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"The Ba'th of Syria and Iraq"

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Three main currents of socialist thought flowed through the Arab world during and after World War II: The Ba'th party's version, that of Nasser, and the options promulgated by the region's various communist parties. None of these can really be considered apart from the others. The history of Arab communists is often a story of their rivalry and occasional cohabitation with other movements, so this article will focus first on the Ba'th and then on Nasser while telling the story of all three. In addition, the Ba'th were active in more places than just Syria and Iraq, although those countries saw their most signal successes (and concomitant disappointments).

Michel Aflaq, a Sorbonne-educated, Syrian Christian, was one of the two primary founders of the Ba'th (often transliterated as Baath or Ba'ath) movement. His exposure to Marx came during his studies in France, and he associated for some time with the communists in Syria after his return there in 1932. He later declared his fascination with communism ended by 1936, but others cite him as still a confirmed party member until 1943. His co-founder, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, likewise went to France for his university education and returned to Syria to be a teacher. Frustrated by France's inter-war policies, the nationalism of both men came to so influence their attitudes towards the West that even Western socialism became another form of imperialism. From 1940 onward, they toyed with the idea of forming a political party based on their nationalism, but the failure of the Rashid Ali revolt in Iraq in 1941 and a crisis in Lebanon in 1943 finally galvanized them into action. By 1945 they had formally created the party, and its first convention took place in 1947. Bitar was more successful at occasionally winning election to office while Aflaq became the recognized ideologue of the party and, through the office of secretary-general, its *de facto* controller.

The Ba'th hold a number of positions that contradict traditional Western socialism. From the start it was intended to herald a "Renaissance" or "Resurrection" (both translations of *Ba'th*) of the entire Arab world, not just merely the Syrian region. Thus, it was a fiercely nationalistic movement. These positions followed from the insistence of the Ba'thists, like many other Arab socialists, that they needed an ideology appropriate to Arab needs. In Aflaq's words, socialism was to be "a means to resurrect our nationalism and our people and is the door through which our Arab nation enters history anew." He saw socialism as the means to achieving a "structural transformation...in the spirit and thinking of the Arab people which would revolutionize their society." Aflaq's writings make it clear that besides internal social justice, Ba'th socialism sought the empowerment of the state precisely so the Arab state could enjoy just treatment on the world stage. Ba'th ideology also rejects the economic determinism of Western models: it sees socialism as a solution arising from the conviction of a majority of society, not a single class. These stances also explain the opposition of Ba'thists to communism as exclusively secular and, during the Cold War, overly dependent upon the Soviet Union. Aflaq's vision for the Ba'th Party has been described, perhaps not inappropriately, as a romantic nationalism. Like previous nationalisms, its "spiritual" message appealed to its target audience and explains some of the early Ba'th success; concurrently, however, that same emotional and intellectual approach often left the Ba'th without the "political realism" that might have seen them better secure their victories and implement their policies.

The 1947 constitution of the party included numerous policy statements which outlined the Ba'th vision of a socialism fitted for an Arab nation. It did not call for the end of private property,

but limited ownership by measuring it against its exploitative factor. Workers were supposed to share in wages and management; usury was to be outlawed, and foreign companies banned. The state would control utilities and all the largest undertakings while guaranteeing employment to citizens. In politics, non-alignment was the preferred option out of a recognition that neither side in the Cold War had Arab interests at heart. On the social front, the Ba‘th dedicated itself to free public health care and education available to all. From its earliest days, the Ba‘th called for equality of the sexes, and by 1947, the right to vote for women was supported by its National Convention. The Ba‘th also espoused parliamentary democracy in many of its calls for action, but this element has often been an early sacrificial victim of political maneuvering once the party gained power.

The practicalities of achieving power in Syria and Iraq, and holding it, have seen the Ba‘th go through numerous incarnations. In its earliest days, its membership was primarily among intellectuals and students. Observers have often noted how the Ba‘th exercised an influence well beyond anything suggested by their actual numbers. They gained enormous prestige, however, as a result of the Palestinian debacle. Party leaders and members went to fight as volunteers in Palestine while the party collected money and weapons for the war. As an opposition party, the Ba‘th were able to distance themselves from responsibility for the defeats. Over time, the Ba‘th also appealed to the sectarian minorities of Syria, especially the Alawites and Druze. In conjunction with this appeal, the Ba‘th began programmatically to seek inroads among the Syrian military; this would prove to be fertile ground since both Ba‘th ideology and the military profession held promises of social mobility for segments of Syrian society.

The role of the military became evident within a few years of Syrian independence. The first of several coups occurred in March 1949 when Husni al-Zaim, apparently with support from Ba‘thists, overthrew the government associated with landed elites and rich merchants. The Ba‘th soon moved to opposition, however, after al-Zaim began pushing a constitution that would have forbidden civil servants from joining any political parties. A Ba‘th pamphlet denounced the regime’s measures, and al-Zaim responded by banning all political parties and jailing the Ba‘th leaders. This situation changed rapidly with the coup led by Col. al-Hinnawi, and several Ba‘thists joined the coalition government that he set up. In December of 1949, the third coup occurred when Adib al-Shishakli took power. He tolerated the Ba‘th until Janaury 1952, when he closed the offices of *al-Ba‘th* , the party’s newspaper. On 29 December of the same year, Shishakli had Aflaq and Bitar arrested, as well as Akram Hourani, leader of the Arab Socialist Party. Five days later, the men managed to escape to Lebanon, and then moved on to Europe. When Shishakli announced new elections for October 1953, Aflaq, Bitar, and Hourani made their way back to Damascus. Disaffection with the government’s management of the elections led to a Ba‘th boycott of the election along with the Peoples’ Party and the National Party. Charges of corruption against Shishakli’s Arab Liberation Movement resulted in widespread demonstrations by all other parties after the election. A leaflet campaign led to new arrests in January 1954 of the three men.

One month later, the fortunes of the Ba‘th changed dramatically. Proselytization amid the army paid off as disaffected troops mutinied in Aleppo in February. The revolt spread to Damascus, and Shishakli fled. A few days later the jailed leaders were released. On 5 March 1954 they announced the merger of the Ba‘th with Hourani’s party: henceforth it was the Arab Ba‘th Socialist Party. The constitution of the new party was adopted virtually unchanged from that of Aflaq’s and Bitar’s party. The merger gave the Ba‘th a membership that went beyond the pockets of intellectuals scattered around the country, including further access to the officer corps of the Syrian military, but the new party remained comparatively small. Still, in the late 1954 elections they won 22 seats in the

Syrian Parliament (by contrast, they had only won three seats in 1949). By working with other leftist parties, including the communists, they could account for a quarter of the votes in parliament. With the Syrian parliament so weak and fractious, the Ba'th benefitted from a clear organization and a clearly delineated agenda. As the Cold War came to the Middle East in the 1950s, the Ba'th resistance to Western schemes further lent it credence not only in Syria but in several other Arab states. By the mid '50s, branches of the party were active in Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq. As these parties became viable, they, along with Syria, were termed "regions" of the party organization, which was overseen by the National Command (an adjective which made sense in light of the party's pan-Arabism).

Not surprisingly, this success led to a effort by opponents to counter Ba'thist gains. In Syria, on the political right, this meant the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). At street-level, Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood campaigned against Ba'thist secularism. The Ba'th also remained ideologically opposed to the communist party's economic determinism and ties to the Soviet Union, but a rapprochement was effected for practical gains. The party leadership often defended the combined efforts by saying, "We may meet in the same trenches, but we can't join up with them." When a member of the SSNP assassinated Adnan al-Maliki, the Syrian army's deputy chief of staff and a Ba'thist, in April 1955, sympathy for the Ba'th ran high, and the party capitalized on this to end the conservative SSNP. Much of the SSNP's leadership fled to Lebanon while 130 members were arrested and put through show trials for treason that cowed much of the remaining opposition to the leftist parties.

The fallout from the Maliki assassination led to further Ba'th cooperation with the communists. This arose in part from Sryia's turn to the Soviet bloc for economic aid and weapons, but it was also a function of how the Ba'th appealed to Syrian voters. As an anti-imperialist party which advocated socialism as the path to a better society, any increase in their rhetoric naturally led them further to the left. The 1956 Suez Crisis naturally confirmed the imperialist threat of the West in the minds of many Syrians, and the country's drift to the political left picked up its pace. By 1957, the Ba'th appeared to have things well in hand: members of the Party had the vital foreign affairs and economic posts in the government, Hourani had become the Speaker of the Syrian Parliament, and the chief of Army Intelligence was an ally. The communists, however, had also benefitted from the partnership with the Ba'th and were enjoying unprecedented support in the country. The overall conclusion among scholars is that Ba'th fear of the communists impelled them into their next initiative: the union of Syria with Egypt under Gemal Nasser's control.

It may not have been fear entirely that moved the Ba'th to advocating the union with Egypt; their sense of Arab nationalism had always been a key part of the movement's ideology. In addition, Nasser's popularity across the Arab world after the Suez Crisis of 1956 was still unmatched by any other regional leader. He may have thus appeared to Aflaq as the person who could achieve the conditions of *inqilab*, the restructuring that was key to Aflaq's vision of Arab recovery. The question of Ba'th motives, however, remains a sharp one since the Syrian Ba'thists, in moving toward union, also knowingly moved toward their own dissolution. Nasser made his conditions for union perfectly clear: a total union, not a federal one; a single executive instead of a plurality (which his popularity virtually guaranteed to himself); the end of all political parties in Syria and their replacement by a single-party system mirroring the National Union operating in Egypt. Given the speed with which the union was achieved, the Ba'th scarcely appeared to blink at the prospect of their own demise, and in fact, they worked to achieve it. When the original set of talks stalled, the Ba'th leadership encouraged the Syrian Army to carry out its own negotiations with the Egyptian military. Those talks

resulted in an agreement to merge the two nations' armed forces, a *fait accompli* which forced Damascus' hand. Al-Bitar was sent to confer with the Syrian officers, but he met instead directly with Nasser to cement further the agreement. The Syrian premier, Quwatli, had little choice left but to bend before the political winds. On 1 February 1958 he and Nasser jointly announced the creation of the United Arab Republic. Referendums in both nations three weeks later confirmed the union and saw Nasser elected as president in a 99 percent landslide.

Perhaps Aflaq and al-Bitar thought that the incipient formal end of the party was merely a technical detail. There seems to have been some expectation that they would play a role in shaping the ideology of the National Union in Syria, and perhaps there, they thought, they could impart a Ba'thist tilt to the one party. "Since it was we who began preaching Socialist ideas at least fifteen years before Nasser assumed power," Aflaq reasoned like many other Syrians, surely Nasser would want to listen to them.

Certainly, at the outset, Nasser understood the role played by the Ba'th in crafting the union, and he rewarded them with several cabinet posts in the new UAR government. They were lesser posts, however, since Nasser was already setting in motion the dynamics that would also bring this hasty marriage to an end; from the start Egypt's tradition of centralized control ran up against Syria's more often fractured, localized structures. He sent Egyptian officers and agents north to bring Syria's armed forces and bureaucracy in line with Egyptian patterns. Although formally disbanded as a party, the Ba'th still had a presence, both as individuals and through their National Command which relocated to Lebanon in this period. They continued to profess their allegiance to the union and to Nasser, but the honeymoon was over. Moreover, the Ba'th were in serious disarray. In September of 1958, Nasser began implementing an Egyptian-style land reform which immediately alienated the many landowners of Syria. Simultaneously, he began sifting the Syrian armed forces for those who might oppose his administration and relocating such people to safer positions, often in Egypt. Thus, the mood in Syria soon soured and the former Ba'thists caught the brunt of this disaffection in the July 1959 elections to the National Union. Of the 9445 seats allotted to Syria in this body, known Ba'thists were only able to win 250. Still trying to put the best face on things, the party's leaders claimed a victory, saying that the union had nonetheless elected a 90 percent socialist majority.

All of these dynamics had to account for another factor after July 1958: the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy in Iraq brought Abdul Qasim to the fore as another leading personality in the Middle East. The fact that his regime included members of Iraq's branch of the Ba'th Party added new impetus to the direction that Arab Socialism might take. Talk of union between Iraq and the UAR began immediately, but before long it was clear that Qasim intended to follow his own trajectory, not Nasser's. Fuad al-Rikabi, the Ba'th secretary-general in Iraq, was so convinced that Nasser was the key to fulfilling Ba'thist goals, that he left his cabinet post in the new government and participated in a 1959 plot to assassinate Qasim The government reaction was predictably harsh and the Ba'th were driven underground. Having been persecuted under the monarchy as well, the Iraqi Ba'thists were accustomed to operating as a cell-type organization, and in this fashion, they actually managed to grow by influencing several key trade unions and even dominating the Iraqi Students Organization. Four clandestine newspapers even managed regular issues during the period of 1958-63.

By 1959, the cracks in the Ba'th Party were becoming unmistakably clear. At the Fourth National Congress, held in Beirut in August, Aflaq was barely able to retain control over the direction of the party. A movement to condemn formally the previous year's dissolution of the Syrian "Region" was barely thwarted. While the leaders remained ideologically committed to

maintaining the UAR, many Syrian Ba‘thists were beginning a passive resistance to Nasser’s policies. A third group, led by the Iraqi al-Rikabi, eventually ended up being expelled from the party. By this point, al-Rikabi had become the spokesman of the segments within Ba‘thism that saw so little difference between Nasserism and Ba‘th ideology that they supported an end to the party and wholesale support of Nasser’s version of Arab Socialism. His wholehearted Nasserism had already earned him several rebukes from the National Command of the party, but he remained intransigent. The final straw apparently was his open advocacy of violence and assassination; such methods, according to the party ideologues, betrayed a lack of trust in the people’s ability to understand and achieve socialism’s benefits. In the same year, another fissure began, unbeknownst to the civilian Ba‘thists. Numerous military officers with Ba‘thist sympathies were stationed in Egypt deliberately by Nasser so they could be supervised more closely. A group of these officers, mostly drawn from the minority Alawi and Druze communities of Syria, formed a “Military Committee”. Its history during these days remains difficult to penetrate, but the members’ later actions testify to a desire to reconstitute the Ba‘th party; on the other hand, their decision not to inform the civilian leadership also testifies to a new element within the Ba‘thist story. The Ba‘th had long decried the intrusion of the military into politics (although they were not above using the military themselves); this military turn would eventually see an inversion of the original Ba‘th stance. Although the Ba‘th in Syria would eventually reconstitute the party, the older generation of leaders were going to find their younger counterparts pressing the party in new directions.

Nasser’s brand of socialism continued to alienate the Syrians. Despite protestations of support from the party’s leaders, the individual Ba‘thists in Nasser’s administration continued resigning across 1959, including Hourani himself. In December, all the remaining Ba‘thists resigned *en masse*. In 1961, Nasser’s measures to nationalize banks and insurance companies left the significant bourgeois elements of Syria worried about the future of private enterprise. For their own reasons, the Ba‘thists were also upset by the maneuver, construing it not as a step toward socialism but as thinly disguised state capitalism. The political Left in Syria, however, had been weakened by Nasser’s policies, and so it was a conservative backlash that brought on the 28 September 1961 coup. Landowners and bourgeois elements supported conservative military units who moved into Damascus that day and declared the end of the union with Egypt.

The Ba‘th faced a dilemma. On one hand, they were committed to the principle of Arab unification; on the other, they knew that a continuation of Nasser’s policies would spell the end of Ba‘thist socialism. Hourani and al-Bitar were originally signatories to the declaration of separation, but al-Bitar soon “removed” his name. Hourani, though, had had his fill of Nasserism and split from the main body of the Ba‘th who could not bring themselves publically to condemn Nasser or to forego the possibility of recreating the union. The next two years were turbulent. At the time of the coup, the National Command directed the Syrian “Region” to reorganize itself and to work for union again, but this time on a “democratic, Socialist, and popular” basis. Splits continued in the Syrian and Lebanese branches of the party over whether union with Nasser was acceptable. Aflaq, still the ideological weathervane of the party, continued to push for union despite mistrust of Nasser. At the 1962 Congress, Aflaq packed the meeting with his supporters and adopted a policy of pursuing a federal union, an idea anathema to Nasser. Simultaneously, the Ba‘th came in for criticism all around the Arab world from Nasser’s supporters, who charged the Syrian socialists with having spearheaded the 1961 secession.

Once again, though, events in Iraq exerted a heavy influence on Syria, Egypt, and whether Arab Socialism might have a Nasserite or Ba‘thist face. Iraq’s Ba‘thists could not claim many

members in 1962, but they had concentrated on developing a street-level sympathy that could bring people out in demonstrations. Such demonstrations were intended both to counter the apparent popularity of Iraq's communists among the people as well as win outright control of key areas if necessary. At the same time, the Ba'th had made overtures among the military to nationalist officers. In 1962, the formed the Military Bureau of the Ba'th, composed of the party's leader Ali Saleh al-Sa'di and several prominent generals like 'Abd al-Salam Arif and Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr. Then a December 1962 incident at Baghdad's al-Sharqiyyah (Eastern) High School led to a strike by the students. The Ba'th in Iraq, well ensconced among the Iraqi Students Union, succeeded in extending the strike across the country at all schools. At the same time, the political arm of the Kurdish resistance approached Iraq's Ba'th in search of an ally against Qasim's regime. The pressure paid off in February 1963. Qasim moved to arrest several of the Ba'thist officers, and this act spurred the others into quick action. The Iraqi Communist Party moved its partisans into the streets of Baghdad, hoping to forestall the coup, and begged Qasim for weaponry to defend his regime. He was reluctant to give weapons out to the public and the Ba'th street forces kept an upper hand. Within a day the coup's military allies forced their way into the Ministry of Defense and captured Qasim. He was tried immediately and executed, with pictures of his bullet-riddled body being broadcast so as to prove the charismatic leader was indeed dead.

Even as Qasim was being besieged, the Ba'th and their allies formed the National Council of the Revolutionary Command to oversee the new administration. It began with twelve Ba'th members (civilian and military) and four Arab nationalist officers. For the government itself, 'Arif assumed the presidency, a result of his popularity with the armed forces, while the Ba'thists al-Bakr and al-Sa'di became vice-president/prime minister and deputy prime minister/minister of the interior respectively. A Ba'thist National Guard was established and grew quickly to 30,000 members as savage reprisals against the communists were carried out. By all appearances, the Ba'th had achieved control of Iraq, but the coalition with the nationalists would prove more tenuous than expected. The regime could not continue its cooperation with the Kurds and an expensive struggle ensued on that front. Within the Ba'th party itself, different ideologies became more apparent with al-Sa'di leading the most left-leaning elements. In short, none of the ruling coalition was really in synch with any of the others, and each was looking to secure its own agenda. Events in Syria soon widened these fissures into real conflict.

On 8 March 1963, one month after the Ba'th had gained control of Iraq, the Military Committee originally formed in Egypt finally became quite visible by toppling the government in Damascus and giving the Ba'th control of Syria as part of a "National Front" government. Scholars of the movement at this point begin to introduce a new term, the neo-Ba'th, to note the new orientation of the party. Aflaq remained a few years yet as a Founding Father and guide, but the new emphasis by the military leaders would begin to emphasize Syria's interests over those of a pan-Arab vision. In addition, the party began to shift its efforts to mobilizing the rural population; one argument sees this change as a tactical movement in the application of socialist ideals, but another sees it more as a result of the growing Alawi and Druze influence on the party.

In the meantime, the unexpected confluence of Ba'th regimes in both Damascus and Baghdad immediately spurred talk of union between those nations. The Ba'thists approached Egypt again, pushing more strongly this time for a federal arrangement that would give each region more autonomy plus a collective executive. Nasser was less than enthused by this prospect, but the movement for union seemed to have all the initiative. By April 17, a Tripartite Union was agreed upon, to be implemented over the next two years. The pace of the talks as well as the schedule of

how to integrate the three nations virtually ensured the self-destruction of the process, a result which most observers appreciate as the goal Nasser actually wanted. Recrimination and propaganda campaigns ensued as each side tried to shift blame for the failed unification. The Ba‘th were accused of being “anti-religious”, a charge they denied vigorously, in no small part because of Aflaq’s Christianity and the growing Alawi presence in the party. In Syria, the military Ba‘thists continued to purge Nasserist officers from all authority positions.

In October 1963, the Ba‘th held their Sixth National Convention. From this convention came a call for a federal union between Syria and Iraq, with their economies to be operated according to socialist principles. Attention was given in particular to collective farming, workers’ “control of the means of production” and austerity programs, in part to avoid having to look abroad for economic assistance. They also called on the Ba‘th governments to support the ongoing revolutions in Yemen and Algeria. The party appeared to be moving more to the Left. One conclusion attributes this movement to the new concentration of rural members in the party, especially in light of the push for land redistribution.

As one of the more Marxist-inclined members of the Ba‘th, al-Sa‘di might have looked upon the October meeting as a confirmation of his views, but it was seen differently back in Iraq. There, the more “rightist” members of the Ba‘th reacted against the leftward tilt and managed a takeover of the party at the November Regional Congress. Al-Sa‘di and his clique were exiled from the country, leading to a violent reaction by the National Guard on his behalf and a mutiny by part of the air force. In this disarray, Aflaq and other members of the National Command came to Baghdad, but their “help” was resented more than appreciated. Finally, President ‘Arif acted, and sent trustworthy military units against the National Guard. Fighting broke out in Baghdad, but full civil was avoided when the National Guard surrendered to the army. The members of the Ba‘th National Command were arrested and later expelled from Iraq.

The story of the Ba‘th in Syria after this point is a complex political narrative of coup and counter-coup within the framework of the party itself. Another military coup struck in February 1966 and adopted the more radical propositions of the 1963 National Congress. The in-fighting eventually saw both Aflaq and al-Bitar expelled from the party they had founded. The nationalist faction of the Military Committee slowly continued to build up its base, most particularly under the direction of Hafez al-Assad, who profited from his quiet resistance to the more socialistic programs of the Ba‘th. In 1970 al-Assad ousted the “progressive” wing of the party in a final coup, and established his control over the party and the state. The very fact that some analysts can refer to the Ba‘th as al-Assad’s fief is sufficient testimony to how far the party had moved from its original founding principles.

In Iraq, although out of power, the party continued on, but no longer as an affiliate of the Syrian “mother” party. While they plotted (including a September 1964 coup among the military which the regime forestalled in advance), ‘Arif implemented a number of Nasser-style socialist reforms: in July 1964, he decreed the nationalization of banks, the insurance industry, and the largest manufacturers. The Iraqi Petroleum Company, however, remained almost wholly in the hands of foreign investors, and this hampered government revenues. By 1965, the country was actually losing capital, unemployment was rising, and the prospect of land redistribution had stymied investment in that sector. When ‘Arif died in 1966 in a plane crash, his brother ‘Abd al-Rahman ‘Arif took over as president, but his ties to the military and the tribal shayks were not as strong as his brother’s. In addition to these troubles, the communist party was reviving in the south of the country, and this prompted concern among religious conservatives that Islam itself might be in danger. When street

demonstrations began in 1967 to "save the country from unbelief", the Ba'th aligned themselves with this movement. Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr, the former vice-president of 1963, had reorganized the party and turned to his own relatives to fill positions, including Saddam Hussein as secretary of the Regional Command. Both of these men went to jail after the 1964 aborted coup, but new cells of the party continued to develop, including among the military.

When Hussein was released from jail in 1966, he was able to expand the recruitment among the military and disaffected, gaining the sort of numbers that would enable him to reconstitute a Ba'th militia. Having such activists available in crisis moments played the pivotal role of making it seem the Ba'thists had control of the streets. The pressure grew to the point that 'Arif's weaknesses became apparent to the Ba'thist Military Bureau; at that point the Regional Command established links with a trio of key officers in the army and Republican Guard. These officers and the Ba'th struck on 17 July 1968, seizing key ministries and expelling 'Arif from the country. Al-Bakr became the president, but Hussein was given overview of domestic security and the police forces. Using this portfolio, plus his position with the Ba'th regional command, Hussein was able to begin consolidating his hold on the party and the regime. He would not take the reins from al-Bakr until 1979, but that changeover only ratified a situation long in the making.

The 1970s saw the Ba'th of Iraq lose their ideological moorings much as was happening in Syria, but the process was more easily camouflaged by progress in several socialist initiatives. In 1972, the long-sought nationalization of the oil industry finally was brought about. The regime also concentrated on creating in-country the goods and services it needed for the dominant industry. They also sought diversification, tapping into the country's rich sulfur and phosphate reserves. Policies were implemented whereby the state took the lead over the tribes in providing health care, handling labor problems, addressing family needs, and making education accessible. The riches that came in from oil meant that Iraq was one of the few developing nations of the world at this time with surplus capital. As one result, spending on the medical infrastructure grew by 40 percent from 1968-74. At the same time, however, Hussein was extending his control through a growing network of secret police and informers, many of whom were recruited from the same pool of desperation that Hussein had himself earlier come from. In the face of torture, illegal imprisonments, wholesale killings, and suppression of all political activity beyond Hussein's countenance, the party's longtime slogan of "Unity, Freedom, and Socialism" doubtless rang hollow alongside the socialist advances. With the initiation of the Iran-Iraq War, Hussein lost his oil-driven economic advantage, and within two years, Iraq moved into the circle of debtor nations. Socialist programs had to be abandoned due both to costs and to conditions "suggested" by lender nations. The regime continued, even increased, its repression, although it was little remarked on the world stage since many of Iraq's erstwhile supporters at this time were more focused on containing the Islamic revolution of Iran. In short, as with Syria, the Ba'th in power found the implementation of socialist ideals undercut by the measures taken to maintain their authority.