

IRAQ: THE RULE OF ʿABDARRAĤMĀN ʿĀRIF AND ITS END (1966 – 1968)*

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The July Revolution of 1958 in Iraq brought Staff Brigadier ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim to power, in alliance with a loose group of Communists, Kurds, *baʿthists*, patriotic democrats and Arab nationalists from the outset. Over the following five years he lost the support of each of these groupings. His overthrow in February 1963 was carried out by a combination of *baʿthist* and Arab nationalist military officers. Although the presidency was placed in the hands of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, a non-*baʿthist* army general, the *Baʿth party* played the predominant role in the government which succeeded the rebellion. A campaign of severe repression against the Communist party was initiated. In November 1963, following attempts by the *Baʿth party* to entrench its hold on power, ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif ousted the principal *baʿthist* leaders from the government and dismissed senior *baʿthist* military officers from their posts. To the extent that organised civilian involvement in government continued, it was a loosely organised grouping of Arab nationalists and *nāṣirists* who provided the regime’s civilian base. In April 1966 ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif was killed in a helicopter crash and was succeeded by his elder brother ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif, a man of weaker personality. His rule was of short duration: in July 1968 the *Baʿth party* returned to power again after a coup.

Key words: civilian government, settlement with the Kurds without success, the death of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, succession of his brother, displacement of the premier by the army; disunity among the military, the return of the *Baʿth*

The ruling forces in Iraq that emerged after the fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim declared its readiness to strengthen pan-Arab ties, but it took to a large extent the form of lip-service only. It is worth mentioning that President ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif was seriously ill: he suffered from a gastric ulcer, emaciation and leukaemia and was considerably limited in his activities.¹ Therefore he had to

* This study is published within the VEGA 2/0107/15 grant project.

¹ ḤASSŪN, Fayṣal. Maṣraʿ al-mušīr ar-rukn ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif. [Violent Death of the Staff Marshall ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif], p. 18.

rely heavily on the officers of his tribe, that is, from al-Jumayla, mainly on the Colonels Saʿīd Ṣulaybī and Ḥamīd Qādir.² After two military prime ministers (Ṭāhir Yahyā and ʿĀrif ʿAbdarrazzāq), the president appointed on 21 September 1965 to the premiership a civilian, ʿAbdarraḥmān al-Bazzāz, who worked with a predominantly civilian cabinet. The *Patriotic Council of Revolutionary Command*,³ (al-Majlis al-waṭanī li-qiyādat ath-thawra) which had been exclusively military in composition – the Council’s Law No. 61 of 22 April 1964 precluded the membership of any person who did not hold at least the rank of Lieutenant Colonel – dissolved itself.⁴ However, the making of the defence policy and the attending to internal security became the prerogative of a new, predominantly military organ, the *Patriotic Defence Council* (Majlis ad-difāʿ al-waṭanī). This new military organisation maintained overall control of the cabinet, and together with the republican guard, constituted the essential mainstay of the regime. Therefore, the cabinet of ʿAbdarraḥmān al-Bazzāz was almost inevitably largely dependent on the president for its continuation in office.⁵

The new prime minister, who was a prominent if somewhat conservative politician, sought to introduce more market-oriented economic policies, and generally to promote a more liberal political line. In an attempt to reassure private capital and to regain the confidence of the industrial and commercial community, he declared that he was going to pursue what he described as a “prudent” or “rational” form of socialism suited to current conditions in Iraq, that there would be no further nationalisations, and that stability and the rule of law would prevail. In addition, he also undertook to put an end to the arrest and imprisonment of the regime’s political opponents, to permit free expression of political opinion and ultimately to re-establish a parliamentary system.⁶

ʿAbdarraḥmān al-Bazzāz tried to ensure that some basic civil liberties were respected, and claimed to be anxious to pave the way for the eventual introduction of some kind of democratic structure. Political parties were still illegal, and the regime’s only attempt to float its own party, an Iraqi version of

² FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. ʿAbdassalām Muḥammad ʿĀrif. Sīratuhu .. muḥākamatuhu .. maṣraʿuhu. [ʿAbdassalām Muḥammad ʿĀrif. His Biography ... his Trial ... his Death], p. 43.

³ Commonly referred to as the National Council of Revolutionary Command.

⁴ BATATU, H. The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Baʿthists and Free Officers, p. 1034.

⁵ PENROSE, E., PENROSE, E.F. Iraq: International Relations and National Development, pp. 333 – 334.

⁶ SLUGLETT, M.F., SLUGLETT, P. Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship, p. 97.

the Egyptian *Arab Socialist Union*, in July 1964, had collapsed in the face of general public indifference. In the course of an interview in the summer of 1966, °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz stated that he intended to embark upon “the resumption of elections as the next step to be taken towards representative government”.⁷ However, it also emerged that he was firmly opposed to any unconditional legislation of political parties, since this would inevitably have involved recognising the communists, an interesting reflection on the influence the *Iraqi Communist Party* still wielded in spite of the persecution to which it had been subjected to since February 1963.⁸ Since the *Ba’th* was widely detested because of its activities in 1963, and both the *Patriotic Democratic Party* and the *Independence Party* had virtually ceased to exist, it is difficult to imagine what sort of elections the premier could have had in mind.

Refusing extremes of *Ba’thism* and *Nāṣirism*, the new regime was unable to formulate a coherent political programme, and its uncertain political course disillusioned those who had greeted it enthusiastically from the outset. Like the preceding governments it failed to reopen the political life of the country on a representative basis, although there was some hope in one brief period within the years 1965 – 1966 when °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz clearly wanted to move in that direction. It was, however, much more civilized than its predecessors had been.⁹ Like the premier, the new cabinet was conservative nationalist. It bound itself to the achievement of Iraqi unity; the maintenance of “the supremacy of the law”; the speeding up of steps for the ushering in of parliamentary life; the pursuit of a “wise Arab socialist” policy aiming at “a higher production and an equitable distribution”, and “regardful of both public and private sectors”; and, finally, continued cooperation with the UAR, “due account being taken of our special circumstances”.¹⁰ Before the cabinet had time to do much about its program, °Abdassalām °Ārif suddenly died. On 13 April 1966, his helicopter crashed in a sandstorm near al-Qurna in the south of Iraq.¹¹ His death marked the end of another chapter in the country’s political history.

°Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz stayed in office almost a year, between September 1965 and August 1966, but his effectiveness was greatly weakened by the sudden death of his patron and protector °Abdassalām °Ārif and by the ensuing political uncertainty. Although °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz managed to secure the

⁷ PENROSE, E., PENROSE, E.F. Iraq: International Relations and National Development, p. 341.

⁸ °ABDALKARĪM, Samīr. Aḍwā’ °alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyū’iyya fī al-°Irāq. [The Lights on the Communist Movement in Iraq]. Vol. IV, pp. 87 – 92.

⁹ PENROSE, E., PENROSE, E.F. Iraq: International Relations and National Development, p. 319.

¹⁰ BATATU, H. The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq, p. 1034.

¹¹ ḤASSŪN, Fayṣal. Maṣra’ al-mušīr ar-rukn °Abdassalām °Ārif, pp. 104 – 108.

smooth succession of the late president's brother °Abdarrahmān to the presidency,¹² the power struggle between the prime minister and the officers, which had been latent from the time of his original appointment, became more and more acute in the course of the summer of 1966. As well as antagonising the officers by his independent stance, and later by his controversial efforts to achieve a settlement with the Kurdish question, his conservative approach to the economy also aroused misgivings outside a fairly limited circle of commercial and industrial entrepreneurs.¹³ The notion that the state should be in charge of the overall direction of the economy and thus act both as the main promoter of economic development and as the principal provider of all social and educational services had taken such firm root that the premier's efforts to reverse this process were viewed with concern by many politically conscious Iraqis. Such measures as the relaxation of import controls and an increase in compensation payable to landlords expropriated under the provisions of the Land Reform of 1958 seemed specifically designed to benefit the privileged classes of the *ancien régime*.¹⁴

The death of the former president – who himself had favoured strengthening the civilian element in government and had appointed °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz as Prime Minister in autumn 1965 – brought the latent conflict between the civilian and militarist elements in government into the open.¹⁵ In accordance with constitutional practice, the premier tendered his resignation to the new president on the day following his election to the presidency. President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif invited him to form a new government on the same day, 18 April 1966.¹⁶ President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif and Premier °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz made public statements in which they pledged themselves to follow the policy of the former President. President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif's public statement, the first he had ever made to the nation, was broadcast on 20 April. He confirmed his belief in the principles which his brother had advocated, especially the rule of law, domestic unity, and social welfare.¹⁷

¹² FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. °Abdassalām Muḥammad °Ārif. *Sīratuhu .. muḥākamatuhu .. maṣra'uḥu*, p. 58.

¹³ AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, ḤUMAYDĪ, Ja'far °Abbās. *Tārīkh al-°Irāq al-mu°āšir*. [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 236.

¹⁴ SLUGLETT, M.F., SLUGLETT, P. *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 98.

¹⁵ McDOWALL, D. *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 317.

¹⁶ The new cabinet included five new members: °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz, Premier and Minister of Interior; Adnān al-Pāchachī, Foreign Minister; Shākir Maḥmūd Shukrī, Defence; Muḥammad al-°Abta; Labour & Social Affairs; Šādiq Jalāl, Industry.

¹⁷ Šawt al-Arab, 21 April 1966. In KHADDURI, Majid. *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 267.

Despite his optimism, ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz’s task after the death of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif was not an easy one, for the military, who had been brought under control by the former President, renewed their pressure under the benign regime of ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif. A final constructive act remained to be carried out by ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz before the short tenure of his second cabinet ended – the termination of the Kurdish war.¹⁸ However, the leading officers were not prepared to accept Kurdish demands since they considered them contrary to Iraqi unity. Therefore the war continued and the Iraqi army suffered initial reverses without a decisive victory for either side. The disappointed premier realised that internal social and economic conditions could not be improved before the Kurdish war was brought to an end. The Defence Minister ʿAbdalʿazīz al-ʿUqaylī represented a school of thought which held that once Mullā Muṣṭafā al-Bārzanī was defeated the Kurds would be prevailed upon to submit to the central government. Thus the war continued and the Iraqi army suffered initial reverses without a decisive victory for either side.¹⁹

Both ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif and ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz held moderate views and the country was tired of the Kurdish war. At a press conference on 18 April 1966, President ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif appealed to the Kurds to maintain the unity of the country and to co-operate with their Arab brothers in ensuring the security of the homeland and raising the standard of living for all the people. ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz dwelt more on the need for cooperation and the maintenance of unity and went so far as to declare that all Kurdish demands short of secession might eventually be achieved.²⁰ These words seemed reassuring, and Kurdish leaders were no less anxious to achieve a peaceful settlement than their Iraqi compatriots, for the war had wrought havoc on both sides. Negotiations with the Kurdish leaders in Baghdad resulted first in a cease-fire and then in preparing an atmosphere favourable for a settlement. The settlement plan has not been made public, but Premier ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz, in a public declaration (or agreement) of 29 June 1966, broadcast the Government’s “twelve-point programme” for the settlement of the Kurdish question.²¹

Premier ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz proved to be more independent in his politics than the *Nāṣirists* had expected. His prudent socialism was regarded as reactionary in Cairo’s political circles, and his efforts to re-establish friendly

¹⁸ JAWAD, Saʿad. Recent Developments in the Kurdish Issue. In NIBLOCK, T. (Ed.). *Iraq: The Contemporary State*, p. 49.

¹⁹ KHADDURI, Majid. Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958, p. 273.

²⁰ AHMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, HUMAYDĪ, Jaʿfar ʿAbbās. *Tārīkh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*. [Contemporary History of Iraq], p. 236.

²¹ McDOWALL, D. A Modern History of the Kurds, p. 318.

relations with Iraq's non-Arab neighbours – Turkey and Persia – were regarded as too conciliatory to Western policy to be consistent with the policy of the revolutionary Arab countries. President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif, a moderate officer, was possibly acceptable to the pan-Arab military group; but °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz, a civilian Premier opposed to military rule, was not considered likely to follow policies acceptable to this group.²² The *Nāṣirists* wanted a premier prepared to collaborate with the U.A.R. Thus °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz was undesirable to them and they decided to remove him sooner or later.

Meanwhile, Brigadier °Ārif °Abdarrazzāq and his company had become restless in Cairo and were anxious to return to Iraq and seize power by force. Secret contacts with the *Nāṣirists* in Baghdad were established and a plan was formulated in Baghdad to overthrow the regime by a coup d'état. The preliminary preparations began early in May 1966, and °Ārif °Abdarrazzāq and his party left Cairo secretly and entered Iraq unnoticed in early June. According to the plan, °Ārif °Abdarrazzāq was to proceed to Moṣul and, with the assistance of the *Nāṣirists*, take control of the military airport and from there launch an attack on Baghdad by air. The other two centres of defection were two military camps, situated on the west side of Baghdad.²³ On 29 June 1966, the day on which °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz announced the twelve-point Kurdish programme, °Ārif °Abdarrazzāq left Baghdad in disguise for Moṣul with a few officers and the next day, in co-operation with the commander of the Fourth Division in Moṣul, took control of the force and the military airport.²⁴ From there military planes were sent to Baghdad to attack the presidential bodyguard and Baghdad radio station.

The air attack on Baghdad began on 30 June at 3 p.m. and half an hour later the Baghdad radio station, captured by the rebels, broadcast a proclamation in which the regime was denounced as having deviated from the principles of the July Revolution.²⁵ Another proclamation announced the success of the coup and called on °Abdarrahmān °Ārif and °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz to leave their offices and retire to their homes. By sunset the rebels' resistance had almost collapsed and the principal conspirators were arrested. Other centres suspected of sympathising with the rebels were brought under control by midnight. In the evening President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif announced that the rebellion had been

²² SLUGLETT, M.F., SLUGLETT, P. Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship, p. 104.

²³ AL-°AYSAMĪ, Shiblī. Tārīkh Hizb al-Ba°th al-°arabī al-ishtirākī. [History of the Arab Ba°th Socialist Party]. Vol. 3. Al-marḥala aṣ-ṣa°ba, 1958 – 1968. [The Difficult Phase, 1958 – 1968], p. 292.

²⁴ MARR, P. The Modern History of Iraq, p. 200.

²⁵ The proclamation was broadcast by Colonel Hādī Khammās who captured the radio station after an attack by a small force of tanks. The full text in al-Ahrām, 1 July 1966.

suppressed and that the rebels had surrendered.²⁶ The next day (1 July) the situation returned to normal.

The swiftness with which the °Ārif °Abdarrazzāq uprising was suppressed became the topic of discussion in Baghdad's political circles and divergent views were advanced to account for it. It was stated that the country had become tired of military coups and therefore there was no sympathy with °Ārif °Abdarrazzāq's attempt to overthrow the °Abdarrahmān °Ārif regime. It was indeed noticed that no enthusiasm had been shown by those who watched the planes pounding the presidential palace. No less important was the fact that the leaders of the rebellion had staged a similar coup a year before and failed. They had not presented any new convincing reason for overthrowing the regime than before. On the contrary, the regime which the rebels sought to overthrow had just brought the Kurdish war to an end and was now ready to concentrate on domestic reforms. Moreover, the leaders of the regime had shown a remarkable ability in coping with the rebellion and had demonstrated that they were better equipped to provide an effective leadership needed to maintain peace and stability throughout the country.²⁷

The factionalism and rivalry between the officers that °Abdassalām °Ārif had been able to contain or balance now gradually came to the surface; the officers especially resented having to put up with the strong-minded civilian prime minister, who had begun to ask awkward questions about military expenditure and was pursuing a constructive and conciliatory policy in Kurdistan.²⁸ °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz had sought to secure public support by holding elections for a representative assembly, but before he could carry out his plan, the army officers began to bring pressure to bear on the President to frustrate his actions. Nor could °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz rely on political parties and ideological groups, for the old parties had completely disintegrated, and the ideological groups either favoured an *Arab Socialist Union* or extremist ideologies.²⁹ Hardly two months after °Abdarrahmān al-Bazzāz had formed his new government a lack of co-operation between president and premier became evident. President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif began to assert his power after the suppression of the °Ārif °Abdarrazzāq uprising, and the military who supported him encouraged him to act independently of the cabinet.

²⁶ AHMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, ḤUMAYDĪ, Ja°far °Abbās. Tārīkh al-°Irāq al-mu°āšir, p. 236.

²⁷ The points given as possible reasons for the collapse of the uprising, in al-Ahrām, 8 July 1966. In KHADDURI, Majid. *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 280.

²⁸ SLUGLETT, M.F., SLUGLETT, P. Iraq since 1958, p. 99.

²⁹ °ABDALKARĪM, Samīr. Aḍwā° alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyū°īya fī al-°Irāq. [The Lights on the Communist Movement in Iraq]. Vol. IV, p. 31.

Matters came to a head after ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz’s return from a visit to the Soviet Union early in August 1966. The military renewed their pressure on President ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif for a cabinet change, and the president again reverted to the practice of postponing action on cabinet decisions. On 6 August ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz went to visit the president in the hope of persuading him to approve cabinet decisions, but after a short talk the president hinted that he desired a cabinet change. Following a meeting with his ministers, ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz tendered his resignation the same day.³⁰ Before the ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz Government had an opportunity to implement this programme, it was replaced by another, headed by Nājī Ṭālib, an army officer whose views were known to be opposed to it. Two days after ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz’s resignation a popular demonstration in Baghdad’s main street took place protesting against his fall, but the police intervened before the demonstration spread. The reluctance of succeeding governments to come to a full understanding with the Kurds reflects a crisis of confidence which had long been in existence, and both Kurds and Arabs accused each other of violations of the June cease-fire, although they continued to assert their desire to reach a final settlement peacefully.³¹ Those governments declared their respect for the twelve-point declaration, but none of them found the time or the courage either to carry it out or to impose a new plan of settlement, by force if necessary.

Since ʿAbdarrahmān al-Bazzāz was attacked by the military mainly because his policy ran counter to pan-Arab doctrines, the military candidate to replace him was bound to be an officer with moderate pan-Arab views who would be acceptable to a coalition of military groups. There was one candidate who could command the respect of such groups – retired Staff Major General Nājī Ṭālib, an Arab *Shīʿite*.³² Moderate and patient by temperament, he maintained friendly relations with many rival groups, and his pan-Arab ideas, though expressed in strong terms, did not always dominate his actions. Moreover, his religious affiliation with the *Shīʿī* community, reputedly antagonistic to pan-Arabism, enhanced his prestige among pan-Arabs who sought to enlist the support of young *Shīʿīs* in the cause of Arab unity.³³

³⁰ PENROSE, E., PENROSE, E.F. Iraq: International Relations and National Development, p. 343.

³¹ AL-BAZZĀZ, Saʿd. Al-Akrād fī al-masʿala al-ʿirāqīya. [The Kurds in the Iraqi Question], p. 48.

³² BATATU, H. The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq, p. 1064.

³³ KHADDURI, Majid. Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958, p. 285.

Nājī Ṭālib was invited to form a Government on 6 August 1966 and remained in power until 10 May 1967.³⁴ In his letter appointing Nājī Ṭālib, President ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif stressed the need to “rally all patriotic and national forces for joint action”. Nājī Ṭālib completed the formation of his Cabinet on 9 August and issued its programme to the nation on the 12th. Despite their pan-Arab pronouncements, Premier Nājī Ṭālib and his Deputy, Rajab ʿAbdalmajīd, took no important steps to achieve Arab union, although meetings of the Unified Political Command were held in Baghdad in November 1966. Hardly four months after the formation of his Cabinet, Nājī Ṭālib faced a serious financial crisis, precipitated by the Syrian government’s conflict with the *Iraq Petroleum Company* (IPC), which affected Iraq’s economy and prevented any constructive work from being undertaken.³⁵ The dues and other payments from the IPC to the Syrian government in consideration of the pipeline transit of oil through Syria to the Mediterranean had long been a subject of dispute. The Syrian Government under Yūsuf Zuʿayyin demanded an increase in oil transit payments.³⁶ Nājī Ṭālib’s approach to the problem, though it contributed little to a swift settlement, helped to keep hot-headed pan-Arabs quiet until in March 1967 the conflict was finally settled, but his position had been weakened, and under pressure from opposing military groups he had to resign. A word about the conflict with the IPC may be in order.

Before he resigned, Nājī Ṭālib had to settle a constitutional problem which called for immediate action. The provisional constitution of 29 April 1964 had provided for a period of three years during which a permanent constitution would be enacted by a National Assembly. Moreover, the election of President ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif by a joint resolution of the National Defence Council and the Cabinet had been for one year, beginning 17 April 1966. A draft electoral law, based on the electoral laws of Arab revolutionary regimes, especially Egypt, was prepared in January 1966, but it did not become law owing to objections raised by opposition leaders, including the Kurds because the law

³⁴ The members of the Cabinet were Nājī Ṭālib, Premier and Minister of Oil; Rajab ʿAbdalmajīd, Deputy Premier and Interior; Adnān al-Pāchachī, Foreign Affairs; ʿAbdallāh an-Naqshabandī, Finance; Shākir Maḥmūd Shukrī, Defence; Muṣliḥ an-Naqshabandī, Justice; ʿAbdarrahmān al-Qaysī, Education; Farīd Fityān, Labour and Social Affairs; Fuʿād Ḥasan Ghālī, Health; Durayd al-Damlūjī, Culture and Guidance; Ismāʿīl Muṣṭafā, Transportation; Aḥmad Maḥdī al-Dujaylī, Agrarian Reform and Agriculture; Muḥammad Yaʿqūb as-Saʿīdī, Planning; Qāsim ʿAbdalḥamīd, Economics; Khālīd al-Shāwī, Industry; Dāwūd Sarsam, Municipalities and Public Works; Gharbī al-Ḥājī Aḥmad, Arab Unity Affairs; Aḥmad Kamāl Qādir, Minister of State for Reconstruction of the North.

³⁵ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 1064 – 1065.

³⁶ PENROSE, E., PENROSE, E.F. *Iraq: International Relations and National Development*, p. 390.

recognised no other parties other than the *Arab Socialist Union*.³⁷ At a joint meeting of the National Defence Council and the Cabinet on 3 May it was decided to empower the Cabinet to enact laws until a National Assembly was elected, and to extend the period of the presidency of °Abdarrahmān °Ārif for another year.³⁸

The door was now thrown open to the armed forces to form a government after the resignation of the civilian premier, but they could not agree on a single candidate, since they were divided into various factions, each led by a prominent officer representing one shade of opinion or another. However, none of the groups could mobilise sufficient support, owing to intense competition, nor could the leaders agree on a single candidate to head a coalition government. It was finally decided that President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif himself should head a coalition, combining the powers of head of state and Government. The decree appointing him Premier was issued on 10 May, on the same day that Nājī Tālib's resignation was formally accepted. The new government was hailed as a national coalition, since it included officers and civilians representing moderate elements as well as representatives of ethnic and religious communities. Four vice-premiers were appointed: Tāhir Yahyā, a *Sunnī* and a former Premier acceptable to moderate groups; °Abdalghanī ar-Rāwī, a *Sunnī* and a moderate nationalist; Ismā'īl Muṣṭafā, a *Shī'ī* who commanded the respect of moderate officers; and Fu'ād °Ārif, a Kurd who was a follower of Mullā Muṣṭafā al-Bārzānī.³⁹ This Government, entrusting responsibility to the head of state, addressed itself to the problem of setting up a permanent regime, since the need to replace the present regime was urgent. However, not unlike its predecessors, it was caught up in an unexpected crisis –

³⁷ AḤMAD, Ibrāhīm Khalīl, ḤUMAYDĪ, Ja'far °Abbās. *Tārīkh al-°Irāq al-mu'āṣir*, p. 237.

³⁸ MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 201.

³⁹ The Cabinet consisted of: °Abdarrahmān °Ārif, President and Premier; Tāhir Yahyā, °Abdalghanī ar-Rāwī and Ismā'īl Muṣṭafā, Vice-Premiers; Fu'ād °Ārif, Vice-Premier and Minister for the Reconstruction of the North; Adnān al-Pāchachī, Foreign Affairs; Shākir Maḥmūd Shukrī, Defence; °Abdarrahmān al-Ḥabīb, Finance; °Abdassattār °Abdallaṭīf, Interior; Muṣṭafā an-Naqshabandī, Justice; °Abdarrahmān al-Qaysī, Education; °Abdalkarīm Hānī, Labour and Social Affairs and acting Minister of Health; Aḥmad Maṭlūb, Culture and Guidance; Fāḍil Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm, Communications; °Abdalmajīd al-Jumayyid, Agriculture; Muḥammad Ya'qūb as-Sa'īdī, Planning; Qāsim °Abdalḥamīd, Economics; Khālīd ash-Shāwī, Industry; °Abdassattār al-Husayn, Oil; Iḥsān Shīrẓād, Municipalities and Public Works; °Abdarrazzāq Muhyiddīn, Union; Gharbī al-Ḥājī Aḥmad and Ismā'īl Khayrallāh, Ministers of State; Qāsim Khalīl, Minister of State for Youth and Federation of Labour; °Abdalkarīm Farḥān, Agrarian Reform. In KHADDURI, Majid. *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, pp. 289 – 290.

the Israeli attack on Egypt, Jordan, and Syria on 5 June 1967 – which diverted the attention of the country from domestic to foreign affairs.⁴⁰

President °Abdarrahmān °Ārif, at heart was more interested in domestic than foreign affairs, was drawn into an affair which only a pan-Arab could have dealt with, since the Israeli war roused widespread nationalist indignation. It was too great a task for a man who was not a strong leader to hold the dual function of head of state and government and lead the nation in wartime. After ending a war with the Kurds which had drained the country's treasury, the Israeli war caught the government mentally unprepared for another war. °Abdarrahmān °Ārif, of course, had no choice but to adhere to an alliance with Egypt and dispatch a small force, which could hardly relieve the pressure of attack on other Arab countries. Distance from the area of war no less than Iraq's unpreparedness necessarily reduced the country's ability to give affective assistance, although Iraq enjoyed a high reputation in the Arab world for military efficiency and experience.

No less significant was Iraq's participation in the war under a government which had been formed to reconcile rival groups. Hardly a fortnight after a cabinet crisis, the country was forced to go to war with Israel, without preparation. Neither in purpose nor in composition could the coalition function as a war Cabinet, and therefore, °Abdarrahmān °Ārif had to rely on Ṭāhir Yaḥyā to fulfil the function of a head of government. Ṭāhir Yaḥyā, accompanied by some of his colleagues,⁴¹ went to Cairo to discuss matters connected with Iraq's participation at a meeting of the Unified Command, but it is doubtful if Iraq was in a position to give more than token support.⁴²

After the war, on 19 July 1967, °Abdarrahmān °Ārif, realising the difficulty of combining the posts of head of state and Government, relinquished his powers as Premier to Ṭāhir Yaḥyā, and the Cabinet was reduced by some seven members. Ṭāhir Yaḥyā, though an able administrator, could not cope with internal problems because of the unpopularity of his administration, which was held to be corrupt. To divert attention from internal affairs, he adopted an anti-Western policy, advocating a total ban on oil exports and severing diplomatic relations with the United States and Britain more completely and abruptly than had other Arab countries.⁴³ The troops sent to Jordan during the six-day war were kept there to demonstrate Iraq's determination to resist further Israeli attacks. More impressive were the exchange of visits between Iraqi leaders and

⁴⁰ Al-°AYSAMĪ, Shiblī. *Tārīkh Hizb al-Ba°th al-°arabī al-ishṭirākī*, Vol. 3, p. 290.

⁴¹ Fu'ād °Ārif, Deputy Premier; Shākir Maḥmūd Shukrī, Minister of Defence; Adnān al-Pāchachī, Foreign Minister; and °Abdarrazzāq Muḥyiddīn, Minister of Unity Affairs.

⁴² ABŪ NIDĀL, Šābir. *Ma°rakat al-khāmis min ḥazīrān*. [The Battle of Fifth June], p. 87.

⁴³ SLUGLETT, M.F., SLUGLETT, P. *Iraq since 1958*, pp. 110 – 111.

the countries supporting the Arab states against Israel, especially the Soviet Union. ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif’s visit to France early in 1968 raised high hopes that Iraq might obtain French instead of Soviet arms. It also cemented commercial relations with France since Iraq began to import French commodities. Most important, of course, were the oil agreements signed between France and Iraq, hailed as a new departure in Iraq’s oil policy.⁴⁴

Some of the opposition leaders, concerned with the deterioration in internal conditions, submitted a number of petitions to the President calling for reform. One of them, dated 16 April 1968, demanded: (1) the appointment of a National Council consisting of 30 members empowered to legislate until the calling of an elected National Assembly; (2) the replacement of the cabinet by a coalition composed of national leaders known for their “competence, integrity, good record and responsibility”, which should achieve the following objectives: (a) settlement of the problem in the north (i.e. the Kurdish question); (b) effective means to check Israeli attacks and the calling for a unified military command among the Arab countries bordering Israel; (c) the holding of general elections within a period not exceeding two years; (d) pursuance of the progressive, national character of the system of government and taking steps towards an eventual Arab union; (e) the need for effective measures to deal with internal problems, such as improving financial and economic conditions and ensuring freedom and internal security by emphasising the rule of law and providing equal opportunities to all citizens.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the Communists began to revive their activities, despite conflicts among their leaders, and their agitation led to a popular uprising in southern Iraq which compelled the Government to dispatch a police force to restore order.⁴⁶ Moreover, to meet the growing Government expenditure, Ṭāhir Yaḥyā decided to increase taxes, but this measure, hitting more directly the fixed salaried class (which could not easily evade taxes, as could merchants and shop-keepers), increased public dissatisfaction, although the Iraqi taxation system was not, by Western standards, excessively high.

Faced with these problems, the Ṭāhir Yaḥyā government could hardly cope with the larger problem of re-establishing a permanent regime. Differences among members of the cabinet leading to three resignations (two Kurds and one Arab) weakened Ṭāhir Yaḥyā’s position and encouraged the opposition to

⁴⁴ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 189.

⁴⁵ Copies of the petition were circulated, signed by some dozen leaders, including Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, Nājī Ṭālib, ʿĀrif ʿAbdarrazzāq, ʿAbdalʿazīz al-ʿUqaylī, and others. In *ath-Thawra*, 19 December 1967.

⁴⁶ Struggle for power among Communist leaders led to the expulsion of Zakī Khayrī Saʿīd, former leader of the Communist Party, and the assumption of leadership by ʿAzīz al-Ḥājī. In ʿABDALKARĪM, Samīr. *Aḍwāʿ alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyūʿiyya fī al-ʿIrāq*, Vol. IV, pp. 252 – 253.

strike. Rumours were on foot that Ṭāhir Yaḥyā was making a deal with Mullā Muṣṭafā al-Bārzānī by appointing two ministers agreeable to him, which critics construed to mean granting the Kurds autonomy without admitting it. Before the reshuffle was carried out, the °Abdarrahmān °Ārif – Ṭāhir Yaḥyā regime was overthrown by a bloodless coup d'état on 17 July 1968, carried out by officers in league with moderate *Ba'ath* leaders.⁴⁷ Brigadier Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, representing the right-wing *Ba'ath*, headed the movement and replaced °Abdarrahmān °Ārif as President.

Before °Abdassalām °Ārif could either succeed or fail in ruling his discordant country, he died when his helicopter crashed in a sandstorm in southern Iraq on 13 April 1966. His brother Lieutenant General (al-farīq) °Abdarrahmān °Ārif, took over Iraq's military government. He devoted himself more to upholding the power of the army than to promoting Arab nationalism or union with Egypt. Despite their failure to address Iraq's internal needs, both brothers did succeed in keeping the country intact and sovereign through the turmoil of threatened coups, the brutality of the *Ba'ath*, the Kurdish rebellion, and the *Nāṣirists*' eternal dream of union with Egypt. One of these challenges was erased in June 1967, when the shadow that Jamāl °Abdannāṣir had cast over the Arab world for more than a decade disappeared. In the Arab defeat of 1967, the logic and symbols of an entire era of Arab political thought was for at least half a century – like Jamāl °Abdannāṣir himself – exhausted and finished.

In Iraq, the demise of *Nāṣirism* left the ideology of pan-Arabism to the *Ba'ath*. But the *Ba'ath* of 1967 was not the *Ba'ath* of 1963. For one thing the whole complexion of the party had changed. The Iraqi *Ba'ath* had originally represented a genuine partnership between *Sunnīs* and those *Shi'īs* who regarded themselves first as Arabs and second as members of Islam's dissenting sects. But by 1967, the *Sunnīs* controlled the party, benefiting from the defection of the *shī'ī* leadership that had demanded that the party embrace Marxism. As a result, 84 per cent of the top command were now *sunnī* Arabs; 7 per cent Kurds, 5 per cent *shī'ī* Arabs and the remaining 4 per cent from other communal groups. More significant for the future of Iraq, the leadership of the *Ba'ath* was more practical and seasoned than in 1963; also more ruthless, more conspirational, and more determined to seize and hold power.⁴⁸ With tight internal organisation and the command of its own militia, the *Ba'ath* no longer had to depend on support from the military. Thus, five years after the debacle of 1963, the *Ba'athists* were ready to reclaim the government of Iraq.

⁴⁷ Al-°AYSAMĪ, Shiblī. *Tārīkh Ḥizb al-Ba'ath al-°arabī al-ishtirākī*, pp. 293 – 294.

⁴⁸ Ministry of Information, Iraq. *The 1968 Revolution in Iraq. Experience and Prospects. The Political Report of the Eight Congress of the Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party in Iraq, January 1974*, pp. 20 – 22.

As the public resentment over Iraq's failure to contribute sufficiently to the 1967 war between Israel and the Arabs swelled, the *Ba^cth party* beat the drum of Arabism. Railing against the cowardliness of the ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif government, the *Ba^cth* sent demonstrators into the streets. Thousands more responded emotionally to *Ba^cth* rhetoric that hit a raw nerve beneath the humiliation of what was being called the Six day war. Riddled by corruption, branded with incompetence, deaf to demands for parliamentary government, ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif and his dwindling corps of army officers huddled behind the facade of authority.⁴⁹ Iraq, which had averaged two coups or attempted coups every year since the revolution, was about to witness another.

At three o'clock on the morning of 17 July 1968, the telephone rang in the bedroom of the sleeping ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif. When the president answered, the voice of a high-ranking *Ba^cth* officer in the Iraqi army tersely announced, "I am speaking from the Ministry of the Defence. Tanks are now proceeding toward the palace."⁵⁰ Suddenly, five rifle shots outside the window split the air. The president surrendered without resistance, accepted transportation to the airport, and boarded an Iraqi airliner to join his ailing wife in London. The coup, planned and executed by the *Ba^cth*, was over. Coincidence struck a haunting chord: the *Ba^cth* had ended military rule almost ten years to the day after the army erased the monarchy in 1958.

In retrospect, the monarchy, despite its serious shortcomings, had governed Iraq better than any government that followed. When it fell, it took the most educated class with it. In place of the king and the educated elite, the military stepped in as the guardians of government. Under batons of generals, the people of Iraq found that they traded feudalism and imperialism for authoritarianism, insecurity, and economic regression. At the end of a chaotic decade of military government in which the competing ideologies of the 1958 revolution waged battle, Iraq passed into the iron grip of the *Ba^cth party*. Over the next decades, the *Ba^cth* through political organisation more than military fiat, would drive a fragmented Iraq towards the dictatorship of Ṣaddām Ḥusayn.

The regimes during the presidencies of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif and, later his brother ʿAbdarrahmān ʿĀrif, may be loosely described as Arab nationalist, but they differed from the *Ba^cthist* regimes in having no such organised party as the *Ba^cth*. The abortive attempt to set up an Iraqi Socialist Union was aimed at establishing a monopolistic association. The regime was composed of military officers in political posts with civilians in a number of departments requiring specialised knowledge and experience. In this respect it resembled the Egyptian regime, but *Nāṣirism* had less appeal in Iraq than in Egypt. In Egypt Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir was a symbol of Egyptian, as well as Arab, dignity and

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 23.

⁵⁰ In *Time*, 26 July 1968, p. 36.

independence, whereas in Iraq there were many who, while appreciating Jamāl °Abdannāšir's importance to the Arab world and admiring his ability to stand up to imperialist encroachments, nevertheless resented the prospect of Egyptian dominance in Iraq of the kind they had seen in Syria. Moreover, many *Shi'ites* feared that *Nāširism* would strengthen the *sunni* dominance in Iraq, while the Kurds feared that their position would be even more restricted in a larger Arab union.

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