Ba'ath Party

The **Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party** (Arabic: حزب البعث العربي الاشتراكي Ḥizb Al-Ba'th Al-'Arabī Al-Ishtirākī [ˈħɪzb alˈbaʕaθ alˈʕarabiː alˈʔɪʃtɪraːkiː]) was a political party founded in Syria by Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and associates of Zaki al-Arsuzi. The party espoused Ba'athism (from Arabic: البعث Al-Ba'ath or Ba'ath meaning "renaissance" or "resurrection"), which is an ideology mixing Arab nationalist, pan-Arabism, Arab socialist, and anti-imperialist interests. Ba'athism calls for unification of the Arab world into a single state. Its motto, "Unity, Liberty, Socialism", refers to Arab unity, and freedom from non-Arab control and interference.

The party was founded by the merger of the Arab Ba'ath Movement, led by Aflaq and al-Bitar, and the Arab Ba'ath, led by al-Arsuzi, on 7 April 1947 as the **Arab Ba'ath Party**. The party quickly established branches in other Arab countries, although it would only hold power in Iraq and Syria. The Arab Ba'ath Party merged with the Arab Socialist Movement, led by Akram al-Hawrani, in 1952 to form the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party. The newly formed party was a relative success, and became the second-largest party in the Syrian parliament in the 1954 election. This, coupled with the increasing strength of the Syrian Communist Party, led to the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR), a union of Egypt and Syria. The union would prove unsuccessful, and a Syrian coup in 1961 dissolved it.

Following the break-up of the UAR, the Ba'ath Party was reconstituted. However, during the UAR, military activists had established the Military Committee to take control of the Ba'ath Party from civilian hands. In the meantime, in Iraq, the local Ba'ath Party branch had taken power by orchestrating and leading the Ramadan Revolution, only to lose power a couple of months later. The Military Committee, with Aflaq's consent, took power in Syria in the 8th of March Revolution of 1963.

A power struggle quickly developed between the civilian faction led by Aflaq, al-Bitar, and Munif al-Razzaz and the Military Committee led by Salah Jadid and Hafez al-Assad. As relations between the two factions deteriorated, the Military Committee initiated the 1966 Syrian coup d'état, which ousted the National Command led by al-Razzaz, Aflaq, and their supporters. The 1966 coup split the Ba'ath Party between the Iraqi-dominated Ba'ath movement and the Syrian-dominated Ba'ath movement

Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party حزب البعث العربي الاشتراكي	
 Flag of the Ba'ath Party	
Secretary-General	Michel Aflaq (1954–65) Munif al-Razzaz (1965–66)
Founder	Michel Aflaq Salah al-Din al-Bitar
Founded	7 April 1947
Dissolved	23 February 1966
Merger of	Arab Ba'ath Arab Ba'ath Movement Arab Socialist Movement
Succeeded by	Ba'ath Party (Iraqi-dominated faction) Ba'ath Party (Syrian-dominated faction)
Newspaper	*Al-Ba'ath*
Ideology	Ba'athism
Colors	Black, Red, White and Green (Pan-Arab colors)
Slogan	"Unity, liberty, socialism"
Jordanian House of Representatives	1 / 130

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History

The party was founded on 7 April 1947 as the Arab Ba'ath Party by Michel Aflaq (an Antiochian Christian), Salah al-Din al-Bitar (a Sunni Muslim), and the followers of Zaki al-Arsuzi (an atheist) in Damascus, Syria, leading to the establishment of the Syrian Regional Branch.[1] Other regional branches were established throughout the Arab world in the later 1940s and early 1950s, in, among others, Iraq,[2] Yemen and Jordan.[3] Throughout its existence, the National Command (the body responsible for all-Arab affairs), gave most attention to Syrian affairs.[1] The 2nd National Congress was convened in June 1954, and elected a seven-man National Command; Aflaq, Bitar, and Akram al-Hawrani were elected and represented the Syrian Regional Branch,[4] while Abdullah Rimawi and Abdallah Na'was were elected to represent the Jordanian Branch.[5] The congress is notable for sanctioning the merger of the Arab Socialist Movement and the Ba'ath Party, which took place in 1952.[6]

The Syrian Regional Branch rose to prominence in the 1940s and 1950s; in the 1954 parliamentary elections the Syrian Regional Branch won 22 seats in parliament, becoming the second largest party in the country.[7] 90 percent of Ba'ath Party members who stood for elections were elected to parliament.[7] The failure of the traditional parties represented by the People's Party and the National Party, strengthened the Ba'ath Party's public credibility.[8] Through this position, the party was able to get two of its members into the cabinet; Bitar was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs and Khalil Kallas became Minister of Economics.[9] Its new, strengthened position, was used successful to garner support for Syria's merger with Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt, which led to the establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR) in 1958.[10]

On 24 June 1959, Fuad al-Rikabi, the Regional Secretary of the Iraqi Regional Branch, accused the National Command of betraying Arab nationalist principles by conspiring against the UAR.[11] In light of these criticisms, the Ba'ath convened the 3rd National Congress (held 27 August – 1 September 1959), which was attended by delegates from "Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, South Arabia, the Gulf, Arab South, Arab Maghreb, Palestine and Party student organisations in Arab and other universities outside the [Arab] homeland".[12] The congress is notable for endorsing the dissolution of the Syrian Regional Branch, which had been decided by Aflaq and Bitar without inner-party consultation in 1958,[13] and for expelling Rimawi, the Regional Secretary of the Jordanian Regional Branch.[14] Rimawi reacted to his expulsion by forming his own party, the Arab Socialist Revolutionary Ba'ath Party which established a rival National Command to compete with the original.[15] The National Command responded to the problems in Iraq by appointing a Temporary Regional Command on 2 February 1960, which appointed Talib El-Shibib as Regional Secretary,[11] and on 15 June 1961 the National Command expelled Rikabi from the party.[11]

In Iraq, the Iraqi Regional Branch had supported Abd al-Karim Qasim's seizure of power and its ensuing abolishment of the Iraqi Monarchy.[16] The Iraqi Ba'athists supported Qasim on the ground that they believed he would enter Iraq into the UAR, enlarging the Arab nationalist republic.[16] However, this was proven to be a ruse, and after taking power Qasim launched an Iraq first policy.[16] In retaliation, the Ba'ath Party tried to assassinate Qasim in February 1959, but the operation (which was led by a young Saddam Hussein) failed.[17] Qasim was overthrown in the Ramadan Revolution led by young Ba'athist officer Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr, and rumoured to be supported by the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).[18] Declassified documents and the testimony of former CIA officers indicate there was no direct American involvement, although the CIA had been previously notified of an earlier Ba'athist coup plot in July 1962 by a high-ranking informant within the Party. The CIA official working with Archie Roosevelt, Jr. on a separate plan to instigate a military coup against Qasim, and who later became the head of the CIA's operations in Iraq and Syria "from late 1968 to June 1970," has "denied any involvement in the Ba'ath Party's actions."[19] The Iraqi Regional Branch, when it took power, was so riven by factionalism that its purported allies launched a counter-coup forcing them out of power in November 1963.[20]

The 4th National Congress, held in August 1960, criticized the leadership of Aflaq and Bitar, called for the reestablishment of the Syrian Regional Branch and deemphasized the party's commitment to Arab nationalism while emphasizing more the socialist character of the party.[21][22] A year after, at the UAR's nadir in Syria, the Syrian General Abd al-Karim al-Nahlawi launched a coup on 28 September 1961, which led to the reestablishment of the Syrian Arab Republic.[23]

Rule in Syria, infighting, the 1966 coup and split: 1963–1966

The challenges of building a Ba'athist state led to considerable ideological discussion and internal struggle within the party.[24] The Iraqi Regional Branch was increasingly dominated by Ali Salih al-Sadi, a self-described Marxist.[24] He was supported in his ideological reorientation by Hammud al-Shufi, the Regional Secretary of the Syrian Regional Branch,[25] Yasin al-Hafiz, one of the party's few ideological theorists, and by certain members of the secret Military Committee.[26] The Marxist-wing gained new ground at the 6th National Congress (held in October 1963), in which the Iraqi and Syrian regional branches called for the establishment of "socialist planning",[27] "collective farms run by peasants", "workers' democratic control of the means of production", and other demands reflecting a certain emulation of Soviet-style socialism.[28] Aflaq, angry at this transformation of his party, retained a nominal leadership role, but the National Command as a whole came under the control of the radicals.[29]

In 1963 the Ba'ath Party seized power, from then on the Ba'ath functioned as the only officially recognized Syrian political party, but factionalism and splintering within the party led to a succession of governments and new constitutions.[30] On 23 February 1966, a coup d'état led by Salah Jadid, the informal head of the Military Committee, overthrew Aflaq and the Bitar's cabinet.[31] The coup sprung out of factional rivalry between Jadid's "regionalist" (qutri) camp, which promoted ambitions for a Greater Syria and the more traditionally pan-Arab, in power faction, called the "nationalist" (qawmi) faction.[31] Jadid's supporters are considered more left-wing then Aflaq and his peers.[32] Several of Jadid's opponents managed to make their escape and fled to Beirut, Lebanon.[31] Jadid moved the party in a more radical direction. Although he and his supporters had not been supporters of the victorious far-left line at the 6th Party Congress, they had now moved to adopt its positions.[32] The moderate faction, formerly led by Aflaq and al-Bitar, were purged from the party.[32]

While it took some years, the 1966 coup resulted in the creation of two competing National Commands, one Syrian-dominated and another Iraqi-dominated.[29] However, both in Iraq and Syria, the Regional Command became the real centre of party power, and the membership of the National Command became a largely honorary position, often the destination of figures being eased out of the leadership.[29] A consequence of the split was that Zaki al-Arsuzi took Aflaq's place as the official father of Ba'athist thought in the pro-Syrian Ba'ath movement, while the pro-Iraqi Ba'ath movement still considered Aflaq the *de jure* father of Ba'athist thought.[33]

Organization

The organizational structure of the Ba'ath Party was created at the 2nd National Congress by amending the party's Internal Regulations (*An-Nidhāmu-d-Dākhilī*), which was approved at the party's 1st National Congress in 1947.[34] The organizational structure ran from top to bottom, and members were forbidden to initiate contacts between groups on the same level of the organisation—all contacts had to pass through a higher command level.[35]

National organization

The National Command was the ruling organ of the party between sessions of the National Congress, and was headed by a Secretary-General.[36] Between National Congresses, the National Command was held accountable by the National Consultative Council (Arabic: *al-majlis al-istishari al-quami*).[37] The National Consultative Council was a forum made up of representatives from the party's regional branches.[37] However, the number of National Consultative Council members were decided by the size of the regional branch.[37] The National Congress elected the National Command, National Tribunal, the party's discipline body, and the Secretary-General, the party leader.[37] The congress delegates determined the party's policies and procedures.[37]

Before 1954, the party was ruled by the Executive Committee, but this organ, along with others too, were replaced at the 2nd National Congress.[36] In Ba'athist jargon "Nation" means the Arab Nation, because of that, the National Command formed the highest policy-making and coordinating council for the Ba'ath movement throughout the Arab world.[36] The National Command had several bureaus, similar to those of the Regional Command.[37] National Command sessions were held monthly.[37] Of these, the National Liaisons Office was responsible for maintaining contact with the party's Regional Branches.[38]

Regional organization

The term *region* reflected the Party's refusal to acknowledge them as separate nation-states.[39] A "Region" (*quṭr*), in Ba'athist parlance, is an Arab state such as Syria, Iraq, or Lebanon.[39] The Regional Congress, which combined all the provincial branches, was the region's highest authority and elected a Regional Command, the party leadership in a specific region, the Regional Tribunal, the body responsible for discipline inspection, and a Regional Secretary, the regional party leader.[35] The Regional Congress is made of delegates from the provincial branches; other members attended, but as observers.[35] The Regional Congress was responsible for evaluating the party's performance since the last Regional Congress, while at the same time formulating new policies for the next period, which lasts until the next Regional Congress is held.[35] How long this period lasts is decided by the Regional Command.[35] The Regional Command, similar to the Branch Command, operated through bureaus and met for weekly-sessions.[35]

Below the Regional Commands there existed branches.[39] The Branch came above the Subbranch; it comprised at least two to five subbranches,[35] and operated at the provincial level.[39] The branch held a congress periodically in which it elected a Command and a Secretary (leader).[35] The Command operated through bureaus, such as the Workers Bureau and the Bureau of the Secretariat for instance.[35] Underneath the branch was the Subbranch, which was made up of three to five sections, "and was the lowest level of the party to hold a periodical Congress."[35] Some subbranches were independent of central authority, and elected their own Command and secretaries, while other subbranches were incorporated into the Branches.[35] In these cases the Subbranch Secretary is appointed by the superior Branch.[35]

A Section, which comprised two to five Divisions, functioned at the level of a large city quarter, a town, or a rural district.[36] It elected its own Command, composed of five members, but the Subbranch appointed the Command's secretary.[35] Below that there existed divisions.[36] A division comprised two to seven Circles, controlled by a Division Commander.[36] Such Ba'athist groups occurred throughout the bureaucracy and the military. They functioned as the Party's watchdog and were an effective form of covert surveillance within a public administration.[39] The lowest level was the circle. It was composed of three to seven members, constituted the basic organizational unit.[36]

The Military Organization was made up of branches similar to those in the Ba'ath's civilian sector.[35] However, unlike the civilian sector the Military Organization was controlled by a separate Military Bureau, and held periodical Military Congresses.[35] The Military Organization and the Civilian Organization converged at the Regional Congress.[35]

Membership

There existed three types of membership categories in the Ba'ath Party; Active member (Arabic: udw ämil), Apprentice Member (Arabic: udw mutadarrib) and Supporter (Arabic: firqa).[35] An Active member had to attend all formal meetings of his party unit, was given the right to vote in party elections,[35] and could run for party office.[35] In the Syrian Regional Branch a member had to spend 18 months as a Supporter to be promoted to Apprentice status, and then wait another 18 months to be promoted to Active member status.[35]
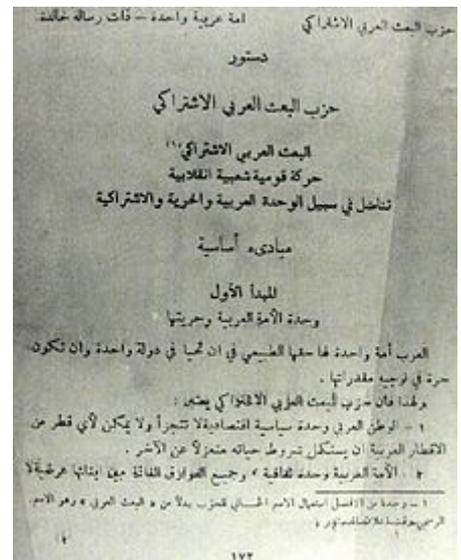
Ideology and policy

Classical Ba'ath: 1947–1960

Arab Nation

From its very beginning, the party was a manifestation of Arab nationalist thought, with the party itself referring to itself as "The Party of Arab Unity".[40] The party's ideology also excluded and subjugated regional minorities like the Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians and others. The pan-Arab tendencies of the party's predecessor, the Arab Ba'ath Movement, was strengthened 1945–1947 by recruiting members from the Zaki al-Arsuzi's Arab Ba'ath.[41] The first article of the party's constitution stated "the Arabs form one nation. This nation has the natural right to live in a single state. [As such,] the Arab fatherland constitutes an indivisible political and economic unit. No Arab can live apart from the others.[42]

To express his heartfelt belief in Arab nationalism, Aflaq coined the term "one Arab nation with an eternal message" (Arabic: ummah arabiyyah wahidah thatu risalah khalidah).[43] Party ideology, and Ba'athism in general, was not based on concepts such as the purity of the Arab race or ethnic chauvinism, but on idealistic thoughts borrowed from the enlightenment era.[44] According to Middle East expert Tabitha Petran, the basic idea of the party's ideology was:[45]

Part of the 1947 Ba'ath Party constitution

> that the Arab nation is a permanent entity in history. The Arab nation is considered, philosophically speaking, not as a social and economic formation, but as a transcendent fact inspiring different forms, one of its highest contributions taking the form of Islam. It was not Islam that modeled the peoples of Arabia, the Fertile Crescent, and North Africa, equipping them with Islamic values, especially the Arabic language and the Arabic culture, but the Arab nation which created Islam. This conception of the Arab nation implicitly advantages the Arab contribution to history. On the other hand, Arab decadence can be overcome through a purifying and spiritual action, not religious but moral."[45]

Peasant and workers

The early Ba'ath gave little attention to the problems facing the peasants and workers.[46] As Hanna Batatu notes, "Aflaq was basically urban in outlook. The peasants never constituted an object of his special concern. In his writing there is scarcely an expression of concentrated interest in the country's husbandsmen."[46] While peasants and issues facing them are mentioned in some of Aflaq's work, there was scarcely any depth given to them or the issues facing them.[46] To take an example, in one instance Aflaq states "the [national struggle] ... can only be based on the generality of the Arabs and these will not take part in it if they are exploited."[46] Secondly, Aflaq never had any official enmity towards the traditional landlords.[46] Issues such as these would only gain prominence when Akram al-Hawrani became a leading party figure, and when the "transitional Ba'athists" took power.[46] Of the four members in the 1st Executive Committee, Wahib al-Ghanim was the only who paid much attention to the problems of the peasants and workers,[46] because the other members (Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar and Jalil al-Sayyide) had a middle class upbringing and upheld middle class values.[47]

The early party organization never cultivated a deep following in rural areas.[46] In fact, at the party's founding congress, only one peasant and one worker were present among the 217 delegates.[46] Most of the delegates were either school teacher or students attending universities.[46] When the Akram al-Hawrani's Arab Socialist Party (ASP) merged with the Ba'ath Party, the majority of ASP members of peasants origins did not join the Ba'ath Party, instead becoming personal followers of Hawrani.[46] However, the majority of Ba'ath members were of rural upbringing.[46] The "Transitional Ba'ath", which grew out of the dissolution of the Syrian Regional Branch in 1958 dissolution and the Military Committee, were more rural in outlook, policy and ideology.[48]

"Unity, liberty, socialism"

The slogan "Unity, liberty, socialism" is the key tenet in Ba'athist thought.[49] Unity stood for the creation of an independent, strong Arab Nation.[49] Liberty did not mean liberal democracy, but rather freedom from colonial oppression and freedom of speech and thought.[50] Aflaq believed that the Ba'ath Party, at least in theory, would rule, and guide the people, in a transitional period of time without consulting the people,[51] however he did support intra-party democracy.[52] The last tenet, 'socialism', did not mean socialism as it is defined in the West, but rather a unique form of Arab socialism.[53] According to Ba'athist thought, socialism had originated under the rule of Muhammad.[53] The original interpretation of Arab socialism did not answer questions such as: how much state control was necessary, or economic equality; but instead focused on freeing the Arab Nation and its people from colonization and oppression in general.[53]

Transitional Ba'ath: 1960–1964

Regionalists versus nationalists

After the failure of the United Arab Republic (UAR), a union of Egypt and Syria, the Ba'ath Party was divided into two main factions, the Regionalists (Arabic: Qutriyyun) and the Nationalists (pan-Arab) (Arabic: gawmiyyun).[54] When the union with Egypt collapsed, the Ba'ath Party was put in a difficult position, the party still sought Arab unity, but did not oppose the UAR's dissolution and did not want to seek another union with Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser's rule.[54] However, being the unionist party that it was, the party's leaders could not state their position on this issue.[54] The end result was that the pro-Arab nationalists within the Ba'ath Party became committed Nasserists, while the more moderate Arab nationalists founded the pro-Nasserite Socialist Unionists party.[54] The third group, led by people disenchanted with both Nasser and the union period, remained in the Ba'ath Party, stopped believing in the feasibility pan-Arabism.[54] on 21 February 1962, the National Command issued a new policy regarding the pan-Arab project by first mentioning the successes and failures of the UAR, but ending the statement by calling for the reestablishment of the UAR as a decentralized federal union with Nasser's Egypt.[55] Many rank-and-file members opposed this change in policy, with many members being both disenchanted with pan-Arabism and Aflaq's continued party rule.[55]

When the Syrian Regional Branch was reestablished, the majority of its members in the provinces were of communal origins–Druze, Alawi or Ismaili.[56] The provincial party members had not been told of the Syrian Regional Branch's dissolution, which in fact broke the communication line with provincial branches and the National Command.[56] While its true that in 1962 the Regionalists supported the slogan, adopted at the 5th National Congress, "the renewal of the union with Egypt while taking note of past mistakes", they treated such a slogan as a propaganda slogan, and not as a feasible goal.[57]

The "Arab road to socialism"

The disillusionment felt among party members on the pan-Arab project, led to the radicalization of the party's interpretation of socialism.[58] Yasin al-Hafiz, a former member of the Syrian Communist Party, was an early frontrunner for the party's radicalization.[58] While he didn't oppose the pan-Arab project, he wanted to turn the concept of Arab socialism into a scientific and revolutionary socialist ideology which adapted Marxism to local conditions.[58] Jamal al-Atassi, who had been a moderate socialist for most of his life, called for the renunciation of Arab socialism in 1963 and the adoption of a "virtually Maxist concept of socialism" by claiming that class struggle was the moving force in society.[59]

Hammud al-Shufi became the leader of the party's Marxist faction during his short stint as Syrian Regional Secretary, literally the head of the Syrian Regional Organization.[60] Shufi was able, due to his position as head of the Organization Bureau of the Regional Command, to recruit several Marxist or Marxist-leaning members to the top of the Syrian Regional party hierarchy.[61] Radical socialists led by Ali Salih al-Sadi took control of the Iraqi Regional Branch in 1963, which led to the official radicalization of the party's ideology.[62]

The delegates at the 6th National Congress elected an Ideology Committee that was responsible to write a charter about the party's ideology.[63] The end result was the document *Points of Departure*.[63] The document, which was approved by the 6th National Congress, relegated Arab unity to a secondary role and gave socialism prominence.[63] Marxists concepts were used interchangeably alongside Ba'athist ones, however, the document was reluctant in explicitly admitting that certain ideas were of Marxist origins.[64] While the *Points of Departure* didn't exist a break with party's traditional ideology, it criticized the party's old guard for given Arab unity primary over socialism and their failing in turning Ba'athism into a comprehensive theory.[64] While the documents says Arab unity is progressive, the reason for it being important changed.[65] The document stated; "Arab unity is an indispensable basis for the construction of a socialist economy."[65] Aflaq's also believed that Arab unity was only an intermediate goal, but it stood at the centre of classical Ba'athism.[65] In the Points of Departure, despite not firmly stating it, the goal of creating a socialist society seemed to be both an immediate goal and the main goal of the party.[65]

The concept of Arab socialism, accused of being narrow-minded and nationalistic, was replaced with the "Arab road to socialism" concept.[65] The Points of Departure criticized the classical Ba'athist view regarding private ownership.[65] Classical Ba'athists supported private ownership as a way to recruit into the party many petty bourgeois elements.[66] The document called for

nationalization of the commanding heights of the economy, the slow incorporation of the petty bourgeoisie into the socialist economy and the elimination of the national bourgeoisie and its allied classes.[66] To safeguard the party from evolving into one supporting state capitalism, the socialist economy would be controlled by a vanguard party together with popular participation from the toiler masses.[66]

Neo-Ba'ath: 1964–1966

Neo-Ba'athism is a term used to describe the dramatic changes that manifested in Ba'athist ideology from 1960 to 1964, and the Military Committee's takeover of the Syrian Regional Branch and the National Command in the period 1964 to 1966.[67] The 6th National Congress signified the takeover of the party by an anti-militarist left, which opposed both the traditional leaders in the National Command and the pragmatists in the Military Committee.[68] When the anti-military left called for popular democracy, no involvement of the military in national politics and popular struggle, the Military Committee became concerned.[69] By 1965 the anti-military leftists began to "spread rumors about the rightist character of the military junta [Military Committee] within the party and their subversive efforts to engulf it. There was not a single officer in the party who was not accused of conspiracy and reactionary tendencies."[70] In collaboration with the National Command the Military Committee succeeded in expelling the anti-military left from the party at the 7th National Congress.[71] The Military Committee, which now controlled the Syrian Regional Branch, took control of the Ba'ath Party in the coup of 1966.[72] According to Middle East expert Avraham Ben-Tzur "the [neo-]Ba'th in its latest variant is a bureaucratic apparatus headed by the military, whose daily life and routine are shaped by the rigid military oppression on the home front, and [Soviet aid among others] military aid.[73]

Regional branches

Iraq

Fuad al-Rikabi founded the Iraqi Regional Branch in 1951[2] or 1952.[74] There are those who trace the branch's founding to Abd ar Rahman ad Damin and Abd al Khaliq al Khudayri in 1947, after their return from the 1st National Congress, which was held in Syria.[75] Another version is that the branch was established in 1948 by Rikabi and Sa'dun Hamadi, a Shia Muslim.[76] However, Efraim Karsh and Inari Rautsi contend that the Regional Branch was established in the 1940s, but that it received official recognition as a Regional Branch of the Ba'ath Party in 1952 by the National Command.[77] What is certain is that Rikabi was elected the Regional Branch's first Regional Secretary in 1952.[76]

The party initially consisted of a majority of Shia Muslims, as Rikabi recruited supporters mainly from his friends and family, but slowly became Sunni dominated.[78] The Regional Branch, and other parties of pan-Arab inclination, had difficulties in recruiting Shia members.[79] Most Shi'ites considered pan-Arab ideology as a Sunni project, since the majority of Arabs are Sunnis.[79]

At the time of 14 July Revolution in 1958, which overthrew the Hashemite monarchy, the Regional Branch had 300 members.[80] The Iraqi Regional Branch supported Abd al-Karim Qasim's rule on the grounds that he would seek Iraq's entry into the United Arab Republic.[16] Of the 16-members of Qasim's cabinet, 12 of them were Regional Branch members.[16] After taking power, Qasim's change his position on the UAR, reverting to the old "Iraq first policy".[16] This turn displeased the Regional Branch and other Arab nationalists groups.[81] Because of his policy reversal, the Regional Branch gathered a group, led by Saddam Hussein, which tried but failed to assassinate Qasim.[82]

The Regional Branch seized power in the Ramadan Revolution.[83] The coup was led by leading Regional Branch member Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr.[83] The plotters appointed Abdul Salam Arif, a Nasserite, to the Presidency while al-Bakr was appointed the country's Prime Minister.[84] However, real power was in the hands of Ali Salih al-Sadi, the branch's Regional Secretary.[85] After taking power, the Regional Branch through its militia, the National Guard, initiated what Iraqi expert Con Coughlin referred to as an "orgy of violence" against communist and left-wing elements.[84] These repressive measures coupled with factionalism within the Regional Branch led to the November 1963 Iraqi coup d'état by President Arif and his Nasserite supporters.[86] Iraq expert Malik

Mufti believes Aflaq may have supported Arif's coup because it weakened al-Sadi's position within the party and strengthened his own.[87] The coup forced the branch to go underground.[88] Because of the coup, several leading Ba'athist were jailed, such as al-Bakr and Saddam.[88] Despite this, the Regional Branch elected al-Bakr as Regional Secretary in 1964.[88]

Jordan

Following the party's establishment in Syria, Ba'athist ideas spread throughout the Arab world. In Jordan Ba'athist thought first spread to the East Bank in the late-1940s, most notably at universities.[89] While the Regional Branch was not formed until 1951, several meetings took place at the universities where students and professors alike would discuss the Ba'athist thought.[89] Despite the ideology being very popular, it took time before the actual Regional Branch was established.[90] A group of teachers established the Regional Branch in the city by Al-Karak.[90] At the very beginning, the clinic owned by Abd al-Rahman Shuqyar was used as the branch's meeting place.[90] Bahjat Abu Gharbiyah became the Regional Branch's first member in the West Bank, and was thus resigned the responsibility of building the party's organization in the area the branch secretary in the West Bank, and was thus responsible in that area.[90] In the West Bank, the branch was most active in the cities of Jerusalem and Ramallah.[90]

The 1st Regional Congress was held in 1951 in the home of Abdullah Rimawi.[90] The congress mapped out the "future course of the party".[90] The next year, the 2nd Regional Congress was held, this time in Abdallah Na'was' home.[90] It elected a Regional Command and appointed Rimawi as the branch's Regional Secretary.[90] Shugyar, Gharbiyah and Na'was agreed to serve in the Regional Branch's Central Committee.[90] Rimawi and Na'was, his deputy, would prove effective leaders.[90] Shortly after the 2nd Regional Congress, the branch launched a successful recruitment campaign in Jordanian and Palestinian neighbourhoods and cities.[90] On 28 August 1956 the branch was legalized by a High Court.[91]

Both Rimawi and Na'was were elected to Parliament in the 1950 and 1951 elections as independents (the branch was not a legal party at the time).[92] In the 1951 election, the branch managed to elect three members to parliament.[89] Rimawi was able to retain his seat in parliament until the 1956 election.[90] None of these elections can be considered democratic.[93] Shuqyar, during the 1951 elections, was imprisoned by the authorities because his views were deemed to radical.[93] Less than a month before the election day, the British Embassy in Amman had estimated that Shuqyar would gain an easy victory.[93] However, because of the undemocratic nature of the election, Shuqyar was not elected.[93] As voting patterns would prove, voters who voted for Ba'athist candidates lived in Irbid and Amman on the East Bank, and Jerusalem and Nablus on the West Bank.[90]

Shuqyar during a government-imposed exile to Southern Jordan, used his spare time reading Marxist and Leninist literature.[92] While he never became a communist, Shuqyar began to support communist concepts.[92] On his return from exile he tried to persuade the Regional Branch to join in an electoral front with the Jordanian Communist Party.[92] However, the Regional Branch leaders Rimawi, Na'was, Gharbiyah and Munif al-Razzaz opposed such an idea, and because of it, Shuqyar left the Ba'ath Party.[92]

Rimawi and Na'was were elected to the National Command at the 2nd National Congress (held in 1952).[5] At the 6th and 7th National Congress, the Regional Branch elected Razzaz to the National Command.[94]

Lebanon

The Lebanese Regional Branch was formed in 1949–1950.[95] During the existence of the UAR, the Regional Branch was split into two factions, those supporting Nasser and those opposing him.[14] However, in April 1960, the UAR denied the Regional Branch organ *As Sahafäh* access into the UAR-ruled Syria.[14]

The Regional Branch was strongest in the city of Tripoli.[96] In the 1960 elections, Abd al-Majid al-Rafei was just a few votes short of being elected to parliament.[96] However, a persistent problem for him during his election campaign was the vocal criticism of him and the Regional Branch by the Lebanese Communist Party.[96] In Tripoli the Communists supported the candidacy of Rashid Karami, to ensure themselves of a Regional Branch victory.[97] On 17 July 1961 a group of rival Ba'athists led by Rimawi opened fire on several of the Regional Branch's members.[98]

During the UAR years, the same factional lines that developed in the Syrian Regional Branch came to the Lebanese Regional Branch.[99] At the 4th National Congress (held in Lebanon), which was mainly attended by delegates representing Lebanon, several resolutions with a pronounced anti-Nasser tone were approved.[100] At the same time, criticism of Aflaq and Bitar was severe, both their leadership records and their ideology were criticized.[22] A resolution was approved, which stated that the party leaders [Aflaq, al-Bitar among others had to hastily entered into a union with Egypt, had wrongly dissolved the Syrian Regional Branch in 1958, given pan-Arabism primacy when socialism was the more important, the need to use Marxist, not Ba'athi, tools to analyze the current situation and the need for the party to strengthen their positions amongst the popular classes—the workers, peasants, artisans and shopkeepers.[22] Because of the position of the Lebanese Regional Branch, Aflaq at the 5th National Congress invited enough Iraqi Regional Branch delegates to neutralize the Lebanese delegates.[55] However, at the same time, the Lebanese Regional Branch opposed Hawrani and his faction.[101] At the 6th National Congress, the Lebanese Regional Branch elected Jubrän Majdalani and Khalid al-Ali to the National Command.[94]

At the 7th National Congress the National Command in collaboration with the Military Committee either expelled or removed leftists such as those found in the Lebanese Regional Branch from leadership position, and in the most severe cases, expelled them from the party.[102] The Lebanese Regional Branch managed to elect three members to the National Command at the 7th National Congress; Majdalani, al-Ali and Abd al-Majid Rafi.[94]

Libya

The Regional Branch was founded in the 1950s[103] by Amr Taher Deghayes.[104] Ba'athism was a major political force in Libya following the establishment of the United Arab Republic. Many intellectuals were attracted to Ba'athist ideology during the later years of the Kingdom of Libya. However, with help from Nasserist propaganda, several Ba'athists changed affiliation and became Nasserists instead.[105] The growth of these pan-Arab ideologies concerned the government, which led to the incarceration of several Nasserist and Ba'athist military officers in the early sixties.[106] The Ba'athist were accused of working to overthrow "the political, economic and social system" of the Kingdom; the sentences ranged from everything to eight months to two years.[107] By 1964, the Libyan Regional Branch had only managed to establish one-level below the Regional Command, the branch-level.[108] Syrian specialist John Devlin estimated that the Libyan Regional Branch had been 50 and 150 members in 1964.[108]

Syria

Syrian politics took a dramatic turn in 1954 when the military government of Adib Shishakli was overthrown and the democratic system restored. The Ba'ath, now a large and popular organisation, won 15 out of 142 parliamentary seats in the Syrian election that year, becoming the second-largest party in parliament. Aside from the Syrian Communist Party (SCP), the Ba'ath Party was the only party able to organise mass protests among workers.[109] The party was supported by the intelligentsia due to their pro-Egyptian and anti-imperialist stance along with their advocation of social reform.[110]

The Ba'ath faced considerable competition from ideological competitors, notably the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), which supported the establishment of a Greater Syria. The Ba'ath Party's main adversary was the SCP, whose support for class struggle and internationalism was anathema to the Ba'ath.[111] In addition to parliamentary-level competition, all these parties (as well as Islamists) competed in street-level activity and sought to recruit support among the military.[112]

By the end of 1957, the SCP was able to weaken the Ba'ath Party to such an extent that the Ba'ath Party drafted a bill in December that called for a union with Egypt, a move that proved to be very popular. The Ba'ath leadership dissolved the party in 1958, gambling that the illegalisation of certain parties would hurt the SCP more than it would the Ba'ath.[113]

A military coup in Damascus in 1961 brought the UAR to an end.[114] Sixteen prominent politicians signed a statement supporting the coup, among them al-Hawrani and Salah al-Din al-Bitar (who later retracted his signature).[115] Following the UAR's dissolution, the Ba'ath Party was reestablished at the 1962 congress.[30] The Military Committee did not show itself to the civilian wing of the party at this congress.[116] During the congress, Aflaq and the Military Committee, through Muhammad Umran, made contact for the first time; the committee asked for permission to initiate a coup d'état; Aflaq supported the conspiracy.[117]

Following the success of the Ramadan Revolution, led by the Ba'ath Party's Iraqi Regional Branch, the Military Committee hastily convened to hatch a coup against Nazim al-Kudsi's presidency.[118] The 8 March Revolution proved successful, and a Ba'athist government in Syria was established.[118] The plotters first order was to establish the National Council for the Revolutionary Command (NCRC), consisting entirely of Ba'athists and Nasserists, and controlled by military personnel rather than civilians from the very beginning.[119]

While the Ba'ath Party had attained power, there was a problem; internal infighting.[120] The Military Committee, which was itself a tiny minority of the already small Ba'ath Party membership, was forced to rule by force.[120] The Ba'ath Party had only 2,500 members by mid-1963, the party lacked a popular base. Even if membership expanded, the authoritarian way of ruling it had introduced when coming to power would get worse, not better[120]

Akram al-Hawrani (left) with Michel Aflaq, 1957.

Another problem was that the civilian wing was riven by infighting between the radical socialist and moderate faction, while the military stood more unified.[121] Whatever the case, the Syrian Regional Command slowly amassed its powers by weakening the National Command.[121] This all came to a head in the 1966 Syrian coup d'état[121]

Others

Following the Ba'ath Party's founding, regional branches were established in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.[122] Not long after it established branches in North Yemen and South Yemen.[123] In Tunisia, a Regional Branch was established in the 1950s, but was forced underground for much of its existence.[124] The Saudi Regional Branches elected Ali Ghannäm to represent them at the 7th National Command.[94] While its currently unknown which side the Saudi Ba'ath took after the 1966 split, it published a newspaper, *Sawt al-Tal'iyya*, from 1973 to 1980. It was an ardent critic of the Saudi royal family and American imperialism The majority of its members were Shia Muslims.[125] In late 1963, Ba'ath cells were being established in Sudan, and there were even rumours that a Ba'ath cell had been established in Egypt.[126]

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48. Batatu 1999, pp. 144–145.
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61. Rabinovich 1972, pp. 77–78.
62. Rabinovich 1972, pp. 82–83.
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