

THE FREE OFFICERS' MOVEMENT AND THE 1958 REVOLUTION IN IRAQ

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The ruling elite of the old regime in Iraq had been too much preoccupied with the problem of achieving independence from foreign control to pay attention to social reforms. After formal independence, the rulers argued that reforms required the capital and technical know-how which Iraq lacked. The new generation soon discovered that even when the capital became available, social conditions were not likely to improve in a way that would enable them to play their role in public affairs. Such devices as strikes and street demonstrations were quickly suppressed by the means at the disposal of those who controlled the state. Nothing short of a violent uprising in which the army participated would bring about a change in rulers, and this was accomplished by the Revolution of 1958. The military coup that finally overthrew the monarchy and inaugurated a new era in Iraqi history succeeded more because of luck and audacity than as 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.

The Iraqi revolution, which put Iraq on the map of the Arab world among "progressive" rather than traditional countries, was generated by internal forces. These were inherent in the structure of the society and state, since no revolutionary movement can possibly be inspired by external pressures unless there is an internal readiness for it. The external forces, especially the upsurge of Arab nationalism coinciding with Western defence plans considered contrary to Arab interests, inflamed young nationalists to agitate against Western imperialism and call for Arab unity. These pressures were taken by many to have generated the July revolution, but in reality they were contingent factors speeding up a revolutionary movement that had already been in the making.¹

The shock of the Suez crisis had sharpened up the social stirrings in Iraq. There had been what is called a "revolutionary situation" for several years past. There

¹ Khadduri, Majid: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*. London, New York, Toronto, Oxford University Press 1969, p. 11.

could be no doubt that the development works had helped to subdue reactions to the crisis, but only in a strictly limited way. It was noticeable that disturbances and riots had occurred mainly in the provinces, not in Baghdad and there was a growing undercurrent of serious discontent. The Iraqi Prime Minister and strongman of the monarchy, Nūrī as-Saʿīd, was so deeply committed to collaboration with the British government and therefore so completely compromised by their apparent support for Israel, that he could make no headway. For the British he was indispensable, although they were aware that he was getting old, but in the case he would fall out of office, his successor might stand hard on neutralism or could lean towards the USSR. On the other hand the British officials did not support Nūrī as-Saʿīd in the sensitive question of Palestine: they readily condemned Arab opposition to Zionism, but never condemned the Zionist expansionism. When Britain invaded Egypt in collusion with Israel, the last bit of basis for Nūrī as-Saʿīd's position was undermined. He had got Iraq into difficulties by his collaboration with Anthony Eden, he had to get Iraq out of it if he could. The opposition offered him support until the withdrawal of the foreign troops from Egypt. With this understanding between Nūrī as-Saʿīd and the opposition, the danger of an unknown revolutionary taking over began to recede.²

The revolutions in all Arab countries may be regarded in part as a vindication of nationalist reaction against the fragmentations of the Arab world no less than a desire to overthrow ruling oligarchies, although the young revolutionary leaders found it exceedingly difficult to unite Arab lands after they achieved power.³ The formation of the United Arab Republic in February 1958, uniting Syria and Egypt, represented a defeat for the pro-Iraqi party in Syrian politics and brought the influence of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir to the very borders of Iraq. Nūrī as-Saʿīd, whose foreign policy had long been identified with British policy, appeared in Arab eyes not only to have been lukewarm to Arab unity but also, under the influence of pan-Arab agitation, to have allied Iraq with imperialism in order to frustrate nationalist aspirations which Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir was just beginning to realize. His open hostility to Nūrī as-Saʿīd and to the monarchy made the threat explicit.

The establishment of the United Arab Republic (UAR), the nucleus of a pan-Arab union, produced the highest pitch of nationalist excitement in 1958, and pan-Arabs in other Arab countries, especially in Iraq and Jordan, began to agitate to join the union. Nūrī as-Saʿīd's answer was to initiate talks with Jordan, hoping thereby to form a defensive alliance against the UAR and all that it seemed to represent at the time in the Arab world.⁴ This resulted in the hasty move of formation of a federation, composed of Iraq and Jordan, with the possibility of Kuwait's future inclusion left open. The setting up of the Arab Union by Iraqi and Jordanian rulers fell short of pan-Arab expectations because they failed to join the UAR. Attempts to overthrow the old regime in Iraq by popular uprising failed, and the

² Ionides, Michael: *Divide and Lose. The Arab Revolt of 1955 – 1958*. London, Geoffrey Bless 1960, p. 186.

³ Khadduri, Republican Iraq. *A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 14.

⁴ Birdwood, Lord: *Nuri as-Said. A Study in Arab Leadership*. London, Cassell 1959, p. 254.

failure of civilian leaders to carry out a revolution provoked the army officers to intervene and carry out the July revolution.

Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that in March 1958 ʿAbdalwahhāb Mirjān offered his resignation, opening the way for Nūrī as-Saʿīd's assumption of the premiership. In this, the last of Nūrī as-Saʿīd's cabinets,⁵ it was noticeable that he created a more than ordinarily equitable balance between the diverse communities of Iraq. Not only did it contain a good balance of *Sunnī* and *Shīʿī* members, but Nūrī as-Saʿīd was also careful to appoint two Kurdish ministers, aware as he was of *Shīʿī* and Kurdish sensitivity to Arab unity schemes. Parliament was dissolved and elections were held in May, producing a parliament that passed constitutional amendments and ratified the act of union between Iraq and Jordan. Under these amendments, the Iraqi government was responsible for everything except defence and foreign affairs. These would be the responsibility of the government of the Arab Union. Nūrī as-Saʿīd thereupon resigned as prime minister of Iraq and was appointed prime minister of the Arab Union. In his place, Aḥmad Mukhtār Bābān was asked to form a new Iraqi government, becoming the first Kurd to do so.⁶

With the installation of Nūrī as-Saʿīd and his associates as the new government of the Arab Union, a different process was unfolding in the armed forces. 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. Due to internal disagreements and jealousies among the Free Officers, as the revolutionary movement among the military came to be called, 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.⁷

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The military had remained aloof from politics in the early post-war years, mainly because of the removal of the Rashīd ʿAlī al-Kaylānī supporters during the war and the presence of a British military mission until 1948, but trouble in the officer corps began again in 1952. That year's riots against the regime played a role in crystallizing discontent among the officers, but what really set them thinking about a coup was the successful military revolt on the Nile. As in 1941, the focus of discontent was the regime's foreign policy. All of the parties in the *United National Front* (al-Jabha al-waṭaniya al-muttaḥida) had long cultivated links with the armed forces, having sympathizers or members in the officer corps, as well as in non-commissioned ranks.⁸ Some, such as the IPC, had formed distinct organiza-

⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, ʿAbdarrazzāq: *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*. (The History of Iraqi Cabinets). Baghdad 1988, p. 208.

⁶ Al-Ḥasanī, ʿAbdarrazzāq: *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*, p. 243.

⁷ Marr, Phebe: *The Modern History of Iraq*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press 1985, p. 153.

⁸ Az-Zubaydī, Layt ʿAbdalḥasan: *Ṭawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1979, p. 99.

tions for their military members. However, the activities of these officers were uncoordinated and it was clear that other officers were themselves organizing, independently of the political parties. The original organizational structure of the Free Officers cannot be traced with any precision before 1956, although a number of discontented officers had been meeting secretly since 1952. The movement, if it can be so described at this stage, attracted increasing numbers of adherents after the accession of Iraq to the *Baghdad Pact* in 1955.

The first revolutionary cell in the officer corps was organized in the autumn of 1952 by Major Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī, a hero of the 1948 Palestine war.⁹ By 1954 his activities had spawned a number of small cells, independent of one another and lacking any central organization. Positive neutrality had acquired many adherents in the army since the start of the Arab cold war, and officers and civilians alike had been increasingly impressed with what the Egyptian Prime Minister Jamāl 'Abdannāṣir had achieved through nonalignment. These sentiments were reinforced during 1955 and 1956 by the conclusion of the *Baghdad Pact*, Radio Cairo's propaganda war (which had a widespread impact on the barracks), and above all, by the Suez crisis of 1956.

In the summer of 1956 news of the secret organization reached higher military authorities. Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī and three members of his group¹⁰ met in a house in the Baghdad suburb of al-Kāzimīya to discuss the affairs of their organization. Intelligence reached the ear of Lt. General (al-farīq) Rafīq 'Ārif, Chief of the General Staff, who upon investigation learnt the names of those who had met. Believing that harsh measures might alienate the loyalty of young officers, General Rafīq 'Ārif contented himself by merely transferring Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī as a recruitment officer to Qal'at Ṣāliḥ, a town on the Tigris downstream. This demotion to a position regarded as lower in rank was intended to dissuade Rif'at from participating in further underground activities. Muḥyiddīn 'Abdalḥamīd became a teacher at the Military Academy and of the remaining two, Ṣāliḥ 'Abdalmajīd as-Sāmarrā'ī was sent as Military Attaché to Amman and Ismā'īl al-'Ārif as Military Attaché to Washington. Why Rafīq 'Ārif did not take more drastic measures must remain a matter of speculation. It is possible that he did not want to alienate the younger officers from the regime entirely or to repeat the weakening of the officer corps that had followed the Rashīd 'Ālī al-Kaylānī affair. His action did break up the movement temporarily and dispersed its leaders.¹¹

⁹ The principal group included in addition to Major Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī, Staff Lieutenant Colonel Muḥyiddīn 'Abdalḥamīd, Captain Khalīl Ibrāhīm Ḥusayn, Lt. Colonel Ṣāliḥ 'Abdalmajīd as-Sāmarrā'ī, Staff Lt. Colonel Ismā'īl al-'Ārif, Major Shakīb al-Faḍlī, Colonel 'Alī Aḥmad Fu'ād, Major Waṣfī Ṭāhir, Lt. Colonel 'Abdalwahhāb al-Amīn, Lt. Colonel Rajab 'Abdalmajīd, Captain Muḥammad Marhūn, Major Nu'mān Māhir. Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-'Irāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1983, pp. 298 – 301. In: Ḡālib, Ṣābiḥ 'Alī, Staff Colonel: *Qisṣat thawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāṭ al-aḥrār*. (The Story of the 14th July Revolution and the Free Officers). Beirut 1968, p. 12.

¹⁰ These were: 'Abdalwahhāb al-Amīn, Ismā'īl al-'Ārif, Ṣāliḥ 'Abdalmajīd as-Sāmarrā'ī. In: Ḡālib, *Qisṣat thawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāṭ al-aḥrār*, p. 14.

¹¹ Kinna, Khalīl: *Al-'Irāq, amsuhu wa gaduhu*. (Iraq, Its Past and Its Future). Beirut 1966, pp. 301–302.

The exposure of the group of Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī after the meeting in al-Kāzimīya had far-reaching effects. It not only brought the movement to standstill for a while, because of loss of confidence, worries and uncertainty of some officers,¹² but more important, it dispersed some of its members and discouraged others from joining it. It also transferred the leadership of the movement to other hands, a change which caused a shift in emphasis from one set of principles to another. However, it may have had a compensating effect in warning the Free Officers against complacency and in underlining the need to screen those they sought to recruit for underground work more carefully.¹³

However, nothing was proven, so the movement calling itself the Free Officers had revived. Under the impact of the Suez crisis it continued its activities in December of 1956 leading a large number of officers to adhere to the organization.¹⁴ Several new groups were formed in short period of time and this, in turn, made necessary a more systematic organization of the officers themselves. A number of these secret groups or cells which existed in one or another part of the country and helped to disseminate revolutionary ideas, were organized either before or after the dissolution of the group of Rif'at al-Ḥājj Sirrī. Most of these groups eventually coalesced into the Baghdad Organization, headed by Staff Colonel Muḥyiddīn 'Abdalḥamīd and they decided to set up a kind of executive committee.

Nūrī as-Sa'īd was either unaware of these developments or had heard too faint an echo to take them seriously. Consequently, having successfully managed the crisis over Suez in 1956, he felt confident enough to open up the political system to some degree. Martial law was lifted and there were indications that party activity would be allowed once again, although under a licensing system which would vet the programmes and control the numbers of the parties concerned. With the immediate crisis over, Nūrī as-Sa'īd decided to resign the premiership in June 1957,¹⁵ provoked, as so often, by dissent among his cabinet colleagues, who had focused on the relatively autonomous – and thus resented – status of the Development Board.

The king asked 'Alī Jawdat al-Ayyūbī to form a new government and to oversee elections to inaugurate the new era of more open political activity. In the event, the elections did not take place. 'Alī Jawdat al-Ayyūbī was forced to resign when he fell out with the crown prince by proposing alignment with Egypt. He was replaced as prime minister in December 1957 by 'Abdalwahhāb Mirjān, a *Shī'ī* landowner and protégé of Nūrī as-Sa'īd, whose influence was to be paramount in the new administration.¹⁶ This was all the more important since developments in the Middle East during the coming months threatened much that Nūrī as-Sa'īd had been trying to achieve.

¹² Farḥān, 'Abdalkarīm: *Tawrat 14 tammūz fī al-ʿIrāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July in Iraq). Beirut 1978, p. 47.

¹³ Khadduri, Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics Since the Revolution of 1958, p. 22.

¹⁴ Az-Zubaydī, Layṭ 'Abdalḥasan: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*. (The Revolution of 14th July 1958 in Iraq). Baghdad 1979, p. 135.

¹⁵ Al-Ḥasanī, 'Abdarrazzāq: *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya*, pp. 140–141.

¹⁶ Birdwood, Lord: Nuri as-Said. A Study in Arab Leadership. London, p. 260.

The group of eight officers met in December 1956 in Baghdad suburb of al-Aẓamīya in the house of pensioned air force Major Muḥammad as-Sabʿ and formed the nucleus of a so called *Supreme Committee* (Al-lajna al-ʿulyā), composed of ten officers from the rank of colonel to that of major.¹⁷ Three of the nominated officers were from the original group of Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī, but Rifʿat himself and ʿAbdalwahhāb al-Amīn could not attend the meeting.¹⁸ Staff Colonel Muḥyiddīn ʿAbdalḥamīd was elected chairman of the *Supreme Committee* and Colonel Rajab ʿAbdalmajīd became secretary of this organization. Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī declined the honour to be a member of the *Supreme Committee* and continued his political activities separately.¹⁹

In December 1956 a *Supreme Committee* of the Free Officers was formed, consisting of Muḥyiddīn ʿAbdalḥamīd, Nājī Ṭālib, ʿAbdalwahhāb al-Amīn, Muḥsin Ḥusayn al-Ḥabīb, Ṭāhir Yaḥyā, Rajab ʿAbdalmajīd, ʿAbdalkarīm Farḥān, Waṣfī Ṭāhir, Šālīḥ ʿAlī Ġālib and Muḥammad Sabʿ, all of whom were army or air force officers of the rank of major and above. This committee functioned as the executive and planning arm of the Free Officers, but there was apparently little cohesion of aims and policy among its members. There was considerable disagreement on the timing and tactics of the coup²⁰ though all seemed to have agreed on the overthrow of the regime, the establishment of a republic, and a trial of the crown prince and Nūrī as-Saʿīd. Most did not wish to kill the young king, but this decision was taken out of their hands by actual events. The committee discussed what was to take the place of the old regime, but no consensus appears to have emerged on particulars. As with most clandestine groups, agreement on what was to be discarded was easier than agreement on a substitute. It was understood that the central organization would function as a revolutionary command council (RCC) on the Egyptian model until a more democratic form of government could emerge, and that a sovereign council would be formed.²¹

Sub-committees were then formed to study the possibility of carrying out a *coup d'état*. As might have been expected from any grouping of army officers at the time, the Free Officers were overwhelmingly Arab and *sunnī* and most of the members of the *Supreme Committee* were men in their forties who had graduated from the Iraqi Military Academy in the late 1930s. Other than dislike of the *status quo* and their resentment of "imperialism", they had few political principles com-

¹⁷ They were: Staff Colonel Muḥyiddīn ʿAbdalḥamīd, senior lecturer in the Military Academy; Staff Colonel Nājī Ṭālib, director of military training; Staff Colonel Muḥsin Ḥusayn al-Ḥabīb, commander of a battalion of heavy artillery; Staff Colonel ʿAbdalwahhāb al-Amīn, director of the first operational branch in the Defence Ministry; Lt. Colonel Engineer Rajab ʿAbdalmajīd, commander of the meteorological school; Staff Lt. Colonel ʿAbdalkarīm Farḥān, staff officer in the Defence Ministry; Staff Lt. Colonel Šabīḥ ʿAlī Ġālib, staff officer in the Defence Ministry; Lt. Colonel Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī, officer of engineers corps; Lt. Colonel Waṣfī Ṭāhir, retired officer; air force Major Muḥammad as-Sabʿ, retired officer.

¹⁸ Az-Zubaydī, Layḥ ʿAbdalḥasan: Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq, p. 135.

¹⁹ Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq, p. 310.

²⁰ Ġālib, Qīṣṣat tawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāt al-aḥrār, p. 25.

²¹ Ġālib, Qīṣṣat tawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāt al-aḥrār, p. 28.

mon. Owing to their different political outlook, the Free Officers could be divided into four groupings: one headed by Muḥyiddīn ʿAbdalḥamīd were apparently influenced by the liberal democratic programme of the *National Democratic Party*; the second, headed by ʿAbdalwahhāb al-Amīn, whose followers advocated pan-Arab ideas, although ʿAbdalwahhāb himself was not a defender of this orientation; the third led by Nājī Ṭālib and Rajab ʿAbdalmajīd also advocated Arab unity; and the fourth headed by Waṣfī Ṭāhir was influenced by the *Communists*.²²

At this stage the *Supreme Committee* did not include the two men who were eventually to emerge as the prime movers of the group, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, both of whom were stationed in Jordan. However, Qāsim and ʿĀrif were members of another group of Free Officers, who included ʿĀrif's brother ʿAbdarrahmān, Fuʿād ʿĀrif (not a relation), Nāẓim aṭ-Ṭabaqchalī, ʿAbdalʿazīz al-Uqaylī and Khalīl Saʿīd. The *Supreme Committee* decided that the most important consideration in planning a coup was to ensure that the commanders of the main military units were either part of their organization or sympathetic to their aims. This led the committee to approach Staff Brigadier ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim who had formed in al-Manṣūr a loosely organized group of likeminded colleagues. In 1957 he was invited to join the *Supreme Committee*, becoming its chairman partly because of his seniority.²³ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 43 years old at the time, in turn introduced the younger, 36-year-old Staff Colonel ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif. As a result, contacts between Qāsim's group and the *Supreme Committee* were suspended until the spring of 1957, when the two groups merged and the number of members became fourteen. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif became the link with the grouping of younger dissident officers, originally recruited by Rifʿat al-Ḥājj Sirrī, the founder of the Free Officer's movement. They attached themselves to the Free Officer's movement at the end of 1957 and remained a key, but distinct element.

The movement had contacts with junior officers and with other cells in various places, but in 1957 the Free Officers still numbered about 200, "less than five per cent of the entire membership of the officer corps",²⁴ although the virtual absence of opposition to the movement from within the armed forces at the time of the Revolution itself indicates higher level of support than this small percentage implies. They were still fairly unorganized, with separate groups existing in various cities.²⁵ It was a clandestine movement, operating under a fairly repressive regime, and those involved lived in constant fear of discovery. Contacts with civilian political parties and organizations were discouraged, but this had little effect. Indeed, when the political parties learned of the existence of the Free Officers, they encouraged their own officer partisans to join. The diversity of these contacts ensured that the Free Officers were neither associated with nor beholden to any

²² Khadduri, *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 23.

²³ Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 312–315.

²⁴ 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, pp. 778–783.

²⁵ Ġālib, Qīṣṣat ṭawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāt al-aḥrār, pp. 18–24.

one particular faction or party in Iraq. On the other hand, the heterogeneity of the Free Officers made it unlikely that their apparent common purpose would survive in the aftermath of a successful *coup d'état*. The fifteen members of the *Supreme Committee* shortly before the coup may be taken as fairly representative of the movement.²⁶ The overwhelming majority were *Sunni* Arabs. There were only two *Shi'i* Arabs and no Kurds, although a few Kurds joined the movement to represent Kurdish views. Most came from the middle or lower middle class, although three – ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif and his brother ‘Abdarrahmān – came from poor families. One, Nājī Tālib, was the son of a large landowner. All had been educated at the Baghdad Military Academy; one, ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, had been a schoolteacher first. The majority were Staff College graduates. Five had studied in England, but they were a distinct minority. Three were brigadiers; nine were colonels or lieutenant colonels; two were majors.²⁷ All belonged to the military wing of the new professional middle class, at odds with the structure and policy of the old regime.

According to one member of the group, a general programme was drawn up. This was more a statement of principles than a programme of action, and it left ample room for disagreement on implementation. The programme called for (1) national freedom; (2) the struggle against imperialism and an end to pacts and foreign bases; (3) the removal of feudalism and the freedom of the peasants from exploitation; (4) the removal of reactionaries and an end to the monarchy, together with the announcement of a republic; (5) freedom, democracy, a constitution, and the establishment of a democratic regime; (6) complete recognition of the national rights of the Kurds and other minorities within the framework of national unity; (7) social justice; (8) peace; (9) positive neutrality; (10) brotherly cooperation with all Arab countries and support for the Arab struggle against imperialism; (11) Arab unity; (12) the establishment of friendly relations with all countries in accord with the interests of the country and its positive neutrality; and (13) the return of Palestine to its people.²⁸ As these points indicate, the programme was overwhelmingly concerned with foreign policy. Some kind of land reform was contemplated, but beyond the call for social justice, economic and social goals were vague in the extreme. An eventual return to civilian democratic rule was expected, but not spelled out in any detail.

Because of the dangers involved in meetings of the clandestine movement, and because some members were stationed outside Baghdad, not all committee mem-

²⁶ They were: Staff Colonel Muḥyiddīn ‘Abdalḥamīd, Staff Colonel Nājī Tālib, Staff Colonel Muḥsin Ḥusayn al-Ḥabīb, Staff Colonel ‘Abdalwahhāb al-Amīn (in absentia), Lt. Colonel Engineer Rajab ‘Abdalmajīd, Lt. Colonel Rif‘at al-Ḥājī Sirrī (in absentia), Staff Lt. Colonel ‘Abdalkarīm Farḥān, Lt. Colonel Waṣfī Tāhir, Staff Lt. Colonel Ṣabīḥ ‘Alī Ghālib, retired air force Major Muhammad as-Sab‘, Staff Brigadier ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, Staff Colonel ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif, Staff Colonel ‘Abdarrahmān ‘Ārif, Staff Colonel ‘Abdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf, Colonel Tāhir Yaḥyā. In: Az-Zubaydī, Layṭ ‘Abdalḥasan: *Tawrat* 14 tammūz 1958 fi al-‘Irāq, pp. 127–128.

²⁷ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, p. 783.

²⁸ Ghālib, Qīṣṣat *tawrat* 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāt al-aḥrār, pp. 44–45.

bers met regularly. This ultimately led to a lack of coordination. Several coups were planned before 14 July, but they did not take place either because circumstances were not right or because officers were hesitant. As time went on, some of the younger officers, led by ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, grew restive. Personal tensions within the group reached a breaking point, and several members withdrew.²⁹ In early 1958 the Free Officers, despite some underlying political differences, had reached an agreement that Iraq should become a republic and that much of the old elite should be put on trial for treason as collaborators with the imperialists. Furthermore, they agreed that army officers should occupy all the senior posts in the administration and that civilians should in future be strictly subordinate to the officers. The officer's power would be institutionalized in a *Revolutionary Command Council* (RCC), formed from the membership of the *Supreme Committee*, and this body would wield supreme executive power in the wake of the overthrow of the monarchy.³⁰

The members of the *Supreme Committee* then proceeded to plan the *coup d'état* that would carry them to power. The larger and more widespread the organization became, the greater the chance of discovery. Consequently, the timetable for action was based upon the assumption that the Free Officers would have to act before the end of 1958. A major problem facing the conspirators in the months immediately before the July Revolution was that, for security reasons, few army units were issued with live ammunition. The successful accumulation of sufficient quantities of ammunition was apparently the work of Nājī Ṭālib, who was Director of Military Training and could thus requisition supplies "for use on manoeuvres".³¹ The actual timing of the coup seems to have been decided by ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif on their own, without any real coordination with opposition political leaders, although Kāmil al-Chādirchī of the *National Democratic Party*, Kāmil ʿUmar Naẓmī of the Central Committee of the *Communist Party* and Fuʿād ar-Rikābī of the *Baʿt Party* were given the date some days in advance.³²

The opportunity was in fact provided in the middle of that year by the unfolding of events in the rest of the Middle East. The coup was triggered by the unexpected revolt in Lebanon against the pro-Western regime of President Kamīl Shamūn, and the resulting fear in Baghdad and Amman that the revolt might spread to Jordan. Alarmed by the growing crisis in Lebanon and the enmity of the UAR, Nūrī as-Saʿīd and the Iraqi government decided, at the request of King Ḥusayn, to send units of the Iraqi army to Jordan to reinforce Iraq's partner in the Arab Union should the need arise and to be on hand in the event of any escalation of the fighting in Lebanon.

²⁹ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, pp. 795–799; Ġālib, Qiṣṣat ṭawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḡubbāt al-aḥrār, pp. 52–68.

³⁰ Tripp, Charles: *A History of Iraq*. Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 146.

³¹ Dann, Uriel: *Iraq under Qasem. A Political History, 1958–1963*. London, Pall Mall and New York, Praeger Publishers 1969, p. 27.

³² Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, pp. 803–804.

In the latter part of June information reached the *Supreme Committee* that the Operational Department of the General Staff sent orders to the Twentieth Infantry Brigade of the Third Division stationed at Ba^cqūba to move on 3 July. The *Supreme Committee* at once realized that Zero Day was at hand and the date for the coup was chosen to coincide with the overland transfer to Jordan of the Twentieth Infantry Brigade, two of whose three battalions (or regiments *fawj*) were commanded by Free Officers, ^cAbdassalām ^cĀrif and ^cAbdallaṭīf ad-Darrājī. However, the 3rd of July was unsuitable as the King, the Crown Prince and the Premier Minister were out of the country and had to return shortly before their scheduled departure for the *Baghdad Pact* session in Istanbul on 14 July.

A meeting of the *Supreme Committee* convoked toward the end of June in order to set the day of the coup and make the necessary final preparations, ran into trouble. The Free Officers or, by some accounts, ^cAbdalkarīm Qāsim, and his closest colleagues saw their chance. Some later suspected him of manipulating the situation in order to take charge of the movement himself.³³ In any event, only the handful of officers who were to take part in the coup were thoroughly informed. The members of the *Supreme Committee* attempted to meet several times to plan the coup, but disagreements prevented their plans from reaching fruition on one occasion; on a second, the meeting broke up under unexplained circumstances. Nevertheless, the *Committee* tried its utmost and succeeded in putting off the move to the seventh and then to the night of 13–14 July, on the proviso that the brigade had to remove its shortages.³⁴

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The coup that finally took place on 14 July was essentially the work of two men, ^cAbdalkarīm Qāsim and ^cAbdassalām ^cĀrif, and a handful of strategically placed followers. A close working relationship between the two men apparently developed in Jordan in 1956, when ^cAbdassalām ^cĀrif was head of a battalion under ^cAbdalkarīm Qāsim's command. The latter disclosed his revolutionary aims to ^cAbdassalām ^cĀrif, who had impressed him by his boldness and courage. ^cAbdalkarīm Qāsim seems to have recognized in ^cAbdassalām ^cĀrif a man who would not hesitate to take the necessary measures when the time came. Upon their return to Baghdad, ^cAbdalkarīm Qāsim brought ^cAbdassalām ^cĀrif into the *Supreme Committee*. However, the actual planning of the July coup did not take place in Baghdad, but in Jalawlā' camp near Ba^cqūba some ninety miles north-east of Baghdad, where both men were stationed in 1958.³⁵

The Twentieth Brigade of the Third Division stationed at Jalawlā' camp, under the command of Staff Brigadier Aḥmad Ḥaqqī Muḥammad ^cAlī, in which ^cAbdassalām ^cĀrif headed a battalion, received its marching orders for the night of 13–14

³³ Ḡālib, *Qışsat tawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāt al-aḥrār*, pp. 68–69.

³⁴ Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-^cIrāq*, pp. 438–439.

³⁵ Al-^cUmar, ^cAbdaljabbār Maḥmūd: *Al-kibār at-ṭalāṭa. Tawrat 14 tammūz fī 14 sā'a*. (The Great Three. The 14th of July Revolution in fourteen hours). Baghdad 1990, p. 8.

July. It was to skirt the centre of Baghdad by the north and to proceed to Jordan along the Fallūja–Ramādī highway. Ammunition for possible operations was to be issued to the brigade at Abū Gurayb camp west of the capital. Since the Twentieth Brigade was not to pass through the city, it was not considered necessary to alert the Baghdad garrison, including the Royal Guards Brigade; for the same reason the Minister of the Interior, responsible for the police and security forces, was also not informed of the intended movement.³⁶

‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif and ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, the latter in charge of the Nineteenth Brigade, decided to act. While ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim stayed at the camp some distance outside the city with the Nineteenth Infantry Brigade, ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif, who was one of the three battalion commanders of the Twentieth Brigade that was leaving camp at Jalawlā’ for Jordan late in the evening of 13 July. ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim was to remain with his brigade in the camp as a backup force in case resistance was encountered and move slowly to the city later on. By a series of clever manoeuvres, ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif was able to neutralize opposition to the coup within the Twentieth Brigade. With the cooperation of Colonel ‘Abdallaḥīf ad-Darrājī, who was the commander of the First Battalion, a friend, and a Free Officer, ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif managed to take control of the whole Brigade and directed it to march on Baghdad.³⁷

At Baghdad the brigade deployed according to plan. The First Battalion occupied the left (or eastern) bank of the Tigris (ar-Raṣāfa) on which the greater part of Baghdad is situated. With the assistance of the Free Officers from the Baghdad garrison, the Ministry of Defence compound (which also housed the General Staff), the General Post Office, and other nerve centres were quickly seized. Ar-Rashīd camp on the south-eastern edge of the city, and the adjacent military airfield, were also easily occupied. Lt.-General Rafīq ‘Ārif, whose living quarters were at the camp, was arrested in his bed.³⁸ However, it was on the right (or western) bank of the Tigris (al-Karkh) that the main targets of the conspirators lay, and ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif reserved their liquidation for his battalion.

Executing a classic *coup d'état*, these troops occupied all the strategic buildings in and around Baghdad. In the early hours of 14 July, ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif occupied the broadcasting station that became his headquarters. The conspirators knew that the King and the Crown Prince would not be sleeping at Qaṣr az-Zuhūr Palace, the official royal residence on the night of 13–14 July before their scheduled departure for Turkey on *Baghdad Pact* business early the following morning, accompanied by the Prime Minister, but at ar-Riḥāb Palace. The next objectives were Nūrī as-Sa‘īd’s residence on the river bank; the headquarters of the Mobile Police Force; al-Washshāsh army camp, next to ar-Riḥāb Palace – where the in-

³⁶ Dann, *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*, p. 28.

³⁷ Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-‘Irāq*, pp. 448–449; Batatu, *Hanna: The Old Social Classes*, p. 800.

³⁸ Khadduri, *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, pp. 40–43.

fantry and artillery schools, the main weapon and ammunition stores and the Armoured Corps headquarters were situated – and Baghdad airport.³⁹

One detachment of the Third Battalion was dispatched to ar-Riḥāb Palace to deal with the King and the Crown Prince. The force surrounded the Royal Palace and opened fire, which was returned by the palace guards. The besieged party at the palace was able to remain in telephone communication with the outside world for several hours, but the Crown Prince showed abject defeatism from the first and any chance of resistance was doomed by his behaviour, despite the desire of the commander of the Royal Guard Brigade to fight. Had the crack Royal Guard resisted, the revolt might have been put down then and there. But the Crown Prince, partly because of a failure of will⁴⁰ and partly to save his life and that of the King, ordered no resistance and after a brief bombardment, the Royal Guard at the palace surrendered. This sealed his fate and that of the royal family. At about 8:00 a.m., when King Fayṣal II, Crown Prince ʿAbdalilāh and a number of female members of the royal family emerged from the building a young captain, who was not a member of the Free Officers' group, opened fire. Others joined in, and in a confusion of shots within minutes they had all been shot dead in the palace courtyard.⁴¹ It remains a matter of conjecture whether this had been planned by the army conspirators or happened as a result of the tension and passions of the moment. However, this ended any hope of restoring the *Hashimite* dynasty in Iraq.

The detachment that went to Nūrī as-Saʿīd's house was less successful. Nūrī had been awakened by the sound of shooting and had managed to escape undetected from the river side of his house in a motor launch. His escape put the success of the coup in some doubt, as it raised the possibilities of intervention by the old regime's allies. Nūrī as-Saʿīd's house was also surrounded, and although he managed to escape, he was captured the following day and shot in the street.⁴² The *coup d'état* of 14 July 1958 was carried out and consolidated by a diverse collection of groups and individuals. Free officers played the decisive role seizing key points in the capital, and preparing for a counter-attack that never came.

Early in the morning of 14 July the citizens of Iraq awoke to the strains of martial music on the radio, especially the nationalist song "Allāhu akbar". At 6.30 a.m. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif read out the "Proclamation No. 1" thus giving the public the first word of the coup. The proclamation ran as follows: "Noble People of Iraq, trusting God and with the aid of the loyal sons of the people and the national armed forces, we have undertaken to liberate the beloved homeland from the corrupt crew that imperialism installed... We have taken an oath to sacrifice our blood and everything we hold dear for your sake. Rest assured that we will contin-

³⁹ Dann, *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*, p. 29.

⁴⁰ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, p. 801.

⁴¹ Ḥanzal, Fāliḥ: *Asrār maqṭal al-ʿāila al-mālika fī al-ʿIrāq 14 tammūz 1958*. (Secrets of the Murder of the Royal Family in Iraq 14 July 1958). Beirut 1971, pp. 126–130.

⁴² Al-ʿUmar, Al-kibār aṭ-ṭalāṭa. *Tawrat 14 tammūz fī 14 sāʿa*, pp. 52–54; Ġālib, Qīṣṣat ṭawrat 14 tammūz wa aḍ-ḍubbāṭ al-aḥrār, pp. 84–85; Az-Zubaydī, Layṭ ʿAbdalḥasan: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 213–216.

ue to work on your behalf. Power shall be entrusted to a government emanating from you and inspired by you. This can only be realized by the creation of a people's republic, which will uphold complete Iraqi unity, tie itself in bonds of fraternity with Arab and Muslim states, act in keeping with the principles of the UN and the resolutions of the Bandung Conference, and honour all pledges and treaties in conformity with the interests of the homeland. Accordingly, the national government shall henceforth be called the Republic of Iraq." Signed: the Commander-in-Chief of the National Armed Forces.⁴³

In the first broadcast the people were invited to go out and watch the edifices of tyranny crumble and liquidate the traitors. Within hours huge masses were milling through the streets screaming their joy and their thirst for vengeance. The mob of Baghdad's dispossessed rose and threatened to engulf everything. The Free Officers apparently unprepared for this reaction, although events in previous coups should have forewarned them, finally imposed a curfew. This brought some order out of chaos but did not entirely end the barbarities. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis regarded these deeds with horror and disgust. They caused great damage to Iraq's international reputation and marred the image of the revolution in the minds of many of its own people.⁴⁴

Outside Baghdad the takeover was accomplished smoothly, on the whole. Soon after the Twentieth Brigade left the camp at Jalawlā', detachments from the Nineteenth Brigade on the orders of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim occupied the nearby headquarters of the Third Division at Ba'qūba, and arrested its commander Maj.-General (al-liwā') Ġāzī ad-Dāġistānī. At dawn the Nineteenth Brigade set out for the capital, in the wake of the Twentieth. Some half-hearted attempts to organize resistance were made by Maj.-General 'Umar 'Alī, commanding the First Division at ad-Dīwānīya, however, these were easily overcome without a shot being fired.⁴⁵

About noon on 14 July, 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim arrived in Baghdad with his forces and, significantly, set up his headquarters in the Ministry of Defence. His late arrival gave colour to suspicions that he was waiting to see if the coup would succeed before advancing. Whatever his reason, the fact is that the revolution itself was carried out by 'Abdassalām 'Ārif, not 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim, and it was not long before 'Abdassalām 'Ārif was to take full advantage of this. Even with the arrival of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim, however, the officers were still in a precarious situation. The attitude of the remainder of the army and of the regime's allies was unknown. Internal resistance in the army did not, in fact, materialize. Iraq's allies were in the same quandary. King Ḥusayn, who had tried to warn Chief of Staff

⁴³ Az-Zubaydī, Layl 'Abdalḥasan: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 217–218; Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, p. 802.

⁴⁴ Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 157.

⁴⁵ Al-ʿAzzāwī, Jāsim Kāzīm: *Tawrat 14 tammūz. Asrārūhā, aḥdāṭuhā, rijāluhā ḥattā nihāyat ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. (The Revolution of 14th July. Its Secrets, its Events, its Men until the End of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim). Baghdad 1990, pp. 152–154; Dann, *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*, s. 31; Az-Zubaydī, Layl 'Abdalḥasan: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 226–227.

Rafiq 'Arif of the Free Officers' movement some two weeks earlier, wanted to intervene, but he too hesitated, because of his own internal situation and because of pressure from the British.⁴⁶

A few hours later, at about 4.30 p.m., Proclamation No. 3, signed by 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim as Commander-in-Chief, declared martial law throughout Iraq and appointed Brigadier Aḥmad Ṣāliḥ al-'Abdī, the newly gazetted Chief of the General Staff, Military Governor General. Huge crowds poured into the streets of Baghdad chanting enthusiastic slogans of support for the "Revolution and its leaders, celebrating the downfall of the *ancien régime*, especially the death of 'Abdalilāh. In this highly volatile situation, where the intensity of popular feeling against the monarchy and the British seemed almost uncontrollable, it is remarkable that the number of casualties was not higher.⁴⁷

The overthrow of the monarchy in the military *coup d'état* of 14 July 1958 brought to an end one historical phase of the Iraqi state. It had been shaped largely by Great Britain, by the *Hashimites* and by the coterie of former Ottoman officers and officials who had sought mastery of the new state apparatus, as well as by the landowners and status-conscious elites of the many communities that constituted "Iraqi society". They had relied on their economic power, on their networks of patronage and on the deference still shown to them to secure their privileges and to advance their interests. At the same time, they had shown little compunction about relying on coercion when these interests were seriously threatened. Initially concerned to bring all inhabitants of the state into a condition of disciplined acceptance, armed force had been consistently and freely used to overcome provincial resistance. Equally, when resistance moved into the cities and into the newly formed associations connected with the development of a more complex political society, these public spaces also attracted the deployment of force. It was therefore appropriate and possibly even inevitable that a regime created and sustained by authoritarian and conspiratorial ex-officers in their own image should have been overthrown by a new generation of military conspirators.⁴⁸

The physical takeover had been accomplished. The new rulers now had to consolidate their hold. They had to prove their claim that the *revolution* (aṭ-ṭawra) had come at last, and that it would be radically different from the numerous *coups d'état* (inqilābāt) known to the Iraqi public over the last twenty-two years. The preliminary stage of consolidation began with the broadcasting of the first Proclamation and ended on 27 July with the publication of the Provisional Constitution. While the regime lasted these two documents demarcated its message and furnished its justification – in the eyes of its leaders and supporters no less than of its detractors and enemies.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Husayn, King: Uneasy Lies the Head. New York, B. Geis 1962, pp. 159–161.

⁴⁷ Sluglett, Marion Farouk & Peter Sluglett: Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship. London, New York, I.B. Tauris Publishers 1990, p. 49.

⁴⁸ Tripp, A History of Iraq, p. 147.

⁴⁹ Dann, Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963, p. 33.

The Revolution of July 1958 was almost universally welcomed by the people of Iraq. For the poor, particularly the *ṣarīfa* (or reed-mat hut) dwellers and the masses of unemployed, as well as for most other social groups, it was a time of great hope and optimism for the future. At last, many believed, a government had come to power that would not only free the country from the tutelage of Britain and her clients, but would pursue policies directed towards the fulfilment of their own interests. Indeed, such views were largely shared by many of the Free Officers, who also believed that if they could only liberate their country everything else would somehow fall naturally into place.

ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif used the radio station to urge the crowds into central Baghdad, calling on them to attack imperialism and its agents. In this atmosphere, the initial feeling of celebration gave way to a darker mood, as the Free Officers told the *National Democratic Party* (NDP), the ICP, the *Baʿt* and others to call out their followers in order to give the impression of massive popular support and to discourage any thoughts of outside intervention. During the days that followed, thousands of people poured on to the streets of Baghdad, partly out of curiosity to see the world turned upside down and, in some cases, to exact a violent revenge on figures and symbols of the regime of the *Hashimites* and their British patrons. The scale of these demonstrations definitely made an impression on those within Iraq and beyond who were weighing up the possibilities of intervention to restore the old regime. However, they also alarmed the Free Officers themselves, who brought the crowds under control within the first day through a curfew and by imposing martial law.⁵⁰

Upon his arrival at the Ministry of Defence, where he established his seat of government, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim began at once to form the new government. ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif had already been given the text of Proclamation No. 2, comprising the names of the three members of the Council of Sovereignty, which he had broadcast to the nation.⁵¹ The Council was designed to appease Iraq's three major communities. Staff Lieutenant-General Najīb ar-Rubayʿī, a *Sunnī* Arab was made president of the Council in recognition of his tacit support of the Free Officers' movement, and because a senior army figure would give the government prestige. Members of the Council were: Muḥammad Mahdī Kubba, a *Shīʿī* Arab the former chairman of the *Independence Party* and a member of the *United National Front* and a Kurd, Khālīd an-Naqshabandī, a former officer and governor of Irbīl.

Since the first proclamation decreed that a republican regime had been established by a revolutionary action, the proclamations announcing the formation of a new government and entrusting supreme civil and military authority to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif were issued as republican orders, signed in the name

⁵⁰ Tripp, *A History of Iraq*, p. 150.

⁵¹ Az-Zubaydī, Layt ʿAbdalḥasan: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 260–261; Dann, *Iraq under Qassem. A Political History, 1958–1963*, p. 40.

of the Sovereignty Council. The first order stated, that ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the national armed forces and ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif his deputy. The second order, entrusting civil authority to a cabinet headed by ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim as Prime Minister and acting Minister of Defence, and ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif as Deputy Prime Minister and acting Minister of Interior.⁵²

In the afternoon, the first cabinet was announced, containing a mixture of officers, prominent political personalities and “representatives” of a number of political parties. It was generally moderate and nationalist in its complexion; neither the *Communist Party* nor the *Kurdish Democratic Party* was invited to participate. The Free Officers occupied the most important posts and besides ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim and ‘Abdassalām ‘Ārif, Najī Tālib took the portfolio of Social Affairs; two leading members of the *National Democratic Party*, Muḥammad Hadīd and Hdayyib al-Ḥājj Humūd, were Ministers of Finance and Agriculture; the *Ba‘t* secretary-general, Fu’ād ar-Rikābī, became Minister of Development; and the secretary-general of the *Independence Party*, Šiddīq Shanshal, Minister of Guidance. The remaining portfolios were filled as follows: Foreign Affairs – Dr ‘Abdaljabbar al-Jūmar, Justice – Muṣṭafā ‘Alī, Trade – Dr Ibrāhīm Kubba, Education – Dr Jābir ‘Umar (an Arab nationalist), Health – Dr Muḥammad Šāliḥ Maḥmūd, Communications and Works – Bābā ‘Alī.⁵³ At the same time, “reliable” Free Officers were appointed as commanders of the army, air force and national security.

The seizure of power at the centre in 1958 was possibly quicker and easier than any of the Free Officers had anticipated. By the same token, they found themselves almost immediately in command of all the financial and administrative resources of the state. Some of their civilian allies believed that this would open the way for a radical assault on the systems of privilege and exclusion which characterized Iraq’s deeply non egalitarian society, allowing political life to be put on a more liberal and democratic basis. However, the very ease of the transfer of power encouraged rather different thoughts among the immediate victors of 1958. ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his military allies soon discovered the immense powers of patronage conferred upon them. The seductions of office worked on them as powerfully as they had on Nūrī as-Sa‘īd and the *sharīfian* officers who had found themselves, a generation previously, in positions of command in the new state of Iraq.⁵⁴

It is difficult to overestimate the suspense and uncertainty that pervaded the political atmosphere in the summer and autumn of 1958. In the first place, after nearly two decades of “silence”, members of the armed forces had once more emerged as active, and indeed decisive, participants in politics. Of course, their intervention in 1958 was of a very different order from the series of coups carried out between 1936 and 1941, in that the latter were essentially struggles for power between different factions of officers and politicians,⁵⁵ while the July Revolution

⁵² Khadduri, *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 49.

⁵³ Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-‘Irāq*, pp. 501–502.

⁵⁴ p. 148.

⁵⁵ Tarbush, *Muhammad: The Role of the Military in Politics: A Case Study of Iraq to 1941*. London 1982, p. 186.

was specifically intended to overthrow the *ancien régime*. The Free Officers, if they wanted to substantiate their revolutionary programme, would have to eradicate all traces of the old regime and lose no time in showing their determination.

The first acts of the new government were to abolish the main institutions of the *ancien régime*. Removal of the three main pillars had been achieved as part of the coup itself. Then were the national institutions cleared away, the government and the two chambers of parliament and those most prominently associated with it were arrested. There were also purges of the higher ranks of the armed forces, the civil service and the police, replacing those, whose loyalty to the Revolution might be suspect. However, the vast majority of those employed in these institutions did not lose their posts, thus ensuring that many of the attitudes and much of the ethos of the *ancien régime* continued to survive. In terms of foreign policy, the federation between Iraq and Jordan, which had been cobbled together in February 1958, the *ancien régime's* somewhat half-hearted response to the United Arab Republic of Egypt and Syria, was quickly dissolved.⁵⁶ Iraq no longer attended the meetings of the *Baghdad Pact* (although formal withdrawal did not take place until March 1959, when the British technical mission also left the Iraqi air force base at Lake Ḥabbānīya).

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The revolution in Iraq came as a complete surprise to the outside world, both in official and unofficial circles, although the representatives of the Western Powers in Baghdad were not unaware of the possibility of an uprising. Within hours of news of the coup, Washington policymakers were in a state of heightened alert and a comprehensive series of emergency meetings followed.⁵⁷ Great Britain and the USA quickly realized that unless they intervened in Jordan and Lebanon, the two immediate objectives of the Arab revolutionary movement, their internal regimes would also soon be overthrown. 'This was the country,' remarked President Eisenhower on the morning of 14 July, 'that we were counting on heavily as a bulwark of stability and progress in the region.'⁵⁸

Most of the Arab countries welcomed the Revolution. President Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir expressed the hope that Iraq would join the United Arab Republic. Alarmed by the Iraqi Revolution, Lebanon and Jordan requested the USA and Britain to send forces for their protection. Great Britain responded to King Ḥusayn's appeal for reinforcements, and the USA to appeals by President Kamīl Shamʿūn.⁵⁹ American marines from the Sixth Fleet landed in Beirut on 15 July and a British para-

⁵⁶ Az-Zubaydī, Layṭ ʿAbdallḥasan: *Tawrat* 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq, pp. 325–328.

⁵⁷ Gendzier, Irene L.: *Notes from the Minefield. United States Intervention in Lebanon and the Middle East, 1945–1958*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press 1999, p. 304.

⁵⁸ Eisenhower, Dwight D.: *The White House Years. Waging Peace, 1956–1961*. New York 1965, p. 269.

⁵⁹ Murphy, Robert: *Diplomat among Warriors*. New York 1964, p. 397; Ḥusayn, King: *Uneasy Lies the Head*, pp. 168–169.

chute force arrived in Amman on 17 July. The intervention was also intended to warn the Soviet bloc that the West would not permit any extension of Communist influence.⁶⁰

In Baghdad a Cabinet meeting on 17 July passed a number of resolutions, demonstrating that the Revolution had already started to move in the right direction. It was announced that Iraq's relations with foreign countries with which the *ancien régime* had come into conflict were to be regularized and diplomatic relations with them to be restored, including the UAR, the Soviet Union, Communist China and other socialist countries. That indicated the new government's desire to pursue foreign policies independent of Britain and the West. The government remained noncommittal about its intentions towards the oil companies, probably well aware of the potential dangers of a major confrontation at this early stage.⁶¹

Before the Revolution Iraq had been concerned about the internal situation in Lebanon and Jordan, and the dispatch of the Twentieth Brigade to the Jordanian frontier was intended either to check the spread of the revolutionary movement in Jordan or to move into Jordan itself if intervention was necessary. The uprising in Lebanon against President Kamīl Sham'ūn and his government that began in May and then the Iraqi revolution brought pan-Arab expectations to their height. However, the Iraqi coup has not been a straightforward Arab nationalist revolution but an explosion of the discontent of many political and social elements of Iraq's fragmented society against the old oligarchy: Kurds, and *Shī'ī* Arabs as well as *Sunnī* Arabs, Communists as well as nationalists.⁶²

Britain and the USA assured the new Iraqi rulers through their representatives in Baghdad, that they had no intention of interfering in Iraq's internal affairs.⁶³ 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim assured Britain and the USA that his government was prepared to respect Iraq's obligations to foreign Powers, including the oil agreements, and promised to pay compensations for the damage done to foreign lives and property. Turkey, a founder member of the *Baghdad Pact*, recognized the new regime on 31 July and on 1 August 1958, both USA and Britain followed suit. In a statement reproaching the quick recognition by the Western Powers, Anthony Eden wrote: "Within a few days the free nations of the West recognized the Government which had endorsed, if had not sanctioned, the gruesome deeds."⁶⁴

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 politi-

⁶⁰ Eisenhower, *The White House Years. Waging Peace, 1956–1961*, p. 270.

⁶¹ Sluglett & Sluglett: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 50.

⁶² Kerr, Malcolm H.: *The Arab Cold War. Gamal 'Abd Al-Nasir and his Rivals, 1958–1970*. London, New York, Oxford University Press 1971, pp. 16–17.

⁶³ Gallman, Waldemar J.: *Iraq Under General Nuri. My Recollections of Nuri al-Said, 1954–1958*. Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins Press 1964, pp. 209–210; Murphy, *Diplomat among Warriors*, p. 413.

⁶⁴ Eden, Anthony: *Full Circle*, p. 423.

cal thinking. 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. Secondly, although ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif had emerged as those principally responsible for the coup 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. They soon became identified in 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.⁶⁵

In fact, the power of the state remained intact. Command now lay in the hands of those who had made the coup, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, with the Free Officers behind them. 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 the suburbs and *ṣarīḥas* of Baghdad. 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. Yet basically the destruction of the power which had silenced the nation succeeded because everyone wished it to succeed.⁶⁶

The sudden lifting of political constraints had led to widespread feelings of optimism, a sense of almost unlimited possibilities for the future of the country, and an upsurge in popular demand for the immediate enactment of radical social reforms. In these euphoric days and weeks it was widely believed that major social evils and injustices could easily be swept away at the stroke of a pen. Those in power lacked both experience and a shared ideology, with the result that fundamental issues of principle, such as who was in command, and what form of governmental and political system should be adopted, remained unresolved. The parallel with Egypt in the first few months after July 1952 is striking.⁶⁷

The old constitution was abolished as from 14 July 1958 and on 27 July a provisional constitution was promulgated. The new constitution was to remain in force during a 'transitional period', until a new one would be drawn up by a National Assembly elected by the people. The new constitution embodied a number of principles acceptable to the people. The principle of republicanism was accepted without hesitation. Islam was declared the religion of the state, but religious freedom for non-Muslims was guaranteed. Article 9 provided for equality before the law and laid down that 'there shall be no discrimination because of race, nationality, language, religion, or beliefs'. The article 14 provided the basis for an

⁶⁵ Az-Zubaydī, Layt ʿAbdalḥasan: *Tawrat* 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq, pp. 415–416.

⁶⁶ Caractacus (pseud.): *Revolution in Iraq. An Essay in Comparative Public Opinion*. London, Victor Gollanz Ltd. 1959, p. 136.

⁶⁷ Rodinson, Maxime: *The Political System*. In: Vatikiotis, P. J.: *Egypt since the Revolution*. London 1968, pp. 87–113.

agrarian reform stating that 'agricultural ownership shall be limited and regulated by law'. Finally, the constitution entrusted all executive and legislative powers to the Council of Sovereignty and the Cabinet during the transitional period.⁶⁸

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Hardly five days after the coup the two leaders began to drift apart – each beginning to take up a position opposed to the other. On 19 July, two days after the British landing in Jordan, the Iraqi regime sent a delegation to Damascus, where Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir was on a visit to Syria and an agreement was signed on the same day. It stated that Iraq and the UAR reaffirmed previous pacts and agreements of co-operation in political, military, economic and cultural affairs, especially the Arab League Pact and collective security treaty. The Iraqi delegation was led by ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif and the speeches exchanged on the occasion were full of nationalist excitement, and it seemed as if the leaders of the principal Arab states – Egypt, Syria, and Iraq – had at last met to draw up an instrument to achieve the pan-Arab aspirations which they had long been hoping to realize.⁶⁹ The military assistance pledged to Iraq by the UAR proved to be more helpful in consolidating the Iraqi regime than as a means of defence against an external attack.

Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the Revolution, the *Communist Party* and its sympathizers were undoubtedly the largest political force in Iraq, and ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, who had neither kin nor regional networks at his disposal – unlike ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif at the time – let alone a political party, found himself almost entirely dependent on mass support in a situation where the 'masses' were more sympathetic to the aims and ideals of the *Communist Party* than to any other ideology or party.⁷⁰ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had little choice but to make an accommodation with the *Communists*, for whom, as a reformer rather than a revolutionary, his enthusiasm was distinctly lukewarm.

At the end of July 1958, Michel ʿAflaq, the secretary-general and co-founder of the *Baʿt Party*, arrived in Baghdad from Damascus to try to press the new government to join the UAR, of which he himself had been a prime mover. This prospect naturally found favour with the *Baʿt* and the nationalists (*qawmīyūn*). As unity with Egypt and Syria, was generally taken as having constituted the principal point of disagreement between the *Baʿtists* and nationalists on the one hand and ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and the IPC on the other, it is useful to try to clear up some common misconceptions that have become part of the received wisdom of many accounts of this period.⁷¹

Although the long-term ideological contradictions were obvious, there had been little practical hostility between the Middle Eastern communist parties and the

⁶⁸ Az-Zubaydī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn: *Tawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*, pp. 504–508; Khadduri, *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 64–65.

⁶⁹ Khadduri, *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 60.

⁷⁰ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, p. 828–829.

⁷¹ Khadduri, *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, pp. 86–88.

Arab nationalist organizations in the pre-independence period, since both were united in their opposition to the foreign colonial presence. In addition, the communist movement in Iraq had developed in an atmosphere imbued with notions of both Iraqi-Arab and pan-Arab nationalism, although the fact that a high proportion of Iraqis were *Shīrī* Arabs or Kurds meant that the former or 'patriotic' sentiment tended to predominate. The Communists began facing determinedly toward the nationalists, and in 1956 reinscribed Arab unity on their banners.⁷² The policies pursued by the IPC had successfully merged notions of 'class struggle' with those of national independence. The *Iraqi Communist Party* had both grown out of and formed an integral part of the struggle for national independence and had gained wide support very largely because the leadership had understood that the achievement of independence was an essential prerequisite for social liberation. Against the background of the immense impact of the rise of Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir, and in particular of the effect of the nationalization of the Suez Canal in 1956, the IPC's party conference that year declared that the Arabs are one nation and acknowledging that they have a 'fervent desire for unity', although it tied the fulfilment of the pan-Arab idea to the "disappearance of imperialism from the Arab world and the carrying out of democratic reforms".⁷³ By July 1958 the increasing popularity of Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir and the new situation created by the formation of the United Arab Republic had greatly widened the appeal of pan-Arabism, particularly among the *Sunnī* Arab urban population, at a time when the *Communist Party* was widely regarded as a, if not the, leading political force in Iraq.

In Syria, the *Baʿt* 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.⁷⁴ In such circumstances it is hardly surprising that Michel ʿAflaq and his colleagues should have hastened to Baghdad to try to persuade the Iraqis to join them in the Union, and equally unsurprising that the *Communists* were entirely averse to the proposal, under, let it be stressed, such conditions. Furthermore, as the clamour for Union was loudly supported by ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, who was known to be profoundly anti-communist, the Iraqi *Communists* had few illusions about the effects such a step would have on their own position. Their opposition to Union was also congenial to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim for two reasons: first, along with many non-Communist Iraqis, he was much more of an Iraqi patriot (*waṭanī*) than a pan-Arab nationalist (*qawmī*); and secondly, he had no particular desire to play second fiddle to Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir.⁷⁵

⁷² Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, p. 822.

⁷³ Grimal, Henri: *Decolonisation: the British, French, Dutch and Belgian Empires, 1919–1963*. Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press 1978; Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, p. 750.

⁷⁴ Abu Jaber, Kamal S.: *The Arab Baath Socialist Party*. Syracuse 1966, pp. 43–44; Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, pp. 822–823.

In this high-charged atmosphere, where the state apparatus was still extremely weak, popular approval was essential for the very survival of the government and its leaders. However, as we have seen, representative legal political parties had not been permitted before the Revolution, and even those that had been allowed to function from time to time, such as the *Independence Party* or the *National Democratic Party*, were never able to test or widen their influence in properly-held elections, with the result that effective opposition to the monarchy had been forced underground. Since the *Ba'ath* and the nationalists were relative newcomers to the political scene, such opposition had been organized almost exclusively by the *Communist Party*, which also controlled most of the mass organizations and the trade unions. After the Revolution, the *Communists* were able to come out into the open for the first time, and in particular to direct the emotions of the crowds in the streets of Baghdad, on whom the new government so vitally depended.⁷⁶

The position in which Qāsim found himself was highly anomalous, since his own political views were reformist rather than revolutionary, and were far closer to those of the *National Democratic Party* – patriotism (waṭanīya), the encouragement and protection of domestic industry and agriculture, and the creation of a welfare state – than to the *Communists*. However, the reformist wing of the national bourgeoisie, whom the NPD represented, had not been able to establish their economic or ideological hegemony in the country as a whole, and had also been prevented from building up an effective political organization or party machine because of the repressive and corrupt conditions that prevailed during the latter years of the monarchy.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the sudden rise in oil revenues in the early 1950s had occasioned a burst of conspicuous consumption that further widened the gap between the very rich and the rest of society, and underlined the pressing need for major social reforms that the monarchy was evidently unwilling to undertake.

In the absence of an effective bourgeois social democratic party that might have concerned itself with such issues, the IPC was increasingly regarded as the only organization able to voice the aspirations of wide strata of society, especially as it stressed the need for democratic reforms as well as revolutionary change. The Party's policy was to press for improvements and radical reforms within the existing social order; while socialism was always represented as the ideal society that, given the right economic and social conditions, would one day be built in Iraq, this was not considered as a practical possibility in the immediate future. Thus the *Communist Party* concentrated on such issues as improvements in living and working conditions, a more equitable distribution of wealth, and better health, educational and welfare services for all. Similar aspirations for a more equitable

⁷⁵ Penrose, Edith & Penrose, E.F.: Iraq: International Relations and National Development. London, Benn 1978, p. 215; Dann, Uriel: Iraq under Qassem, pp. 79–81.

⁷⁶ Batatu, Hanna: The Old Social Classes, p. 828.

⁷⁷ Al-Chādirchī, Kāmil: Muḍakkirāt Kāmil al-Chādirchī wa tārikh al-ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī. (Memoirs of Kāmil al-Chādirchī and the History of the National Democratic Party). Beirut 1970, pp. 637–639.

society were also held by the pan-Arab nationalists and *Ba'athists*; but, for historical and demographic reasons, pan-Arab ideology had exerted little influence.⁷⁸

The revolutionary government soon found that it was exceedingly difficult to erect a new political structure and carry out a reform programme. The Free Officers did not possess the experience necessary to run the government in a business-like way, nor were they ready to entrust the administration to civil hands. The gravitational pull of the Iraqi state exerted its force on the men who came to power in 1958. In seeking to master that state and to stay in command, they were destined to follow a logic suggested both by the distinctive politics of Iraq and by the way they had come to power. In the first place, conspiracy within the officer corps and beyond became the practical norm. With this went the use of violence as the ultimate sanction in a polity where there were profound disagreements not only on the substance of policy, but also on the very rules of the political game. Secondly, the tendency to centralize and to dominate negated attempts to create provincial or societal autonomy, frustrating efforts to represent the plurality of Iraq's diverse society in any institutional form. 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.⁷⁹ The 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. For example, how far should land reform or the nationalization of oil and of industry, actually go? These were important issues that divided the population, and that particularly worried the religious conservatives and other influential sections of society that were becoming increasingly fearful of what they imagined to be the pressures being exerted from the left. 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. The 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'athists* and pan-Arab nationalists, joining them in their opposition to 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim and the *Communists*.

⁷⁸ Batatu, Hanna: *The Old Social Classes*, p. 704.

⁷⁹ Tripp, A *History of Iraq*, p. 149.