

## THE POLITICAL CLIMATE IN IRAQ IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 1958 REVOLUTION

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The masterly fashion in which the military coup of 14 July 1958 in Iraq, that finally overthrew the monarchy and inaugurated a new era in Iraqi history was carried out, raised high hopes that the new regime would wipe out past injustices and open a new era which would provide freedom, prosperity, and progress. The revolution succeeded more because of luck and audacity than a result of a long planning or extensive organization. The coup was unquestionably a reflection of deep-seated discontent among officers and among civilian politicians with the regime's foreign policy and its slowness to reform. However, the military men, who were particularly susceptible to slogans from Radio Cairo, gave far more thought to the overthrow of the existing regime than to what would replace it. In order to meet the common expectations the newly formed government under Brigadier 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim made it clear, in official and unofficial statements, that all restrictions on personal liberty were lifted, discriminatory measures abolished, and steps would be taken to repair past errors. The reality that turned out appeared to be quite different.

The Free Officers and those members of the armed forces who supported them were a highly heterogeneous and disparate group, united only by their desire to overthrow the *ancien régime*. Thus there were considerable differences of opinion among them over the policies that the new government should pursue. Due to internal disagreements and jealousies among the Free Officers, the military action, when it occurred, was the work of only a few men; it was not a concerted effort by a cohesive military group with decided political ideas. Herein lay the source of most of the new regime's difficulties.<sup>1</sup> Conspiracy within the officer corps and beyond became the practical norm. With this went the use of violence as the ultimate sanction in an atmosphere where there were profound disagreements not only on the substance of policy, but also on the very rules of the political game. The tendency to centralize and dominate negated attempts to create provincial or societal autonomy, frustrating efforts to represent the plurality of

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<sup>1</sup> Marr, Phebe: *The Modern History of Iraq*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press 1985, p. 153.

Iraq's diverse society in any institutional form. When the new government turned from negative to constructive work, it found that it was very difficult to erect a new political structure and carry out a reform programme.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, the genuine and widespread hopes for a radical break with the past and for the creation of a more open society that were awakened by the events of 1958 were gradually disappointed in the following decade.

The new men who came to power in 1958, in seeking to master the state and to stay in command, followed a path suggested both by the distinctive politics of Iraq and by the way they had come to power. They immediately announced the dismissal from active service of all army officers above the rank of brigadier.<sup>3</sup> In addition, because the main perpetrators had been middle-ranking or even junior officers, it was not immediately clear who was actually in charge. As the organizational structure of the Iraqi Army was still 'apolitical', that is, based on hierarchy and rank, and was profoundly influenced by military values such as the 'honour of the officer' and 'respect for the uniform', the fact that most of the Free Officers were of approximately the same age and rank, and that none of them had emerged as undisputed leader by the time the coup actually took place, meant that there was no pressing reason for any of them to defer to any particular individual or individuals among their colleagues, although 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim and 'Abdassalām 'Ārif emerged relatively quickly as the main contenders for power.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, none of the officers had yet been able to build up a consistent body of supporters within the armed forces based on either regional, tribal or party loyalties, so that the power struggle in these early months became concentrated crucially around obtaining mass popular acclaim.

The actions of the new regime, which were taken almost immediately, were particularly welcomed, and were accompanied by enormous demonstrations of popular approval and expressions of confidence in the new regime. 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's public appearances were greeted with rapturous enthusiasm, and contemporary photographs and eyewitness accounts of the enormous crowds that filled the streets in the first few weeks after the Revolution are striking testimony to the support it enjoyed. Beneath the surface, however, tensions and differences were at work, which were soon to erupt into open conflict.

The members of the Supreme Committee of the Free Officers movement were surprised when the issued decrees did not include the establishment of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). Some of them visited the Ministry of Defence late in the afternoon of 14 July demanding from 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim its proclamation but he ignored the request.<sup>5</sup> The RCC that was to have been formed

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<sup>2</sup> Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*. London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press 1969, p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Dana, Uriel: *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*. London, Pall Mall and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup> Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*. London, New York, I.B. Tauris Publishers 1990, p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-‘Irāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1983, pp. 531 – 532.

after the revolution from within the Supreme Committee of the Free Officers movement never came into existence. Both ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim and ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif were not ready to entrust the administration to civil hands and set up the RCC composed of leading officers, as was contemplated before. They instead, contrary to the wishes of their supporters among the military, assumed the highest political posts and took direct responsibility for public affairs without adequate preparation. Many of the Free Officers could not readily forgive their exclusion at the last moment from any important part in the coup for which they had long worked and with great bitterness followed their subsequent placing in insignificant posts.<sup>6</sup> This step turned out to be a grave mistake by the two leaders.

Iraqis found themselves subject to the command of individuals, more or less skilled at manipulating systems of patronage and coercion, who exercised a power greater than any enjoyed by the politicians under the monarchy. Among the small circle of the new rulers themselves, these conflicts were often of a personal nature, but they were understood, translated or adopted by members of the public as expressions of divergent or conflicting political viewpoints. The regime that emerged from the Revolution bore in its first months the imprint of ambiguity. There was no indubitable focus of political authority; only with the enactment of the provisional constitution on 27 July 1958, the legislative and executive powers were vested in the Council of ministers.<sup>7</sup>

Command now lay in the hands of those who had made the coup, ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim and ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif, with the army behind them. In the first place, although the Free Officers shared and were able to reflect some of the more widely-felt political aspirations as far as domestic and especially foreign policy was concerned, most of them, and the majority of their civilian cabinet colleagues, were essentially reformist, even conservative, in their political thinking. So the new rulers ensured that, despite the rhetoric, the various proclaimed “changes” would never be sufficiently radical to challenge an order from which they derived so much strength.<sup>8</sup> The new rulers found it exceedingly difficult to effect a complete change, for the running of the business of government required the preservation of the administrative and financial systems, even if these were purged of corrupt elements. A complete break with the past was not possible, as it could lead to anarchy and paralysis of the machinery of government.

‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim clearly believed that greatest degree of direct control was necessary for his survival, although in retrospect it can be argued that his growing determination to dominate all facets of public life deprived him of the major pillars of support, which might have helped him when he had to confront conspiracy in the armed forces. The new constitution proclaimed Iraq a republic and established a three-man *Sovereignty Council* to fulfil the ceremonial functions of the head of

<sup>6</sup> Husayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Thawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawsil* 1959. (The ash-Shawwāf Revolution in Mosul 1959). Vol.I. Baghdad 1987, pp. 54 – 57.

<sup>7</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Layth ‘Abdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-‘Irāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1979, pp. 252 – 256.

<sup>8</sup> Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 149.

state. However, no representative institutions were established and ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim himself filled the posts of prime minister and minister of defence, as well as commander-in-chief. He included ‘Abdassalām ‘Arif (as deputy prime minister and minister of interior) and a few of the Free Officers in his cabinet, but otherwise appointed civilians associated both with the *National Democratic Party (NDP)* and with the Arab nationalist trend.<sup>9</sup> This disappointed some of the Free Officers who had expected a more prominent political role which the Commanders’ Council, composed of Qāsim’s and ‘Arif’s military associates, failed to fulfil.

In fact, the power of the state remained intact. Rarely can revolutions swiftly replace old regimes by new ones, unless preparations for such changes have been undertaken long beforehand. In the case of Iraq little or no preparation had been made before the Revolution, and the leaders had to embark upon a long transitional period. Moreover, popular participation was largely symbolic, despite the thousands of Baghdadis milling around and celebrating the end of the old regime. Once “the people” had served their purpose during the first few days, many were bundled off the streets and the remainder encouraged to return to their homes. In the capital and in the provinces, the administration continued to function normally and the most urgent task facing officials was to calculate how their own positions were affected by the changes at the top.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the military regime tried to secure popular support to legitimize its exercise of power. No better means were found than a civil militia, organized on the model of Communist countries, which was used as a paramilitary instrument against political opponents. The Popular Resistance (al-muqāwama ash-sha‘bīya) was organized in accordance with a law of 1 August. It consisted of volunteers of Iraqi nationality as well as Arabs of other nationalities. Its functions were to train citizens in civil defence as a means of helping the army to maintain order and to provide civil defence and defence against foreign attack.<sup>11</sup> Colonel Ṭāhā Muṣṭafā al-Barmānī, former commander of the Royal Guard, was appointed its commander and made ultimately responsible to the Ministry of Defence.

Attempts by political parties to build more substantial forms of popular support were dependent on the initiatives of the new ruling elite, and so were vulnerable to their power plays and prejudices. Thus the *Iraqi Communist Party (ICP)*’s attempts to set up independent centres for *Popular Resistance* (al-muqāwama ash-sha‘bīya) were soon thwarted by ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim who took them over himself. Trade unions and peasant’s associations were not legalized until early in 1959 and then enjoyed only a brief period of independent existence before being subsumed into ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim’s system of corporate, patrimonial control. The same applied to various other forms of associational life which appeared soon after the fall of the monarchy; professional syndicates and youth and women’s organizations emerged, often with official encouragement and subject to increasingly in-

<sup>9</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-‘Irāq. (The Revolution of 14<sup>th</sup> July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1983, pp. 501 – 504.

<sup>10</sup> De Gaury, G.: Three Kings in Baghdad, 1921 – 1958. London 1961, pp. 190 – 201.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Waqā‘i‘ al-‘irāqīya, 4 August 1958.

trusive state patronage, bringing them all eventually into line with a system unambiguously dominated by 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim himself.<sup>12</sup>

Much the same could be said of the growing realization among the new rulers of Iraq that, despite the initial enthusiasm of some of them for the ideals of Arab nationalism and its associated schemes of Arab unity, only by concentrating on the condition of Iraq itself could they cement the alliances within the state necessary for political survival. Iraq in all its variety was the terrain of a distinctively Iraqi politics and it was this which demanded attention before anything else could be contemplated. Significant changes did take place, but the men who had seized power by force, were more preoccupied with the immediate struggle for power. The first two laws enacted under the republic were promulgated on 4 August "For the Purge of the Judiciary" and "For the purge of the Government Services".<sup>13</sup> Originally due to lapse after six months, the legislation was perpetuated by successive extensions, and the independence of judiciary was thus deprived of any effectiveness.

In order to bring Iraq under full military control, the new government declared the country to be under martial law from the first day of the coup, and appointed Brigadier Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAbdī as Military Governor-General for the country, who was made directly responsible to 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim as Minister of Defence.<sup>14</sup> The police were put under the control of Colonel Ṭāhir Yaḥyā who, though nominally responsible to the Minister of Interior, allied himself with the Prime Minister when his chief, Colonel 'Abdassalām 'Ārif came into conflict with 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim. The Special Supreme Military Court, known as the People's Court, was another instrument designed to assert the authoritarian rule. Its function was to try persons for acts regarded either as conspiracies against the safety of the country or corruption. The powers given to the court were so extensive that they could apply to anyone regarded as an opponent to the regime either by conspiring against the state or through contributing to corruption.<sup>15</sup> The court consisted of five officers, presided over by Colonel Fāḍil 'Abbās al-Mahdāwī.

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In the autumn of 1958, effective power lay with 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his growing following. He discovered, as his *sharīfian* predecessors had done in the 1920s, that vast powers of patronage were conferred upon those who seized control of the centre and its resources. As his opponents found to their cost, he used these powers with skill and ruthlessness, ruling over a state which differed little in

<sup>12</sup> 'Abdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḍwā' 'alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyūṭiyya fī al-ʿIrāq*. (Light on the Communist Movement in Iraq). Vol. II /1958 – 1963/. Beirut, Dār al-miṣṣād without date, pp. 33 – 38.

<sup>13</sup> Dann, Uriel: *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*. London, Pall Mall and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 46.

<sup>14</sup> *Al-Waqā'iʿ al-ʿirāqīya*, 23 August 1958.

<sup>15</sup> *Muḥākamat al-maḥkama al-ʿaskariyya al-ʿulyā al-khāṣṣa*. (Proceedings of the Special Supreme Military Court). Vol I. Baghdad 1958, pp. 8 – 20.



many of its particulars from that which he had inherited from his predecessors.<sup>16</sup> Although ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif had emerged as those principally responsible for the *coup d'état* that brought about the Revolution, neither was widely known at the time, and as differences between them emerged almost within the first few days, there was considerable confusion about their respective roles. It was not long before tension developed between Brigadier ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and Colonel ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif. Each believed that he had a claim to precedence over the other – the Brigadier outranked the Colonel, but the latter was convinced that he represented the core of the young Free Officers, that he had been the initiator of the march on Baghdad in July 1958 and that he should therefore be recognized as the leader of the revolution.<sup>17</sup>

Factionalism in the army began to emerge soon after the military regime had been established, because of lack of agreement among military leaders on essential political questions, especially on Arab union. Since there was disagreement on this question, the Free Officers were divided when it was raised after the Revolution. The pan-Arabs pressed their demand for union and approached officers who were sympathetic with their views. The differences between the two leaders soon crystallized around this key policy question – union with the UAR. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif encouraged by the *Arab Socialist Renaissance Party (Baʿth)* and the pan-Arab nationalists, favoured prompt union; ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was more cautious in his approach to this issue.<sup>18</sup> For most politically conscious Iraqis, the success of the Egyptian Revolution of 1952 had been a source of inspiration and example, and the figure of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir had attracted devotion, even adulation, although this had not been expressed in the formation of a *Nasserist* political party. It is difficult to pinpoint this group accurately before the Iraqi Revolution, since the appeal of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir while Nūrī as-Saʿīd was still in power was almost irresistible to nearly all shades of political opinion, and in fact remained so until the split between the two Iraqi leaders began to reach ominous proportions in the autumn of 1958.

ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was born on 21 October 1914, in Baghdad in the al-Mahdīya quarter of the ar-Raṣāfa, on the left bank of the Tigris river. He came from a modest background and from a family which was more representative of the diversity of Iraq's varied population than that of most of his brother officers (his father was a *Sunnī* Arab from Baghdad who claimed descent from the tribe of Zubayd, but his mother was from a *Shīʿī* family claiming descent from Banū Tamīm).<sup>19</sup> This may have played a role in the integrative vision he had for an Iraq in which all inhabitants would work together for the common good.

<sup>16</sup> Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 152.

<sup>17</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Layth ʿAbdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1979, pp. 411 – 419.

<sup>18</sup> Marr, The Modern History of Iraq, p. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Husayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Thawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawsil 1959*. (The ash-Shawwāf Revolution in Mosul 1959). Baghdad 1987, p. 23; Az-Zubaydī, Layth ʿAbdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1979, p. 375.

The second-in-command, ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, also came from a poor family and claimed Arab descent. He was born in 1917, in Baghdad in al-Karkh. He was an extrovert, outspoken and fluent in speech, but his knowledge and understanding of public affairs was superficial. These traits were exactly the opposite of ʿAbdalkarīm's, who was an introvert, quiet, discreet, and far from fluent, often stammering.<sup>20</sup> He must have noticed ʿAbdassalām's naiveté and come to the conclusion that it would not be difficult to control his protégé. However both of them were overambitious and the latter superficially came to the conclusion that ʿAbdalkarīm advocated no particular doctrine and was possibly deceived by his discreet manner. He may have believed that he would be able to persuade ʿAbdalkarīm to carry out his pan-Arab ideas.

What above all hastened to turn the apparent concord into fierce division was the issue of Arab unity. To weld the Arabs into one nation and bring them under one government had been only a year previously a vision of idealists, a vague popular feeling, a weapon in the arsenal of ambitious parties, or the cry of calculating merchants in search of a wider market.<sup>21</sup> One characteristic of the UAR was from the outset unmistakable: by the very principle of its being, it had an inherent tendency to reach out beyond its frontiers. The accession to the UAR of one or more of the neighbouring eastern Arab states was, from the standpoint of the Syrians very urgent, because it would have added to their role and given to the union a stronger and more authentic pan-Arab character. This is why the Iraqi branch of the inter-Arab-based *Baʿth* placed the question of unity with the UAR upon the order of the day.<sup>22</sup>

However, what the Iraqi *Baʿth* lacked in strength, it compensated for in vehemence of agitation. But ambition was not the only spur of the *Baʿth*; it was also impelled by the genuine zeal for the ideal of unity that animated its ranks. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif perceived in pan-Arabism his opportunity. At the same time he felt warmly for Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir. It is clear that ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif's enthusiasm for the UAR at that time and his devotion to the person of Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir were genuine, but it was equally clear that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim regarded his second-in-command's repeated public assertions of his beliefs as at best ill-advised, and at worst as simply disloyal.

For his part ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim did not consider that Iraq's salvation would be achieved by her joining the UAR and regarded ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif's convictions to that effect as threatening his own position as well as being downright imprudent.<sup>23</sup> For ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, although any unity scheme would mean deferring to Jamāl

<sup>20</sup> Khadduri, Majid: Republican Iraq, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> 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, Baʿthists and Free Officers. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1978, p. 815.

<sup>22</sup> Devlin, John F.: The Baʿth Party. A History from Its Origins to 1966. Stanford, Ca., Hoover Institution Press 1976, p. 149.

<sup>23</sup> Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship. London, New York, I.B. Tauris Publishers 1990, p. 59.

ʿAbdannāṣir as the senior partner, the prospect seems to have been infinitely more attractive than deferring to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and remaining outside the political framework that he fervently wanted Iraq to join. In 1958 pan-Arab ideology was identified with the role of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir as the leader of Arab unity, and there was no room for another leader of equal stature. Here it must be remembered that less than a month had elapsed since the Revolution and nothing, including of course ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s leadership, was yet firmly established; furthermore, ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif’s own ambitions were constantly encouraged by suggestions from a variety of sources that he was the rising star of the Iraqi Revolution, and that he might soon be in a position to kick ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim upstairs in the way that Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir had done to Muḥammad Najīb.<sup>24</sup>

The most serious episode took place in Syria five days after the coup. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, who was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior, paid a visit to Damascus at the head of a delegation to negotiate with Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir for his support in the event of a counterrevolutionary attack and appeared in public with Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir and the former Syrian president Shukrī al-Qūwatlī. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif also discussed the possibility of Iraq joining the UAR and reportedly referred to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim as the “Muḥammad Najīb” of the Iraqi revolution. This was the first of a series of meetings between Iraqis, Syrians and Egyptians, which were concerned with the planning of joint ventures and mutual cooperation in a number of fields, including defence, economic and financial matters, communication and education.<sup>25</sup> At this stage, the merger of Egypt and Syria into the United Arab Republic was less than six months old, and it seems most probable that these early exchanges were principally designed to receive Iraq into the revolutionary fold from which British tutelage had hitherto excluded her.

Ostensibly, the main grounds for the eventual showdown between the two were connected with what became the burning issue of whether or not Iraq should join with Egypt and Syria in the United Arab Republic. The clearest expression of the disunity at the top was the growing rift between the two leaders. Their policy differences soon led to a struggle for the leadership of the revolution, which was a struggle for supreme power as well as a clash of personality and ideals. Despite the fact that the coup had been a joint effort, ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif soon began to put himself in the limelight. In a widely publicized tour of the provinces, he made ill-considered speeches strongly advocating union with the UAR. He referred frequently to Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir, while scarcely mentioning ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim.<sup>26</sup> The rivalry of these two men was not simply personal, but became entangled with the long-unanswered question of the identity of Iraq, as a potential nation-state or as an administrative part of a larger Arab nation. They soon became identified in

<sup>24</sup> Dann, Uriel: *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*. London, Pall Mall and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 79 and 89.

<sup>25</sup> Muḥākamāt al-maḥkama al-ʿaskariya al-ʿulyā al-khāṣṣa. (Proceedings of the Special Supreme Military Court). Vol. V. Baghdad 1958, pp. 247 – 270.

<sup>26</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 159.



the public mind as exemplifying "left wing" (Iraqi nationalist and communist) and "right wing" (Arab nationalist) attitudes, and political alliances gradually crystallized around these two poles. They were therefore considerably more cautious and very much less "revolutionary" than many of their supporters in the streets, who were acclaiming the success of their movement with such enthusiasm.

In this respect, the existence of the UAR confronted the new rulers in Baghdad with an immediate test. 'Abdassalām 'Ārif was an admirer of Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir and seemed to share the Arab nationalist view that immediate adherence of Iraq to the UAR was both desirable in itself and necessary for the defence of the new regime. He was also aware that the slogan of "Arab unity" gave him a substantial following in the army and beyond.<sup>27</sup> It no doubt came as a shock to 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim to find the man he had most trusted should turn out to be his greatest potential rival with ideas repugnant to him. He was also an Arab nationalist, and was ready to establish close relations with other Arab countries and possibly even a federation with the UAR, but he would never have agreed to surrender Iraq's sovereign rights, as did Syria. To counter pan-Arab pressure, he stimulated the groups potentially opposed to Arab unity, and went so far as to flirt with left-wing groups in order to weaken right-wing groups. His decision to pursue this policy naturally affected the course of the Revolution, but he was in the main influenced by 'Abdassalām 'Ārif's challenge to his leadership.<sup>28</sup>

This challenge and the precipitous and untimely drive for unity forced him into action: the conversation in Damascus was soon reported to him, and he drew his own conclusions and began to make his plans. 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's patient and clever manipulation of affairs behind the scenes assured his success in the ensuing power struggle. His response to his rival's challenge was the first evidence of the political style that would mark his regime. The growing division brought him to the realisation that he would have to counter 'Abdassalām 'Ārif by a vigorous espousal of the anti-unity cause knowing that this will bring him even closer to the Communists. Thus on 7 August he encouraged the huge demonstration in favour of "federation" with the UAR organized by the ICP, and attempted, although without success, to bring 'Abdassalām 'Ārif into line.<sup>29</sup> The manifestation was sufficiently impressive to shake the *Ba'ṭh* and the likeminded nationalists badly.

The Arab nationalists (al-qawmīyūn) represented one of the main trends in political opinion in Iraq. They felt, that the essence of their political existence is their Arabdom (*'urūba*). Since 1955, their belief in Arab identity meant that they were drawn to Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir, the central figure of the Arab world, although by no means all of them were ready to carry their loyalty to the extreme conclusion of pressing for "full unity now" (*waḥda fawriya kāmila*) with the UAR.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq*, p. 92.

<sup>29</sup> Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*. London, New York, I.B. Tauris Publishers 1990, p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Dann, Uriel: *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*. London, Pall Mall and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 69.

Although Arab unity was a key concern of the nationalists and the *Ba'ath* – whose adherents in Iraq were very few in number at this stage – it is highly unlikely that the precise articulation of this notion into a concrete plan for the enlargement of the UAR to include Iraq had predated the July Revolution. There are no suggestions that such a plan had had any currency among the Free Officers, the creation of the UAR itself had been accidental, the brainchild of the Syrian *Ba'ath* rather than of Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir.<sup>31</sup> Hence the translation of these vague aspirations for unity into a concrete scheme for the enlargement of the UAR probably dates from 'Aflaq's visit to Baghdad at the end of July, and was eagerly seized upon by 'Abdassalām 'Ārif, to whom the idea was particularly attractive.

The personal aspects of the struggle for power must not obscure the genuine policy issues that were involved. The fragmentation of the opposition under the old regime played a role in the struggle. All elements in the opposition movement came to the fore to jockey for position, rapidly eroding the unity of the new regime and 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. 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim gradually began to make public appearances, he made speeches and aroused popular applause, stimulated by leaders opposed to the pan-Arab nationalists. He already received delegations from the provinces in July and August 1958, to which he made welcoming statements.<sup>32</sup>

The chief participants in the struggle for power in Iraq can easily be identified. The Arab nationalists, who favoured the ideal of pan-Arabism, continued the tradition of the *Independence party* but drew their inspiration primarily from the Egyptian revolution and often looked to Jamāl 'Abdunnāṣir for leadership. In the situation as it developed in Iraq after the revolution, their attitude towards 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim was soon tempered with coolness at best.<sup>33</sup> For most of the political leaders who called for immediate Union (though not, of course, for many of the rank and file), pan-Arabism and union were largely tactical notions, and 'Union' was far more a stick with which to beat the Communists – whom they could accuse of being traitors to the Arab nation – than a genuine political aim or option, as is evident from the total absence of any progress in this direction in the periods in which either the nationalists or the *Ba'ath* have actually held power.

Closely allied with the Arab nationalists and drawing on much of the same support was the *Arab Socialist Renaissance Party* (*Ba'ath*).<sup>34</sup> The major impetus for the *Ba'ath Party's* growth came after the 1958 coup, when it utilized a surge of Arab nationalist sentiment to organize and gain adherents. The *Ba'athists* shared

<sup>31</sup> Jankowski, James: *Nasser's Egypt, Arab Nationalism, and the United Arab Republic*. Boulder, Colorado, Lynne Rienner Publishers 2002, pp. 108 – 111.

<sup>32</sup> 'Alī, Muḥammad Kāzim: *Al-'Irāq fī 'ahd 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958 – 1963*. (Iraq in the Era of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim). Baghdad 1989, pp. 140 – 141.

<sup>33</sup> Dann, Uriel: *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*. London, Pall Mall and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 69.

<sup>34</sup> Devlin, John F.: *The Ba'ath Party. A History from Its Origins to 1966*. Stanford, Ca., Hoover Institution Press 1976, p. 150.

the goal of Arab unity with the Arab nationalists, but Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir was not their hero. They looked instead toward Syria, where the party had originated and where its firmest 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. If no sharp picture emerges of the party during these months, the reason is that in the mind of the public it was largely synonymous with the general movement for “unity now”. Like the Communists, the *Baʿth* leaders preferred to keep the details of its structure and their identity concealed, but unlike the Communists they made no calculated efforts to infiltrate the press and professional organizations.<sup>35</sup>

The leading group on the left was clearly the *Iraqi Communist Party (ICP)*, which surfaced again in the post-revolutionary euphoria. The Communists continued to make inroads among the dispossessed, the *Shīʿa*, the Kurds and the intelligentsia. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim appeared to be leaning toward the other main contender on the left, the *National Democratic Party*. Unfortunately, the party was no better organized than it had been in the past, and it soon split between those supporting and those opposing ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim.<sup>36</sup> With the gradual entrenchment of his leadership and the widespread propaganda to the effect that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was simply a tool of the Communists, the nationalist-*Nasserists* and the *Baʿth Party* gradually developed into the main focus of opposition to the Communists, in which they were assisted materially and morally by Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir and his supporters in Syria.<sup>37</sup>

From this it may be inferred that the *ICP*’s unenthusiastic reaction to the suggestions of immediate union with Syria and Egypt in 1958 was less a matter of principle than a reaction to their Syrian and Egyptian comrades’ unhappy experience of the practical workings of the UAR. In Syria, the *Baʿth* leaders Michel ʿAflaq and Jamāl al-Atāsī, who were nominally in alliance with the Syrian Communists, had produced an internal party document in 1956 that had emphasized the fundamental incompatibility between communist internationalism and their own way of thought, and expressed alarm at the effect that rising Soviet popularity was having on support for the communism in Syria.<sup>38</sup> This coincided with a period in which the Syrian *Baʿth* itself was disintegrating into a number of warring factions, and the leadership seems to have seized on the expedient of a constitutional union with Egypt as a sort of *deus ex machina*. Although the terms of the Union required the *Baʿth* to dissolve, the Party command assumed (wrongly, as things turned out) that their positions would be strengthened by the distribution of office to senior Party members in Syria, while the Union had the further advantage for the *Baʿth*

<sup>35</sup> Dann, Uriel: *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*. London, Pall Mall and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> ʿAlī, Muḥammad Kāzīm: *Al-ʿIrāq fī ʿahd ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958 – 1963*. (Iraq in the Era of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim). Baghdad 1989, p. 159.

<sup>37</sup> ʿAbdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḍwāʿ al-ḥarakah ash-shuyūṭiyya fī al-ʿIrāq*. Vol. II /1958 – 1963/, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> Abu Jaber, Kamal S.: *The Arab Baath Socialist Party*. Syracuse 1966, pp. 43 – 44.

that the Egyptian anti-communist laws would be introduced, forcing the *Syrian Communist Party* to dissolve itself as well.<sup>39</sup>

A merger with the UAR implied a sharper turn in the life of Iraq and the Near East than that involved in the Revolution of 14 July. Every force with a stake in a fragmented Arab people was, sooner or later, bound to resist it. As it was, the founding of the UAR had caused no little misgiving among the big powers with a footing in the area. The prospect of its expansion rendered them even more uneasy. Even if the Qāsim regime decided to maintain the existing social and political system – and the options remained open throughout 1958 and most of 1959 – there was still a wide variety of possible trajectories concerning land reform or the nationalization of oil and of industry.<sup>40</sup>

These were important issues that divided the population and particularly worried the religious conservatives and other influential sections of society that were becoming increasingly fearful of what they imagined or were told daily on Cairo Radio to be the pressures being exerted from the left. ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim gave reason to think that he was not against union, but against a headlong rush into it. By September 1958, however, no one could mistake that he had thrown his weight on the side of particularism and become the centre of its hopes, even if he went on asserting that he was “above trends and inclinations”.<sup>41</sup>

Thus an alliance emerged between those forces who feared that their interests or their way of life were being threatened by ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim and those who believed, or professed to believe, that the Communists were simply awaiting a suitable opportunity to take over and thus exclude them from power. That is why “union” developed into a rallying cry for opposition to the left, since for many, the prospect of Union with Egypt and Syria (itself fairly vague and distant) was a far lesser evil than the radical social and economic changes they feared the *ICP* might press ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim to introduce. Thus many of the vested interests that had not been destroyed in July 1958 gradually came to seek, and find, common cause with the *Ba‘thists* and pan-Arab nationalists, joining them in their opposition to Qāsim and the Communists.<sup>42</sup> The *NDP* seeking a guarantee of a free party life and other democratic liberties, rallied in effect to ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim. But the most powerful and, in the event, conclusive support for him came from the *ICP*. The possible union with the UAR caused certain uneasiness among the Communists: they had no illusion as to what a merger would portend for their party.<sup>43</sup>

Thus union was the symbol rather than the substance of the rift between the Communists and their opponents, and the fact that ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim’s personal predilections, because of his thin support among the officers, happened to coincide with the Communists’ more nuanced opposition to the practicalities of the

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<sup>39</sup> Olson, Robert W.: *The Ba‘th and Syria, 1947 to 1982. The Evolution of Ideology, Party and State*. Princeton, N.J., The Kingston Press, Inc. 1982, pp. 31 – 32.

<sup>40</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Layth ‘Abdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-‘Irāq*, pp. 300 – 305.

<sup>41</sup> Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 818.

<sup>42</sup> Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958*, p. 58.

<sup>43</sup> Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 827.

UAR was almost fortuitous. From this crucial weakness flowed ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s necessity of manoeuvring between the nationalists and the Communists, counterpoising one against the other, and harassing and patronizing them by turn, as circumstances dictated. His very survival depended upon his not allowing any of the two forces to become too strong or both to reach an accord.

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In August and early September, ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif continued to proclaim his support for Arab unity in the course of several provincial speaking tours in an attempt to whip up nationalist support for his own leadership. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim ignored his speechmaking, certain that it would alienate people, and at the same time began to encourage support for himself among the officers. Then, on 10 September, he succeeded in securing ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif’s dismissal as Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces.<sup>44</sup>

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. The four mentioned groups vied with each other for the dominant position in the state. Whereas the older opposition groups – mainly the *Independence Party* and the *NDP* – had been rooted in liberal traditions, the *Baʿth* and the Communists were both clandestine, highly organized groups, committed to a total monopoly of power by ruthless means if necessary.<sup>45</sup> With ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif gone, the situation of the Arab nationalists and the *Baʿthists* 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 ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. Qāsim’s increased reliance on the left was a response to this challenge. The struggle left scars: it generated a fear of chaos on the part of successive governments that soon ended any hope of returning to a democratic system. 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.

From then on things went from bad to worse; ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif refused to accept that he had lost this round and continued to voice his views. In September, after he had made another bid for leadership by reviving the idea of the RCC in a public speech, on 30 September, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim also dismissed him from his posts as deputy prime minister and minister of interior.<sup>46</sup> After relieving ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif from his posts, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim also dismissed a number of prominent Arab nationalists, including Dr Jābir ʿUmar, the Minister of Education, and demoted the secretary-general of the *Baʿth Party*, Fuʾād ar-Rikābī, from his post as Minister of Development to Minister of State. Brigadier Aḥmad Muḥammad Yaḥyā, a political moderate and a close friend of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s, was brought

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<sup>44</sup> Husayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Thawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawsil* 1959, pp. 210 – 212.

<sup>45</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 161.

<sup>46</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Layth ʿAbdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, p. 419.



in as Minister of Interior, and the other ministries were given to Muḥammad Ḥadīd and Hudayyib al-Ḥājj Ḥumūd in addition to the portfolios they already held.<sup>47</sup>

The fact that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's "victory" over ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, seemed to be so closely connected with the issue of Arab unity, meant that it affected most other prominent Arab nationalists in Iraq, and increased the sense of polarization between the various political groups. This accounts in considerable measure for the fanaticism and vehemence with which the struggle between them was to be waged in the years to come. Finally, after ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif's removal ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had no serious rival, and could become "sole leader" (*az-zaʿīm al-awḥad*), as he was known after October 1958.<sup>48</sup>

After ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif was relieved of his political functions, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim attempted to remove him from the country by offering him an appointment as ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany. At first ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif indignantly refused to take up the post, so on 11 October, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim invited his rival to his office in the Ministry of Defence in a final attempt to persuade him to leave. The meeting took place in the presence of Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ al-ʿAbdī, Chief of staff and several other officers and lasted all day as the clash between the two men continued. Late in the afternoon, ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif removed his pistol from his belt. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim maintained that he was going to assassinate him, but ʿĀrif said that he was going to commit suicide. The outcome of the encounter was that ʿĀrif had to comply and agreed to leave for Bonn temporarily.<sup>49</sup>

ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif arrived in Vienna on 12 October, but refused to go to Bonn. He stayed several days in Europe and then returned secretly to Baghdad on 4 November, amidst rumours of an attempted coup against the regime. This time ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim lost his patience. On 5 November, ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif was arrested on charges of attempting to assassinate the leader and of trying to overthrow the government. He was kept over a month in detention before he was delivered to the Maḥdāwī court on 27 December 1958 and tried in camera. Thus began the trial that was to reveal to the world many of the secrets of the revolution. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif denied all charges, and insisted that he was devoted to the leader and loyal to the principles of the revolution.<sup>50</sup>

On 5 February 1959 the court condemned him to death and dismissed him from the armed forces. The sentence was later reprieved to life imprisonment on the recommendation of the court. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim may have intended to use the sentence as a threat to the convicted and his followers. This temporarily eliminated ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, but failed to neutralize those who shared his views about the need for union with the UAR. He remained in prison the next three years until he was acquitted in autumn 1961, after the secession of Syria from the UAR.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ḥusayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Thawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawsil* 1959, pp. 301 – 348.

<sup>48</sup> Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958*, p. 60.

<sup>49</sup> Dann, Uriel: *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*, p. 83.

<sup>50</sup> Muḥākamāt al-maḥkama al-ʿaskariyya al-ʿulyā al-khāṣṣa. (Proceedings of the Special Supreme Military Court). Vol I. Baghdad 1958, pp. 8 – 20.

<sup>51</sup> Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq*, p. 98.

‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif’s fall was important for a number of reasons. In the first place the commutation of his death sentence was an expression of ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim’s belief that his former deputy was easily led rather than fundamentally wicked, and of course ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif’s survival meant that he was there to rally opposition elements around himself in ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim’s later years. ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, however, was more sympathetic to the views of the *NDP* and to those who believed that domestic social reform and the building of an Iraqi national community should precede serious engagement with the Arab world.<sup>52</sup> He had support for his views among all those who regarded Arab unity schemes with suspicion – a suspicion openly voiced among the Kurds and the *Shī‘a* and shared by the communists, who were wary of Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir and the UAR. Consequently, in 1958 ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif and the enthusiasts for union were held in check by those who wanted to use the Iraqi state as the means of advancing their own ideas of reform. ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim knew of ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif’s ambitions – highlighted by ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif’s attempt to create a popular following in a series of provincial tours which aroused the peasants’ expectations and led to a number of uprisings against landlords during the late summer months.<sup>53</sup>

Huge demonstrations in support of ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim followed ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif’s arrest, with bloody clashes between ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim’s supporters, now usually identified as “Communists”, and the nationalists and their supporters in various parts of the country. The next months saw a hardening of the positions of what now developed into two distinct sides, the Communists and their sympathizers and the nationalists and theirs, although the latter group also included individuals who were motivated more by feelings of solidarity against the Communists rather than by any fervent desire for Arab unity. This “opposition” embraced a multiplicity of political and socio-economic groups, ranging from members of the *ancien régime* who feared what ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his associates might have in store for them, to members of the Muslim Brethren and other religious groups including the *Shī‘ī* ‘ulamā’ as well as *Nasserists* and *Ba‘thists*.<sup>54</sup>

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As far as the reform programme of the new regime was concerned, among its first targets were the vast landed estates of the largest landowners (numbering fewer than 3,000 people, they nevertheless owned over half of Iraq’s cultivable land) and distributing them to the landless peasants or to the smaller and middling landowners. In practice, the relatively high limits set on individual landholdings and the choice given to the landlords concerning the land they could retain, as well as the payment of compensation, lessened the measure’s radical impact. Equally, the absence of appropriate state machinery, as well as the continuing

<sup>52</sup> ‘Alī, Muḥammad Kāzīm: *Al-‘Irāq fī ‘ahd ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, 1958 – 1963, p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 153.

<sup>54</sup> Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, pp. 829 – 830.

difficulty of establishing rightful ownership claims in many parts of Iraq, meant that by 1963 only about a quarter of the great estates had been sequestered and of these less than half had been redistributed. Furthermore, in many areas, redistribution echoed land reform schemes of the Ottoman and monarchical periods in that the prime beneficiaries were those who were best placed to exploit the prevailing regime, as existing small and middling landowners with capital or as friends and clients of the new ruling elite. The landless peasants, as ever, received little.<sup>55</sup> In the second half of 1958, the land reform legislation seemed to promise a more radical future, tempting peasants in 'Amara and elsewhere to occupy the lands of their absentee landlords. This happened more rarely than might have been expected. However, for the large landlords, whether tribal *shaykhs* or urban landowners, these events and the threat of sequestration served notice that their days of power and privilege were numbered.<sup>56</sup>

The elimination of 'Abdassalām 'Ārif did not improve matters, as 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim had expected, since the ideas he advocated were shared by other high ranking army officers. Factionalism in the army was accentuated by rivalry among ideological groups vying for power and stimulated by the autocratic rule, subordinating national to personal interests. But no other officer emerged as a leader of the opposition. This lack of leadership prompted officers to approach civilians for guidance. Rashīd 'Ālī al-Kaylānī, the hero of the national uprising of 1941, left Cairo for Damascus immediately after the Revolution and tried from there to obtain permission to return to his homeland. As soon as he got the permission, he returned to Baghdad where he was received with acclamation by a crowd of friends and admirers. Even 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim paid a personal visit to welcome him home.<sup>57</sup>

For a time, after the decline of 'Abdassalām 'Ārif's star had become obvious to many of his potential supporters, it seemed possible that the mantle of the nationalist leadership might fall upon the veteran politician Rashīd 'Ālī al-Kaylānī, who had returned to Baghdad early in October 1958 at the age of sixty-six after seventeen years of exile in Germany, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Syria. Although 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim had been anxious to invite this legendary figure back to Baghdad, the substance of the quarrel with 'Abdassalām 'Ārif and the fact that Rashīd 'Ālī al-Kaylānī was an avowed pan-Arabist meant that his presence became something of an embarrassment. In the circumstances 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim did not, as Rashīd 'Ālī al-Kaylānī almost certainly expected, offer him the presidency of the Republic or a post in government, much to his evident chagrin.<sup>58</sup>

The leaders of the Revolution believed that he was now too old and that his political outlook belonged to the old regime, despite the fact that he had opposed it. The revolutionary regime was the responsibility of the new generation. They

<sup>55</sup> Penrose, Edith & Penrose, E. F.: Iraq: International Relations and National Development. London, Benn 1978, pp. 240 – 247.

<sup>56</sup> Tripp, Charles: A History of Iraq. Cambridge University Press 2000, pp. 155 – 156.

<sup>57</sup> Khadduri, Majid: Republican Iraq, p. 101.

<sup>58</sup> Dann, Uriel: Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963, p. 128.

believed that they had done their duty by receiving him with full honour and compensating him for the material losses he suffered by restoring him his confiscated property.<sup>59</sup> Disappointed at his neglect by the new government following his return to Iraq, Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, in contact with some disgruntled pan-Arab Free Officers and tribal *shaykhs* worried by the prospect of expropriation, became involved in a conspiracy.

So the internal struggle continued under the banner of an unlikely candidate, Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, who had spent the latter part of his exile in Cairo, where he had been in touch with Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir. His home soon became a gathering place for the two groups that had previously supported him – the Arab nationalists in the army and the tribal leaders. The former now included *Baʿthists* as well as officers who had supported ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif. The tribal leaders were less interested in nationalism than in preventing the Communist influence and land reform.<sup>60</sup> Whether out of pique at what he interpreted as ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's snub, or out of genuine conviction of the error of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's ways, Rashīd ʿĀlī set about planning the sort of coup that he had organized to bring down governments in the 1930s, an utterly unrealistic scheme to overthrow ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim by raising a rebellion among the Middle Euphrates tribes. This plot, planned for early December, quickly ended in failure, as the conspirators were amateurish in the extreme and bragged of their intentions to members of the secret police.<sup>61</sup>

News reached ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim that this group was planning a coup for 9 December, and he devised a counterplot to smoke out his enemies. Rashīd ʿĀlī's nephew and one of his agents were implicated by two of Qāsim's informers, and they were arrested on 9 December and brought to trial together with Rashīd ʿĀlī. In the event, the plot was discovered. Rashīd ʿĀlī was set free for lack of evidence; the other two, who felt unjustly accused of a crime for which Rashīd ʿĀlī had gone free, asked for a second hearing. This time more information was revealed, including testimony that weapons and money had been received from the UAR and Rashīd ʿĀlī had been working for a union with Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir. Rashīd ʿĀlī was sentenced to death but never executed (later commuted to a term of imprisonment).<sup>62</sup> Whatever Rashīd ʿĀlī's involvement, the real threat came from the nationalist army officers.

The arrest and trial of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, coinciding with the trial of ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif (who was also sentenced to death, but also reprieved), made clear the rift between the pan-Arabists and ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. 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 *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

<sup>59</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Layth ʿAbdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 427 – 428.

<sup>60</sup> Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 162.

<sup>61</sup> Az-Zubaydī, Layth ʿAbdalḥasan: *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 428 – 429.

<sup>62</sup> Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*, p. 832.

the streets and for the opportunity to present their case before the leader in a curious mixture of adulation and overt pressure. Outside the government, the Communists moved to take control. They sent cables to the prime minister urging death for the traitors, and addressing him as, the "Sole Leader" (az-zaʿīm al-awḥad).<sup>63</sup> They infiltrated key organizations, including the broadcasting station, the press, and the proliferating professional associations. The officer corps remained a nationalist stronghold, although the Communists made inroads there as well. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim himself was not slow to exploit this, sponsoring marches and factions which could be relied upon. Counter-demonstrations were organized and the violence that sometimes resulted provided a vivid form of street theatre, heightening the atmosphere of crisis.<sup>64</sup>

More immediately, the arrest of ʿĀrif had followed a number of moves against *Baʿthists* and Arab nationalists in the administration, signalling the importance of the "Iraq first" line under Qāsim's leadership. This sentence, together with mounting discontent on the part of Arab nationalists, finally induced the nationalist politicians in the cabinet to resign. In February 1959, *Baʿthist* Fuʾād ar-Rikābī; Ṣiddīq Shanshal, the representative of the *Independence Party*; nationalists Nājī Ṭālib and Abdaljabbar Jūmard; and Kurdish ministers Bābā Alī and Ṣāliḥ Maḥmūd left in a bloc. Their place was quickly filled by leftists supported by Qāsim, including *NDP* member Ḥusayn Jamīl.<sup>65</sup>

More ominous, perhaps, than the plot itself, was the fact that several senior Free Officers, including Ṭāhir Yaḥyā, Rifʿat al-Ḥājī Sirrī, Nāẓim at-Ṭabaqchalī, ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf and ʿAbdalʿazīz al-ʿUqaylī, were known to be at least privy to Rashīd ʿĀlī's plans, if not actually involved in them in some way. These officers were to form the nucleus of a far more serious revolt in Mosul in March 1959, in which, as in Rashīd ʿĀlī's attempted coup, the UAR was to be heavily involved. Perhaps the most significant feature of the earlier incident, coming as it did so soon after the Revolution, was the feeling of uncertainty and tension that it created, contributing to the general sense of insecurity and impermanence surrounding the government of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim.<sup>66</sup>

ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim hoped to build a basis of support among the diverse communities of Iraq but, like many autocrats, he feared any institutional solidity that might eventually call him to account. Thus he helped to reproduce the ambiguity of the Iraqi state itself, divided between the institutional forms of the public state and the less visible, but more important personal links of patronage and mutual obligation that decided where power lay and who should have access to resources. On the Kurdish question, for instance, the new constitution recognized the bi-national character of the state – but notoriously failed to institutionalize this unprecedented declaration. In October 1958 the *Kurdistan Democratic Party* (KDP)

<sup>63</sup> ʿAbdalkarīm, Samīr: Aḍwāʾ al-ā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyūʿiyya fī al-ʿIrāq. Vol. II /1958 – 1963/, pp. 18 – 21.

<sup>64</sup> Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 156.

<sup>65</sup> Ḥusayn, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: Thawrat ash-Shawwāf fī al-Mawsil 1959, pp. 301 – 348.

<sup>66</sup> Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958*, p. 62.



and the *ICP* had reached a compromise on their ideological conflict: the *KDP* abandoned its claim to an independent Kurdistan in return for *ICP* endorsement of administrative autonomy. ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim decided that Mulla Muṣṭafā Barzānī was potentially a powerful counterweight to the Arab nationalists and that there was unlikely to be any love lost between them. So he named him chairman of the *KDP*, gave him one of Nūrī as-Sa‘īd’s old residences, a car and a handsome monthly stipend.<sup>67</sup> It suited Muṣṭafā Barzānī to co-operate with ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, since he had been publicly confirmed by him as leader of the Kurds. He realized that Ibrāhīm Aḥmad’s (his deputy in the *KDP* during his exile) flirtation with Arab nationalists was also dangerous for relations with ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim. He had little difficulty in finding allies in the Politburo to help oust Ibrāhīm Aḥmad and replace him with the pro-communist Ḥamza ‘Abdallāh in January 1959.<sup>68</sup> This helped the government of ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim against the Arab nationalists, but he had no intention of granting the Kurds the institutional autonomy that would have satisfied the *KDP*.

A similar ambiguity characterized Qāsim’s relations with the Iraqi communists whom he also cultivated as a counterbalance to his Arab nationalist opponents. The *ICP*, under Ḥusayn ar-Rāḍī, emerged in 1958 as the best-organized party in the country, with a clear structure and solid foundations in Iraqi urban society, among the peasantry of the south, as well as in the northern Kurdish region.<sup>69</sup> For ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, the *ICP* was a useful ally precisely because of its capacity to organize nationally in areas of Iraqi society largely untouched by other political organizations, even if, ideologically, he was closer to the *NDP*.

In reality, to be a communist or communist sympathiser in Iraq at that time, as in previous decades, did not necessarily mean strict adherence to the doctrine of Marxism-Leninism. When combined with tactical considerations, this allowed and sometimes impelled the *ICP* to reach accommodation with other political forces. Its focus on the evils of social injustice, economic exploitation and questions of wages and conditions of work won the *ICP* a wide basis of support and made it the leading party of social reform. In this context, the *ICP* also emerged as one of the chief advocates of greater democracy in Iraq. However, like other advocates of democracy, the communists had to face the question of how to create the conditions of equitable representation in an inequitable society. Like others before and since, the *ICP* believed that in the short term only the army had the power to keep in check the forces of established social and economic privilege prior to their dismantling. Consequently, despite its weak representation in the officer corps, it had backed the Free Officers.

With the new freedoms after July 1958 the *ICP* built up its civilian following, believing in the importance of control of the streets to give the impression of mass support and to deter further use of military force. As the balance of Iraqi society

<sup>67</sup> Ad-Durra, Maḥmūd: *Al-Qaḍīya al-kurdiya*. (The Kurdish Question). Beirut 1966, p. 280.

<sup>68</sup> McDowall, David: *A Modern History of the Kurds*. London, I. B. Tauris 1996, p. 304.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Abdalkarīm, Samīr: *Aḍwā’ ‘alā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyū‘īya fī al-‘Irāq*. Vol. II /1958 – 1963/, pp. 11 – 12.

had shifted towards the towns, so the streets of the major cities were becoming correspondingly important as sites for public action and thus, for forms of symbolic representation.<sup>70</sup> However, the see-sawing ambiguity of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's actual relations with the Communists should not be forgotten; it was not until the end of January 1959 that the Communists were permitted to publish their own newspaper, *Ittiḥād ash-shaʿb*, although some other newspapers had adopted a generally pro-Communist line over the previous months. More significantly, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim could still not be persuaded to appoint any *ICP* representative to a sensitive executive or ministerial position.<sup>71</sup>

The next move of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was to assert his control in the government by dropping the members who were either identified as nationalists or failed to become subservient to him. He accepted the resignations of six members of his cabinet and formed a new government on 7 February 1959. The new cabinet, though formally non-partisan, included ministers sympathetic to left-wing groups in order to counterbalance the initial ascendancy of the pan-Arabs. However, factions in the army meant the gravest danger with which the regime had to cope. The next challenge to the regime was the counter-revolutionary movement led by Colonel ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf in Mosul in March 1959.

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<sup>70</sup> Qasim, ʿAbdalkarīm: *Mabādiʾ thawrat 14 tammūz fi khuṭab az-zaʿīm*. (The Principles of the 14 July Revolution in the Speeches of the Leader). Baghdad 1958 and 1959.

<sup>71</sup> Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958*, p. 61.