

IRAQ ON THE EVE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR*

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By the mid-1930s, several officers of the Iraqi army had become actively interested in politics and found that the army's reputation for suppressing the Assyrian rebellion was a political asset. The most influential officers were true nationalists, that is, pan-Arabists, who inspired many of the junior officers. They looked to the examples of neighbouring Turkey and Iran, where military dictatorships were flourishing. Under the leadership of General Bakr Ṣidqī the army took over the government in the fall of 1936, and opened a period of military meddling in politics. During December 1938 General Nūrī as-Sa'īd, a staunch partisan of close ties with Great Britain seized power. While professing democratic principles, he and his followers did not hesitate to use identical repressive measures to their predecessors. Nūrī as-Sa'īd used the outbreak of the war as an excuse for imposing emergency legislation upon the country and abandoning all pretence of democracy.

Key words: Iraq 1939, the death of King Ghāzī, the army's role in politics, the outbreak of World War II, rise of anti-British feelings

Through the whole interwar period the Iraqi monarch, centred in Baghdad, had in effect a social meaning diametrically opposed to that of the tribal shaykhs, the then still virtual rulers of much of the countryside. The shaykhs represented the principle of the fragmented or multiple communities (many tribes), the monarch the ideal of an integral community (one Iraqi people, one Arab nation).¹ While the shaykh was the defender of the divisive tribal tradition,

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¹ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Ba'thists and Free Officers*, p. 27.

the monarch was the exponent of the unifying national law. In the view of the presence of large non-Arab minorities in the country, there was some inherent contradiction between the ideal of one Iraqi people and that of one Arab nation. Although under the reign of the young and inexperienced King Ghāzī (1933-1939) Iraq fell a prey to tribal rebellions and military coups, there was nevertheless no essential deviation from the prior trend of royal policy. Except during the short Ḥikmat Sulaymān government, the pan-Arab character of the state became more pronounced.

In the two years before the outbreak of the Second World War, three distinct lines developed in Iraqi politics. One was the increased intrusion of the army into politics and the continued erosion of the constitutional system established by the British. Parliament had been brutally manipulated by the traditional politicians and the British, but meddling of the military in politics was to prove even more damaging. Another line was the tendency of the politicians – especially Nūrī as-Saʿīd – to conduct business as usual, pursuing their own power struggles and neglecting pressing social issues. The assassination of Bakr Ṣidqī marked the collapse of the axis Bakr Ṣidqī – Ḥikmat Sulaymān and the end of Iraq's first coup government.² Most important of the three developments was the re-emergence of the Palestine problem. The shadow of Palestine fell heavily on Iraq: Zionism and the threatened partition of Palestine had long been the concern not only of the government and the politicians, but of a fair proportion of the urban public at large.³ All this resulted in intensification of anti-British and Arab nationalist sentiment, especially among key groups such as the students, the intelligentsia, and the officer corps.

The military coups represented a successful, even if short-lived, break by the armed segment of the middle class into the narrow circle of the ruling elite. The coups were carried out on the initiative of a small number of individuals, and could be explained both by personal motives and by the intrigues of ambitious politicians. The superior weight of the pan-Arab trend was partly the consequence of the fact that a large number of younger officers hailed from the northern provinces, which leaned strongly towards pan-Arabism. The emergence of the seven senior officers of the “military bloc” (al-kutla al-ʿaskariyya)⁴ – the “circle of seven” – (Ḥusayn Fawzī, Amīn al-ʿUmarī, Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh, Maḥmūd Salmān, Kāmil Shabīb, ʿAzīz Yāmulkī and Muḥammad Fahmī Saʿīd) who had conspired to kill Bakr Ṣidqī and had caused

² YĀGHĪ, Ismāʿīl Aḥmad. *Ḥarakat Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī 1941. Dirāsa fī taṭawwur al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya al-ʿirāqīya*. [The Movement of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī. Study in the Development of Iraqi National Movement], p. 25.

³ LONGRIGG, S. H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950. A Political, Social and Economic History*, p. 272.

⁴ AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Al-asrār al-khaṭīya fī ḥarakat as-sana 1941 at-taḥarrurīya*. [The Hidden Secrets of the 1941 Liberation Movement], p. 12.

the collapse of Ḥikmat Sulaymān's government introduced an era in Iraqi politics during which civilian politicians held office only with the consent of these men. Politics as usual continued in the face of the threatening international situation brought about by the onset of World War II. The intertwining of these three lines gradually drew the young officers further into politics, intensified their pan-Arab feelings, isolated the pro-British politicians, and eventually precipitated the crisis of 1941.

The members of "circle of seven" were all known for their sympathy with pan-Arabism and they would intervene periodically when the question of the attitude of the government towards pan-Arabism came to the fore.⁵ This was not simply a question of foreign policy, even though it often came to a head over specific foreign policy issues. It was more a question of their vision of Iraq's identity which they felt it was the duty of any government to preserve. These officers, all Sunnī Arab by origin, tended to share a predominantly pan-Arab view of Iraq's identity and destiny, giving them an ambivalent attitude towards the state of Iraq itself. On the one hand, it could be seen as a temporary edifice, due to disappear once the Arabs as a whole had won their independence from the European imperial powers, when, in theory, a single state should be constructed to encompass all the Arabs. On the other hand, they were officers in the armed forces of the Iraqi state which, even if still tied to Great Britain in various resented ways, was formally independent. It was thus a regime of power capable both of shaping and disciplining its own society and of playing a leading role on the larger stage of the Arab world.⁶

These views and to some extent their ambivalence had been in evidence since the end of the Ottoman occupation and, in many of their particulars, resembled late Ottoman thinking on national identity and the importance of authoritarian command and military discipline in the creation of an ordered society. Most current and most plausible initially among the former Ottoman officials and officers who formed the administrative elite of the new state, they had been reinforced during the 1920s by the appointment of Sāṭi^c al-Ḥuṣrī who had come to Iraq after the fall of Fayṣal's administration in Damascus, as director-general at the Ministry of Education.⁷ In this position, he was able to lay the foundations for a highly centralized, tightly disciplined and elitist education system in Iraq. Much of Sāṭi^c al-Ḥuṣrī's work in Iraq concerned the teaching of "nationalist history" that would engender among pupils a sense of original attachment to the Arab nation.

However, the two big communities of Iraq – the Kurds and the Shī^ʿī

⁵ TARBUSH, M. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 150.

⁶ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 94.

⁷ SORBY, K. Jr. *Arabi, islām a výzvy modernej doby*. [The Arabs, Islam and the Challenges of Modern Times], pp. 153-154.

traditionalists – saw Sāṭi^c al-Ḥuṣrī as a protagonist of the centralizing, hegemonic Sunnī Arab-dominated state. By the mid-thirties the Shī^cīs had already come close to dominating the ministry of education and the opposition to Sāṭi^c al-Ḥuṣrī was such that he had to resign his position. His removal paved the way for the Shī^cīs, who in those years almost exclusively held the post of minister.⁸

Sāṭi^c al-Ḥuṣrī was displaced by Muḥammad Fāḍil al-Jamālī a Shī^cī who while sharing many of the previous views on Arab nationalism and on the virtues of military discipline in the formation of a modern society, advocated a more decentralized, less elitist educational system and ensured that resources were distributed more equitably in the provinces, providing opportunities in particular for the Shī^cī majority.⁹ At the same time, however, the educational system became increasingly militarized. By introducing military training to schools and teachers' training colleges in 1935-1936, or by establishing the paramilitary Iraqi Youth Movement, al-Futūwa in 1939, state officials were trying to ensure disciplined acceptance of the *status quo* in the name of nationalism. Yet the complex of relationships and power that constituted the *status quo* was founded on economic privilege, status hierarchies and multiple forms of discrimination – tribal, familial, sectarian and ethnic – that invalidated any practical form of either Iraqi or Arab nationalism.¹⁰

These were the themes dominating the years during which this “military bloc” was in the ascendant and was able to contribute greatly in removing the Jamāl al-Midfa^cī cabinet. The rest of Iraq's population, its communities, hierarchies and social formations, recognized the power of these men, their command of coercive force and their capacity to dispense favours. They formed the necessary background for the officers' exercise of power, but the latter had little interest in and no incentive to reform or reconstruct the *status quo*. Preoccupied with their immediate factional concerns or with the larger questions of Iraq's place in the world, the condition of Iraqi society, as long as it remained more or less passive, failed to engage them. When set against a background in which the dominant economic interests – landed or commercial, Iraqi or British – were satisfied with their acquired privileges, it is not surprising that no significant structural changes occurred during this period. Instead, state consolidation through conscription and other methods continued and the extension and entrenchment of a landowning interest proceeded undisturbed.¹¹

⁸ NAKASH, Yitzhak. *The Shi'is of Iraq*, p. 125.

⁹ AL-ḤUṢRĪ, Sāṭi^c, Abū Khaldūn. *Mudhakkirātī fī al-ʿIrāq*. [My Memoirs in Iraq]. Vol. II, p. 283.

¹⁰ CLEVELAND, W. L. *The Making of a Nationalist. Ottomanism and Arabism in the Life and Thought of Sāṭi^c al-Ḥuṣrī*, pp. 74-76; TIBI, B. *Arab Nationalism. A Critical Enquiry*, pp. 123-158.

¹¹ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 96.

During the two years following the downfall of Ḥikmat Sulaymān's cabinet, the men and the policies that had previously governed Iraq gradually returned, but not without a protracted struggle. When Ḥikmat Sulaymān resigned, Jamīl al-Midfa^cī was asked by the king on 19 August 1937 to form a government, but consented only once he knew that he had the approval of the rebellious officers. Jamīl al-Midfa^cī's conciliatory policies were well known: he tried to pursue a policy of healing old wounds, and of "dropping the curtain" on the past.¹² Elections were held and in December 1937 a new parliament assembled, but its composition had changed little save for the disappearance of Bakr Ṣidqī's nominees and of the reformists associated with the radical wing of the Ahālī group. However, this policy, backed by the moderates and the king, did not satisfy Nūrī as-Sa^cīd, who began to agitate for the removal of Jamīl al-Midfa^cī's cabinet and for punishment of Ḥikmat Sulaymān and his supporters. On this issue, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd found common ground with the Arab nationalist officers, who opposed Ḥikmat Sulaymān and the policy he represented and also feared retribution for Bakr Ṣidqī's assassination, should Ḥikmat Sulaymān ever return to power.¹³

When Jamīl al-Midfa^cī consistently refused to take action, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd, now joined by Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī and Rustum Ḥaydar, in accordance with the charter of the *Arab Independence Party* (Ḥizb al-istiqlāl al-^carabī) secretly collaborated with the Arab nationalist officers to end Jamīl al-Midfa^cī's cabinet and seize power.¹⁴ Jamīl al-Midfa^cī initially tried to placate the "circle of seven" by giving them senior posts. Yet they did not trust him and there were always plenty of politicians eager to exploit that mistrust. The decisive power now lay with the officers, and the members of the "circle of seven" were indignant when on 31 October 1938 the prime minister gave up the post of minister of defence in favour of Colonel Ṣabīḥ Najīb al-^cIzzī, whose tactless and arrogant attitude towards high-ranking officers was well-known, instead of staff Lieutenant General Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī.¹⁵ Matters came to a head two months later, when Ṣabīḥ Najīb deprived the chief of the general staff of much of his powers and took steps to retire or transfer the Arab nationalist officers (the Four Colonels)

¹² AL-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ^cAbdarrazzāq. *Al-asrār al-khafīya fī ḥarakat as-sana 1941 at-taḥarrurīya*. [The Hidden Secrets of the 1941 Liberation Movement], p. 23.

¹³ MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 77.

¹⁴ YĀGHĪ, Ismā^cīl Aḥmad. *Ḥarakat Rashīd ^cĀlī al-Kaylānī 1941. Dirāsa fī taḥawwur al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya al-^cirāqīya*. [The Movement of Rashīd ^cĀlī al-Kaylānī. Study in the Development of Iraqi National Movement], p. 27.

¹⁵ BARRĀK, Fāḍil. *Dawr al-jaysh al-^cirāqī fī ḥukūmat ad-difā^c al-waṭanī, wa al-ḥarb ma^ca Briṭāniyā ^cām 1941*. [The Role of the Iraqi Army in the Government of National Defence and the War with Britain in the Year 1941], p. 173.

and thus end their influence in politics.¹⁶

This was probably the main reason that the government fell. On 24 December, while considerable forces were concentrated at ar-Rashīd camp in the outskirts of Baghdad, the officers insisted on the resignation of the cabinet on the grounds that the army no longer had confidence in it.¹⁷ The prime minister was informed that a coup d'état was in the offing. The chief of the general staff then told the king that the army had lost confidence in the government and that either Nūrī as-Sa^cīd or Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī (both had been busy cultivating the "circle of seven") should be asked to form a new cabinet. When Jamīl al-Midfa^cī called Nūrī as-Sa^cīd, the latter made it clear that he fully supported the officers, thereafter Jamīl al-Midfa^cī's resignation followed the same day, and Nūrī as-Sa^cīd became prime minister for the first time since 1932.¹⁸

Nūrī as-Sa^cīd retired the supporters of Jamīl al-Midfa^cī in the army and held an election, filling parliament with his own supporters. He then attempted to deal with Ḥikmat Sulaymān and his collaborators in the coup. Since he was unable to bring them to trial for the coup because of an amnesty law previously passed by Ḥikmat Sulaymān's government, a new charge had to be found. An alleged plot against the life of the king was "discovered" in March 1939, and Ḥikmat Sulaymān and a number of his group were implicated, brought to trial, and convicted. The evidence convinced no one. Only the intervention of the British ambassador Sir Maurice Petterson got the sentences reduced and saved Ḥikmat Sulaymān's life.¹⁹ This indicates the extent to which Nūrī as-Sa^cīd was willing to go for retribution and the degree to which personal feelings were allowed to dominate politics.

When Nūrī as-Sa^cīd was asked by the king to form a government, he too found that his power depended largely on his ability to placate the "circle of seven". To some degree he was able to do so because of the views they shared on the importance of the question of Palestine. During the previous few years, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd had made considerable efforts to establish a role for Iraq – and thus for himself – in Palestine. In 1936, with the outbreak of the general strike organized by the Arab Higher Committee in Palestine, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd had made

¹⁶ Ad-DURRA, Maḥmūd. *Al-ḥarb al-^cirāqīya al-brīṭānīya 1941*. [The Iraki-British War 1941], p. 93; Aṣ-ṢABBĀGH, Ṣalāḥaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-^caqīd ar-ruḡn Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. Fursān al-^curūba fī al-^cIrāq*. [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq], p. 69.

¹⁷ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ^cAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, p. 36.

¹⁸ Al-HĀSHIMĪ, Ṭāhā. *Mudhakkirāt Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī, 1919-1943*. [Memoirs of Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī], pp. 296-297; Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ^cAbdarrazzāq. *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya* [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, pp. 54-55.

¹⁹ Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, p. 76.

several unsuccessful attempts to mediate first between the Arabs and the Jewish Agency and then between the Higher Committee and the British authorities. His professed hope was to bring all sides together in agreeing to a solution to the Palestine problem within the framework of a larger Arab federation of the Fertile Crescent, led by the Hashemite dynasty.²⁰ This was an idea that he repeatedly sought to promote, making much-publicized visits to various Arab capitals and suggesting that he held the key to reconciliation between the British and the Palestinian leader al-Ḥājī Amīn al-Ḥusaynī. This proved not to be the case, but it served to create the impression in Iraq that Nūrī as-Saʿīd, more than any other of the established politicians, was determined to work on behalf of the cause of Palestine. This stood him in good stead with the pan-Arab officers of the Iraqi army. Consequently, when he became prime minister he was careful to pursue these initiatives, personally heading the Iraqi delegation to the London Round Table Conference on Palestine in January 1939, where he tried to bring about agreement between the Palestinian and British sides. He failed, but his commitment won the approval of the “circle of seven” in the armed forces.²¹

Now when Nūrī as-Saʿīd and his supporters were in power, the opposition was taken over by Jamīl al-Midfāʿī and his followers. There were also those, who supported neither of the two. Therefore it was not surprising that Nūrī as-Saʿīd should harbour a feeling of insecurity which – in his view – could be diminished by installing his “men” in Parliament. So his next move was to have parliament dissolved and to set in motion plans for general elections. According to a number of Iraqi authors he had three tasks to solve: 1. to settle the problem of King Ghāzī; 2. in view of the looming war to put Iraq fully in the service of the British war effort and 3. to contain the nationalist forces within and outside the army pretending the endeavour to solve the national problems.²² Arab nationalist sentiments were hardly new in Iraq, but the end of the mandate and the escalation of the Palestine problem gave them new impetus. The wave of fascist propaganda emanating from some European countries fanned already intense anti-British feeling. These sentiments, although shared by some of the older politicians, had their firmest roots among the younger generation raised under the British mandate and now coming into their own. The main locus of

²⁰ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid ʿAbdarrazzāq. *Al-asrār al-khafīya fī ḥarakat as-sana 1941 at-taḥarrurīya*. [The Hidden Secrets of the 1941 Liberation Movement], pp. 38-40; LONGRIGG, S. H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950*, p. 272.

²¹ EPPEL, M. *The Palestine Conflict and the History of Modern Iraq*, pp. 30-79.

²² SHABĪB, Maḥmūd. *Asrār ʿirāqīya fī wathāʾiq inkilzīya wa ʿarabīya wa almānīya, 1918-1941*. [Iraqi Secrets in English, Arab and German Documents], p. 103; FARAJ, Luṭfī Jaʿfar. *Al-malik Ghāzī wa dawruhu fī siyāsāt al-ʿIrāq fī al-majālayni ad-dākhilī wa al-khārijī, 1933-1939*. [King Ghāzī and his Role in Iraqi Internal and External Policies], pp. 263-264; Al-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajāʾ Ḥusayn. *Al-masʿūlīya at-tārīkhīya fī maqatl al-malik Ghāzī*. [The Historical Responsibility for King Ghāzī’s Murder], p. 49.

the pan-Arab movement was in the school system, particularly at the secondary and college levels, where the seeds planted earlier by Sāfi^c al-Ḥuṣrī had taken root.²³ Though primary education was slowly spreading, secondary schools and colleges were still scarce, and they were concentrated in the large cities. These schools were thus vulnerable to the influence of a handful of teachers, who made them centres of political activism.

By the 1930s, Arab nationalism had taken firm hold in these institutions. Political action began with a demonstration against Alfred Mond, a British Zionist who visited Baghdad in 1928. This event inaugurated an era of educational politicization, enhanced by the importation of several Palestinian secondary and college teachers and the introduction of new texts, heavily oriented toward pan-Arabism, in history and the social sciences. Nationalist clubs like al-Muthannā (named after a seventh-century Arab hero) and al-Jawwāl al-^carabī (the Arab Scout) appeared in schools and colleges in addition to the government sponsored al-Futūwa program.²⁴ Pan-Arab sentiments, strongly influenced by German ideas of nationalism and encouraged by Fritz Grobba, German minister in Baghdad until 1939, reached a peak in 1939, when Sāmī Shawkat, brother of Nājī and an ardent Arab nationalist, was appointed director-general of education. Sāmī Shawkat began making inflammatory speeches on the art of death, advocating the shedding of blood for the sake of Arabism and the Arabs.²⁵

General Nūrī as-Sa^cīd with tacit British support was struggling with his opponents for his political survival by every possible means. And in this tense situation another incident occurred which had far-reaching effects on the internal politics of the country. This was the sudden and unexpected death of King Ghāzī. According to the official communiqué, King Ghāzī on his way from the Zuhūr Palace to the Ḥārithīya Palace, on the late evening of 4 April 1939, drove his car at excessive speed into an electric pole. He died shortly afterwards of a fractured skull. Although the investigations were very perfunctory, the police report stated that "it has been proved that the crash was purely accidental." The case was therefore closed on the advice of highest authorities "as there was no suspicion of a criminal act".²⁶ This official version of the king's death has always been suspected by Iraqis and particularly by the nationalists, who have claimed that Nūrī as-Sa^cīd and the British had hatched

²³ SORBY, K. Jr. *Arabi, islām a výzvy modernej doby* [The Arabs, Islam and the Challenges of Modern Times], p. 154.

²⁴ DAWISHA, A. *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*, pp. 77-78.

²⁵ KHADDURI, M. *Independent Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics from 1932 to 1958*, p. 166.

²⁶ Text of the "Report of the Baghdad West Investigating Magistrate". In *Iraq Times*, 1939, the 6th of April. Cit. KHADDURI, M. op. cit., p. 140.

and accomplished this treacherous murder.²⁷

King Ghāzī's death created a serious political vacuum at the centre of power, providing an opportunity for the establishment to recoup some of its losses by installing one of its supporters. The candidacy of Amīr °Abdalilāh to the Regency became the subject of controversy among leading politicians. Some of them supported the candidacy of Amīr Zayd, uncle of the new king and half brother of Fayṣal I, an older man with some experience who was married to a Turkish woman. He was rejected, according to some, because of his liberal social behaviour and because his Turkish leanings were viewed with suspicion by the Arab politicians;²⁸ according to others, he was rejected as too independent to be malleable.²⁹ Nūrī as-Sa'īd and the leading army officers, with whom Amīr °Abdalilāh had recently developed friendly relations through Maḥmūd Salmān, insisted on his candidacy.

The immediate political consequence of Ghāzī's death was the necessity to appoint a regent since his son, was only four years old. On 5 April, early in the morning the Council of Ministers met at the Zuhūr Palace and passed the following resolutions: 1. To proclaim His Royal Highness Amīr Fayṣal as His Majesty King Fayṣal II, in accordance with Article 20 of the constitution;³⁰ 2. to proclaim His Royal Highness Amīr °Abdalilāh Regent, in view of the fact that His Majesty the King had not come of age; 3. to convene Parliament, in order to approve the proclamation of Regency in accordance with article 22 of the constitution.³¹ The British were in a dire need of a loyal figure as head of state, the choice (as a part of the same complot) fell on Prince °Abdalilāh, the 26-year-old son of ex-king °Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn of al-Ḥijāz and brother of Queen °Āliya, mother of Fayṣal II. Amīr °Abdalilāh was proclaimed Regent on the alleged contention of the Queen and Princess Rājiḥa, King Ghāzī's sister before the Council of Ministers, that this had been the wish of the late king. However, it was commonly known that Ghāzī was forced into a political marriage and his relationship with the queen was rather formal. As he resented his cousin and brother-in-law, °Abdalilāh, he would never have suggested him for the

²⁷ Al-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā' Ḥusayn. *Al-mas'ūliya at-tārīkhīya fī maqṭal al-malik Ghāzī*. [The Historical Responsibility of King Ghāzī's Murder], p. 49.

²⁸ Aṣ-ṢABBĀGH, Ṣalāḥaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-°aqīd ar-ruḡn Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. Fursān al-°urūba fī al-°Irāq*. [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq], p. 82.

²⁹ Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, p. 82.

³⁰ Art. 20 states "The heir apparent shall be the eldest son of the King, in direct line, in accordance with the provision of the law of succession." (Text of the article before its Second Amendment of 1942). In KHADDURI, M. *Independent Iraq*, p. 140.

³¹ Az-ZUBAYDĪ, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Al-malik Ghāzī wa murāfiqūhu*. [King Ghāzī and his Companions], pp. 286-289.

regency.³²

There is little doubt that Ghāzī's death came as a relief to the British and strengthened Nūrī as-Sa'īd's hand still further. Always in tune with the younger army officers, the young king had become an outspoken advocate of anti-British and nationalist sentiment. German and Italian propaganda made their contributions to this state of mind of the Iraqis, the German Minister in Baghdad, Dr. Fritz Grobba, doing much to promote pro-Axis feelings in the country.³³ Political sympathies linked the king to his generation among the Sunnī Arab elite of Iraq. He resented the continued British influence, but in a rather unfocused way, since the question of that influence was not the burning issue of Iraqi domestic politics by the time he came to the throne. In 1937 he had begun broadcasting from a private radio station in his palace, violently denouncing French rule in Syria and Zionist claims in Palestine, and attacking British influence in the Gulf.³⁴ He was associated with the first serious public arising of the Iraqi claim to sovereignty over Kuwait.

Like that of his father, King Ghāzī's death dealt a serious blow to Iraq's fragile centre of power. Though of limited effective power, the monarchy provided a balancing, at times crucial, instrument for the country's political structure. A swift containment of the country's "imbalance" required a vision, a charisma and a determination that King Ghāzī's effective successor, 'Abdalilāh lacked.³⁵ At the time of Ghāzī's death, 'Abdalilāh was not popular, but he was known to be pro-British, and he had good relations with Nūrī as-Sa'īd, Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī, and the officers who supported him. He was also young – twenty-six – and for that reason, the politicians probably felt that they could control him. As events were to prove 'Abdalilāh's appointment changed the delicate balance between the Palace, the officer corps, the civilian political elite and the British. 'Abdalilāh differed from his late brother-in-law in that he was grateful to the British and was ready to fulfil their instructions. He considered the alliance with

³² As-SAHRAWARDĪ, Najmaddīn. *At-tārīkh lam yabda ghadan*. [History did not begin Tomorrow], pp. 11-13; An-NĀṢIRĪ, Ṭāriq. *'Abdalilāh al-waṣīy 'alā 'arsh al-'Irāq, 1939-1958. Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī*. ['Abdalilāh the Regent of the Iraqi Throne, 1939-1958. His Life and his Political Role], pp. 23-24; Az-ZUBAYDĪ, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Al-malik Ghāzī wa murāfiqūhu*. [King Ghāzī and his Companions], pp. 193-194.

³³ LENCZOWSKI, G. *The Middle East in World Affairs*, p. 246.

³⁴ "King Ghāzī's total irresponsibility," writes Sir Maurice Peterson "became accentuated under the new regime. In particular his private broadcasting station in the Palace, which had long been a source of anxiety, became more and more mischievous in tone, especially towards the Sheikh of Koweit, Iraq's next-door neighbour at the head of the Persian Gulf and a ruler who stood in close relation to the British Government. The line taken by the broadcast was that the Sheikh was an out-of-date feudal despot whose backward rule contrasted with the enlightened regime existing in Iraq. Koweit, it was implied, would be much better off merged with her northern neighbour." In PETERSON, M. *Both Sides of the Curtain*, p. 150.

³⁵ TARBUSH, M. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 159.

Great Britain the main guarantee for the Hashemite dynasty. Even Anthony Eden admitted that "while he (the regent) is not a very strong character ... there can be no question of his loyalty".³⁶ This meant that he had little in common with the Arab nationalist army officers whom he tended to regard as social upstarts, unworthy of his cultivation.

The death of King Ghāzī was felt to be a national calamity, since he was regarded as a popular hero by the Arab nationalists and the rank and file of the people. His personal relations with certain influential army officers were intimate, and his outspoken political pronouncements gave great satisfaction both to the army and to the nationalists. His sudden death was a mystery to the great majority of the people, especially in the absence of a clear official announcement immediately afterwards. It therefore took Iraq by surprise and gave rise to speculations and rumours which spread like wildfire throughout the country that the accident was due to a secret British plot or to combined foreign and internal political intrigue.³⁷ Arab nationalist and anti-British sentiment was sweeping Iraq.

Thus before the candidacy of Amīr °Abdalilāh was announced to the public and presented to both houses of Parliament for approval, it had been agreed upon among the politicians and the army.³⁸ On 6 April Parliament was convened, after its dissolution the preceding December, and both the Prime Minister and the President of the Senate paid tribute to King Ghāzī. At the joint session of Parliament, the resolutions passed by the Council of Ministers on 4 April, all those present unanimously approved the proclamation (only eight deputies were absent). On 6 April 1939, °Abdalilāh was appointed a regent.

°Abdalilāh was born in Mecca just before the First World War, the grandson of the Sharīf Ḥusayn. For one brief year (1925-1926), his father °Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn had been king of al-Ḥijāz, before losing the throne to °Abdal°azīz Āl Sa°ūd (Ibn Sa°ūd). Because of the loss of the throne, °Abdalilāh keenly felt himself to be second-class royalty, an inferiority complex he attempted to remedy after the war by regaining Fayṣal's lost throne in Syria. °Abdalilāh's early upbringing and education took place in the insulated environment of Mecca, and it was only in 1926 that he came to Iraq. Later he attended the

³⁶ Cit., In TARBUSH, M. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 159.

³⁷ For different versions as to the possibility of the assassination of King Ghāzī see: AŞ-ŞABBĀGH, Şalāḥaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-°aqīd ar-ruḡn Şalāḥaddīn aş-Şabbāgh. Fursān al-°urūba fī al-°Irāq*. [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel İalāḥaddīn aş-Şabbāgh. The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq], pp. 80-97.

³⁸ Al-ḤASANĪ, *Al-asrār al-khafīya fī ḥarakat as-sana 1941 at-taḥarrurīya* [The Hidden Secrets of the 1941 Liberation Movement], pp. 31-32.

British-run Victoria College in Alexandria for three years without graduating.³⁹ Partly because of his background and training, partly because of his shy nature, °Abdalilāh always seemed to feel more at home among the English than among the Iraqis. Despite native intelligence, he was neither a conscientious reader nor a natural politician. He often relied on those around him for information, a characteristic that was eventually his undoing.⁴⁰ °Abdalilāh used his position of power to draw the establishment closer to the British than to the nationalists, with fatal consequences for the British and the regime they established.

Iraqi politics were increasingly overshadowed by the approach of war in Europe. The relationship with Great Britain came to the fore once again, partly because the growing number of British demands reminded the officers and others of the more controversial aspects of the 1930 Anglo-Iraqi treaty. At a time when the British were increasingly intolerant of dissent or reluctant compliance by Iraq, many of the Arab nationalist officers were wary of being drawn into the British orbit. The British did not appreciate the rise of national consciousness of the officers and were convinced that they were influenced by the example of National Socialist Germany, the image of which had been assiduously promoted by the head of the German legation in Baghdad during these years, Dr. Fritz Grobba.⁴¹ The officers resented Great Britain's demands and were convinced, or wanted to believe, that the Axis Powers would win the war. Many of the civilian politicians and the regent found themselves caught between two opposing forces and relatively helpless.

In accordance with constitutional practice, Nūrī as-Sa°id tendered his letter of resignation to the Regent on 6 April in order to give him the opportunity of making his choice for the premiership. On the same day Amīr °Abdalilāh invited Nūrī as-Sa°id to form the new government, affirming confidence in the man who had supported his candidacy for the Regency.⁴² Nūrī as-Sa°id made no immediate change in the composition of his government, but when a month later Nājī Shawkat, Minister of the Interior, who supported the conspiracy case, resigned, he sought to strengthen his government by taking the portfolio of interior himself and giving the portfolio of Foreign Affairs to °Alī Jawdat al-Ayyūbī.⁴³

³⁹ An-NĀŠIRĪ, Tāriq. °Abdalilāh al-wašy °alā °arsh al-°Irāq, 1939-195. *Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī*. [°Abdalilāh the Regent of the Iraqi Throne, 1939-1958. His Life and his Political Role], pp. 6-8.

⁴⁰ ḤANẒAL, Fāliḥ. *Asrār maqṭal al-°ā'ila al-mālika fī al-°Irāq 14 tammūz 1958*. [Secrets of the Murder of the Royal Family in Iraq 14 July 1958].

⁴¹ Al-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā' Ḥusayn. *Ta'sīs al-jaysh al-°irāqī wa taṭawwur dawrihi as-siyāsī, 1921-1941*. [The Establishment of the Iraqi Army and the Development of its Political Role], pp. 218-220.

⁴² Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-°irāqīya* [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, pp. 89-90.

⁴³ LONGRIGG, S. H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950*, p. 277.

Before this pattern of events became clear, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd organized general elections in May. The elections were completed early in June, and the new Parliament met on 11 June. Owing to overwhelming internal difficulties, and to the deterioration in the international situation, the elections were rigidly controlled and martial law was still in force.⁴⁴ The government nominees were therefore all returned as members of the new Chamber of Deputies which proved to be a subservient tool in the hands of various cabinets. However, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd knew that parliamentary support was no match for the kind of power represented by the army. He ensured that he stayed on good terms with the "circle of seven", particularly with its four leading members, Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh, Fahmī Sa^cīd, Maḥmūd Salmān and Kāmil Shabīb. These Four Colonels formed a body which the British began to call the "Golden Square" that had become the effective arbiter of power in Iraq.⁴⁵

Nūrī as-Sa^cīd tried to mediate once again on the Palestine issue by seeking to persuade the muftī of the virtues of the British White Paper on Palestine of May 1939. Although obliged to be critical of the White Paper in public, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd was unable to bring the muftī round to his point of view and the differences between the two men became ever sharper, contributing to the growing polarization of Iraqi politics. In his Speech from the Throne on 12 June the Regent confirmed the standpoint that the White Paper would help to constitute a national government in Palestine and stop the Zionist political ambitions.⁴⁶ While Nūrī as-Sa^cīd showed remarkable ability in handling Iraq's internal problems the deterioration in the international situation greatly affected the policy of his Cabinet. Iraq had been subjected to ideological propaganda for a long time, and the familiar subject of the role of the Arabs should the war break out was discussed by various groups. The foreign policy of Nūrī as-Sa^cīd's cabinet was based on pursuing: 1. the policy of alliance with neighbouring independent Arab States, and sincere friendship with the two neighbours, Turkey and Persia, in the spirit of the Sa^cdābād Pact; 2. the policy of alliance with Great Britain in the view of mutual advantage.⁴⁷

When the war finally broke out with Germany's attack on Poland on 1 September, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd and a few of his followers were prepared to carry out in full Iraq's obligations under the treaty. In a speech of the same day he

⁴⁴ Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁵ The group of Four Colonels known as the Golden Square consisted of Staff Colonel Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh, commanding the 3rd division stationed in and around the capital, Staff Colonel Kāmil Shabīb, commanding the 1st division, Colonel Maḥmūd Salmān, head of the Iraqi Air Force and Staff Colonel Muḥammad Fahmī Sa^cīd, in charge of mechanized forces.

⁴⁶ SHABĪB, Maḥmūd. *Asrār ^cirāqīya fī wathā'iq inklīzīya wa ^carabīya wa almānīya* [Iraqi Secrets in English, Arab and German Documents], p. 132; Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, pp. 93-95.

⁴⁷ Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-^cirāqīya*. [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, p. 60.

reminded the country of the terms of article IV of the treaty under which railways, rivers, ports and aerodromes would be at the disposal of Great Britain.⁴⁸ On 3 September when Great Britain declared war on Germany, Nūrī as-Saʿīd went so far as to advocate the declaration of war on the side of Britain. The Iraqi Government issued a decree announcing that the international situation had become critical, and therefore the Minister of Interior was empowered to censor all news or other information that was received for publication, especially that which had a bearing on the foreign policy of Iraq.⁴⁹ With the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939, Great Britain asked Iraq to sever diplomatic relations with Germany, to intern all Germans and to give whatever assistance Great Britain would require under the terms of the treaty. Nūrī as-Saʿīd was quick to comply and on 5 September the Iraqi Government broke off diplomatic relations with Germany. On the following day the German Minister, Dr Fritz Grobba, was given his passport and left Iraq, with the members of his staff. Moreover all German subjects in Iraq were at first interned and then handed over to the British authorities, which deported them to India.⁵⁰

By proclaiming a "state of emergency" on 12 September Nūrī as-Saʿīd's government introduced censorship, curfews, rationing, requisitioning and all the regulations needed to place Iraq virtually on a war footing. The next day two more decrees were issued, the first entitled "Decree for Organizing the Country's Economic Life during the present International Crisis", gave the government powers to issue regulations for the control, prevention, or restriction of the import or export of certain goods, including goods which were in possession of the Customs authorities. The second provided for the establishment of a Central Supply Board (Majlis at-tamwīn al-markazī) to be appointed by the Council of Ministers which was entrusted with the duty of seeing that the measures for regulating the economic life of the country were effectively carried out.⁵¹ The government now had the power to rule by decree and by administrative regulation, causing great concern among Nūrī as-Saʿīd's political opponents, since they rightly feared that these powers would be used against them.

Nūrī as-Saʿīd's action in breaking off diplomatic relations with Germany aroused criticism in nationalist circles who had hoped that German victory

⁴⁸ BIRDWOOD, L. *Nuri as-Said. A Study in Arab Leadership*, p. 170.

⁴⁹ KHADDURI, M. *Independent Iraq*, pp. 145-146.

⁵⁰ AL-ḤASANĪ, *Al-asrār al-khaṣīya fī ḥarakat as-sana 1941 at-taḥarrurīya* [The Hidden Secrets of the 1941 Liberation Movement], pp. 51-52.

⁵¹ YĀGHĪ, Ismāʿīl Aḥmad. *Ḥarakat Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī 194. Dirāsa fī taḥawwur al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya al-ʿirāqīya. I* [The Movement of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī. Study in the Development of Iraqi National Movement], p. 41.

would free Palestine and Syria from British and French control. His action in handing over the German subjects in Iraq to the British authorities was particularly criticized by both moderates and extremists as an unnecessary measure of unfriendliness towards Germany.⁵² The Axis propaganda, augmented by nationalist frustration in Syria and Palestine, had influenced a great number of the people who looked forward to a better future for the Arabs if Great Britain and France lost the war. In the generally anti-British environment, Nūrī as-Saʿīd's support of Britain surpassed even that of the leaders of her own dominions. The pan-Arab group (including Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, the muftī, and the leading army officers) wanted to extract from Britain concessions on Palestine and Syria in return for Iraq's fulfilment of her treaty obligations; however, the majority, while seeing no reason to declare war on the side of Britain, advised caution.⁵³

The leading Iraqi nationalists were apprehensive as to the fate of the Arabs if the Axis Powers penetrated into the Middle East. This created divided loyalty and the clash between the two became serious after the fall of France in June 1940. On the other hand the extremely pro-British stance of Nūrī as-Saʿīd was met with disapproval from many quarters, including three members of his cabinet (Rustum Ḥaydar, Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī and Maḥmūd Ṣubḥī ad-Daftarī), and, more importantly, from the "circle of seven", particularly the Generals Ḥusayn Fawzī and Amīn al-ʿUmarī. In addition, there were the cabinet's traditional rivals, consisting mainly of politicians out of office, who would naturally exploit an opportunity to give their opposition a patriotic line. They too now sought the friendship of the Four Colonels, appealing to them to overthrow the cabinet.⁵⁴

When Parliament was convened on 1 November 1939, criticism was made of some aspects of Nūrī as-Saʿīd's policy. In his Speech from the Throne the Regent reviewed the policy of the government and also referred to the decision of the Iraqi Government to sever diplomatic relations with Germany, and its reaffirmation of fulfilling Iraq's treaty obligations towards Britain.⁵⁵ The speech was criticized in both Houses of Parliament on the grounds that the government, before making those decisions, should have summoned Parliament to an extraordinary session, in order to discuss the measures necessary for the defence of the country and the regulation of its economic life. With regard to Iraq's

⁵² HADDĀD, Uthmān Kamāl. *Ḥarakat Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī 1941*. [The Movement of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī], pp. 13-14.

⁵³ Al-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā' Ḥusayn. *Ta'sīs al-jaysh al-ʿirāqī wa taṭawwur dawrihi as-siyāsī, 1921-1941*. [The Establishment of the Iraqi Army and the Development of its Political Role], p. 219.

⁵⁴ TARBUSH, M. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 162.

⁵⁵ Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya* [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, pp. 107-108.

treaty obligations towards Great Britain, the prevailing opinion in Parliament was favourable to their fulfilment; but a few members, in both Houses, requested the government to ask Britain to fulfil the national aspirations of the other Arab countries, especially those of the Arabs of Palestine.⁵⁶

The year following the king's death was one of relative stability, partly because of a temporary coincidence of interest between Nūrī as-Sa'īd and the nationalist officers. As a result, Nūrī as-Sa'īd was able to break relations with Germany in September 1939, without serious protest from the officers but the calm was deceptive. Beneath the surface, nationalist sentiment continued to mount, creating a climate of opinion that would eventually isolate the pro-British politicians and create irresistible pressures within the establishment.⁵⁷ From the Munich Agreement to the declaration of war, opinion was divided as to the attitude of the Arabs should the Middle East be drawn into the war. The Arab nationalists in Iraq saw an opportunity to achieve the true independence they had dreamt of for so long. The ongoing conflict in Europe would offer them a possibility to rise against their British masters.⁵⁸

At this stage the "circle of seven" in the officer corps saw no reason why Iraq should not comply with Great Britain's requests. Nor were they perturbed by the strengthening of Nūrī as-Sa'īd's position since they knew that he was aware of the terms on which he occupied the office of premier. For his part, Nūrī as-Sa'īd still believed that he could maintain the balance between their brand of Arab nationalism and the demands made upon his government by the British. He therefore made no objection – whatever misgivings he may have felt privately when the officers invited the defeated leader of the Palestine revolt, the muftī of Jerusalem, al-Hājj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, to Baghdad in October 1939.⁵⁹ However, the muftī was to become an influential figure during the following two years, keeping alive both the cause of Palestine and the hostility towards Great Britain which that cause evoked.

Despite the growth of pan-Arabism and residual anti-British feelings in Iraq, it is doubtful whether popular opinion would have become as inflamed as it did, had it not been for the role of the Palestine struggle and the influence of the muftī who led the resistance movement in Palestine which had reached a peak between 1936 and 1939 and was ruthlessly crushed by the British. The

⁵⁶ KHADDURI, M. *Independent Iraq*, p. 147.

⁵⁷ Ad-DURRA, Maḥmūd. *Al-ḥarb al-irāqīya al-brīṭānīya 1941*. [The Iraki-British War 1941], p. 106; Al-KHAṬṬĀB, Rajā' Ḥusayn. *Ta'sīs al-jaysh al-irāqī wa taṭawwur dawrihi as-siyasī, 1921-1941*. [The Establishment of the Iraqi Army and the Development of its Political Role], pp. 221-222.

⁵⁸ TARBUSH, M. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 160.

⁵⁹ Aṣ-ṢABBĀGH, Ṣalāḥaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-raqīd ar-ruqn Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. Fursān al-urūba fī al-irāq*. [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq], p. 109.

activities of the Palestinians and the muftī, which received the sympathy of most Iraqis, put an increasing strain on Anglo-Iraqi relations and on the continuance of the alliance.⁶⁰ The muftī, becoming a refugee in Baghdad, added his voice to the mounting anti-British sentiment and his contacts with Iraqis intensified, especially with the Palestine Defence League, headed for a time by Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī. The muftī's house soon became one of the centres of political life in Baghdad.⁶¹

The political opponents of General Nūrī as-Sa'īd contended that the strength of his Cabinet was mainly due to Rustum Ḥaydar, minister of finance, who had already distinguished himself in the service of King Fayṣal I in Syria and Iraq and had been a close friend of Nūrī as-Sa'īd. Rustum Ḥaydar, it is true, was praised for his intelligence and integrity,⁶² but his Syrian origin and the fact that he was a Shī'ī told against him. He was mistrusted by Sunnī and anti-Syrian elements for championing the cause of the Shī'ī community. Rustum Ḥaydar was also much criticized by many Arab nationalists for his support of Nūrī as-Sa'īd's policies, in particular his pro-British policy.⁶³ However, after the tragic end (murder) of King Ghāzī, he became suspicious of the prime minister's role in this event and began opposing the prime minister plans within the cabinet.⁶⁴ On 18 January 1940 Rustum Ḥaydar was murdered by a violently anti-British adventurer. Nūrī as-Sa'īd chose to see this as part of a more general plot organized by his enemies and seemed ready to use this case as he had done the alleged "plot" of March 1939 to ensnare and to eliminate his political rivals. He decided to carry out an extensive investigation using the case against his political opponents (the Jamīl al-Midfa'ī group), who were accused of "inducing the murderer to commit the crime".⁶⁵ However, the court martial came to the conclusion that the assassination was the work of a lonely disgruntled civil servant who had moved in the circles of anti-British and pro-Axis Iraqis, and that the murderer had committed the crime on his own initiative. He was

⁶⁰ LONGRIGG, S. H. *Iraq, 1900 to 1950*, pp. 272-273.

⁶¹ An-NĀṢIRĪ, Ṭāriq. *ʿAbdalilāh al-waṣīy ʿalā ʿarsh al-ʿIrāq, 1939-1958. Ḥayātuhu wa dawruhu as-siyāsī*. [ʿAbdalilāh the Regent of the Iraqi Throne, 1939-1958. His Life and his Political Role], pp. 85-86.

⁶² He was born in Ba'lbakk (Baalbek) in 1889, a town in Syria before the First World War (now in Lebanon). In: ḤAYDAR, Rustum. *Mudhakkirāt Rustum Ḥaydar*. [The Memoirs of Rustum Ḥaydar].

⁶³ ṢAFWAT, Najda Fathī. *Al-ʿIrāq fī mudhakkirāt ad-diblūmāsīyīn al-ajānīb*. [Iraq in the Reports of Foreign Diplomats], pp. 152-154; Aṣ-ṢABBĀGH, Ṣalāḥaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-ʿaqīd ar-ruḡn Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. Fursān al-ʿurūba fī al-ʿIrāq*. [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq], p. 71.

⁶⁴ YĀGHĪ, Ismā'īl Aḥmad. *Ḥarakat Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī 1941. Dirāsa fī taṭawwur al-ḥaraka al-waṭanīya al-ʿirāqīya*. [The Movement of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī. Study in the Development of Iraqi National Movement], p. 39.

⁶⁵ KHADDURI, Majid. *Independent Iraq*, p. 150.

accordingly sentenced to death and hanged. Nūrī as-Sa^cīd who could not count on Rustum Ḥaydar's loyalty any longer (possibly at British instigation) needed to get rid of him. Both Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī and Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh imply that Nūrī as-Sa^cīd had somehow been an accomplice to that murder and therefore personally supervised the immediate silencing of the murderer.⁶⁶

For Nūrī as-Sa^cīd's political opponents, the only hope of removing him lay in cultivating rival officer factions. After the assassination of Rustum Ḥaydar, some of these tensions erupted. Personal dissension in the cabinet over prime minister's treatment of adversaries, as well as the general tensions brought about by the Palestine issue had made his position untenable. The opposition contended that he had tried to get rid of his political opponents by involving them in the affair and his measures gave the opposition further cause to work against the government. The prime minister was naturally aware of this and of the unpopularity of his pro-British policy. He was aware too that the most ominous threat to his position came, on the army's side, from the "circle of seven", and on the political side from Rashīd ^cĀlī al-Kaylānī. All of these factors – the pan-Arab issue, the intrusion of the military into politics, and personal fears – came to a head once again on 18 February 1940, when Nūrī as-Sa^cīd tendered his resignation to the regent. He accordingly recommended that Rashīd ^cĀlī al-Kaylānī should be called to form the next cabinet, which should include himself as foreign minister and Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī as minister of defence.⁶⁷

Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh was aware that should this happen, Nūrī as-Sa^cīd would thereby associate his most formidable rival, Rashīd ^cĀlī al-Kaylānī, with his own foreign policy and would therefore stand a better chance of receiving the endorsement of the "circle of seven".⁶⁸ What Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh did not add (although he later admitted to having fallen into a trap set up by Nūrī as-Sa^cīd) is that, should Nūrī as-Sa^cīd's scheme fail, it would, as proved later, lead to disagreement within the "circle of seven" themselves, which might result in a split and in ultimate weakening of the group. Nūrī as-Sa^cīd knew then that considerable animosity existed between Ḥusayn Fawzī, chief of the general staff and Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī, the minister of defence. But the unease between the politicians communicated itself to the officer corps. Here a rift was developing

⁶⁶ AL-HĀSHIMĪ, Ṭāhā. *Mudhakkirāt Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī, 1919-1943*. [Memoirs of Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī], p. 341; AṢ-ṢABBĀGH, Ṣalāḥaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-^caqīd ar-ruḡn Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. Fursān al-^curūba fī al-^cIrāq*. [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq], p. 134.

⁶⁷ TARBUSH, M. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 162.

⁶⁸ AṢ-ṢABBĀGH, Ṣalāḥaddīn. *Mudhakkirāt ash-shahīd al-^caqīd ar-ruḡn Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. Fursān al-^curūba fī al-^cIrāq* [Memoirs of the Martyr Staff Colonel Ṣalāḥaddīn aṣ-Ṣabbāgh. The Knights of Arabdom in Iraq], pp. 121-133.

between some of the older members of the “circle of seven”, particularly General Ḥusayn Fawzī, chief of the general staff, and the younger Four Colonels with whom Nūrī as-Saʿīd enjoyed closer relations.

The prospect of Nūrī as-Saʿīd’s resignation indeed generated a split among the officers who had previously supported him. The four young colonels, who formed the backbone of Nūrī as-Saʿīd’s support, saw no reason for a cabinet change and therefore asked Nūrī as-Saʿīd to stay in power. The older officers, and specifically Lieutenant General Ḥusayn Fawzī, the chief of general staff and Major General Amīn al-ʿUmarī, commanding the 1st division, were unwilling to continue their intervention in politics and wanted the matter of the new cabinet left to ʿAbdalilāh, the regent.⁶⁹ Threatened by the constant political intervention of the younger colonels and the support they enjoyed from Nūrī as-Saʿīd, Amīn al-ʿUmarī and Ḥusayn Fawzī told the regent they could not approve of either Nūrī as-Saʿīd or his cohort Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī being included in any new cabinet.⁷⁰ After much debate, the regent refused the general’s request and instead relieved them of their appointments and placed them on pension. This led to the crisis of February 1940 when Nūrī as-Saʿīd resigned as prime minister and his military allies promptly demanded his reinstatement, mobilizing their forces at ar-Rashīd camp and apparently preparing to march on the capital. General Ḥusayn Fawzī mobilized his forces at al-Washshāsh camp and the scene seemed set for a military clash to decide on the future government of Iraq. So the attempted coup against the government was immediately foiled by a successful countercoup organized by the Four Colonels.⁷¹

At this point, the regent, seeing where the balance of power lays and being sympathetic himself to Nūrī as-Saʿīd, called on him to form a government. However, Nūrī as-Saʿīd’s subservience to the Four Colonels undermined his authority, as exemplified in his failure to get his way in the trials associated with Rustum Ḥaydar’s murder and in the inability of his minister of defence Ṭāhā al-Hāshimī, to break up the Four Colonels themselves. The latter saw this attempt as the first move in a plan to re-establish civilian control over the officer corps, particularly in the light of a meeting of senior politicians summoned by the regent in March 1940 to discuss the problem of army intervention in politics. Faced by rifts within his cabinet, by increasing criticism of his policy of close co-operation with Great Britain and aware of the shifts

⁶⁹ YĀGHĪ, Ismāʿil Aḥmad. *Ḥarakat Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī 1941. Dirāsa fī taḥawwūr al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniya al-ʿirāqiya*. [The Movement of Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī. Study in the Development of Iraqi National Movement], pp. 44-45.

⁷⁰ MARR, P. *The Modern History of Iraq*, p. 81.

⁷¹ BARRĀK, Fāḍil. *Dawr al-jaysh al-ʿirāqī fī ḥukūmat ad-difāʿ al-waṭani, wa al-ḥarb maʿa Briṭāniyā ʿām 1941*. [The Role of the Iraqi Army in the Government of National Defence and the War with Britain in the Year 1941], p. 177; TARBUSH, M. *The Role of the Military in Politics: a Case Study of Iraq to 1941*, p. 163.

within the officer corps, Nūrī as-Saʿīd resigned as prime minister on 31 March 1940.⁷² The regent thereupon turned to the head of the Royal Dīwān, Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, to form a “national coalition” which included Nūrī as-Saʿīd as minister of foreign affairs. By bringing most of the senior politicians into a single government which implicitly accepted the 1930 treaty and the assistance which Great Britain might ask of Iraq under its terms, Nūrī as-Saʿīd and the regent believed that they could deprive the increasingly vociferous Four Colonels of significant political allies.

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⁷² Al-ḤASANĪ, *Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya* [The History of Iraqi Cabinets]. Vol. 5, pp. 128-129.

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