



Dr. Rifaat Al-Assad

Dr. Rifaat Al-Assad was born in 1937 in western Syria in the town of Qardaha located in the district of Latakia. He was a member of a large family, the youngest of ten. Though brought up in a rural area, his father - himself an educated man - was determined to educate his younger children, including Rifaat, once facilities became available in the area. His primary education, therefore, took place in Qardaha Primary School, established by the French in the early thirties.

Rifaat's father, Ali Suleiman Al-Assad, later moved with his family from Qardaha to Latakia, to monitor the children's education, particularly that of Rifaat, who was due to commence his secondary education in 1949. Upon finishing school, Rifaat Al-Assad joined Homs Military Academy to train as an officer. In 1952 Rifaat Al-Assad joined the Baath Party.

Throughout his life, Rifaat Al-Assad has been accustomed to speaking out against ideologies that go against his beliefs in Justice, Peace and Freedom. He has never shied away from confronting the governing powers, even if that has meant putting himself at risk.

In 1963, he was at the forefront of the 8th March revolution, leading the graduating officers from the Military Academy. This was a revolution of the socialist Baathist officers against the regime of Prime Minister Khalid al-Azm and President Nazim al-Qudsi.

Then, just over a year after graduating from Military Academy, Rifaat Al-Assad took part in the coup of 23rd February, 1966. This was a neo-Baath coup against the first Baath regime which brought to power a more radical government.

In response to misconduct by the new president, Salah Jadeed and Abdel Kareem Al Jendi, director of the General Intelligence Bureau, Rifaat, along with Hafez Al-Assad, his older brother, initiated a reformist movement between 25th and 28th February, 1969. During this time, Rifaat Al-Assad joined the Tank Regiment at Qaboon as a squadron commander.

When Hafez Al-Assad initiated the 'Corrective Movement' by which he seized power, Rifaat Al-Assad assisted him.

Rifaat Al-Assad was to play a vital role in supporting his brother throughout his presidency. His many political activities, along with development and construction projects and business ventures made him one of the most respected and influential members of the regime.

Loyalty, freedom of expression, courage and progression have always been central values guiding Rifaat Al-Assad's life. He devoted much time and attention to supporting Syria's youth and encouraging a patriotic spirit among them. In support of this aim, he published a magazine entitled 'Al-Fursan' (The Knights). Furthermore, he created forums for university graduates and professionals to discuss pertinent issues in an open environment.

Rifaat Al-Assad himself highly valued education and intellectual development. He achieved a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in History and Law from Damascus University, and later a PhD from Moscow: his thesis was entitled "Social Class Dispute in Syria".

It is important to mention a pivotal moment in Syrian history. In 1980, a severe coup was carried out against Hafez Al-Assad's regime by the Muslim Brotherhood. A series of terrorist bombings took place throughout the country killing many innocent civilians. This required immediate security intervention to subdue the coup and restore order. This extremist phenomenon was not unique to Syria indeed it had an impact on the wider world, where others also suffered from disturbances which they opposed and to whom the coup in Syria posed a potential future threat. The situation in Syria became critical and in 1982 a decision was made at a political level to take military action.

When President Hafez Al-Assad was taken ill in 1984 Dr. Rifaat Al-Assad assisted in keeping security and order in the country. During this time, however, there were some disagreements within the government and false accusations were made against Dr. Rifaat Al-Assad. Upon the president's return then, Dr. Rifaat Al-Assad decided to leave Syria in 1984 to avoid any clashes or bloodshed resulting from the tension that was rising between him and certain individuals and groups within government.

This decision was proof of his courage and wisdom as a man who loves his people, whom he still honours fully. As a sign of this, he vowed to his people that while away from his homeland, he would not utter a word in any language other than Arabic. Despite living abroad for 26 years he holds true to this promise and longs to return to his home country and people. He works for the wellbeing and rights of the people of Syria, and the wider Arab world, within the framework of a vision for global renaissance where Justice, Peace and Freedom prevail. It is towards achieving this aim that Rifaat Al-Assad strives today.