The modern state of Iraq has no historical antecedents for its present territorial dimensions. The heterogeneity of its society has preclude the development of a sense of political community among its diverse constituents. Hardly any community in a conglomeration of minorities—ethnic, religious, sectarian and denominational—wanted the state in the form it was created. Muslims, Sunnis and Shi'is, Arabs, Kurds and Turcomans, Christians and Jews entertained divergent political ends. Their new state was artificial as the lines drawn to demarcate its international frontiers. It was born out of the ruin of the Ottoman Empire, rejected and opposed by the people whose life and livelihood were to be determined and regulated by its laws and procedures. As such it failed to provide the general basis for the rule of law; nor could it serve as a single focus of loyalty or allegiance for the different communities. Thus, a salient feature of Iraqi politics has remained inherent instability and a marked propensity toward coercion in the settlement of political disputes, due mainly to its failure to develop an institutional framework under which political difference could be accommodated and resolved.

Milton Esman in his book Ethnicity, pluralism and the state in the Middle East addresses that ethnic
politics is a phenomenon that prevades the Third World. Since many of the states in Asia and Africa are the product of their colonial past, their national frontiers are no more than the reflection of the European imperial interests, conquest and domination. The same pattern obtains in the Middle East, only in a more pronounced fashion. Under the post-colonial arrangement the territorial state, as the new political authority, has claimed exclusive control over the territory it occupies and the allegiance of all communities and people residing therein. It becomes the task of the new authority to engage in nation-building practices to subsume the diverse and divergent primordial loyalties of the various minorities encouraging their assimilation into the dominant ethnic community in order to fuse a union between nation and state. But unfortunately the majority of the territorial states in the world have failed to secure such an achievement. The inheritors of the colonial states have shown little inclination to revise the boundaries to make them more compatible with demographic reality.

The state has had to establish its exclusive control through force and coercion rather than popular consent. Its instrument has been the Iraqi army, which has continued to be the repository of political power in the land. The imposition of its will did not resolve the prevailing hostility which the various communities harboured
toward the state and to each other. The tribesmen, who had little enthusiasm for a centralized administration, have been crushed and pacified. The Kurds, promised a state of their own in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, have been bludgeoned but not completely cowed. The Muslim Arab Shi'is, who resented and opposed sunni political domination following their enfranchisement from the disabilities imposed by the Ottomons, have witnessed the destruction of their tribal structure which afforded power and protection, the deportation, exile and execution of their religious leadership, while their more westernized and secular groups have remained alienated, resentful and ignored. The Turcomans, who awaited liberation at the hands of Mustafa Kamal Ataturk, caught between recalcitrant Kurds and a domineering Arab government in Baghdad, have been intimidated into submission.

Moreover, the elaborately devised means for national integration proved drastically inadequate. Iraq has been governed by different regimes, monarchical and republican, professing variants of the same ideology. Pan-Arabism transformed into a radical doctrine of Arab nationalism under the Ba'ath has ill served the integrative processes sought in nation-building. It has been a disruptive factor as it tends to draw a distinction between Arabs and non-Arabs as well as Muslims and non-Muslims.
However, in the provision of historical perspectives for the right to nationhood, Arab nationalist ideologies both Muslim and Christian, rely on the Islamic legacy which closely associated with Orthodox Islam.

The glory of the Arab past owes a great deal to it, the unity of Arabia was achieved through the spread of Islam, and nationalist aspirations have been inspired by it. None the less the non-Sunni Muslims, particularly the Shi’is, do not share the view of history. For them, as for other religious groupings, the invocation of religious symbols and the constant reference to Sunni traditions has raised doubts about the validity of the nationalist ideology.

It is rather paradoxical that the popularization of nationalist claims on religious grounds has rendered the nationalist doctrine more divisive. It is this dichotomy which Ayatollah Khomeini sought to exploit in his campaign against Iraq under the Ba’th and conversely Saddam in the promotion of an Islamic concept of the state. It has become a common perception for states engaged in conflict to view the heterogeneity of society as an instrument of policy utilized for the purpose of obtaining territorial or other concessions at times of domestic upheavals.
The contribution of the Ba'th to this ideology has accentuated the inherent contradictions rather than resolved them. In a society where kinship, communal, tribal and other primordial loyalties prevail, the Ba'th has attached considerable value to the mystique of being an Arab. The self-assertion of his Arab identity would awaken the nationalist consciousness that lay dormant and trigger off automatic processes for self realization as an Arab nationalist. It is clear that Ba'thists are not prepared to distinguish between the individual being a national of the state and a nationalist.

However, the over-emphasis on people rather than territory, and nationality rather than citizenship, makes Ba'thist doctrine repressive as its strives for the assimilation of heterogeneous communities so that everyone conforms to its militant nationalist requirements. It is a recipe for the establishment of authoritarian rule under the control of a totalitarian party.

It is in this background that the present study is divided into five chapters. The First Chapter begins with a brief description of the origins of Arab nationalism, showing how the idea of 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 West Asia 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 of national liberation, seeking independence from foreign rule or foreign influence. Secondly a number of writers, 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 colonial imperialism and (since 1948) Zionism.

The Second Chapter highlights the growth and developments of the Ba’th movement in Iraq, as was elaborated by the Syrian Christian writer Michael 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 in Syria and Iraq.

Chapter Third, Political Development in the Republican Iraq, begins with the February 1963 coup de’tat which brought the Ba’th party to power in an orgy of
bloodshed until their overthrow in November 1963 by a military nationalist coup. It further examines the successor governments that ruled Iraq until the Ba'th regained power by a coup in July 1968 and Ba'th rule since then. This chapter also attempts to cover the Ba'th Party activity in early 1970 to gain wider support by having a national alliance with some of the opposition parties, inside the count in the Algiers Treaty with Shah of Iran in 1975; increasingly terroistic one party rule culminating from 1978 in violent repression of all opposition, life and history of Saddam Hussain and seizure of presidency in 1979 by eliminating all his opponents rivals in the Ba'th Party. This Chapter also traces the involvement of the army in politics, the role of political parties and ideologies in the army; and the post-1968 Ba'thisation of the army aimed at creating al-Jaish al-'Aqaidi (the ideological army).

The Fourth Chapter Ba'th Party and the Kurdish Question provides a detailed history of the Kurds since the 19th. century, including the Kurdish politics before the 1958 Revolution in Iraq and after. This study also includes the significance of the 1970 manifesto and Algiers agreement of 1975. The discussion however in its ultimate analysis highlights the underlying conflict between a central government, anxious to solidify its authority and to preserve Iraq's territorial integrity and an entrenched
Kurdish leadership whose desire for Autonomy was exploited by foreign interests, which sought to promote the instability, if not the destruction -- of the Ba‘th regime in Baghdad.

The last Chapter Republican Iraq at the cross roads demonstrates the causes and effects of the two Gulf Wars & subsequently its over all impact on the politics of the region.