

**OPEN ACCESS**

SUBMITTED 27 January 2025

ACCEPTED 26 February 2025

PUBLISHED 23 March 2025

VOLUME Vol.05 Issue03 2025

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The Emergence of Arab Nationalism in The Middle East and The Baath Party

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Abstract: At the beginning of the 20th century, new ideologies and ideas emerged among Arab intellectuals in the Middle East and North Africa with the aim of uniting the Arabs of the region. On the one hand, there were ideas such as unifying the Arabs of the region through cultural and linguistic elements, and on the other hand, under Islam. This article describes the history and distinctive features of nationalist ideas that emerged in the Arab world in the 20th century.

Keywords: Nationalism, Baathism, Arab unity.

Introduction: The Middle East region has become a hotbed of attention, with terms such as military coups, assassinations, wars, internal conflicts, sectarian conflicts, energy crises, water shortages, and the Arab Spring that began in December 2010, and especially the bloody conflicts that began on October 7, 2023, which are becoming more dramatic with each passing day, and which are almost a genocide of Israel, are becoming the main phrase for describing the current state of the Middle East region. In particular, in this article, before touching on the Baath party based on Arab nationalism and its pretensions, we considered it appropriate to cite the above information and emphasize once again the current state of the Middle East.

Before discussing Arab nationalism, it is appropriate to define the word nationalism. Although there is no generally accepted definition of the concepts of nation and nationalism, the concept of nation can be summarized as "a society that lives or has lived in the same territory, has the same culture and history, and shares the same language, religion, and race." Nationalism is the consciousness of belonging to this society.

RESULTS

In fact, nationalism, the concept of a nation state, which started a new era in world political history, guaranteed

personal rights and freedoms and embodied the nation, state sovereignty, secularism, democracy and justice, emerged after the "French Revolution". Nationalism became an important tool for peoples oppressed by imperial powers to achieve freedom and organize their own statehood. Since the 19th century, Arab peoples in the Middle East, influenced by the "French Revolution", with their desire to establish their own states, led liberation movements against the Ottoman Empire. This process has become a widespread force aimed at realizing the "Arab Renaissance" era, that is, determining the place of the region isolated from the modern world on a global scale. (Some word to transition to a new topic..) A clear definition of nation has not been formed among Arab intellectuals, so the term "nation" is used instead of

The French Revolution of the 18th century spread the idea of nationalism throughout the world. The idea entered Arab society mainly through Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. In Egypt, Kavalali Muhammad Ali Pasha, who came to power after the Napoleonic invasion in 1798, established developing trade relations and sent students to Europe to study. After receiving an education based on Western thought, these students were convinced that the Arabs existed before Islam and that these two concepts were different from each other. One of these students was Rifat al-Tahtawi. The foundations of Arab nationalism in Egypt were strengthened by the ideas of Egyptian nationalism and Islamic modernism that developed under Tahtawi's leadership. One of the most important figures in the field of Islamic modernism was Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who argued that Muslim society, which was lagging behind the West, could only progress through Islamic reforms. He believed that Western ideas, especially the concept of secular nationalism, were designed to "divide" Muslim society. Therefore, Afghani saw Islam as the supreme identity and the only unifying factor, and opposed secession from Ottoman rule. Among the followers of Afghani, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Reza stand out. In Reza's views, the Arabist tendency is more pronounced. In his opinion, the Turks forcibly took the caliphate from the hands of the Arabs and harmed Islam. From this point of view, Reza considered the Arabs to be the true owners of Islam and emphasized that religious power should return to the hands of the Arabs.

In Syria and Iraq, European cultural influence spread to the region through the schools opened by French Jesuits and American Protestant missionaries, through Christian Arabs. One of the factors that influenced the emergence of the idea of Arab nationalism in Syria during this period was the permission of the Syrian governor Ibrahim Pasha to establish missionary

schools and support new ideas. In this process, the Syrian Abdulrahman al-Kawakibi is considered one of the important figures in recognizing and promoting the ethnic identity of the Arabs. During this period, the nationalist Arab thought, which was not opposed to Ottoman rule, gradually began to support the ideas of secession and nationalism based on Arabism.

Arab nationalism in the 19th century was generally cultural in nature, but from the early 20th century the movement began to become political. It was faced with the question of whether the ethnically diverse Arabs should fight for political independence or, conversely, should they remain part of the Ottoman Empire, prioritizing Islamic unity and avoiding division based on ethnic and linguistic differences. This question lost its relevance with the collapse of the Ottoman state after World War I. As a result, Arab nationalism began to take shape as a political movement.

In particular, the politicization of Arab nationalism can be traced back to the emergence of the Baath movement. The Christian Orthodox Arab Michel Aflaq, the Sunni Arab Salah al-Bitar, and the Nusayri Arab Zeki Arsuzi are considered the founders of the Ba'ath movement. The Ba'ath movement, which means "rebirth", describes itself as a nationalist left-wing movement that aims to unite the Arab nation within a single socialist state. Michel Aflaq merged the Arab Renaissance Party, which he founded in 1947, with the Arab Socialist Party of Ekrem Hawrani, which was in the same form.

Despite the expression "socialism" in its name, the Baath Party or regime did not advocate scientific socialism and did not rely on the working class. They received support from the middle and lower classes, along with developing industry. They quickly reorganized the state apparatus into a party state. They waged an internal struggle against elements of the feudal order. The Baath movement appeared mainly as a national socialism that emerged in the exploited and backward Arab countries.

The activity of the Syrian party: Influenced by the 1963 Ba'ath coup in Iraq, the Syrian Ba'ath Party also carried out a coup on March 8, 1963. As a result of this coup, Salah Bitar assumed the position of Prime Minister.

The number of sectarian officers in the army increased, giving them more authority at the expense of Sunni officers. This minority of officers were mainly Alawites, Druze, and Ismailis.

The coup not only changed political power, but also the socio-political system of the traditional political elites that had ruled Syria since its independence.

After the new government formed by Salah Bitar,

various factions emerged within the Ba'ath Party, paving the way for Hafez al-Assad to become leader. The party's early leaders, Michel Aflaq, Salah Bitar, and Amin al-Hafez, were advocates of Pan-Arabism, while the Neo-Ba'athists, composed of Alawite officers such as Salah Jadid, Hafez al-Assad, and Muhammad Omran, supported Syrian nationalism and a socialist path.

After the 1963 coup d'état, the Ba'ath Party began to change its political profile as new members joined. This group, which formed a young and radical wing, gained a majority in the party, and the supporters of Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar became a minority. These internal changes marked a significant difference between the Ba'ath Party of the 1940s and 1950s and the Ba'ath Party of the 1960s.

With the rise of Arab nationalism in Syria, a process of building a common language, a dominant ethnic group, and a common religion, which would serve as a cultural foundation, would develop. Of course, a leader/party to organize this process was also needed. In Syria, this gap was filled by the Baath Party led by Hafez Assad. With the Baath Party, a movement came to power that sought to reconcile Arab nationalism with socialism. While the early Baathists advocated Arab nationalism and a concept of collective rule, neo-Baathists such as Hafez al-Assad advocated Syrian nationalism and a one-man regime. Another important feature of this period was sectarianism. The Syrian social structure, which was composed of various faith structures, placed the Alawites in a strategic position under Hafez al-Assad, which led to Sunni-Alawite tensions. Indeed, these conflicts played a significant role in Hafez al-Assad's rule, which lasted for 30 years and then passed to his son, Bashar al-Assad.

In Egypt, the mainstay of the military regime was also Baathist ideology. Baathist rule in Iraq began with the 1968 military coup under Saddam Hussein and ended with the US invasion and the overthrow of Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The Baath Party initially enjoyed the support of all Arabs. Islam was a unifying factor for the Middle East or Arab world, which constituted the homeland of Islam. Many Islamic states established in the region were also governed by forms of government similar to socialist systems. Although most Arab states appear to have an electoral system or democracy, this does not constitute a true democratic government. Even today, there is no state in the Arab world that is governed by democracy, except for Israel. Although almost all Arab states appear to have elected governments, this is only an appearance. Arab states were mainly ruled by dictatorial regimes until the Arab Spring. The Baath Party, which supported Arab nationalism during the

rule of Hafez Assad, initially united the masses with the slogan "Unity, Freedom, Socialism" (al-wahda, al-hurriyya, al-ishtirakiyya), but later brought misery to the people. The Baath Party, which promised revival, was characterized by its policies of injustice and oppression in Syria.

CONCLUSION

These policies of repression and restrictions on human freedoms drew the Syrian people into the popular uprisings known as the Arab Spring. The voices for democracy in Arab countries began to move towards the original goal of Islamic unity of the Baath Party. In Syria, the previously unwanted Muslim Brotherhood re-emerged as a new organization, the Free Syrian Army, and emerged as an opposition force demanding a share in state governance. The popular uprisings known as the Arab Spring first began in Tunisia in December 2010. Over time, they spread like a domino effect to Egypt, Libya, Syria, Bahrain, Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, Mauritania, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iraq, Lebanon, and Morocco. In the Middle East, people rose up against their governments for freedom, democracy, and equality. While the Arab Spring resulted in regime change or government overthrow in many countries, it failed to produce any results in Syria. The regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad has killed thousands of people and displaced hundreds of thousands.

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