanon from Arab nationalism we would also exclude a sizable proportion of the Iraqis, Palestinians, Jordanians, and Sudanese, as well as a great number of Arabs who have immigrated to America, Africa and other continents."

He further argues, when we lose there millions (of Arabs), the theory (that Islam is an essential element) would have in consideration every Muslims in Asia, Africa & Europe as brother to the Arab Muslims ....... brothers in the national sense, which means that the sons of the same nationality
will have the same political destiny and one ultimate national interest, and requires the establishment of a social and political solidarity and association among them. The consequences of this type of thinking and the responsibilities and obligations, which are beyond our power and resources.

To illustrate why nationalism should not be founded on one particular religion, al-Bazzaz expands al-Huzri’s theory, giving as examples the cases of Israel and Pakistan.

The principal aim of his thought was not to arouse traditional religious zeal, as some have suspected but to temper the spirit of young men who advocated secular nationalism by the re-introduction of religious and ethical values into Arab nationalism.

After the July revolution, Bazzaz resumed the duty to the Deanship of the law college, very soon, however, he fell into disfavour with President Qasim, because he supported the Pan-Arab group of which Arif had become the Spokesman, calling for union with Egypt. Under communist pressure, he was first transferred to the Department of Justice, as a judge in the court of Cassation, but after the Shawwaf uprising in February 1959, he was arrested with other Pan-
Arabs and sent to an internment camps in Abu Ghurayb. For over six months he was subjected with other Pan-Arabs to various kinds of indignities unparalleled under the old regime before he and others were released. By that terms he lost faith in the Qasim regime and resigned from his post as judge. After that short vocation in Lebanon later on he shifted to Cairo and served as a Director of the Institute of Arabic Studies - an institute for training young men in Arab affairs under the auspices of the Arab League - and remained there until the overthrow of the Qasim regime 20.

The Ramadan Revolution of February 1963 marked a turning point in Bazzaz's life. No sooner Arif become President Bazzaz was appointed as Iraq's Ambassador to the UAR. It is held that what prompted the newly formed Ba'th government to appoint him as Ambassador in Cairo was the need for his services in the forthcoming Arab unity talks with Nasir, since he was known to have supported Arab Union on a federal basis 21.

Some of Bazzaz's friends in Cairo wanted him to remain as Director of the Institute of Arabic Studies. Since the Institute, falling in lesser hands after Husris resignation, needed an able administration, but Bazzaz, anxious to return he resigned to resume his personal contacts with Arif, which led to his swift elevation as premier two years later. Before he was ready to serve in that capacity, he had yet to
spend the next two years in London and Geneva as Ambassador at the Court of St. James in 1963-64 and as Secretary General of the organization of petroleum exporting companies on 1964-65, in each post he gained practical experience invaluable for the head of the Government. No one doubted that once Arif decided to invite a civilian to form a Government, he could think of no more suitable candidates than Bazzaz. From the moment Arif became President in 1963, Bazzaz's star began to rise.22

Much of al-Bazzaz's early writings are concerned with defining the relation between Islam and Arab Nationalism. In 'Min Rohal Islam (From the spirit of Islam) published in Baghdad in 1959, he advanced the thesis that 'there is no real opposition between Islam and Arab nationalism: the Arab nation is the core of the Islamic community, most of Muslims are also Arabs; the Quran is in Arabic and embodies the traditional morality of the prophet was an Arab; Islam is the medium through which the Arabs made their contribution to history.23"

This conception of the essential unity of Arab Nationalism and Islam runs through his early formulation of the basis of Arab nationalism; language, history, literature and customs and character.

Abdul Rahman al-Bazzaz thus revived the old arguments when he asserted that nationalism and Islam went hand in
hand in many respects. In the course of so doing he was to expose the nature of Arab Nationalism as a divisive and elitist movement and so to provide an affirmation of the nationalist belief in the necessity for the prominent position of the Sunni community in Islam. To him nationalism had to take on the activist nature of Islam since nationalism was an assertion by the Arabs of the resumption of the mission of Mohammad (PBUH). Thus the Prophet becomes the founder of the Arab nation, and Islam is the product of the Arab national geneous. This kind of analysis leaves out the non-Muslims Arab, the Christian and the Jew, the non-Arab Muslim, the Kurds and Berber, and the heterodox Muslims, Shī‘ite Druze Alavī and Isma‘īlī. But Bazzaz claims to provide a solution for this dilemma too. These groups become true Arabs when they recognize Mohammed as the hero of Arab nationalism and venerate Islam as the religion that entitled the Arab nation to assert its place in the world. This seems to be an open invitation not only to the non-Sunni Muslim but to the Christian, and Jews to acknowledge that the Muslim Sunni Arab had the right ordained in orthodoxy to enjoy a position of primacy and presumably rule over all non-Sunni communities.

Strangely as it may seem to a number of Christian ideologues of Arab nationalism have accepted Bazzaz's thesis and condoned his pretensions. Indeed Zuraq — whom Bazzaz cites as a model Christian nationalist thinker, in contrast
to the early Christian advocates of nationalism (who advocated the separation of religion and State), has also emphasized the compatibility between Islam and Nationalism and called on his fellow Christians to accord Islam a special veneration.

1.3 Jamal Abdul Nasir:

The personality of Jamal Abdul Nasir becomes a point of departure in Arab history when he successfully led the Egyptian Arab revolution of July 23, 1952. He announced the radical and forward-looking movement all over the Arab world. His revolution was not merely a routine change of government but a basic and historical change which inspired the Arab masses both in traditionalist, conventionalist Arab countries as well as in republican and left-oriented countries. 'Nasirites' as a party continue until this day in almost all Arab countries and they are likely to continue for as long as one can see. The principles for which Nasir stood did not concern Egypt alone but the Arab world at large.

Nasir was born in Alexandria on January 15, 1918 and obtained his primary education in Cairo & subsequently his secondary education in Alexandra Saad Zaghlul the leader of the Wafad party and the hero of the 1919 revolution died on 23rd August 1927, Nasir was 9 years old and observed much of
heated political discussions which raged all round. At this time Egypt was undergoing a period of crisis and confusion because of the tussle between its ancient religious traditions and the modern European trends of thought and life under the British Suzerainty. Nasir took part in political demonstrations while a schoolboy and was the victim of a baton attack leaving a scar on his forehead. In 1937 Nasir moved to Cairo from Alexandria where he keenly followed the leaders of Egyptian Nationalism and religious reform such as Jamaluddin al Afghani, Shaikh Mohd. Abduh. By now Nasir's nationalist ideas had taken a concrete shape. President Nasir was not a religious bigot. He had a broad mental horizon and was able to look at the world stage in the larger setting of geo-strategic. Nasir's effort was to create Arab strategic unity and not unity on the basis of religion. Nasir felt that religion could not be a bonding force between countries of different cultural identities with differing geo-political interest. In his view Arab unity had certain unique feature in that religion, language as well as geo-politics all combined together make it a viable and workable concept.

The political and social ideas of Jamal Abdul Nasir derived basically from the practical needs of a changing society. Nasir's social origins and background helped in explaining his ability to understand the spirit of the Arab masses, to identify himself with them, and to manipulate
them for his political purposes.

After completing his law education, he joined the lieutenant commission from the Military Academy of Cairo in 1937. He later became an instructor in the Military Academy and participated in the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. The defeat of the Arabs, Crystalized his thoughts about the need of the time and to restore self confidence. His revolutionary activity, which began after 1948, brought him into contact with the Muslim brotherhood and he organised a free officer committee, out of which grew the Council of Revolutionary Command, which later on over threw the regime of King Faruq in July 1952. In 1954, Nasir emerged as the leader of the revolution after General Mohd Naguib, its nominal leader, was ousted. He was elected president of Egypt in 1956 and subsequently he was re-elected within uncontested elections. After the Israeli forces defeated those of the UAR in June, 1967, Nasir resigned the presidency but on popular demand, reassumed office the following day.29

To him that ideology of Pan-Arab movement was a protest against three related political situation. The most obvious target of Pan-Arab protest was the division of Arabic-speaking peoples into a number of independent states. Second, it was a protest against the existing economic and social systems of all the Arab countries and against the
political power structure of some. The third protest against the bipolarization of international power.

The basis of Arab nationalism as was characterized by these three protests were sometimes referred to as 'Nasirism' with the implications that the policies of the United Arab Republic had substantial support beyond the boarders of that country and that they were an accurate reflection of Pan-Arab ideology.

Thus Nasirism does not refer to a single individual, and does not refer to a specific government such as that of the UAR. It refers clearly and precisely to the national revolutionary force - in its ideological position, its principles, its goals of nationalism liberation, unity and in the economic and social spheres of life.

The policy of Nasirism was opposed by the Ba'thists because they attempted to isolate President Nasir and his government of the UAR from the Arab people, while what they really oppose were the aspirations and the interests of the people.

Hence the situation was such that those opposing Nasir did not oppose the legitimacy of his leadership, they opposed the Arab Nationalist Movement. These opponents number more than a few, they included the Syrian Nationalists, the Lebanese Confessionalists, the Hashemites,
the communist infiltrated government of Iraq and the traditional Arab rulers. With so many opponents, claiming to speak for the interests of the Arab people, or for parts of them, it was probably not correct to assume that there was a good deal of interaction between policy formation in the UAR and expectations about popular reaction throughout the Arab world. The policy of the UAR, therefore, might be seen as an adaptation of the practical choices of the Egyptian political military elite to the exigencies of the opinion of the (politically) participant Arab classes.31.

The views of President Nasir were borne out in most conversations with informed Egyptians. In answer to inquiries about the ideology of UAR government, an admittedly unfair question, two sorts of answers were forthcoming. Either people say that there was none, or they referred the inquirer to president Nasir's published speeches. If one inquired more specifically about certain policies of the UAR, then the answer was almost invariably that the policy was not rigid; it did not stem from any fixed idea, it would be tested pragmatically and discarded if found wanting. Of course, opposition nationalist groups might have their favourite ideologues. If you asked Ba'athists about the ideology of the Arab Nationalist Movement, they would no doubt refer to Michael Aflaq and several others.
The primary promise had become the identity of the policy of the UAR and the interest of the Arab nation. Once this had been established building the theory of Arab Nationalism became a process combining exegesis, justification, and generalization.

Despite the lack of ideological limitation the policy of the UAR can be shown to be more or less fixed at the present time and to have gone through a sort of rational growth. This growth, no doubt was due to a gradually increasing awareness of the attitudes of the broader Arab public, as well as to the effect of international pressures and the blind logic of history, which never permits an act to be completely erased from the consciousness of man.

References

1. Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi belonged to a family of Aleppo, of Turkish origin. He had an old-fashioned Arabic and Turkish Education in his native city, and then worked there as official and journalist until he fell foul of the Turkish authorities and found it best to move to Cairo in 1898.


5. Devlin John F., The Ba'th Party, A History from its origin to 1968. (Stenford University Californian,


9. Devlin, John F. op.cit., no. 2, p. 34.


14. Ibid., p. 27.


19. Ibid., p. 173.


22. Ibid., p. 252.


25. Ibid., p. 91.


27. Ibid.


