
Interview: Dr. Elias Farah

Iraq has suffered, but we remain optimistic about the future

Dr. Elias Farah is a member of the national leadership of the Ba'ath Party, responsible for the External Affairs Bureau. He has written various works on the history and ideology of the Ba'ath Party. The interview, which we excerpt here, was given to Muriel Mirak-Weissbach in Baghdad on July 24.

EIR: Can you give me some historical background on the Ba'ath Party, so as to make clear your view of the current situation?

Farah: The philosophy of the Ba'ath Party is characterized in broad terms by three essential aims: Arab unity, liberty, and socialism. Founded in 1937, its foundation was preceded by a long period of maturation. During this period, there were several ideologies of Western origin. It was necessary to go through a long period in dialogue with these ideologies to assimilate them, adapt them; in the final analysis, this dialogue gave us the impression that we cannot begin with an ideology that is not our own. Hence, we must search history, within the Arab people, but with a modern vision. We have truly profited from the cultural exchange with others in order to see our national past, but with a modern, a contemporary vision. And this way, we have been able to discover a deeper sense of our spiritual and national patrimony. Also, in Islam, we have resources, but not merely Islam as a religion, but more as a revolution in the life of Arab nations in a given period.

Arab unity means restoring a body to this Arab nation. Division is not a natural state in the Arab world; it is a state imposed by the colonial period. This idea of Arab unity was imbued with the idea of liberty, because one cannot unify the Arab world without fighting against colonialism, in order both to give a rebirth to the Arab nation and to have an Arab man who is authentic, and simultaneously modern, contemporary, who is able to participate with other peoples in the search for a new civilization, better adapted to the values of the world.

The idea of socialism was the result of this generalized tendency in the world, not only since 1917, but before that. This tendency depended on the movement of the masses, on the involvement of the majority; hence for us, socialism is not solely an ideology, adapting Marxism. Prof. Michel

Aflaq, our founder, wrote in 1936, in an article: "I do not seek socialism in the works of Marx and Lenin, but in the laws of life; the human life must be based on equality, on a principle which gives each man the possibility to exercise his virtues and talents and open up his life"—because life, in the Ba'ath philosophy, is a form of wealth. Thus, socialism is for exploiting this wealth, not only on the social level, but on the psychological, individual level. This relation between man and society is conceptualized in a beneficial perspective in the philosophy of the Ba'ath.

For this, the three aims of the Ba'ath—Arab unity, liberty, socialism—are not three slogans, but are three aspects of the same humanitarian conception: for the Arab renaissance, but within the context of a renaissance for the world as a whole, a cultural renaissance. For this reason, nationalism is not, for the Ba'ath, a racial relationship, a sort of egocentrism, but rather a cultural relationship; hence, the Arab language is essential. The aim is the awakening of the Arab world.

EIR: What period in Arab history do you look back to, in the perspective of effecting an Arab renaissance?

Farah: We take our reference point in a period when there was a revolution in Arab society, but before this revolution there had been stages in which Arab thought was a cradle for cultural maturation. In Yemen and also in the North, there had been cultural exchanges with Ethiopia, with Africa; in the North with the Romans and with the Persians. There had been cultural exchanges with India: That was a reservoir of commercial and cultural exchanges, which always lacked spirit, the spirit which gives these relations a cultural personality. It was Islam that was able to respond to this need, which was able to unify the Arabian Peninsula; which was also able to unify an Arab world, which was Arab as well before Islam, because the Arab countries were in Iraq, in Egypt, in Syria. But this unification was accompanied by a large-scale unification of the Arab world in Spain, as well as in India, Persia; this world was able to adjoin even China, because there had been commercial exchanges with China before Islam. So, Islam was to give not only a commercial aspect to these relations, but also a spiritual one. Hence, after the rollback in 1258, when Baghdad was destroyed, one sees

the traces of Arab civilization in all regions where Arabs lived. . . .

The Crusades were an occupation under cover of religion, but everything has its negative and positive aspects. So, this was also an exchange—a struggle, but a cultural dialogue at the same time.

The worst project which was really able to counter and cut off this positive relation with Europe was the foundation of Israel.

This project, fomented by the idea of a Greater Israel, a new colonial period, brought even the relations among Arab Christians and Muslims and Jews to an impasse. Before that, Jews were subjected to ill treatment everywhere except in the Arab world. In spite of their aggressive attitude against the Prophet Muhammed—they always kept a certain distance between themselves and other people—but the Arabs continued to live with the Jews without complications. At one point even, during the Spanish period, there had been real cultural friendship and a very positive relationship in everyday life.

Our project for a modern renaissance after the Second World War was countered by the Zionist foundation in Palestine, which sought to survive at the expense of the Palestinians and by force against all the Arab ambitions for modernization, progress, and to recover their unity.

If we refer back to the past, we see the political history of this Arab unity, from the seventh century to the thirteenth century. Throughout this whole period of five centuries, and in spite of political division, there was an aspiration for a new life. This renaissance was envisaged from a very optimistic standpoint before the foundation of Israel, the colonialist period it was based on, and the imperialist period before that, which means a sort of negative Western attitude against Arabs and Islam. And we have expended immense efforts to slow down negative developments and factors which could infiltrate this relationship with the West with its fanaticism. The reaction against Zionist fanaticism, against its aggressive aspect, cannot take the identical attitude. It's necessary to overcome this ill-adjusted egocentrism and have cultural exchange.

Looking back at the past gives us plenty of lessons for the present; also our project for the future is full of sadness, but has a spiritual joy. . . .

For us, the question of democracy comprises a guarantee that our change will be just. We make changes, but in order to give the popular masses a consciousness of their historic period and a consciousness of their actual interests. Literacy, for example, is a democratic project; also women's rights, children's rights. Democracy is not formulas acquired through Western practice: For us, it is a process. Democracy must be achieved, but by going through periods that Europe has long since left behind. One cannot transplant a solution which has been completely carried out in European society to societies elsewhere.

This is what was wrong with communism, for the essen-

tial failing of Marx was to think that the ideas of socialism could be carried out everywhere and almost automatically, but with time. What is wrong with Marx, the same as what is going wrong now, is abstraction. On the contrary, what is necessary is to concretize the abstract, because the abstract distances us from man insofar as he lives in special conditions. There is a sort of false cultural formation. In Russia for example, a sort of cultural deformation took place when one adopts an ideology from outside, like clothes already made up such that the same size would fit everybody. . . .

EIR: Do you think Iraq was targeted in this war mainly because of its industrial development policy?

Farah: Development in Iraq is not only a materialist development, from the standpoint of the economy, industry, building things; it is not just to redress material underdevelopment, but also to resuscitate the soul, the mind, intellect, for which development was generalized. To create a personality for Iraq, which assumes a responsibility not only on the national level, which could not only correlate to the present position of the world, but to the historical moment. This means the consciousness of the era, the mind of the era. It was a spiritual renaissance. That could change the world. If one begins with man alone, with a society, a nation, this implies a change for the world—but for the better—in the sense of humanist progress. Bush represents, for the moment, a sort of end, marking the end of a period in the global sense, the end of a period in which technology has achieved its height, perfection, but a technology that lacks respect. Technology was vastly inflated, but at the expense of the mind. . . .

We have a very important historical task. We look at the future with optimism, in spite of the pain we are undergoing right now, whereas Bush has all the happiness of the present, but in the future, he will have sadness. Each day is going to be witness to a declaration of something Bush has done that is artificial and superficial. He's played out the great game, but at the expense of all the participants, at the expense of the relations between the U.S. and the Arabs. But we are not taking the attitude of reaction. We know quite well that the American people do not all agree, and now, thanks to technological development in the information media, Bush can deform opinion everywhere. For example, in France: Apparently, three out of four Frenchmen supported the policies of Mitterrand. What does this signify? The same thing was done in 1956, at Suez, in Egypt. The proportion was four out of four when it came to Algeria, during the years afterward up to 1960-61. Opinion was deformed. If someone—three and a half out of four in French public opinion—was with Pétain, then who would have been able to set that right? It was de Gaulle—de Gaulle spoke in the name of France, not the French.

The same thing now. Bush has been able to misshape opinion, and make us pay. . . . It's a sort of historical aggression, not just military aggression. . . .