CHAPTER 2
ORIGIN OF THE BA’TH PARTY

The idea of nationalism had begun amongst 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 scholarship. The impact of the Ba’th ideology on 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 cause.

The Ba’th’s founders were theorists with a vision and were able to put forth their ideas on social revolution and Arab nationalism more cogently and longer than any of their rivals. Thus in Syria, the Ba’th has grown from a purely Syrian Party into a regional inter-Arab movements with adherents in every Arab country and branches in most.

There is much controversy among Ba’thists as to whether Zaki al-Arsuzi or Michael Aflaq and Salah al-Din

al Bitar were the real founders of the Ba'th. In a more immediate sense the Ba'th Party can be considered as a successor to the league of National Action ('Usbat al-'Amal al-Qawmi) which was organized in 1932 to spearhead the struggle against the French and remained politically active until 1940. The league provided a relatively cohesive organizational framework, which the nationalist movement lacked at the time. Decline of the league came with the death of its first Secretary, 'Abd al-Razaaq al-Dandashi, and the expulsion of its second Secretary Sabri al-'Asali because of his agreement to serve in parliament before the termination of the Mandate. After the withdrawal of Zaki al-Arsuzi from active membership in 1939, league was gravely weakened and shortly after its activities were suspended because of the outbreak of World War II. A number of events in the late 1930s and early 1940s provided the stimulus for the formation of the Ba'th Party. Probably most important was the crushing defeat of

4. Zaki al-Arsuzi was originally the head of the Arab resistance in the Sanjaq of Alexandretta, where he captured the admiration of the Syrian nationalist youth and became a veritable national symbol to them. After the loss of Sanjaq, he moved to Damascus, but remained politically active. The victorious radical Ba'thist of the 23 Feb., 1966 coup have acknowledged al-Arsuzi instead of Michael Aflaq as the 'Spiritual father' of the Ba'th.

France by the Nazis in 1940 and the consequent weakening of its power in its overseas dominions especially in Syria and Lebanon. The dangers of pro-Nazi control of these areas led the British and the Free French to invade both Syria and Lebanon in June 1941. The Free French representative, Delegate General Catroux, promised in a statement issued the day the invasion began that the Lebanese and Syrians would "be from henceforth sovereign and independent peoples". Five years of political turmoil and civil strife ending with French shelling of Damascus, were to pass before his promise was completely redeemed. However, it served to open up political possibilities in Syria.

The event that paved the way for the Ba’th Party entry into Iraq was the formation of the Rashid Ali Gaylani Government in the Spring of 1941. Iraq had become formally independent in 1932, but retained close ties to Britain, especially in defence and security affairs. By treaty, Britain retained the right to maintain certain forces in Iraq. However the relations between the two got severed when London tried to introduce larger forces in Iraq on the pretext of the Germans’ military threat against the will of the nationalist government of Gaylani in Iraq. Soon after fighting broke out when the Iraqis tried to capture the British Base at Habbaniyah. Military developments in Iraq caught the attention of young Arab nationalists in

6. Devlin, John F; op.cit, p.3.
Syria, and several Syrians, acting in accordance with the principles of Arab unity, went to Iraq to offer their services to the Gaylani regime. When British forces crushed the Gaylani movement all were interned by the French authorities.  

Before examining the Ba'hist ideology more specifically, it is useful to try to place the Ba'th in the context of other 'nationalist' political parties and groupings of the 1940s. In Syria the older generation of nationalists, who had no experience 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-wataniyya. Both these bodies opposed the mandate as constituted, and had been instrumental in conducting the abortive negotiations with the French, which had begun in 1936. In general, both the groupings believed in the notion 'Syria for the Syrians' and were fiercely opposed the acceding of Alaxendaretta to Turkey, and sought an independent united Syrian State.

For the Syrian nationalists the war years were trying, filled with soul-searching and sporadic

attempts to escape from political emptiness. In 1939 an Arab nationalist party was apparently founded by al-Arsuzi and a handful of followers, but it lasted for only a few months. At the end of November 1940 al-Arsuzi, with only five of his disciples, organized another party, al-Ba’th al-Arabi (the Arab Resurrection). Sami al-jundi, a founding member of that demunitive group, records how he and al-Arsuzi incidentally learned of the existence of another, very similar, party which called itself al-Ihya al-Arabi and alternatively al-Ba’th al-Arabi. Its leaders were Michael Aflaq and Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and all the members of the two Ba’ths, with one or two exceptions, were their students at the Tajhiz Demashq high school. Al-Arsuzi Ba’th eventually disbanded, and its members joined al-Ihya al-Arabi, which became a vocal protagonists of Arab unity and socialism in the country.\footnote{Kalyani, Nabil M; IJME’s, op, cit, p.4}

Michael Aflaq was born in 1910 into a Greek Orthodox Christian family in the Maydane quarter, a centre of nationalist agitation, of Damascus. His father a middle class merchant was twice imprisoned for his nationalist activities, first by the Ottomons and then by the French mandate authorities. Aflaq received his secondary education in Damascus and participated in the Syrian uprising against the French. In 1928 he won a scholarship to the Sorbonne.
where he completed licentiate of History in 1932. While in Paris he acquired a thorough knowledge of the cultural and philosophic issues of the day. Influenced through the intensive study of the works of Anatole France, Andre Gide, Nietzsche, Marx, Dostoeivski, Tolstoi and Bergson, Aflaq formed a union of Arab students in France which set as its goal the independence and unification of the Arab world. The rich intellectual background of Paris had made significant impact on Aflaq's mind. He was lured by communists to attend some of their meetings but did not become member of the communist party, he seems to have been fascinated by Marx and may have become in theory, if not in practice, a Marxist above all, he was most impressed by communist discipline and tenacity, which taught him at first hand the practical methods of a highly organized political party.

Before going to France I was simply a nationalist (Aflaq said later), I had been greatly influenced by my father who have taken an active part in the struggle against the French and had been imprisoned several times. Nationalism was our local reality, but Bitar and I


discovered socialism in French. On our return we were eager to pass on these ideas to a new generation.\(^{12}\)

On his return to Damascus in 1932 he started teaching at the (Al-Tajhiz) government secondary school. He objected to the methods of instruction and examination and when after many warnings the Minister of Education fined him a fifteen days salary deduction he resigned from the school along with his colleague Bitar. At the same time he made contact with the Syrian nationalist leaders to begin to work more particularly with the National Bloc, consists of firebrand Syrian nationalists for the liberation of Syria from the French mandate. From 1933 to 1936 he was attracted by communists, hoping to get their support to the cause of Arab nationalism. During this period he even wrote for the communist magazine al-Talia'h (The vanguard)\(^{13}\). The message Aflaq preached was fundamentally Arabism that the Arabs as one people - the Ummah' Arabiyyah - had a distinct existence and a special role in the Arab world. For him and his followers this belief was a self evident truth, as it was also for a growing number of politically conscious Arabs who


did not associate themselves with the Ba‘th Party or who did not accept all of its other doctrines. In Aflaq’s view, devotion to and love for one’s homeland were articles of faith which needed no reasoned explanation. Writing in 1940, he asserted:

The nationalism for which we call...... is the same sentiment that binds the individual to his family, because the fatherland is only a large household and the nation a large family.¹⁴

Here lies the crux of Aflaq’s political philosophy: he was an Arab nationalist with a Western education and Western European attitudes. For a time he was torn between the doctrines of Marxist materialism and romantic nationalism. This romantic nationalism touches a chord close to nearly all Arab hearts harking back to the days of glory and Islamic Arab Empire which stretched from Morocco to the Indian Ocean. But Aflaq being of Christian Origin, has been compelled to establish his nationalism on a secular basis, despite the fact that Arab nationalism is often equated with the Arab Muslims.¹⁵

¹⁴. Devlin, John F; op; cit, p. 24
¹⁵. Torry Gordon H; MEJ, op; cit, p. 449.
From 1943 onwards, Aflaq, Bitar and their supporters used the term Ba'th (resurrection) in place of the earlier more common use of ihya (revitalization). The first mention of Harkat al-Ba'th al-Arabi (The Arab Ressurection Movement) appears in a statement issued by Aflaq and Bitar in support of Shukri Quwatli in June 1943.

In essence his basic political principles may be summarized as follows:

1. Emphasis on the dynamic nationalist ideas which represents the aspirations of the Arab people.

2. Emphasis on protecting the integrity and unity of Arab culture from the fragmenting influences of Western culture.

3. Rejection of religious factionalism and localism.

4. Condemnation of communism which represent an artificial materialistic progress.

16. Aflaq wrote that the party was named the "Arab Resurrection party not only because it was the first party to believe ideologically and practically in Arab unity, and to place its organization on a universal Arab foundation but also because it believed that any view-point or remedy of the vital difficulties of the Arabs, either in parts or in toto, which does not emanate from the axiom 'The Unity of the Arab people' is an enormous outlook and injurious cure".

17. Devlin John F; op; cit, p. 11.
5. Emphasis on the freedom and unity of the Arab World\textsuperscript{18}.

By this time Arab students in Syria as well as in other countries had become highly politicized, and started showing readiness to listen to those revolutionary ideological groups who approached them to enlist their support in organizing strikes and street demonstrations. Aflaq wielded strong influence on several thousands young Arabs. In the last analysis, his political strength had depended on them as the vehicle of his political ideas\textsuperscript{19}.

At this point, the followers began to consider the Ba'th a political party rather than a movement. In August 1944, Aflaq signed a propaganda bulletin on behalf of the Arab Ba'th Burea (Maktab al-Ba'th al-Arabi). And finally the Ba'th movement (Harkat) was replaced in the name of Arab Ba'th Party (Hizb al-Ba'th al-Arabi) when they applied for a license to function as a legal political party in July 10, 1945 and assumed to himself along with Salah al-Din, Bitar and Midhat Bitar the membership of the central executive body. Although the three were applying for a license to function as a party in Syria, the application pointed out that the Ba'th party was interested in all parts of the Arab nation and addressed its appeal to all Arabs.

\textsuperscript{18} Ismail, Tariq Y; The Arab Left, Syracuse University Press, America, 1976, pp. 20-21.

\textsuperscript{19} Khadduri, Majid; 1973, op,cit, p. 219.
The request for a license was not granted. The party renewed its application for a license in May 1946, after the French had left Syria.\textsuperscript{20}

Legal or not, the Ba'th was in full swing as a political party by the end of 1945. In December of that year, a general meeting of the party membership was held in Damascus. It issued a statement ranging over a broad array of Arab problems, the Palestine question, relation with England and France, and conditions in virtually all Arab countries. Hence, after the departure of the French, the party moved to obtain its own press outlet, and the first issue of its daily newspaper, al-Ba'th, appeared on July 3, 1946. The paper was issued under the party slogan "One Arab Nation, One Immortal Mission". Its checkered career reflected the fortunes of the party to a considerable extent. It was suspended for the greater part of 1948 and 1949.\textsuperscript{21}

After Syrian independence, the party assumed the role of opposition to the government. In a speech by Aflaq to party members in November 1946, he commented on the newly formed government, saying "The truth is that this

\textsuperscript{20} Devlin; John F; op cit; p. 12.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
regime is inflicted with a disease; it is not faithful to its constitutional principles” 22.

Throughout 1946, the Ba’th party continued its campaign to hasten the French withdrawal, to Syrianize the administration and the army, and to spread its triple slogan of independence, Unity and Socialism for the entire Arab world. During this period, it acted pretty much as would any conventional political party in an Arab State 23. For the party itself however, size was becoming a problem. By 1947, the party had branches in Syria’s half-dozen major cities and members in many of the larger provincial towns, and the party leaders realized the time had come to put the organization on a more formal basis.

The founding congress of the party began on April 4, 1947 at the Luna Park Coffee House in Damascus open to any party members who were able to come, the congress was attended mostly by Syrians, naturally but Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq were represented by students studying in Syria. The 247 people who attended were mostly students, teachers, government employees, and private professional people. Jalal al-Sayyid was elected Chairman of the congress. Michael Aflaq gave the opening address and Salah Bitar a

22. AbuJaber; Kamel S, op; cit, p. 25.
23. Devlin; John F; op; cit, p. 13.
statements of policy. The congress approved the constitution of the party, which was read, discussed, and accepted article by article. The Congress ended by electing Michael Aflaq as amid or doyen - later Secretary General of the party and choosing an executive body consisting of Salah al-Din Bitar, Jalal al-Sayyid, and Wahib al-Ghanim. With this Congress, the Ba'th Party completed its transition from a movement to an organized political party. Ba'thists themselves refer to the three-day April 1947 congress as the founding date of their party.

That is how the Ba'thists reject the Western theory of nation state being a political entity and instead of emphasize the moral, spiritual, and dynamic qualities which people possess through their heritage, dreams and aspirations to qualify them for being called a nation. An authoritative translation of the Arab Ba'thist position explaining their viewpoint on Nationalism and Arab regions, invariably appears in all their publications as a sort of preface. It would be revealing to go through it. It says "the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party regards all Arabs as being part of one nation both in cultural and spiritual sense. The different countries in which they live, make up

24. Ibid.
politically and economically united Fatherland.\(^25\)

The Arab has been defined as early as the first congress of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party in 1947. The constitution of the party adopted, laid down "an Arab is any one whose language is Arabic, who lives on Arab land or aspires to live there and who is convinced of his belonging to the Arab nation".\(^26\)

The definition of the 'Arab' in itself makes it clear that the Ba'thist faith in the nationalist idea is not a fanatical concept as has been propagated by many a philosopher of Europe. The very first resolution of the party in 1947, emphasized the point that Arab nationalism was an integral factor of world humanism and was to develop in harmony with humanistic principles. It made it abundantly clear that Arab desires for unity, liberation and collaboration among the Arab is in the context of the good of the humanity as a whole, and aims towards the creation of a free harmonious and peaceful world progressing continuously.\(^27\)

\(^25\) In the party's documents, the Arab Fatherland means all the Arab countries. Each of these is a 'Qutr' which, literally translated, means country; in the Ba'th context, it should be read as province or region. The adjective 'Qutri' (provincial or regional) is used when referred to an individual country.

\(^26\) See Appendix-C, Constitution of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, Article 3 and 22.

\(^27\) Berindranath, Dewan; Iraq the Land of Arab Resurgence, India, 1979, p. 12.
The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party had declared, "the concept of nationalism that we propose is marked above all by a spirit of brotherhood. It proceeds from the same feelings that tie its family members to its home, for we consider that a homeland is one vast heart and that a nation is one large family."

To Aflaq Arab nationalism is formulated as an ideology which would achieve its goals in two stages, each stage embodied in a movement intimately connected with the other. The first is the emancipation of Arab lands from imperialism, the second the unification of Arab homeland. The first cannot completely disappear until the second one is realized. There seems to be nothing new in this formulation, for Arab thinkers have been calling for independence and unity long before the Ba'th came into existence. But the Ba'th Party was perhaps the first ideological group to put forth Arab unity as a primary demand to call for revolutionary approach to achieve it. The Ba'th call for unity came indeed at a time when the Arabs were in greater need for it, that is, when it became evident that the Arabs were unable to stand up to Israil as a result of disunity. The Ba'th expressed this point in its well-known slogan of "Common Arab Destiny", which was an apt cry against bickering Arab leaders who revealed their

negativism, traditionalism, and vested interests.

Aflaq outlined Pan-Arab ideology through defining three objectives for his party: The National unity, Freedom and Socialism. The three ends were believed to be fastened together in an organic relationship. They were indivisible whole, none can be realized at the expense of the others. This find expression in the following words:

"In order to reach this level, the level of National unity, our party defined its three ends, It's belief in Arab unity, Freedom and Socialism. (Arab nationalism) People understand that none of these aims can be brought about without the achievement of the other two. We believe that there will be no unity without freedom and no freedom without socialism and no socialism without freedom and Arab unity".

"These aims must move side by side because if one precedes the other two ends, we go astray from the road and enter the road of tyranny. The unity might be frightful unless it has spirit of freedom and the freedom might be frightful unless it contains socialism. Our nationalism is not a racial nationalism as long as the freedom is a

base and a pillar for it, therefore it is linked with the human consciousness which is existing nowhere but in the chest of the liberal man”.

“The freedom is nothing but a word if equity is not achieved between individuals. Therefore socialism is a fundamental factor in the real freedom and at the same time, the real freedom is a perfect and right way to achieve socialism, thus we find the three ends are always there in one motto: Unity, Freedom and Socialism.\textsuperscript{30}

The struggle for unity is not conceived simply in straight forward Pan-Arab terms as the elimination of divisive political boundaries, it is seen as a regenerative process leading to 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 external values of mankind. Unity, therefore, is not merely a clear cut political objective, it is search for the ‘treasure of hidden vitality’, the moral and spiritual founts of nationalism\textsuperscript{31}.

The arguments given by Dr. Munif al-Razzaz

\textsuperscript{30} Unanimous book, op. cit, p. 352.

\textsuperscript{31} Ismail, Tariq Y; op. cit, p. 32.
are more systematic, in the sense that they convey essence. According to him, unity means not just unification of existing states but the transformation of society itself:

"This unity is horizontal in the sense that it aims to bind the present parts into one economic, political and military unit. And it is vertical in the sense that it tends to fight familism, tribalism, racism and sectarianism and to unite people in the way of liquidation of colonialism firstly and secondly to build up a free dignified life."32.

A cardinal point that dominated the literature of the party and occupied the minds and hearts of party adherence was the question of unity. Writing in 1962, Michael Aflaq noted that "the aim of the Arab unity is the strongest and deepest motivation, for the existence of the Arab Ba‘th Socialist Party as a popular revolutionary and progressive movement". In the constitution of the Ba‘th, innumerable references were made to the need and plausibility of unifying Arab countries. The existing divisions and frontiers were shunned as fabrications of colonial powers with no substantive reality to them. Unity

was considered an existing reality that merely needs to be embodied in formal institutions. A primary object of the party was to break down and eradicate the barriers separating the Arabs.

Ba'th constitution spoke not only on political and economic unity but also on the cultural unity. The first and second fundamental principles of the constitution read:

1. The Arab fatherland constitutes an indivisible political and economic unity. No Arab country can be alive independent of the other.

2. The Arab nation constitutes a cultural unity. Any differences existing among its sons are accidental and unimportant. They will disappear with the awakening of Arab consciousness.

For more than two decades, this Ba'th notion of Arab unity remained almost unaltered. The experience gained by the 1958 Egyptian - Syrian union and its dissolution in 1961, however, enriched and transformed the theoretical formulation of this notion. In 1963, in the Sixth National Conference of the Ba'th, for instance, the

33. Seale, Patrick; op, cit, p. 154.

34. See Appendix-C Constitution of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party.
Conference criticized the high level abstraction in the concept of unity and the party's over-emphasis of unity to the neglect of socialism. The place of unity in the literature of Ba'th in Sixties was minimized while Socialism received more importance than others. The conference also directed the Ba'th provincial leadership in Iraq and Syria to unify the two countries. The directive, however, was not realized due to the external disagreements and conflicts within the party. The assumption to power of Hafiz-al-Assad in Syria in 1970 witnessed the last Ba'thist attempt at unity. Following negotiations between Egypt, Syria and Libya, a union of Arab Republic was declared in 1971, but this too could not be materialized.

The party also strongly believes that sovereignty belongs to the people which alone is the source of all authority and leadership, that the value of the state is measured by the support it received from the masses, and that its sanctity is contingent upon the freedom they would enjoy in the choice of their government. It is, moreover, committed to create objective conditions conducive to the exercise of full rights by the citizens in the individual capacity as well as in national life. These includes establishment of a constitutional representative system.

requiring the executive to be responsible to the legislative, independence of the judiciary, and a single code of laws for all citizens in harmony with the spirit of the present age. 

Central to Aflaq's thinking is the quest for freedom, conceived not merely as emancipation from political tyranny and oppressive poverty, but the liberation of the Arab people, unified in mind and spirit, joined together in social brotherhood. Freedom, should therefore, emanate from the very soul of the Arab and be cherished as an indivisible part of his cultural heritage. Here again the path to freedom is that of struggle strewn with sacrifice. Since such a generic conception of freedom could not be achieved or even promoted without state action, especially in the education of the masses, the political machinery of the state had to be freed from the grip of the privileged classes, considered to be custodian of the feudal past, and intrinsically opposed to the idea of the Inqilab. 

As far as freedom was concerned, the construction of the Ba'ath tapped the question of freedom in the following article:


37. Kalyani, Nabil, M; IJMES, op, cit, P.6.
"The party of the Arab Ba'th therefore believes that: Freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of belief, as well as artistic freedom are sacred, no authority can diminish them"38.

The article dealt with the freedom of individuals but ideologically, the Ba'thist ideologists speaks more on freedom of nation which directs its affairs and freedom from external control as well as from indigenous arbitrary rule. Freedom is elaborated by al-Razzaz in these words:

"Arab nationalism believes in freedom. The freedom outside through establishing a free relations with the people of the world without any disintegration of Arabian Authority (al-Sayadah al-arabiyya) and the freedom inside by establishing a perfect democracy that represents the will of the people and gives them the responsibility and it realize that its struggle against imperialism contains this essence because one of the faces of colonialism is the liquidation of freedom and destoration of people's will"39.

38. See Appendix-C, Constitution of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party.
Perhaps Aflaq, more than any other writer, sees the ills of Arab society as a result of weakness in the Arab "self". Thus he demands an end to the evasion of responsibility. He deems necessary a regeneration of those noble values within each individual that once made the Arab nation strong.

Aflaq is very frank in his approach to the problem of personal freedom. At one point he is merciless in his treatment of those who do not accept the tutelage of the vanguard during the 'Inqilab' period. In effect, he wants to force them to be free. He says, "our mercilessness has for its objective to restore them to their true selves which they ignore, to their hidden will which they have not yet clearly discerned and which is with us even though their swords are against us."40.

The Ba'ath constitution calls for a "Parliamentary constitutional Regime" (Art. 14). Emphasising their democratic spirit, the constitution also insists on a decentralized government (Art.16). Decentralization is required to curb the power of the bureaucracy and secure more popular participation in government. Munif al-Razzaz, writing in 1952, elaborated on this article in the following words:

"It is not possible for this sense of community
(among the individuals in a society) to be completely achieved except through a popular democratic system, by democratic meaning a freely elected parliamentary system with the government directly responsible to the representatives of the people, by popular meaning one built on the will of the majority of the Ummah where in each person enjoys freedom of thought and opinion in the widest application 41.

The sixth national congress of the party acknowledged that in the past the party did act in a way suggesting that it accepted bourgeois liberal democracy as "a permanent and adequate framework for struggle and political action". And this was the main reason for its failure to formulate a new theoretical basis for a clearly defined concept of freedom and democracy consistent with a socialist framework. The starting point of the quest for a new theoretical basis derived from the objective conditions of Arab life was a critical evaluation of the bourgeois concepts of freedom and parliamentary democracy 42.

It was in this context that the congress VIIth of the party commended the alternative model of popular


42. Engineer Asghar Ali, op, cit, pp. 55-58.
democracy. This was considered to be the most suitable system of government during the period of change-over from a feudal capitalist order to a socialist order. The theory of popular democracy, which the Ba'thist government of Iraq has translated into reality, rests on a series of interrelated postulates.

Regarding socialism, though it was placed in third position but it had become a pre-fix word and a part of the party's name "Socialist Arab Ba'th Party". Socialism occupies a greater scope in the constitution and literatures of the party and only one among the three objectives which could partially be implemented in Syria and Iraq after the capture of power. Thus, it is more interesting to examine socialism of Ba'th on both theoretical and practical levels.

On the theoretical level, socialism like other values of Ba'th was subjected to spiritualization for gaining an independent identity as an 'Arab Socialism'. But what exactly Arab Socialism meant? Aflaq gives the following answer:

"If I am asked about the definition of Socialism, I will not find it neither in the treaties of Marx nor in Lenin's book but I shall reply that it is the religion of life and victory of life against

43. For detail see Appendix-B, decision of the Sixth National Convention of the Arab Ba'th Socialist Party, 1963.
Socialism is also intimately bound up with other elements of the party doctrine. In fact, Aflaq in an early writing (1946) went so far at one point as to equate it with nationalism. He says, "The Arab nationalists are the socialists, hence there is neither incompatibility nor contrition nor war between nationalists and socialist."

The concept of Arab socialism actually existed for many centuries before modern Arab nationalism came upon the scene. Its roots were planted long before Marx. They lie deep in the soil of Islam and in the cultural heritage of the Arabs.

The idea of socialism has long been the subject of discussion in the Arab world, but Arab nationalists showed no great interest in it mainly because the overriding principle of Arab union was uppermost in their minds. Young Arabs who exhibited concern about social problems tended to become socialists or communists, and paid little or no attention to Arab union. Such was the trend of thought among young men before World War II. It was the

44. Aflaq, Michael, Fi Sabil al-Ba’th (In the Way to Ba’th), Beirut, Dar al-Tali’a, p. 22.
45. Devlin, John F, op, cit, p. 32.
Ba'th thinkers who made the first attempt to reconcile the two divergent viewpoints and demonstrated that Arab union can not be achieved or possible endure unless it is based on socialism.  

In the pre-1947 writings of Michael Aflaq, socialism signifies an ardent commitment to social justice unsupported by any serious comprehension of the socio-economic realities of Arab life or of the ways and means to achieve the socialist goal. "My concern is not", wrote Aflaq in 1936, "that people should be equal in the distribution of food but that every individual should be allowed to realize his gifts and potential. We are not concerned about alleviating misery (we are concerned about) increasing the wealth of life."  

Speaking on Militant Arab Nationalism as cited in "selection from a collection of article and speeches by the founder of the Ba'th Party, Fi Sabil al-Ba'th (for the Resurrection, Beirut, 1959), Aflaq further explains his positions:

"When we say that we are in need of an Arab Socialism, all we mean is that attention should be given to


the special circumstances that pertain to us as Arabs in this phase of our history. We all agree as to the principle of socialism, but not as to the manner in which it should be applied or to the place it should occupy in our national life. We cannot accept the view of Western Socialism that nationalism is merely a transient phase in the process of economic evolution. On the contrary, socialism must be suited to our national and to our political struggle and not become an instrument of conspiracy against our fatherland, or a means of external divisions and strife, or a screen for antinationalist maneuvers.

We want socialism to serve our nationalist cause, to increase our intellectual daring and to strengthen our call for individual freedom and the fruitfulness and richness of our spirit—not to kill our new freedom in its cradle.....

..... What would become of Arab thought if it were overcome by an artificial philosophy such as communist socialism..... with all that is false and destorted in this philosophy? If we adopt (communist) socialism as our philosophy of life..... then we shall destroy the future of Arab thought and its freedom with our own hands49.

Michael Aflaq had written earlier that communism was a product of abstract eighteenth century philosophy and that its practice in Russia seems to be the product of Russian spiritualism and scientific European thought. To him, communism had no resemblance to any Arab intellectual traditions or to the past and present life of the Arabs. The insistence of Ba’th on differentiating its socialism from Marxist scientific socialism has led to the coining of the term "Arab socialism", not as a derivative of Marxism but as an opposing and contradictory ideology. Besides, both Aflaq and Bitar believed that Marxism greatly exaggerated the importance of class struggle, ignoring the vital historical role of nationalism.

Aflaq advocates the independency of Arab socialism in these words:

"Socialism is for all people, it is an independent socialism which does not follow specific school and it is not an instrument for fanaticism and dispute but it benefits from all theories and experiences of the nations. It tends to be in harmony with the spirit of the nation, its conditions and deeds. This is Arab socialism."
Nationalism.\textsuperscript{51}

Also, for the sake of legitimacy, socialism was described as an "Islamic Socialism". This was expressed by Jalal al-Sayyid a senior Ba'thist leader.

"The Ba’th Socialism is actually an Arab Socialism but it is possible to say that Ba’th Socialism is an Islamic or more specifically it is a ‘Hanbalite’ version because the Hanbalite Jurists went away than the Ba’th Party in this regard.\textsuperscript{52}

But Salah al-Din Baytar unambiguously disclosed the nature of Arab Socialism:

"Before everything else, I would like to remove a confusion that surrounds this slogan (Socialism). The phrase "Arab Socialism" may reveal that we are inventing a new kind of socialism and here I want to affirm that socialism in our view is one. It is the scientific socialism.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{51} Aflaq Michael, Ma’alim al-Qawmiyya al-Taqadumiyya (Characteristics of the progressive nationalism); in Derasat Fi al-Qawmiyya, Beirut, Dar al-Tali’a 1960, p.29.

\textsuperscript{52} Jalal al-Sayyid, op. cit., p. 207.

As regards the constitution, it reads:

"The Party of the Arab Ba‘th 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 which will ensure for the constant national progress in its material and moral output. It makes possible a trustful brotherhood among its members."

The Ba‘th constitution is a little more specific in that it incorporated a series of propositions prescribing national ownership of major natural resources and public utilities, ceiling on agricultural holdings, worker’s participation in management and share in profits and equitable distribution of wealth. But the over all pattern it envisaged was one of moderate socialism complete with class cooperation and protection of the rights of private property and of inheritance.

The constitution does specify the economic plan of the party. Article 26 described the Ba‘th as a

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54. See Appendix-C the Constitution of the Arab Ba‘th Socialist Party.
55. Ibid.
socialist party claiming that all the economic resources of the Arab nation should be owned by Arabs themselves. Article 27 declared that this economic wealth had been distributed unjustly; hence, it should be redistributed equally among the people. It followed in Article 28 that the exploitation of man by man was condemned, for all citizens are equal. The state's manipulation of the means of production was also approved by virtue of Article 29. The aforementioned article clearly stated that the state should run co-operations of public interests natural resources, factors of production, and the means of transportation. Aflaq wrote in 1950 "... Socialism in the Arab Ba'th is limited to economic organization that aims to reconsider the distribution of wealth in the Arab fatherland and to layout economic basis 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, Aflaq wrote that "all of these were reducible to the simple statement that socialism is the sharing of the resources of the country by its citizens." Changes in Ba'thist attitudes regarding socialism began to appear in the mid 1950s. Jamal Attasi, 56. Ibid. 57. Devlin, John F, op, cit, p. 34.
writing in 1956, repeated the party’s oft-stated differences between communism and Ba‘thisim, but noted that Ba‘thists could learn a good deal from the manner in which socialism had been put into practice in the socialist countries. Attasi said in a companion article for example, "Socialism cannot realize its goals unless it starts from the (fact of) division, differences and conflict among society’s structures and classes".

Munif al-Razzaz an early member of the party in Jordan was equally forthright in his article entitled "why socialism now? it takes a very different approach to socialism than Aflaq did.

To him, "Socialism is a way of life, not just an economic order. It extends to all aspects of life economic, politics, training, education, social life, health, moral, literature science, history and others, both great and small". Disgressing from the established practice of placing nationalism above everything else, he sought to demonstrate that socialism, freedom and unity were interrelated and independent.\(^58\).

It was in this context that the party’s Sixth

58. Ibid, pp. 36-37.
National Congress in 1963 reviewed the Ba'th's outlook on socialism focusing on its positive as well as negative aspects. While nothing that in the early stage the Ba'th's concept of socialism was not clear and well defined, it maintained that this deficiency was partly compensated by the party's revolutionary standpoint in struggle which indeed saved it from being submerged in bourgeois reformism 59.

In the new formulation socialism aims at the establishment of a new social order in which objective, economic, social, intellectual and political conditions are established that free the individual from all forms of exploitation, subjugation, and stagnation and allow him to become a completely free human being. This new conception of socialism which the Sixth National Conference had approved however was soon attacked by both rightist and leftist elements within the Ba'th. The former discredited it as being extremist and the latter condemned it as being selective and not sufficiently radical 60.

The Arab nationalist doctrine dictated by Michael Aflaq had at its heart a call for a revitalization


60. Ismail Tariq Y, op, cit, p. 45.
of Arab society. This was the essence of the sacred mission of the party and was 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 then, before being a political and social program, 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."

Thus, to Aflaq 'Inqilab' means changing people rather than the system. Once the people, or enough of them had undergone an interior transformation, "liberating the intellect.... and releasing the source of faith in the soul". Change in the system would follow automatically. This interpretation of 'Inqilab' as transformation came to have considerable influence in the Ba'th Party in the forties and early fifties. As article 6 of the Ba'th constitution states, "The Party of the Arab Ba'th is revolutionary. It believes that its main objectives for the realization of the renaissance of Arab nationalism or for the establishment of socialism can not be achieved except by means of revolution and struggle."


rely on slow evolution and to be satisfied with partial and superficial reforms is to threaten these aims and to conduce to their failure and their loss."63.

Aflaq laid down three essential conditions for the Inqilab.

1. Awareness of the historical and contemporary realities which called for drastic transformation

2. A feeling of responsibility rooted in a strong moral base and

3. A genuine belief in the feasibility, at the existing stage of Arab history, of the proposed Inqilab.

These conditions were to be fulfilled by al-Talia (the vanguard) who constitutes the membership of the Ba‘th. The struggle which designated as the practical expression of the Inqilab, wrote Aflaq, creates its own crusaders. The Inqilab becomes a living thing in their souls, minds and manners or it become life itself. Once achieved, the Inqilab would presumably usher in the Ba‘thist trinity - unity, freedom, and socialism. Conversely, the trinity are indispensable ingredients for the success of the

63. See Appendix-C, Constitution of the Arab Ba‘th Socialist Party.
Inqilab, since the ideal of unity, freedom and socialism are considered fundamental and inseparable objective of equal importance. The concept of secularism in the Arab World emerged as a result of the impact of the West on the Arab intellectuals. Serious attempts were made by the Arab intellectuals to philosophize the concept of secularism in nationalistic terms for the purpose of legitimacy in the Arab World.

The Ba'th party, indeed, worked out for decades to define Arab secularism or more specifically, the relationship between State and Religion. In order to provide a detailed description for the ideological development of the Ba'thist secularism, it is necessary to analyse the problem on constitutional, ideological and practical level.

On constitutional grounds, the manifesto of the Ba'th which was drafted by Michael Aflaq in 1947 and the

64. Kalyani, Nabil M. IJMES, op. cit, p. 5.

65. David Robert writes: The West displayed the Successful and secular nation - State to the visitors including the Arab nationalist. The intellectual influences which swayed them, Hegel, Marx, Stalin, Rosenberg and Hitler in Europe and Antun Sa’adeh at home, all had one common denominator, the exaltation of the State in one form or another.

Interim Constitution of the Iraqi State promulgated in 1968 are better specimens for study since this may still be regarded as the primary power of Ba‘thist programme in Iraq.

The Ba‘th Constitution tries to project the ideal vision of the party to the Arab people, which is epitomised in the dictum that "Arab nation constitutes a cultural unity and that the Arab land belongs to Arabs who alone have the right to administer its affairs". Such secular tendencies and nationalistic colour dominated the forty eight articles of the constitution. The first fundamental principle reads:

"The Arabs form one nation. This nation has the natural right to live in a single state and to be free to direct its own destiny".

The Ba‘th therefore believes that:

(1). The Arab fatherland constitutes an indivisible political and economic unity. No Arab country can live apart from the others.

The Arab nation constitutes a cultural unity. Any differences existing among its sons are accidental and unimportant. They will all disappear with the awakening of the Arab consciousness.

The Arab fatherland belongs to the Arabs. They
alone have the right to administer its affairs, to dispose of its wealth, and to direct its destinies.\(^67\).

In the Ba'\'th ideology, Arab nationalism is the essence of the Ba'\'th theory. It is "an eternal and living reality", "the will of the Arabs", "sacred feeling" and "the only tie in the Arab State".

"The party of the Arab Ba'\'th is a national party. It believes that nationalism is a living and eternal reality. It believes that feeling of national awakening which intimately unites the individual to his nation is a sacred feeling. This feeling has within itself a potential of creative power; it binds itself to sacrifice, it seeks the exercise of responsibilities, and it directs the individual personality in a concrete and active manner.

The national idea to which the party appeals is the will of the Arab people to free themselves and to unite. It demands that the opportunity be given to it to realize in history its Arab personality, and to collaborate with all the nations in all the fields which will ensure the march of humanity toward welfare and progress".

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Further the Constitution reads:

"The national tie is the only tie that may exist in the Arab State. It ensures harmony among all the citizens by melting them in the crucible of a single nation and counteracts all religious, communal, tribal, racial, or regional factions."\(^{68}\).

This concept of secular nationalism is reinforced by Article 18 which prescribes "a single code of laws" in harmony with "the spirit of the present age" and "the past experience of the Arab nation".

Thus it is clear that the Ba'th replaces Islam by nationalism to be the only tie that binds Arabs in a State and a weapon to counter all religious factions.

The Ba'th's preference for secularism is also reflected in its cultural and educational policy. Article 41(a) states that "the party endeavours to develop a common culture for the Arab homeland - a culture that will be Arab, free, progressive, comprehensive, deep and humanist in its aims". And Article 43 declares that the party's educational policy aims at creating "a new Arab generation believing in the unity and immortal mission of its nation, taking to scientific thinking, freed from the bonds of superstition and reactionary traditions.... and serving the..."

\(^{68}\) Ibid.
cause of human progress.69

But as Ba‘th captured power in Iraq in 1968, a clear departure from the above fundamentals came to be seen in the interim constitution of Iraqi State which supposed to be based on the principles of the Ba‘th.

The Ba‘thist regime seems unable to neglect the religious factor since religion is a deep rooted phenomenon in the Iraqi society.

The Arabic text of the interim constitution speaks in terms of religion on six occasions. The first and fourth articles of the first part of the constitution define the Arab heritage and the spirit of Islam as a source of democracy and popularity. Also they consider Islam as the religion and fundamental base of the Iraqi State:

Article - I:

"The Iraqi republic is a democratic republic state. The Arab heritage and the spirit of Islam constitute the source of its democracy and popularity".

Article - 4:

"Islam is the religion of the State and the fundamental base for its constitution and the

69. Ibid.
Arabic language is the official language.\textsuperscript{70}

Here, the purpose behind declaring Islam as a base of Iraqi constitution is nothing but to give rise to a sort of ambiguity which tends to win over the majority in Iraq. Such ambiguity also surfaced in Article 8, 17 and 30 of the second part and Article 57 of the third part of the constitution:

**Article-8:**

"Inheritance is a recognized right regulated by the Islamic law.\textsuperscript{71}

**Article-30:**

"The State shall maintain the freedom of religious and the right of religious ceremonies provided that this freedom shall neither contradict the law nor violate the morality.\textsuperscript{72}

**Article-57:**

"I swear by the Almighty God to be a faithful to my religion, country and nation and to preserve the republican regime and abide by its constitution and care for the people's interests

\textsuperscript{70} See Appendix-A, Interim Constitution of the Iraqi Republic.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
with full attention and to protect the independence of the country and the integrity of the lands.\textsuperscript{73}

The above articles shows that the ideal principles of Ba'\text{th} could not be transferred into the interim constitution. The State’s Constitution was made to correspond to Iraq society and theoretically, the constitution is more applicable and realistic as compared with the Ba'\text{th} constitution of 1947.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.