

IRAQ: THE MOSUL UPRISING OF 1959

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After the overthrow of the monarchy, the revolutionary regime in Iraq under ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was constantly beset by an internal struggle: communists and their supporters on one side and pan-Arab nationalists and Iraqi Baʿthists on the other. Street fighting erupted in Baghdad at the slightest provocation. In March 1959, a revolt broke out in Mosul led by anti-communist army officers and pan-Arabists. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim crushed the revolt with massive communist support. He might have been able to keep a balance between the two had he not antagonized nationalist leaders through his execution of nationalist officers opposed to him. Thus the country became divided into two radical camps

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When the Iraqi monarchy finally fell, opinion in the Middle East and throughout the West was unanimous that pan-Arab nationalism under the leadership of Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir had been the main lever that had toppled it. Early reports from revolutionary Baghdad enhanced the impression that a merger with the UAR was pending. The mass processions displaying outsize portraits of Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir and calling for “complete unity now” were to be a daily sight in the streets of Baghdad for weeks after the revolution. But all this was a serious misunderstanding of the new Iraqi leader’s intentions. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim tried to dampen the enthusiasm of the crowds, because in his estimation, the crucial danger to Iraqi independence, and probably to his own position, lay with the Arab nationalists.¹

The personal aspects of the struggle for power must not obscure the genuine policy issues that were involved. All elements in the opposition movement came to the fore to fight for position, rapidly eroding the unity of the new regime and

¹ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*. London, Pall Mall Press and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 71.

reducing the country to near chaos. The political instability of the revolutionary governments and the cycle of coups that became their hallmark can be traced to this early struggle.²

The arrest and trial of Rashīd ʿĀlī, coinciding with the trial of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, made clear the rift between ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and the pan-Arabists. It provided opportunities for the communists and their sympathizers to organize more extensively, not only against the pan-Arabists, but also against the perceived conservative influence of the *National Democratic Party (NDP)*, which threatened to thwart any truly radical reform. Street demonstrations and marches became a marked feature of Baghdad life during this period, as the various factions struggled with each other for command of the streets and for the opportunity to present their case before ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim in a curious mixture of adulation and overt pressure.³ After ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif's removal ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim himself was not slow to exploit this, sponsoring marches and factions which could be relied upon to cheer repeatedly for the "sole leader" (*az-zaʿīm al-awḥad*). Counter-demonstrations were organized and the violence that sometimes resulted provided a vivid form of street theatre, heightening the atmosphere of crisis.

The chief participants in the power struggle can easily be identified. The *Arab nationalists*, who favoured the ideal of pan-Arabism, continued the tradition of the older *Independence Party* but drew their inspiration primarily from the Egyptian revolution and often looked to Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir for leadership. Closely allied with the Arab nationalists and drawing on much of the same support was the *Baʿth Party*. The major impetus for the *Baʿth Party's* growth came after the 1958 coup, when it utilized a surge of Arab nationalist sentiment to organize and gain adherents.⁴ The *Baʿth Party* shared the goal of Arab unity with the Arab nationalists, but Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir was not their hero. The *Baʿth Party* looked instead toward Syria, where the party had originated and where its finest base lay. Its strong organization and its ideology made it a much more effective competitor in the struggle for power than the amorphous Arab nationalist group. The leading group on the left was clearly the *Communist Party*, which surfaced again in the post-revolutionary euphoria. The communists continued to make inroads among the dispossessed, the *shīʿa*, the Kurds, and the intelligentsia.⁵ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim appeared to be leaning toward the other main contender on the left, the *National Democratic Party*. Unfortunately, this party was no better organized than it had been during the monarchy, and it soon split between those supporting and those opposing ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, but at that time they favoured federal unity between the Arab countries.⁶

² Marr, Phebe: *The Modern History of Iraq*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press 1985, p. 161.

³ Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 156.

⁴ Abu Jaber, Kamal S.: *The Arab Baath Socialist Party*. Syracuse 1966, pp. 43 – 44.

⁵ ʿAbdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḥwāl al-ḥaraka ash-shuyūʿiyya fī al-ʿIrāq*. (Light on the Communist Movement in Iraq). Vol. II /1958 – 1963/. Beirut, Dār al-mirṣād without date, p. 13.

⁶ ʿĀlī, Muḥammad Kāzīm: *Al-ʿIrāq fī ʿahd ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958 – 1963*. (Iraq in the Era of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim). Baghdad 1989, pp. 159 – 160.

These four groups vied with each other for the dominant position in the state. The struggle perpetuated the old polarization of the intelligentsia between the nationalists and the leftists, but this time with a difference that boded ill for the future. Whereas the older opposition groups – mainly the *Independence Party* and the *NDP* – had been rooted in liberal traditions, the *Ba'ath Party* and the *communists* were both clandestine, highly organized groups, committed to a total monopoly of power by ruthless means if necessary. With 'Abdassalām 'Ārif gone, the situation of the Arab nationalists and the *ba'athists* deteriorated, and both groups soon attempted to recoup their losses. The fierce struggle of the next year and a half was precipitated by nationalist efforts to return to power by removing 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim. His increased reliance on the left was a response to this challenge. The struggle left scars and generated a fear of chaos on the part of successive governments that soon ended any hope of returning to a democratic system.⁷ It polarized the ruling elite between nationalists and leftists; and it left a legacy of escalating violence and ruthlessness that worsened as time went on.

What was actually happening after the July Revolution in the latter part of 1958 and the beginning of 1959 was that the *Iraqi Communist Party (ICP)* and its front organizations were gaining strength and popularity, and to the extent that the Party was able to command the streets of Baghdad it was a power to be reckoned with. The appeal of the Party was such that in January 1959 it was forced to issue directives aimed at tightening supervision and restoring discipline. In addition, a temporary halt to party membership was called and a training programme enjoined.⁸ This spectacular rise in its fortunes, and the gradual takeover by communists of the executive committees of the Students' Union, the Youth Federation, the Women's League, and the Lawyers', Engineers' and Teachers' Unions, as well as the great popularity of the Partisans of Peace, a communist front organization founded in 1950, created a profound sense of alarm in the minds of those who had no sympathies for communism and who feared the emergence of a genuinely left-wing government.

Born in opposition and secrecy in 1934, the *ICP* was ill-qualified to adapt itself to this unexpected new situation. It had no experience of 'open' or non-clandestine political activity, and had not yet gained, and was not to gain – and then by the most terrible of ironies – official permission to operate legally until 1973. The Party interpreted the events of July 1958 as a national democratic revolution, however, it stressed that the regime resulting from this victorious movement was a revolutionary bourgeois democratic one representing various bourgeois strata and it did not represent all the patriotic forces.⁹ The Party called for free elections and a democratic constitutional government, but its opponents, who were as ill-prepared by their own political experience within the Iraqi context as the communists, simply did not believe them. Furthermore the fact that the

⁷ Az-Zubaydī, Layī 'Abdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-'Irāq*. (The Revolution of 14 July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1979, pp. 425 – 426.

⁸ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*, p. 114.

⁹ 'Abdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḥwā' 'alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyū'īya fī al-'Irāq*. Vol. II, p. 13.

communists controlled the Baghdad "street" and seemed to have the ear of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was so much more relevant to the realities of everyday experience that their calls for democracy went largely unheeded. Hence those who feared or opposed the communists were behaving as if they were actually in power – began to make preparations to combat what they saw as the two most likely consequences of the enormous and visible rise in support for the *ICP*; whether an election in which the Party would win a substantial share of the vote, or a sudden seizure of power, by whatever means, on the part of the communists.¹⁰

As far as the nationalists were concerned, the struggle to win the hearts and minds of Iraqis to the ideals of unity was decisively lost in 1958 and 1959. Since the *ICP* had captured substantial sections of "progressive opinion" not only in Baghdad but in most of southern Iraq and in many parts of Kurdistan, the nationalists and their associates decided to promote their cause partly by relying on anti-communist or religious elements,¹¹ but more crucially on members of the armed forces who were unhappy with Qāsim's rule and still had ambitions for themselves. Since the early autumn of 1958 when the situation started to deteriorate the nationalists and *baʿthists* formed themselves into loosely coordinated underground groups. The positive credo of these groups was their devotion to Arab nationalism, but on the negative side they nourished a hatred of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and they began to attack the communists and their supporters in a systematic fashion for their alleged misdemeanours. It was a hatred that can be rationalized with the disappointed hopes of Arab political unity.¹²

Factions in the army seemed to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim the gravest danger with which he had to cope. No sooner had he suppressed one than he had to face another. The movement led by Staff Colonel ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf in Mosul on 8 March 1959 was the culmination of military agitation that had been going on since the Revolution, and was a serious threat to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, who was denounced as having betrayed the July Revolution. In reality, a complex of social factors prompted their opposition. The principal centres of agitation were in the Mosul, Arbīl-Kirkūk, Dīwānīya, and Baghdad provinces. In each of these centres there was a set of officers who had either been active in the Free Officer's movement before the Revolution or who came out in support of the new regime after it.¹³ Qāsim's policy of encouraging radical and pro-communist elements in order to counteract ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif's pan-Arabism had paid little or no attention to officers who were embittered at having been ignored or felt that their services had not been adequately recognized after the Revolution. Landowners and tribal shaykhs were shocked to learn that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had fallen under communist

¹⁰ Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*. London, New York, I. B. Tauris Publishers 1990, p. 64.

¹¹ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*, pp. 134 – 135.

¹² ʿAbdalḥamīd, Ṣubḥī: *Asrār ṭawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*. (Secrets of the 14 July 1958 Revolution in Iraq). Baghdad, Al-maktaba al-waṭaniya 1983, pp. 122 – 124.

¹³ Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*. London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press 1969, p. 104.

influence and began to agitate against his regime. These elements helped to create a climate of opinion favourable for a counter-revolutionary movement.

The Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī affair had shown that two commanders of army divisions – Staff Brigadier Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī of the Second Division at Kirkūk and Brigadier ʿAbdalʿazīz al-ʿUqaylī of the First Division at ad-Dīwānīya – were dismayed by ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and at least passively disloyal. ʿAbdalʿazīz al-ʿUqaylī, a Mosul-born army officer, whose command covered the southern half of the country, was strongly opposed to communist infiltration in his province,¹⁴ but had never been in a position to raise a rebellion with a reasonable chance of effective local support. The *shīʿī* population, though chronically disaffected, certainly did not favour Arab nationalism with its *sunnī* tincture. The communists were strong in the towns and well organized. The peasants in the region had more to gain from agrarian reform than anywhere else in the country. The tribal chiefs had been involved in the Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī affair to a greater degree than their brethren in the north and would guard their steps for the time being.¹⁵

Mosul, where the uprising broke out, represented an environment in which there were complex social problems. Whether because of its historical trading links with Syria,¹⁶ or because of a combination of cultural and religious conservatism and the control of almost all the surrounding countryside by a small group of urban based landowners, Mosul had the reputation of being one of the most profoundly conservative cities in Iraq. Political consciousness was largely intertwined with religious traditionalism, which meant that “atheist” ideas of any sort (whether communist or *baʿthist*) were unable to take root, and as a result the “dominant ideology” was a form of vague *sunnī* pan-Arabism.¹⁷ The main exceptions to this were certain predominantly Christian or Kurdish quarters of the city, which had traditionally sympathized with the left. Before the Revolution its inhabitants had keenly felt that their city, though second in the country, had long been neglected and many of its sons had to move to Baghdad to participate in politics or improve their social status. This feeling of neglect began with the separation of Mosul from the former Ottoman provinces to form a part of the new state of Iraq, when Mosul’s commercial ties with Syria and Turkey were severely restricted. It never really recovered economically under the national regime. As a result, Mosul remained disaffected, although many of its sons held influential positions in the central government. It thus had good cause to welcome a revolutionary movement against the monarchical regime.¹⁸

¹⁴ Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 107.

¹⁵ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*, p. 164.

¹⁶ Penrose, Edith & Penrose, E. F.: *Iraq: International Relations and National Development*. London, Benn 1978, p. 223.

¹⁷ Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 66.

¹⁸ Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 105.

The events of March in Mosul illumined with a flaming glare the complexity of the conflicts that agitated Iraq and disclosed its various social forces in their essential nature and in the genuine line-up of their life interests. What added to the acuteness of the conflicts was the high degree of coincidence between the economic and ethnic or religious divisions. For example, many of the soldiers of the Fifth Brigade were not only from the poorer layers of the population, but were also Kurds, whereas the officers were preponderantly from the Arab middle or lower middle classes.¹⁹ The tribal, ethnic, and class conflicts had been ripening for years. Many of the peasants in the villages around Mosul were Christians, whereas the landlords were, for the most part, Muslim Arabs or Arabized Muslims. Where the economic and ethnic or confessional divisions did not coincide, it was often not the racial or religious, but the class factor that asserted itself. The Arab soldiers clung not to the Arab officers, but to the Kurdish soldiers.²⁰ The hostility of the peasants of the Mosul country toward their landlords was also deep seated, and had its source in genuine, long-standing grievances: therefore landed Kurdish chieftains sided with the landed Arab chieftains. The old and affluent commercial Christian families did not make common cause with the Christian peasants. When acting on their own initiative, the peasants, whatever their nation, poured their wrath upon the landlords indiscriminately and without regard even to political alignment. For their part the poor and the labourers of certain Arab Muslim quarters of Mosul stood shoulder to shoulder with the Kurdish and Christian peasants against the Arab Muslim landlords. In those quarters the influence of the communists was widespread.²¹

The July Revolution and its aftermath had also greatly speeded up the political consciousness of the peasants. Moreover, they had been traversed by powerful communist currents. But what above all let loose the long-simmering indignation was the attempt by the large proprietors to beat down the Agrarian Reform Law of 30 September 1958.²² To the peasants this was the real meaning of the Mosul revolt, although the raising of the pan-Arab cry by the *Ba'ath Party* did play a role in galvanizing the non-Arab elements among them against that ill-fated, many-coloured venture. That the revolt was to a considerable degree the work of the more active stratum of the propertied class is beyond dispute, because the new Agrarian Reform Law threatened the very core of its social position. Not only did the landowners stand to lose the bulk of the land that they owned, but their social status was thereby also put in jeopardy.

As with other provinces, 'Abdassalām 'Ārif visited Mosul a fortnight after the Revolution and his statement in favour of union with the UAR – especially Syria, with which Mosul had commercial ties before World War I – was received with

¹⁹ 'Abdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḥwā' 'alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyū'iya fī al-'Irāq*. Vol. II, pp. 61 – 68.

²⁰ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'athists and Free Officers*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1978, p. 869.

²¹ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 869.

²² Az-Zubaydī, Layl 'Abdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-'Irāq*, pp. 304 – 307.

great enthusiasm. He also made some statements, ridiculed in Baghdad as senseless, to the effect that the new regime would not discriminate between Bāb al-Bayḍ (a quarter inhabited by the poor) and Bāb as-Sarāy (inhabited by an upper class).²³ ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, who had served as an officer in the Mosul garrison in 1952, had sensed the existing social unrest in that city stemming from sharp inequality and made his statements accordingly. To the poor the Revolution meant an improvement in social conditions, to the upper class, the end of isolation and beginning of general prosperity. Thus the Revolution was to be a panacea. Qāsim's failure to understand social grievances and the inability of his regime to pay attention to them necessarily created the feeling that he had betrayed the aims of the July Revolution.

Not only had ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim been unable to solve the urgent problems but also he committed errors which aggravated the situation. The Mosul Free Officers found themselves after the dismissal of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif in pretty much the same isolated situation as before the Revolution. They were the more incensed when ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim apparently began to fall under communist influence. Some officers were sent out of the capital. Staff Colonel ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf, a member of the former Supreme Committee of the Free Officers movement,²⁴ was sent to command the Mosul garrison – the Fifth Brigade of the Second Division. He may have agreed to serve in Mosul only temporarily, until the Revolutionary Council was set up of which he was expected to be a member, and he regarded his assignment in Mosul as exile. But the Revolutionary Council was not set up and his services were not adequately recognized in his eyes. He particularly resented the access to the highest posts of men who were only incidental to the July Revolution, such as Brigadier Aḥmad Muḥammad Yaḥyā, who filled the portfolio of Minister of Interior, vacated by the dismissal of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif. ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf regarded him as his junior and he was not even a Free Officer.²⁵

This and other incidents alienated a host of former supporters. Some officers, like Captain ʿAbdaljawād Ḥamīd, who had captured the royal palace on 14 July and was now commander at Mosul of the Second Company Third Battalion Fifth Brigade, were ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif's own men, officers of the famed Twentieth Brigade, whom ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had dispersed and who never reconciled themselves to the fall of their leader.²⁶ Still others, like Staff Brigadier Nāzim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, commander of the Second Division at Kirkūk and the highest ranking officer that the plot could attract, dreaded above all the progress of the

²³ Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 105.

²⁴ He became a member of the Supreme Committee on 15 May 1958. In: Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*. (The Revolution of 14 July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1983, p. 315.

²⁵ Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 106.

²⁶ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 872.

communists.²⁷ This was perhaps a sentiment that most of the disaffected officers shared, and which provided the common ground upon which they and the large proprietors met.

Thus the large number of disaffected Free Officers stationed around Mosul who were offended either at what they regarded as Qāsim's sell-out to the communists and infidels, or his failure to set up an effective Revolutionary Council on which the Free Officers themselves would be more prominently represented, found a sympathetic audience for their grievances.²⁸ The anti-Qāsim forces in Mosul and Qāsim's opponents in the Mosul garrison included *nasserists*, nationalists (*qawmīyūn*), *ba'athists* and Muslim Brethren, as well as large landowners, whose interests seemed directly threatened by the fall of the monarchy. Whatever money the undertaking needed, the large proprietors offered to supply. Upon the parties, and especially the *Ba'ath*, fell the role of organizing the street. At first the idea was for the *Ba'ath Party* to eliminate 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim physically in the streets of Baghdad and then for the officers to lay hold of the high points of the state.²⁹

However, the real lever of the revolt was an army group, from a middle or lower middle-class background, consisting of Staff Major Maḥmūd 'Azīz, staff officer of the Fifth Brigade at Mosul, Staff Lieutenant Colonel 'Azīz Aḥmad Shihāb, adjutant to the commander of the Second Division at Kirkūk, and Colonel Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī, chief of the military intelligence³⁰ and the founder of the Free Officers' movement. These men, it goes without saying, cared very little about the large proprietors' fear for their land or the probable forfeiture by the shaykhs of their tribal position. Indeed, some of their followers could not hide their uneasiness about cooperating with the old classes. What impelled the group to act against 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim differed from officer to officer. Some, like Colonel Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī, were undoubtedly sincere nationalists or had, like Staff Major Maḥmūd 'Azīz, drawn close to the *Ba'ath* and been alienated by 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's particularist (*iqḷīmī*) policies. Very probably motives of self-advancement were here simultaneously at work. There were, however, instances where pan-Arabism was a mere cloak beneath which hid the pettiest of passions.

The rising tide of communist influence, which 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim supported, provoked the next – and the most serious – nationalist uprising, the Mosul revolt. Led by Arab nationalists, the revolt was actually inspired by a mixture of motives. It was as much anti-communist as it was pro-nationalist. The main leaders of the revolt, 'Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf, Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī and Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī,

²⁷ Ḥusayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Ṭawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawṣil* 1959. (The ash-Shawwāf Revolution in Mosul 1959). Vol. III., *Aṣ-ṣirā' bayna 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim wa ash-shuyū'īyīn wa ḥulafā'ihim wa Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī wa al-qawmīyīn*. (The Struggle between 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim and the Communists and their Allies and Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī and the Nationalists). Baghdad 1988, pp. 49 – 52.

²⁸ Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 67.

²⁹ Ar-Rikābī, Fu'ād: *Al-ḥall al-awḥad*. (The Sole Solution). Cairo 1963, pp. 28 – 29.

³⁰ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Ṭawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya* 1959. *Faṣl fī tārikh al-'Irāq al-mu'āṣir*. (The National Revolution of 1959 in Mosul. Chapter of the Contemporary Iraqi History). Baghdad 1987, p. 115.

all came from conservative, well-known Arab *sunnī* families with little to gain from communism.³¹ As members of the Free Officers movement, they resented the fact that no Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) had been created. They had been shunted aside to less important posts while ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his cronies made the decisions, and feared that the fate of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif would be theirs as well if they did not act soon.

After the dismissal of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif and his dramatic arrest and imprisonment, the leadership of the pan-Arab group in Baghdad devolved on Colonel Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī, then head of the military intelligence, whose office was not far from Qāsim's headquarter in the Ministry of Defence. Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī and Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī came to an understanding that the political situation had become unbearable and firm measures to change it had to be taken.³² Precisely how the disaffected Free Officers originally planned their revolt is not quite clear.

According to Maḥmūd ad-Durra there were two plans. The first presumed that Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī and his group of officers in the General Staff consisting of Staff Brigadier Shākīr Maḥmūd Shukrī, Staff Colonel Ṣubḥī ʿAbdalḥamīd, Colonel Nuʿmān Māhir al-Kanʿānī and a group of officers and non commissioned officers of the defence regiment would surround the council of ministers during session and either enforce the formation of a new cabinet of patriotic and nationalistic elements, setting up of the Revolutionary Command Council (which ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim after the victorious coup refused to create) or force ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim to resign and leave the country with the possibility of killing him during his journey.³³ The timing had to be set when the circumstances would be suitable.³⁴

The second plan (when the execution of the first would be impossible) counted on the Fifth Brigade in Mosul under the command of Staff Colonel ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf. He joined the group on 1 March 1959, and agreed that he would merely declare a military revolt in Mosul, since aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī's Second Division included elements strongly opposed to pan-Arabism, and he would leave the question of the arrest and elimination of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim to the Sirrī group. He had to take the lead and, after gaining full possession of the city, to raise a revolt against the rule of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and – with the consent and support of Staff Brigadier Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, the commander of the Second Division stationed in Kirkūk – to broadcast a revolutionary manifesto, thus giving the signal for their associates in Baghdad under Colonel Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī, to occupy the Ministry of Defence, arrest ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, exile him or finish him off, and achieve the conquest of power.³⁵ The civilian leaders of the pan-Arabists in Baghdad

³¹ Marr, Phebe: *The Modern History of Iraq*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press 1985, p. 162.

³² ʿAbdalḥamīd, Ṣubḥī: *Asrār ṭawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, p. 135.

³³ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Ṭawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*, pp. 106 – 107.

³⁴ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Ṭawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*, p. 113.

³⁵ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Ṭawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*, p. 114.

promised to organize demonstrations in the capital in support of the movement immediately after the start of the revolt in Mosul.

All these various forces began drawing toward one another around the beginning of 1959, but practical preparations for a revolt did not get under way until after the resignation of the nationalist and conservative ministers on 7 February.³⁶ Matters came to a head when the leaders of the Partisans of Peace decided to hold their second annual conference in Mosul early in 1959. This organization had been started in Baghdad in 1946, when political parties were allowed to resume activities, but it was suppressed two years later on the grounds that it advocated disguised communist affiliation. But under the leadership of ʿAzīz Sharīf, former leader of a leftist political party,³⁷ it resumed activities after the July Revolution and held several meetings in Baghdad and other southern towns, advocating peace, socialism, and opposition to imperialism. Early in 1959 it announced a commemoration of their foundation in Mosul on 6 March 1959 and decided to launch a northern provinces' peace offensive.

The decision to focus all activity on Mosul was presumably directly related to the announcement in the ICP's paper *Ittiḥād ash-Shaʿb* on 23 February that the Partisans of Peace would be holding a nationwide rally in Mosul on 6 March, although Hanna Batatu suggests another and in fact more accurate sequence, that the rally was held to underline the strength and support of the Left in the country as a whole in the face of mounting rumours of a revolt in the Mosul garrison.³⁸ It is not clear whether the decision to hold the conference in Mosul originated from among the leaders of the organization itself or was suggested by a military faction. It is certain, however, that the Qāsim regime encouraged the move, for we know now that when the commander of the Mosul garrison made representations to Baghdad against holding the conference there, on the ground that it would lead to outbursts since tension in the city had already reached a high pitch,³⁹ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim is reported to have said that he wanted tensions to explode. Staff Colonel ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf went twice to Baghdad shortly before the uprising to warn Qāsim of communist infiltration and asked him not to hold the conference in Mosul, but ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim assured him that his policy was above partisan issues and that communist activities would eventually be restricted. ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf returned to Mosul dissatisfied.⁴⁰

³⁶ Husayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Tawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawṣil 1959*. (The ash-Shawwāf Revolution in Mosul 1959). Vol. I, Baghdad 1987, pp. 301–302.

³⁷ Khadduri, Majid: *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*. London, Oxford University Press 1960, p. 300.

³⁸ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 879.

³⁹ Al-ʿAzzawī, Jāsim Kāzīm: *Mudakkirāt al-ʿamīd ar-ruḡn Jāsim Kāzīm al-ʿAzzawī. Tawrat 14 tammūz. Asrāruha, aḥdāṭuha, rijāluha ḥattā nihāyat ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. (Memoirs of Staff Brigadier Jāsim Kāzīm al-ʿAzzawī. The Revolution of 14 July. Its Secrets, its Events, its Men until the End of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim). Baghdad 1990, pp. 220–221.

⁴⁰ Husayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Tawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawṣil 1959*. (The ash-Shawwāf Revolution in Mosul 1959). Vol. II., *Aṣ-ṣirāʿāt bayna ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa ash-shuyūʿiyyīn wa Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī wa al-qawmīyīn*. (Struggles between ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and the

It is not difficult to understand why the organizers of the rising pitched upon Mosul. Mosul was reputed as both a nationalist and conservative stronghold. It was also the home of between one-fourth and one-third of all officers of the army. Beyond that, it lay close to the Syrian frontiers. No less conclusive was the fact that many of the officers of its garrison had already been won over to the rebellion. Before the preparations had gone a long way, the communists sensed that something was brewing, and on 23 February informed ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. At about the same time, Lieutenant Colonel Muḥammad Yaḥyā Šāyig, an Arab officer of the Fifth Brigade from a family of artisans, passed on particulars of the plot to Colonel Ṭāhā ash-Shaykh Aḥmad, the pro-communist head of Qāsim's personal intelligence service.⁴¹ A confirmation also came from the Mosul branch of the *National Democratic Party*. The disclosure accorded with the premier's fears, and inclined him more decisively toward the Left.

At any rate, it is clear that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and the communists strongly felt that the correlation of forces within Mosul was not to their advantage, and rather than wait for their enemies to strike in their own good time, decided to anticipate them. From the first the communists showed no hesitation as to the best course to adopt.⁴² On 23 February, even as they were opening Qāsim's eyes to the plot, they announced that a Peace Partisan's rally would be held in that city on 6 March. As it soon became evident, this was to be no ordinary, routine affair: they aimed at nothing short of inundating Mosul with their supporters. By this means they apparently hoped to force the opposition to show its hand prematurely, or at least to smoke out some of its nuclei and smash them to pieces, while at the same time buttressing the position of the local communists. In the meantime – on 27 February – ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had given his consent to the holding of the peace rally and, to assure its success, proceeded to bring every governmental lever into play: the radio, the television, the railways – he scheduled a special train to Mosul at half rate – even the security services.⁴³ The communists had, in any case, been under standing instructions that “should the authorities waver or be dilatory, they were themselves to suppress any conspiracy against the Republic with all the force and means they could muster.” Now they took the fullest advantage of Qāsim's support, and developed such an agitation for the rally that the political atmosphere became extraordinarily tense. In the nationalist and conservative quarters of Mosul, people began warding themselves in as if against an invasion.⁴⁴ A rumour that there was going to be “a massacre” flew in all directions. The fear of the propertied classes, in particular, was extreme.

Already suspicious of a coup, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim agreed on the rally, undoubtedly intending to intimidate his enemies. In any case, in spite of two visits

Communists and Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī and the Nationalists). Baghdad 1988, pp. 31 – 32;

ʿAbdalḥamīd, Šubḥī: *Asrār taḥrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, p. 139.

⁴¹ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 873.

⁴² Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 879.

⁴³ Mallāḥ, ʿAbdalganī: *At-tajriba baʿda arbaʿaḥashar tammūz*. (The Experience After 14 July). Beirut 1966, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 880.

to Baghdad by ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf to warn ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim of the possible consequences of permitting the rally to take place, it duly went ahead. The leading officers in Mosul, on the pretext of preventing a conflict between communists and pan-Arabists, closely watched the movements of the Peace Partisans because the leaders of the Mosul units were essentially pan-Arabists. On 5 March, communists, Peace Partisans, and other supporters of the government began pouring into Mosul from various parts of Iraq. They arrived by every sort of conveyance and many came on foot. An attempt to tear up the railway line did not check the human flow. In the afternoon of the following day, as was officially claimed, some 250,000 people had massed in the city – most of them from the nearby villages and towns or from the neighbouring northern provinces – and now marched through the streets chanting slogans of support for the sole leader.⁴⁵ The nationalists and conservatives, not desiring to give battle under unfavourable conditions, stayed at home. The conference was held on 6 March and the rally itself passed off without violence. Special trains brought members and guests to Mosul, and the conference was hailed as a victory over the pan-Arab groups. After an impressive march through the streets of Mosul, most of the visitors left the city by the evening of the same day, 6 March. By mid-morning of 7 March, the Peace Partisans had departed, but many communists remained behind and the rest of the day was filled with demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, which progressively grew in intensity.

* * *

Tentative plans for a coup had been laid by the nationalist officers and others, but their hand was forced prematurely by the leftists and ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. The nationalist officers decided to act. Plans had already been made for the cooperation of two other groups outside of the army: the Shammar tribe surrounding Mosul and the UAR. Aḥmad ʿAjīl al-Yāwir, leader of the Shammar and one of Iraq's largest landowners, was an anti-communist who feared agrarian reform. The UAR, which was by now openly hostile to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, and its authorities promised, if necessary, to prop up the basis of the rebellion with a battalion of commandos and a squadron of MiGs and had arranged to send arms and a radio transmitter from across the Syrian border. Aḥmad ʿAjīl al-Yāwir undertook to transport arms and a radio transmitter from the Syrian region of the UAR to Mosul.⁴⁶ Although the Peace Partisans rally passed without a major outbreak, on the following day (7 March) demonstrations, attacks, and counterattacks escalated between the communists and the nationalists, now reinforced by Shammar tribesmen.

On the same day (7 March) ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf decided to cross the Rubicon. He and his followers became active, and the order putting the army on

⁴⁵ ʿAbdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḥvā' alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyū'īya fī al-ʿIrāq*. Vol. II, p. 66.

⁴⁶ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Tawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*, p. 110.

the alert remained in force. ‘Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf had notified Rif‘at al-Ḥājī Sirrī and Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī that the military uprising would start next day. Rif‘at al-Ḥājī Sirrī concurred, although he may have been reluctant to do so; Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, who counselled restraint and delay, was impatiently brushed aside.⁴⁷ Maḥmūd ad-Durra also discovered to his surprise that there was no full agreement among the military leaders on the ways and means of conducting the uprising. Above all, ‘Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf wished to proclaim the revolt in his own name, as Commander of the Revolution, while other leaders had demanded that the revolt should be proclaimed in the name of Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, and ‘Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf should be his deputy.⁴⁸ ‘Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf, however, insisted that he should be the commander and proceeded to raise the revolt without the consent of others. It was his attitude that discouraged Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī from joining the revolt when it began.

On the night of the 7 – 8 March ‘Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf in collaboration with Maḥmūd ad-Durra composed his first “Manifesto” to the Iraqi nation.⁴⁹ Then they discovered that the broadcasting equipment, which had been requested from the Damascus authorities, had not been received in time to broadcast the proclamation. Also during the night officers from brigade headquarters, aided by newly created militia force, arrested some sixty ICP members and sympathizers. Meanwhile chaos was mounting in the city. The ill-directed and unorganized nationalist militia failed to serve as a containing force. Staff Colonel ‘Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf decided to act and at 7 a.m. on 8 March the rebellion was announced over the Mosul radio and heard only in the city. In the “Manifesto” to the Iraqi people which was issued in his name as leader of the Revolution, he declared that ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim had “betrayed” the July Revolution and his own brothers, the Free Officers; allowed the country to lapse into “chaos”, the economy to deteriorate, confidence to disappear, and money to “go into hiding”; “warred against Arab nationalism” and “let loose” the radio and the press against the UAR, “which had risked its existence for the triumph of our revolution”; and, driven by “an insane ambition” was leaning on “a category of people belonging to a certain political doctrine” which had no appeal to Iraqis.⁵⁰ Violent confrontations between local nationalists and communists broke out in earnest early in the same morning, fighting which escalated into warfare began as the communists and their supporters marched toward the camp where their colleagues were detained. They were met by fire from Shawwāf’s troops. In the short span of two days 8 – 9 March, the pan-Arabists were in full control of the city. The Shammar tribes, scattered in the north-western area between Mosul and the Syrian borders, had been alerted about

⁴⁷ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*, p. 169.

⁴⁸ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Tawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-‘Irāq al-mu‘āṣir*, pp. 119 – 122.

⁴⁹ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Tawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-‘Irāq al-mu‘āṣir*, pp. 131 – 132.

⁵⁰ Full text of the “Manifesto” in: Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Tawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-‘Irāq al-mu‘āṣir*, pp. 133 – 136.

the impending revolt and they rushed into the city to support ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf. But they could not hold it when the resistance collapsed.

From the start, the revolt suffered from haste and poor planning. After the revolt was formally proclaimed, only the Infantry Regiment in ʿAqra under Staff Lieutenant Colonel ʿAlī Tawfīq and the Third Infantry Brigade in Arbīl under Staff Colonel Munīr Fahmī al-Jarrāh, declared themselves in favour of it,⁵¹ while Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī and Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī made no move to support it. Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī seems to have been annoyed by ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf's declaration that he was the commander of the revolt, and so he decided to dissociate himself from it. In the meantime, Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī took no action since Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī failed to move, and he seems to have been astonished that ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf had failed to notify him of the time of revolt.⁵²

So only two units from outside Mosul city, those in Arbīl and ʿAqra, joined ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf. The radio transmitter from Syria did not arrive in time to announce the revolt, and when it did arrive the signal was weak. An attempt to bomb the broadcasting station in Baghdad on 8 March failed. Above all, ash-Shawwāf's colleagues, Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī and Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, could not come to his aid. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim moved quickly to suppress the uprising by diplomacy and force. He ordered the leading officers, including Nāzīm aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī and ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf to stop action. He was able during the first day of the uprising to isolate the insurgents, and next day after fierce fighting between pan-Arabists and communists, ash-Shawwāf's headquarters and other key positions were bombed by planes sent from Baghdad. This seems to have fatally crippled ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf's resistance, and he himself was seriously wounded and taken to hospital. While still under treatment, he was assassinated by a Kurd loyal to the Qāsim regime, and this news discouraged his followers from further resistance. His officers were either killed in the affray or fled to Syria. Shortly thereafter, the movement collapsed.⁵³

The four days of upheaval were chaotic, horrifying and confused. Fighting also broke out between rival army units, who were joined by other groups from the suburbs and surroundings of the city. As emerges from Hanna Batatu's detailed description (based on both eyewitness accounts and police records), much of the subsequent fighting had more to do with long standing ethnic and inter-tribal rivalries between Arabs and Kurds and between different Arab tribal factions, and with the hatred of peasants for their landlords, than with strictly party political matters. ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf himself was killed, as was the loyalist commander of the Engineering battalion, ʿAbdallāh ash-Shāwī.⁵⁴ However, after

⁵¹ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Tawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya* 1959. *Faṣl fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*, pp. 143 – 145.

⁵² Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 109.

⁵³ Marr, Phebe: *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 163.

⁵⁴ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Tawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya* 1959. *Faṣl fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*, pp. 159 – 160.

the news had leaked out of the murder – in prison – of the much-loved Peace Partisan leader, lawyer and poet Kāmil al-Qazanchī, who had spectacularly defended the ICP leader Fahd in his trial in 1947, and who had led the huge demonstrations against the Portsmouth Agreement in Baghdad in January 1948, the communists and their supporters began to wage a campaign of indiscriminate revenge against suspected “nationalists”. These terrible days of fighting, during which at least 200 people were killed, hardened and widened the bitter divisions between the two sides in the country as a whole. Order was eventually restored and the leaders of the revolt were arrested and taken to Baghdad to await trial in the People’s Court.⁵⁵

The pan-Arabists were now severely beaten. For Mosul, the aftermath of the revolt was far worse than the rebellion itself. As the Shammar tribes faded into the desert, the Kurds looted the city and attacked the populace. The communists and the Peace Partisans massacred the nationalist and some of the well-to-do Mosul families, and looted their houses. Hundreds of people were killed, the overwhelming majority of them Arab nationalists. The city of Mosul virtually fell into the hands of communist and anti-pan-Arab elements who, saw that no one known to have supported the uprising would escape punishment. What made the pan-Arabists helpless was the attacks by Kurds and others loyal to ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim who rushed into the city and wrought havoc. Moreover, the communists were aided by the residents of the poorer quarters, who were ready to attack the upper and well-to-do classes, and the murder and robbery that followed revealed the hatred of the poor and wretched for the rich. These raids encouraged the communists to behave despicably to the pan-Arabists, while the mob sacked and burned upper-class homes.⁵⁶

An informal court was established by some communists, and passed summary sentences which were carried out instantly. At least seventeen people, including some with no connection with the revolt, were summarily executed. Some of those condemned to death were hanged on street lamp posts and those assassinated by the mob were dragged through the main streets. All kinds of animosities festering beneath the surface erupted. Christians killed Muslims, Kurds attacked Arabs, and the poor looted the rich. Never in living memory had Mosul been subjected to such a merciless slaughter and indignities in the brief span of four days before ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim moved to restore order.⁵⁷ It was suspected that he did not hurry to re-establish order in a city supporting a rebellion against him, for it had certainly been in his power to stop the disaster from the day after the collapse of the uprising.

In many of its other practical aspects, the revolt leaves the impression of a work not maturely considered, and done hurriedly and without care. The short-

⁵⁵ Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ ‘Abdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḥwā’ ‘alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyū‘īya fī al-‘Irāq*. Vol. II, pp. 74 – 77.

⁵⁷ Nājī, Hilāl: *Ḥattā lā nansā: Fuṣṣil min Majzarat al-Mawṣil*. (Not to forget. Chapters from the Mosul Massacre). Baghdad 1963; Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 110 – 111.

wave transmitter furnished by the UAR arrived late and in bad working order, and did not go on the air until after 9 a.m. The manifesto was neither prepared nor approved by the officers in Baghdad: it was drafted on the eve of action by retired Staff Major Maḥmūd ad-Durra, who was wholly incidental to the revolt. The bombing of the Baghdad Radio transmitters at Abū ʿurayb was also decided at the last moment and on the run, and poorly executed.⁵⁸

ʿAbdalwāhhāb ash-Shawwāf, the son of a landed one-time head of the Religious Court of Cassation, had been drawn into the movement only on 1 March. His casting of himself now as its leader was not calculated to enhance its chances. In the army he had the reputation of being an extremely courageous but unstable officer:⁵⁹ up to a few months before the revolt he was known to harbour communist sympathies. Some of his civilian associates also do not seem to have had a great opinion of him. Much more serious was the fact that Colonel Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī and the other officers in Baghdad had understood that the right of leadership would belong to Staff Brigadier Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, immediate superior of ʿAbdalwāhhāb ash-Shawwāf.⁶⁰ Apart from an insignificant demonstration by the *Baʿth Party* on the Karkh side of Baghdad and the rallying to ʿAbdalwāhhāb ash-Shawwāf of two small garrisons, the revolt had no response outside Mosul. Colonel Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī and Staff Brigadier Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī did not lift a finger. They did not act mainly because they could not act: the loyalist officers and the communists kept too close a watch over them. When ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim telephoned him to sound his attitude, he assured him that he had nothing to do with it. After that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim arranged the announcement by Baghdad radio that Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī expressed his support to him.⁶¹ The assistance apparently promised by the UAR (to provide commandos or air cover for the insurgents) did not materialize, although enthusiastic sabre-rattling could be heard on the radio from Damascus, where Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir was celebrating the first anniversary of the Union.

In the meantime, the heads of the communist-sponsored unions and organizations – the General Union of Students, the Federation of Peasants' Associations, the Peace Partisans, the League for Defence of Women's Rights, and so on – had appealed to “valiant citizens” everywhere to prepare to nip “treason” in the bud and “crush” or execute⁶² all those who tried “to play havoc” with the existence of the Republic or to oppose the “good son of the people, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim”. They also called upon “the faithful leader” to mobilize and arm the masses.

⁵⁸ Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Tawrat al-Mawṣil al-qawmīya 1959. Faṣl fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-muʿāṣir*, pp. 140 – 144.

⁵⁹ Al-ʿAzzāwī, Jāsim Kāẓim: *Mudakkirāt al-ʿamīd ar-ruḡn Jāsim Kāẓim al-ʿAzzawī. Tawrat 14 tammūz*, p. 220.

⁶⁰ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 881 – 882.

⁶¹ ʿAbdalḥamīd, Ṣubḥī: *Asrār tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, p. 141.

⁶² Al-ʿAzzāwī, Jāsim Kāẓim: *Mudakkirāt al-ʿamīd ar-ruḡn Jāsim Kāẓim al-ʿAzzawī. Tawrat 14 tammūz*, p. 228.

Having no other recourse – doubtful, as he was, of the loyalty of most of the officer corps – he partially responded to their appeal. He gave the Peoples Resistance Forces a free hand, but continued to withhold ammunition from them. At the same time he afforded the communists and their tens of thousands of supporters the run of the streets in Baghdad and other towns. This completed the paralysis of the nationalists and conservatives.⁶³

It was not expected that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim would let the Mosul affair pass without punishing the culprits. Towards the end of March all those suspected of having inspired or participated in the rebellion were brought before the Special Supreme Military Court (al-Maḥkama al-ʿaskariyya al-ʿulyā al-khāṣṣa), the notorious Maḥdāwī Court.⁶⁴ Before the trial began they were subjected to third-degree questioning, and some suffered indescribable indignities and torture, because they refused to make statements satisfactory to questioners. After five months of torture, the court passed death sentences on the principal culprits on 16 September 1959, and they were executed four days later. Others had already been put to death. Attempts to dissuade ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim from ordering the execution of his former comrades in arms, especially Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī and Nāzim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, were of no avail. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had already made up his mind to eliminate his chief military opponents, while the communists were demonstrating in the streets of the capital demanding “death for treason”.⁶⁵ The pan-Arabists suffered such a severe setback that they were unable to recover for the next four years, although they by no means stopped their sporadic attacks on communists, including a desperate attempt on ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s life, as will be seen.

The significance of Mosul was twofold. In the first place the confidence of the ICP leadership increased still further after the foiling of the revolt, and the Party and its supporters staged huge demonstrations demanding that the People’s Resistance militia should be armed and pressing for communist representation in government.⁶⁶ Secondly, the Qāsim government began to initiate purges and dismissals of those, whose loyalty to the Revolution was suspect, in other words, prominent nationalists and *baʿthists* in the ministries and in the armed forces. Thus these events provided ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim with the pretext for an extensive purge of the armed forces and the administration, targeting officers and officials with known pan-Arab sympathies, as well as those connected to the Mosul conspirators. In their place, he appointed his own protégés, thus extending his own patronage networks and the communists also benefited.⁶⁷ More importantly, the ICP gained the impression that, by rallying “the people”, it could effectively

⁶³ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 883.

⁶⁴ Al-Jaʿfarī, Muḥammad Ḥamdī: *Maḥkamat al-Maḥdāwī. Aḡrab al-muḥākamāt as-siyāsīya fī tārikh al-ʿIrāq al-ḥadīth*. (Al-Maḥdāwī Court. The Most unusual Trials in the Modern Iraqi History). Baghdad 1990.

⁶⁵ Az-Zubaydī, Layl ʿAbdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 444 – 447.

⁶⁶ Penrose, Edith & Penrose, E. F.: *Iraq: International Relations and National Development*. London, Benn 1978, pp. 228 – 229.

⁶⁷ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*, pp. 181 – 183.

check any attempted coup d'état, reinforcing its belief that it could now play an active part in the direction of the Iraqi state. At this point *ICP* support was growing rapidly in both the army and the air force, and the *ICP*-backed People's Resistance Force expanded from 11,000 members in August 1958 to about 25,000 in May 1959. The *ICP* became more visible on the streets, organizing a massive demonstration in Baghdad on May Day 1959 which called on the leader to appoint communists to the government and to hold elections for a representative assembly.⁶⁸ Under these circumstances the *ICP* began to press harder for due recognition of its vital role in safeguarding and supporting the regime and began to demand that their strength should be adequately reflected in the government.⁶⁹

ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim now began to look on the *ICP* with some concern: he viewed this as a fundamental challenge to his own authority and rapidly began to regard the communists as a threat rather than an asset. Consequently, he tightened up on the activities of the Popular Resistance, ensuring that they could never challenge the organized force of the army. Strenuous efforts were made to withdraw the arms which had fallen into the hands of the PRF during the revolt. In Baghdad the PRF patrols ceased as a rule to carry firearms.⁷⁰ He reiterated the ban on all party activities, but also promised legislation on political parties within a year, implying that the time was not yet ripe for the restoration of constitutional democracy.⁷¹

The presence of the *ICP* on the streets, its strength in various associations, trades and peasants' unions, its members' mass adherence to the Popular Resistance organization and the expansion of party membership to an estimated 25,000 made it seem increasingly formidable. How deeply committed this vast influx of new members and sympathizers actually was, is hard to estimate; nevertheless, it must be recognized that the communists possessed genuine mass support.⁷² More importantly, the prominence of the party alarmed those whom ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim did not want to alienate. These included the small industrial entrepreneurs and the middling landowners of the *NDP*, as well as his fellow officers, the great majority of whom mistrusted the communists. Thus he resorted to the old game known as "balance of forces".⁷³

The events in Mosul had confirmed the belief held by the enduring authoritarian faction within the Iraqi officer corps and civil administration that any uncertainty about the power of the centre and any opportunity for "the people" to express their opinion without restraint would result in conditions approaching civil war. Ethnic and clannish antagonisms had inevitably been reinforced by the attack on privilege. This was the nightmare of many in Iraq, especially in the officer corps where a

⁶⁸ Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*, p. 157.

⁶⁹ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*, p. 182.

⁷⁰ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958 – 1963*, p. 184.

⁷¹ Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 69.

⁷² Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 898.

⁷³ ʿAbdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḥwāʾ ʿalā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyūʿiyya fī al-ʿIrāq*. Vol. II, p. 96.

consciousness of privilege and distaste for disorder and indiscipline went hand in hand. To some extent, 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim himself shared these views, as he was concerned about the need for national cohesion and sensitive to the many possible fracture lines in Iraqi society.

'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's refusal to accept the communists' demands either for Party representation in government or for some form of parliamentary democracy prompted many Party members to ask whether it should not seize power by force as long as it was still in a position to do so. However, after heated arguments within the leadership it was agreed that while the Party might well succeed in taking power, its original analysis of the essentially bourgeois character of the revolution was correct. The constellation of national and international forces was not favourable, and the Party's opponents would be able to combine successfully against it; a civil war would follow in which the left would be defeated. Thus the Party decided to moderate, or at least not to press, its demands and generally began to pursue a line of accommodation towards 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim.⁷⁴ The decision not to attempt to seize power when the opportunity was most favourable was to cause a serious rift in the Party in later years. The effect of the adoption of this line at the time was to cause it to lose much of the impetus that had carried it forwards over the previous year, forcing it to give up much of its revolutionary spirit.

The failure of the Mosul rebellion, the execution of its perpetrators, and the engulfing tide of communism had convinced the leadership of the *Ba'ath Party* that the only way out was to eliminate 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim himself. Since their forces in the army had been removed, a coup was no longer feasible; assassination seemed the only course of action.

⁷⁴ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 903.