

IN July 1958, when Abdel Karim Qasim overthrew the Iraqi monarchy and the government of Nuri el-Said, Fadhel Jamali was at the United Nations. Prime Minister of Iraq twice, Foreign Minister eight times, twice President of the National Assembly, Jamali had relinquished office as Foreign Minister in April 1958.

"When the revolution came I had simply gone to the Security Council to defend Lebanon. I returned and I was condemned to death and to 55 years prison sentence. It was very funny. I was supposed to have intended to move the Iraqi Army to invade Syria and if I had invaded Syria, then the Syrian Army would have attacked Iraq and I would then have exposed the country to external danger; and whoever exposed Iraq to such danger deserved to be put to death. I said I did not want to move my Army to Syria and the Syrian Army did not invade Iraq. Therefore, I did not expose Iraq to danger, but I had to be condemned anyway. I stayed in prison for over a year and several times my execution was postponed because of international pressure. Dag Hammarskjöld, the then UN Secretary-General, intervened. Nehru intervened, the European powers (not Britain or America) intervened and of course the Muslim States. Ayub Khan wanted to come to Baghdad, to save my life, but the last man who finally succeeded in saving my life was King Muhammad V of Morocco. He was invited to come to Baghdad, but he said I cannot come as long as Jamali is under death sentence. So when he came the sentence was commuted to 10 years imprisonment".

But before he came into politics, Jamali was a teacher. Once a teacher, always a teacher, and that is how Prof. Mohammed Fadhel Jamali—now teaching at the University of Tunis—seems to look at the past. There is none of the bitterness that one could expect in such a situation. To him the whole problem is educational. Boys are boys, some dull, some bright, some good, and some bad, but to him they are all boys. You feel sorry but never bitter or negative.

It is about fourteen years since Qasim's revolution. How does he evaluate these post-revolution years? Does it in any way vindicate his policies and his politics?

"The trouble is that there is a great chaos of values, political values, moral values, social values, they are all upset and it makes very difficult for one to judge or to pronounce. I myself believe that the humanity at large, as anywhere else, should be guided by three basic principles. First the Faith, its universal purpose and wherein the Will of God dominates. Second, application of science and scientific methods, in thinking and in every relevant department of life. Third, and this is much misunderstood, is democracy. By democracy I mean, let me make it very clear, social justice, co-operative and shared living, freedom of thought and expression and the dignity of the human person. Unless we accept and apply these fundamental rules of life, which are in themselves part of Islam, we will continue to go down. We will continue to have unrest... Problem is, the Arab world is not clear on what it wants. It is confused, and undecided".

Why this is so?

"There are two reasons and one of them goes back in history. We inherited decadence, that's one thing, and the other is that we are overwhelmed by foreign ideologies, influences and powers, and those external forces still play on us and use us as pawns in their own game. But had we not been weak and retarded that could not have happened. That means we must begin with ourselves. If we are strong from within then there is no danger from without."

How did you happen to become weak from a position of strength? Certainly something must have gone wrong, to begin with.

"I said we inherited weakness from the dark periods of Muslim history when ignorant and selfish rulers and governors became despots and began to oppress and exploit their own people. They demanded submission in all situations, in all circumstances as if they were pharaohs."

Are you referring to the Ottomans?

"No, it begins from the last days of the Abba-

Nationalism, Baghdad Pact, Revolution and Education

Prof. Fadhel Jamali speaks to
IMPACT about his years in Iraqi
politics



Mohammed Fadhel Jamali

sides when the Muslim society got infected with racialism and chauvinism, with bigotry and narrow-mindedness, and when the religious schools closed their minds and stopped thinking. I suppose that was the background situation when Arab nationalism started taking roots".

If you go back to the nature of your situation, the whole set of problems that arose, the problem of despotism, the problem of discrimination, the problem of inequity, of bigotry, of narrow-

mindedness, it all starts from the deviation of the leadership and society from Islam. This is a deviation from the normal, now how do you start solving the problem: by trying to revert to the normal or by going away from the normal, no matter in what direction? To an outsider this phenomenon of Arab emergence or Arab revolts, whichever way you put it, has shown itself as a self-defeating exercise. You started, or you thought so, from being the Arab nations, and now one can see where the Arabs are?

"The point is that Arab nationalism, modern Arab nationalism, was not meant to be self-defeating. It was meant to be a positive link in developing a group of Muslims".

But why should one seek an exclusive development of a particular group of people? The problems arise because of a deviation from the normal. One may be a Turk, a Persian, or an Arab or an African, but this is irrelevant, if one accepts that as the causal factor. Have emancipation and liberation got to be exclusive and separatist? You don't divide, you unify and harmonise if you seek liberation.

"Well to me, nationalism is not divisive at all. It should not be. It is a natural social bond, it's like a bond within a family or a tribe, I belong to a family, a tribe and a country, and I also belong to the world of Islam. If you read the Qur'an you will see that it recognises nationalism, for the purposes of identification but, not for division and discord. Once you come to know and to recognise one another you begin to develop togetherness and mutuality. True that has not been understood so clearly. My object in politics and in education has, therefore, been and is, to prove to my Arab fellows, to my Muslim brethren that that's the meaning of nationalism. I have travelled very widely. I went to Malaysia, to Pakistan, to Turkey and so many other Muslim countries and I always felt at home with our Muslim brethren. I remember speaking in the Great Mosque of Djakarta; I was over-whelmed, I felt as close as a brother. That was after the Bandung Conference".

What you are trying to say means that perhaps a great many Muslim Arab nationalists were well-meant, but one can see that they have failed.

"Yes that's true, we have not been able to educate our people. The leaders too were confused. Our masses are well-meant, but the leadership unfortunately is confused and ignorant. In such a situation one who shouts, who is a demagogue, can come up and be the leader... Anyway to my mind the basic problem is education, we must have a sound new system of Islamic education for the Arabs, for the Pakistanis, for the Indonesians, for the Iranians, for the Turks, for the Africans, for the Chinese; we must all work towards this goal. I have myself written one book in Arabic and another in English: "The Reconstruction of Islamic Education". The Muslim world needs to be clear on the point and decide what type of society it wants to establish. It's really a great injustice to Islam to regard the Muslims as representatives of the Great Faith. Could we not establish even a small village which is an embodiment of the true Muslim way so that we show it and tell the world, this is the way Muslims live: co-operation, mutuality, honesty, creativity, dignity and work."

One thing which is very difficult to understand is that people like yourself, when they are out of power they come with very good things about Islam, about education, and so on, but what about the period you actually had the opportunity of implementing those things? How does it help now to talk of the opportunities lost?

"If you are interested and if you have the time I would invite you to study the record of my cabinet during the period I was Prime Minister. As Foreign Minister my record is clear, because it is mainly in the United Nations; one can see what I said and what I did. My foreign policy is known, but as a Prime Minister, when I first took office, I did a few things which I can humbly feel happy about. When I came to power there was no freedom of the press in the country, the newspapers and the press were under strict control. The political parties were suppressed; they were not allowed to function and from 1948 onwards

there had been Martial Law. We lifted Martial Law, lifted restrictions on press and the political parties. We fixed a minimum standard wage for the worker. We controlled rents and distributed state land among the landless. One thing which I must also tell, today it may sound reactionary, but there used to be a very big alcohol advertisement on the bridge of Baghdad, in beautiful colours, a lady pouring wine and serving to the public. I got that removed. The prostitution quarters were abolished and prostitution banned. One can look into my record.

In the field of education we started the University, we started educational reform, but I did not stay long enough to see its results. Of course, I am partly responsible for a certain period in education. That's a long history; for twelve years I was Director-General of Education. During those years my main aim was to liberate our system of education from foreign influence and to inculcate the idea of Pan-Arabism; we were trying to liberate Syria and Palestine, also Lebanon. We tried to extend education in the whole country and opened schools for the tribal people. Education was confined not to the cities alone, we also tried to reach the rural and the outlying areas. We tried to see that the people of Iraq were treated justly, and that there was no discrimination between the urban and the rural people or between Turks, Arabs and Kurds. We tried to eliminate differences by providing every group an equal opportunity and a harmonising climate. We similarly tried to promote girl education and give them the same opportunities as the boys. All my twelve years I resisted attempts to establish the British-type schools for the aristocratic families and was much unpopular for that."

To liberate the system of education from the British frame was of course important and necessary, but that is only negative. What positive measures were taken to Islamise the system of education?

"One thing we did was very important. In Iraq we have both Shias and Sunnis who form part of the nation. I established a committee of eminent scholars from amongst both and asked them to draw a combined programme of Islamic education. They were able to prepare a unified syllabus and it was a great achievement."

You still had the revolution. Would you say that the coming of the revolution signified the failure of your work or that it was some other phenomenon?

"I want to tell one thing: At the beginning of the war the British insisted that I should be kicked out of the Education Ministry. After me they brought a communist gentleman to head the Ministry of Education. This was in 1941; they also brought an English adviser to undo what I had done. So I would say that part of the revolution owed itself to that. They said that I was a Nazi, which was of course not true. After I left the Ministry of Education, the Oriental Secretary of the British Embassy, Capt. Holt came to my house and told me that the British Ambassador (the British Ambassador in fact was the ruler of Iraq at that time) was sad that I had to leave. I said: 'Please give my compliments to His Excellency and tell him that if he really thought I was a Nazi, then also tell him that he was now planting Communism in Iraq and some day they will have to pay for it.' So that was the seeding of the Iraqi Revolution?"

I have discussed the Iraqi revolution in "Al-Iraq Al-Hadith" published from Beirut. It incorporates my point of view on the causes of the downfall of monarchy in Iraq. The causes were both internal and external. Internally, as I said earlier, my policy was not followed. There was persecution, there was despotism, there was feudalism, there was sectarianism, and all sort of other corruption, like any other country in the Third World. Externally Nasser played a big role, the Ba'athists played a big role, and some other powers played a big role. America and Britain acquiesced and I put a question mark over there, because I have proof that they knew what was going to happen . . ."

You don't think the Americans were more involved than the British?

"I do not know. It is possible, but I really can't tell. I say that we and the British and the Americans were friends. If they knew what happened and did not tell us, that's betrayal. If they did not know and it happened, then they were bankrupt. That is my view. There are some signs which point that they knew what was going to happen."

The most controversial part of your Foreign Ministership is Baghdad Pact?

"Yes, I am still a great believer in Baghdad Pact, not in relation to the West, but in its relation with the Muslim world. I always considered Iraq as a great Islamic country and felt convinced of the need to unite Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This has been my goal. I saw the Iraqi role as a bridge between the Arab and the non-Arab Muslim countries. That was a natural role. Iraq is a meeting point for Persians, Turks and Arabs."

Menderes was invited to go to Cairo . . . then came the incident of the Muslim Brethren . . . the invitation was withdrawn . . . Before that Nasser had written beautifully about the Turks . . . Menderes then came to Iraq . . . Iraq happened to take the lead . . . That started the trouble . . .

No matter the quality of your own sentiments, but one cannot overlook the whole origination of Baghdad Pact: by the West and for the West.

"I said then and even now maintain that in order to protect themselves weak powers should have alliances with the bigger powers, whether of the East or the West. Non-alignment to me is advantageous only if you could maintain it."

Now if the object is to seek protection, then the natural protector in your case should have been Soviet Russia rather than the West?

"Yes that is the dilemma. If I go to America I may lose part of my economy and I may be exploited to some extent politically but culturally I am less exposed, but if I go to Russia, I am no more a Muslim, I am no more an Arab, I am a Marxist. That is why I always said we could not go to Russian side. I am not against the Russians as fellow humans, but I do not like Communism, and to my mind Communism and Imperialism are one. In fact Communism is more thorough. I do not differentiate between Zionist Communism and Zionist Capitalism. As a Muslim I believe in our own system of economy and our system of social justice. In 1947, Faris al Khoury of Syria came to me and said: let's vote for the Russians. It was at the UN and I told Faris I will vote for the Russians provided they supported us on the Palestine issue and vote against the Partition Plan. But if they don't I will be losing both Palestine and my own self. I am opposed to all kinds of ideological totalitarianism."

You don't see Western Imperialism as another kind of ideological totalitarianism?

"No, one can still kick and cry. During the British rule in Iraq, we could make demonstrations and shout and curse, but under a Communist regime all such people are either liquidated or put in a mental asylum."

In a situation like yours, where you have a big power like Russia so close to you and another big power, America, not physically close, yet very closely involved, would you not be more sensible to steer clear of both?

"Yes, provided I could do that. I am not dogmatic about that. But if you must have friends, then it is for you to choose those who are less

harmful. I told this to Nehru. At Bandung we had a 24-hour secret debate and Nehru attacked Baghdad Pact. I said: Mr. Nehru I can see the Communist danger; while they form one solid block, the non-Communist world is split and divided. If you want to create a block and guarantee my defence, come along, *tafaddal!* But if you cannot, then I have to find my own solution."

"I said that colonialism was on the way out and we had succeeded in meeting it, but Communism was an on-coming colonialism, and more dangerous. When you have two evils to choose from you decide on the lesser one. That, of course, is a negative approach, but positively I always say: we don't shut our eyes and our minds to that which may be good and useful either in the East or the West."

"Talking of Baghdad Pact one has to think also of the situation which then existed. Personally, I worked hard for Baghdad Pact because I was working for the unity of Iraq and Syria. The US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, told me that America would not support that union unless we joined Baghdad Pact. To me it was a means to the goal of unifying Iraq and Syria."

But in actual fact Baghdad Pact served to subdivide the Arabs?

"That was unfortunate, because it was not properly handled. Our propaganda machinery failed to explain it in the correct light."

How do you interpret Nasser's attitude? Was it a clash of personality with Nuri el-Said or . . . ?

"No, it was not like that. I have dealt with the subject in my memoirs. Nasser was supposed to be in the Baghdad Pact. He had accepted it."

Can you prove it?

"I speak from personal knowledge. Adnan Menderes, the Turkish Prime Minister, was invited to go to Cairo and then came the incident of the Muslim Brethren when Nasser was alleged to be shot at. There is no logical correlation between the two, but the invitation to Menderes was withdrawn. Before that Nasser had written beautifully about the Turks: the Turks are our brothers, we are related by marriage, we are one family and so on. Menderes then came to Iraq and since Iraq happened to take the lead, Nasser felt offended. That was, to my mind, a question of petty jealousy. That started the trouble. Nasser tried to isolate Iraq. He called a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo. Nuri refused to go. I went on his behalf and explained Iraq's position very very clearly, but all that my explanation did was to neutralise the Arab states and make them accept that Iraq was entitled to do what she did. I did achieve the non-alienation of Iraq, but I could not convince Nasser."

"It would not be correct to think that Nasser was opposed to Baghdad Pact because he was anti-West or the like. The agreement he made with Britain allowed the British troops to come back, in the event of an attack. He had already acquiesced to the British return to the canal, and if you want to brag about patriotism, nationalism, anti-imperialism etc, then that was not the case."

"The Anglo-Egyptian agreement was signed in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact came a year later in 1955. Before the Pact I was having dinner in Cairo with Naguib and Nasser and the next evening Nasser came to the Iraqi Embassy and had dinner with us. He had brought a copy of the *New York Times*. It carried a report on an alliance between Turkey and Pakistan which Iraq would join subsequently. Nasser did not say that we should not join, he said: Do not join until we have finished our job with the British and the evacuation from the canal is complete. I agreed and gave my word. After that I returned to Baghdad and "Sawt al-Arab" radio began to attack me."

Why?

"They said they had information that we had joined. This was false. We had not joined. It came later. Nasser had finished his job with the British, and from all moral and legal consideration, Iraq was entitled to join Baghdad Pact. By then I had resigned and Nuri had taken over. What followed later is well known. Nasser, it seems, wanted to tell the West that it was he who had the Arab world's cards in his hands. But, in our days Iraq would not yield to such things."