

THE 14th RAMAḌĀN COUP IN IRAQ*

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The 14th Ramaḍān 1382 (8th February 1963) coup that finally put an end to the regime of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim came from the Arab nationalist quarter; no other element in the political spectrum was prepared to undertake the task. The Communists and the left still tacitly supported ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, and in any event they had too little support in the army officer corps. The Kurds had weakened the fighting capacity of the army, but they were in no position to overthrow the regime by themselves. However, there was no real unity of purpose among Arab nationalists beyond their common desire to be rid of the “Sole Leader” (az-Zaʿīm al-Awḥād) and to reorient foreign policy toward some kind of union with other Arab countries. This action was no palace coup. The Baʿthists and their nationalist allies only succeeded in gaining control of the government after a day of fierce fighting with the defenders of the regime, which cost hundreds of lives. At last the rebel forces broke through into the Ministry of Defence compound, capturing ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his colleagues on 9 February. They were immediately brought before a tribunal of Baʿthist and pan-Arab officers, sentenced to death and summarily shot.

Key words: the regime of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim; the coup of 8 February 1963; the Baʿth Party; pan-Arab Iraqi Officers

To overthrow a military dictatorship by civil resistance is a very difficult task. However, when an army’s loyalty to a regime is alienated or the area of civil disturbances is so widespread that the regime is incapable of bringing it under control, there can be hope of a successful take-over. In the Iraq of the early 1960s, civil resistance to military rule had neither been continuous nor effective, even though public dissatisfaction with the military had become widespread. The attempt to end military rule by the assassination of the dictator

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proved to be almost impossible and was rejected by many on the ground that it carried with it a criminal touch. In these circumstances, there was no alternative for a civilian group other than to persuade sympathetic elements in the officer corps opposed to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's rule to raise an open military rebellion, even at the risk of bringing misfortune upon the party and provoking civil war.¹ The group that was ready to influence officers likely to take action was, of course, the *Baʿth Party*. Its members had the reputation of not being afraid to face danger in their struggle against military dictatorship ever since their unsuccessful attempt on ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's life in 1959.

The coup that was to destroy ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim in February of 1963 was essentially the conception of the *Baʿth Party*. The Baʿthists had impressed the public with their courage; they entered into violent battles with the Communists at the height of the ideological warfare to the great satisfaction of many nationalists. They proved to be the only possible group which could incite a rebellion in the army, for they were determined to act without hesitation and were able to carry the country with them. The antecedents of the 14th Ramaḍān coup must be traced back to the spring of 1961, when the *Baʿth Party* had recovered from the retaliatory strikes caused by the failure of the attempt on ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's life in the autumn of 1959 and the subsequent flight and arrest of so many of its most active members. In Damascus a special organ, the Bureau of Iraq came into being, and took in hand the task of helping Ḥāzīm Jawād put the party back on its feet.² A new party command had consolidated and the old cadres had resumed activity. In June 1961 the Naserites seceded – or were excluded – from the National Front (al-Jabha al-qawmīya),³ as the *Baʿth Party* would no longer tolerate a partner whom it regarded as a fifth column of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir and this development strengthened rather than weakened the nationalist underground. Finally, the amnesties granted that year – possibly not a very wise step of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim – restored the leadership which executed the coup in 1963. His acts of clemency had restored to liberty, and often to office and command, some of his most formidable enemies.

¹ KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 188.

² BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: a Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, Baʿthists and Free Officers*, p. 966.

³ The National Front (al-Jabha al-qawmīya) emerged in 1961 after the collapse of the Front of National Union (Jabhat al-ittiḥād al-waṭanī) and comprised of the Baʿth Party (Ḥizb al-baʿth al-ʿarabī al-ishtirākī), the Independence Party (Ḥizb al-istiqlāl) and the Movement of Arab Nationalists (Ḥarakat al-qawmīyīn al-ʿarab). In Az-ZUBAYDĪ, Layth ʿAbdalḥasan. *Thawrat 14 tammūz 1958 fī al-ʿIrāq*. [The Revolution of 14 July 1958 in Iraq], p. 516.

The conspirators took their time. From about the summer of 1960 onwards, total concealment proved unnecessary for the *Ba'ath Party* and its sympathizers as there was a certain relaxation of political pressures. Early in 1961 the *Ba'ath Party* resumed its work when 'Alī Šālīḥ as-Sa'dī, one of its active young members, was entrusted with the leadership of the party's regional command which proceeded to make the forces of the party ready for the governmental overturn. In the months that followed, it established a network of "Alarm Committees" which would later constitute the core of the notorious National Guard.⁴ A military bureau named "Advisory Committee for executing the Revolution" (al-Lajna al-istishārīya li-tanfīdh ath-thawra) was created for co-ordinating the armed activities of both the military and civilian population.⁵ In the meantime, the party began to devise plans to overthrow the regime, patiently weighing the chances for success of each, but 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's efficient police made it exceedingly difficult for them to move. However, the security forces put no heart into the persecution of Ba'athists, and of nationalists in general, although occasionally cells were unearthed, or leaflets seized. In this respect, the feelings of the police and government officials coincided with public opinion in general. Ba'ath principles did not rouse anything like the feelings of opprobrium that were stirred by the communist practices of the spring of 1959.⁶ The blind-eye attitude adopted by the security services during the last two years of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's regime enabled the *Ba'ath Party* to organize and train its party militia. By the day of the coup this body was able to take to the streets in the thousands.

In 1961-1962 the *Ba'ath Party* – while remaining illegal – became increasingly active and its official, though unlicensed, press organ *al-Ishtirākī* (the Socialist) was secretly circulated in ever-increasing numbers. The first attempt by the revived *Ba'ath Party* at a trial of strength with the regime was prompted by the Baghdad riots of March 1961.⁷ The riots were strictly non-political in origin, and were a response to sharp increases in the excise on petrol. The drivers were hit particularly hard, since the rise in prices was not accompanied by corresponding rises for diesel, and therefore omnibus fares were not affected. The party leadership had expected the riots to develop into a

⁴ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 968.

⁵ This Committee under the leadership of 'Alī Šālīḥ as-Sa'dī, comprised of Ḥāzīm Jawād, Ṭālib Ḥusayn Shabīb, retired Colonel Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, Staff Lieutenant Colonel Šālīḥ Maḥdī 'Ammāsh and retired Staff Lieutenant Colonel 'Abdassattār 'Abdallaṭīf, Staff Colonel Khālīd Makkī al-Ḥāshimī, Flight Lieutenant-Colonel Ḥardān 'Abdalghaffār at-Tikrītī. In *Al-JUBŪRĪ, Šālīḥ Ḥusayn. Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-'Irāq. Nihāyat ḥukm 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 117.

⁶ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 364.

⁷ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 957.

mass movement which might sweep away the regime. Ba^ṯhī agitators put themselves at the head of the demonstrators who called for revolt. But the police, joined by the army, cleared the streets and drove the Ba^ṯhī demonstrators back with little opposition. A number of rioters were killed.⁸ The party took the lesson to heart. Its further plans were based on close cooperation with sympathetic "Free Officers". The planned coup was to be effected by army spearheads, reinforced and complemented through mass action organized by the party.

Despite attempts to divert public attention from internal to foreign affairs, the regime of personal rule began to show signs of disintegration. Meanwhile, the Ba^ṯh Party intensified its underground agitation in order to prepare the public for the forthcoming uprising and to justify military rebellion on the ground that it was raised in response to popular demand. By the end of 1961 a joint committee of Ba^ṯhists and Free Officers, later to be known as the "National Council of Revolutionary Command" (NCRC), was established.⁹ The object of this cooperation was, first, the elimination of "the dictator". This was to be followed by a final settlement of accounts with the Communists. Lastly, a sincere but not unconditional rapprochement with the UAR was envisaged.

Several plans had been made during 1962, but some seem to have been impossible to implement and others became directly or indirectly known to ^ṢAbdalkarīm Qāsim, because his chief of military intelligence kept a vigilant eye on the movements of the military. The efficiency of the internal security bodies should not be judged by their ultimate failure, however. They were well paid and certainly not hampered by constitutional or operational restraints, and the heads of the services were faithful to ^ṢAbdalkarīm Qāsim. In addition Brigadier Ṭāhā ash-Shaykh Aḥmad, director of planning at the General Staff, and Brigadier ^ṢAbdalkarīm al-Jidda, commander of the military police, had in effect turned their departments into intelligence services to watch the sympathies of the officers corps, including both the active and retired

⁸ The Ba^ṯh Party: *Li-takun dhikrā shuhadā'inā ḥāfīzan li-tashdīd an-niḍāl li-taṣfīyat al-ḥukm al-askarī al-fardī ad-diktātūrī*. [Let be the Memory of our Martyrs a Spur to Strengthening the Fight for Elimination of the Military, Personal, Dictatorial Rule]. In *Niḍāl al-Ba^ṯh*. Vol VII, Al-Quṭr al-^ṢIrāqī 1958-1963, pp. 121-123.

⁹ The members of this body were: ^ṢAlī Ṣāliḥ as-Sa^ḍdī, the recently elected secretary of the Iraqi Ba^ṯh Regional Command, Ḥāzim Jawād, Ṭālib Ḥusayn Shabīb, retired Colonel Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, retired Staff Lieutenant Colonel ^ṢAbdassattār ^ṢAbdallaṭīf, Staff Colonel Khālīd Makkī al-Ḥāshimī, commander of the Fourth armoured Battalion at Abū Ghurayb, Staff Flight Lieutenant-Colonel Ḥardān ^ṢAbdalghaffār at-Tikrītī, commander of Kirkūk air base, and Flight Captain Mundhir Tawfīq al-Windāwī co-opted in September 1962. In *Al-JUBŪRĪ*, Ṣāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-^ṢIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ^ṢAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ^ṢAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 122.

members.¹⁰ According to subsequent reports, a number of attempts to assassinate ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and take over the government had been made during 1962; on each occasion the attempts were abandoned largely due to last-minutes fears about the damage an unsuccessful attempt might cause to the party.¹¹

The conspirators postponed their strike several times because they feared it had been discovered – needlessly, as it became apparent. The large military forces which ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim kept concentrated in and about Baghdad had a similar effect. They turned the Ministry of Defence compound between ar-Rashīd Street and the Tigris into a fortified camp. The Nineteenth Brigade, which occupied the Ministry of Defence, was ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s old brigade, while the Fifth Division located in ar-Rashīd Camp, had been commanded since 1960 by Brigadier ʿAbdaljabbār Jawād, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s brother-in-law.¹² On the other hand, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s unwillingness or his inability to develop power or to create institutions that could mobilize effective popular support meant that he not only focused all animosity on himself, but also that he had no defence against a well-organized military conspiracy. Whether through family background or upbringing, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was peculiarly sensitive to the diversity of Iraq’s population and thus to the need to encourage some sense of national community in Iraqi politics.¹³

Matters came to a head on 27 December 1962 when students in Government high schools went on strike. The strike was prompted by a trifling incident in one of the Baghdad high schools originating in a quarrel between Munāḍil, the son of Fāḍil ʿAbbās al-Mahdāwī, President of the High Military Court, and another student. When the school tried to enforce discipline on both students, Fāḍil ʿAbbās al-Mahdāwī intervened on behalf of his son. The students of the school went on strike in protest and were joined by students in other high schools and the University of Baghdad.¹⁴ The general strike was a manifestation of disaffection which the *Baʿth Party* exploited to create conditions favourable for the forthcoming military rebellion. Despite the strict secrecy of Baʿth contacts with the military, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim received

¹⁰ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 358.

¹¹ Al-JUBŪRĪ, Šāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 113-116.

¹² DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 359.

¹³ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 170.

¹⁴ ABU JABER, K. S. *The Arab Baath Socialist Party*, p. 67; Al-JUBŪRĪ, Šāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 124.

intelligence of an impending plot against him in December 1962, but he knew the names of only some of the conspirators, not all, and ordered their arrest.

The plotters had tried several times before to mount a movement against the Sole Leader but had been forced to call off their plans before putting them into execution. Towards the end of the year 1962 a further, more specific plan, was worked out, to be implemented on 19 January 1963, but again ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was alerted. At least eighty officers were retired or detained as a result.¹⁵ The principals, however, escaped arrest. The arrangements resembled those followed in the successful coup of 14th Ramaḍān, but less reliance was placed on improvisation, and armoured units were assigned a greater role. A new date was set for 25th February, on the holiday of ʿĪd al-Fiṭr when the state of preparedness to cope with such a situation might be low. This plan was indeed also betrayed to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim at the last moment. The Communists had warned him that a rebellion was imminent, and he had received other reports of a conspiracy. He had continued to remain confident of his own networks of control. He had warned his opponents that in the past he had already arrested and executed rebels who dared to expose the Revolutionary regime to danger. Thereupon, on 3 February he ordered the arrest of ʿAlī Ṣāliḥ as-Saʿdī, Ṣāliḥ Maḥdī ʿAmmāsh, one of the active Baʿth officers and Saʿdūn Ḥammādī, just returned from exile.

John Devlin states, that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was fairly well aware of plots and movements among the military forces, which was, of course, precisely what had caused him to make the rather sweeping retirements in January and February. In so doing, however, he destroyed the utility of one of his principal sources of information, an army captain in whom Ṣāliḥ Maḥdī ʿAmmāsh confided, thinking the captain was a loyal Baʿthist. With the “source” in detention and out of touch with the Baʿthī plotters, the captain did not learn of the plans and intentions of the conspirators as they moved into action under the leadership of Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr. Thus, a coup mounted in haste on a now-or-never basis, by men who had operational control of very few army units turned out to be the one to topple the Sole Leader.¹⁶

ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was believed to have gained possession of the complete list of the plotters, military and civilian, and was daily expected to swoop down on them. This spurred the remaining conspirators into action since they now feared a more general purge and the command decided that the safest policy was boldness, and that only immediate action could save the situation.

¹⁵ DANSHALĪ, Muṣṭafā. *Ḥizb al-Baʿth al-ʿarabī al-ishtirākī, 1940-1963*. [The Arab Baʿth Socialist Party], p. 248; AL-JUBŪRĪ, Ṣāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāt 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 125.

¹⁶ DEVLIN, J. F. *The Baʿth Party. A History from Its Origins to 1966*, p. 233.

On the following day, Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, head of the military group, issued instructions to fellow members that the coup was set for the morning hours of Friday, 8 February, two weeks earlier than planned, before ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim moved to arrest other Baʿth leaders.¹⁷ At that time ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, who worked at night, would be asleep in his house in the ʿAlwīya quarter, the streets would not be overcrowded and most of the officers kept out of the secret would be on weekend leave. By an additional stroke of good fortune, Brigadier ʿAbdaljabbār Jawād was ill, and his acting deputy was in the plot.¹⁸ The Kurds, the pan-Arabs, the UAR government, and the Baʿth National Command at Beirut were left in ignorance of zero hour.¹⁹

The military coup came as no surprise. The Military Bureau of the party adopted a plan of action in which there were two main targets: the Ministry of Defence compound on the east bank of the Tigris River and ar-Rashīd Camp, some ten kilometres southeast of Baghdad. In the Ministry of Defence ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had concentrated his own Nineteenth Brigade, provided with heavy arms, anti-aircraft guns, and ample ammunition. In ar-Rashīd Camp, with a view to a swift transition to the counterblow in an emergency, he had organized a special striking force of infantry, tanks and aircraft. Several squadrons of *MiG-19* fighters together with their Communist pilots and crews stationed in the camp, made a direct and powerful stroke against the base imperative.²⁰ Early in the morning, while the first bombs rained on the Ministry of Defence an assassination detachment called on Brigadier Jalāl al-Awqātī, the able Communist commander of the air force and a loyal supporter of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, at his residence, and when he tried to flee, they instantly shot him dead.²¹

Since ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's headquarters in the Ministry of Defence had been heavily fortified, a direct attack by a land force was not considered likely to achieve success. On the other hand there were only defensive and no striking

¹⁷ The principal officers who took an active part in the preparation of the military uprising were Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, ʿAbdassattār ʿAbdallaṭīf, Šāliḥ Maḥdī ʿAmmāsh, Khālīd Makkī al-Ḥāshimī, Ḥardān ʿAbdalghaffār al-Tikrītī, Mundhir Tawfīq al-Windāwī, ʿAbdassattār ʿAbdallaṭīf, and Khālīd ash-Shāwī.

¹⁸ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 365.

¹⁹ The Zero Hour was set on 9 a.m., on 8 February 1963; the password was "Blessed Ramaḍān". In KHAYŪN, ʿAlī. *Dabbābāt Ramaḍān. Qiṣṣat Thawrat 14 Ramaḍān 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq*. [The Tanks of Ramadan. The Story of the 14th Ramadan Revolution in Iraq], p. 95.

²⁰ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 970.

²¹ AL-JUBŪRĪ, Šāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 147.

forces there.²² It was therefore decided to subject the fortified compound of the Ministry of Defence to heavy attack by air before it would be stormed by tanks. It was also decided to strike first at ar-Rashīd Camp, south of Baghdad, where a strong force loyal to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim might come swiftly to his rescue, and to capture a supply of ammunition to the north of Abū Ghurayb before the entire force moved towards Baghdad.²³ When all these preparations had been completed, the officers were ready for the signal to move.

The means by which the objectives of the coup could be secured were dictated by the particular distribution of the support that the Baʿth had in the army. The ground forces nearest to the capital in which the party had enough adherents or allies were in the garrison at Abū Ghurayb, a village some thirty kilometres to the west of Baghdad, and in the military base al-Ḥabbānīya. The closest air force unit was the Sixth Squadron, also at al-Ḥabbānīya. The eighth of February 1963 was a Friday in the fasting month of Ramaḍān, when official work was considerably reduced, and when many defenders would be off duty. The moment of attack was chosen for early in the morning because ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim preferred to work at night and to retire then.²⁴ It was assumed that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim would still be asleep at 8 a.m., and in Ramaḍān most people who fast do not ordinarily start work early and therefore traffic in the city would not be very heavy. This would allow tanks and armoured cars to move quickly into the city and proceed to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's headquarters unhampered by civilian traffic.

In the early hours of that morning Baʿthī officers and nationalist officers belonging to the armoured corps from the near-by al-Anbār province made their way into the Abū Ghurayb Camp and with the help of their people inside the camp gained control of the Fourth Tank Battalion whose commander, Staff Colonel Khālīd Makkī al-Hāshimī, was not present. The conspirators found most of the tanks not ready (without water, fuel and ammunition), only one company of the Fourth Tank Battalion was ready for action.²⁵ As there were too few non-commissioned officers among the Baʿthists, officers had to take

²² ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿalā ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 109.

²³ ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿalā ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 79 and p. 83; KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq*, p. 190.

²⁴ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihi al-akhīra*. [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], pp. 111-112.

²⁵ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihi al-akhīra*. [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], p. 122; Al-JUBŪRĪ, Šālīḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 142; ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿalā ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 84.

the places of tank drivers and shooters.²⁶ The tanks were divided as follows: two tanks to defend the Abū Ghurayb Camp, two tanks to capture and defend the radio transmitter at Abū Ghurayb, three tanks to the Broadcasting House in aş-Şālīḥīya quarter, in the western part of the capital,²⁷ three tanks to ar-Rashīd Camp, and seven tanks under the command of Staff Airborne Colonel ʿAbdalkarīm Muṣṭafā Naṣrat to the Ministry of Defence.²⁸ For the first assault specific tasks with the names of the responsible officers were set, which had to be fulfilled before the broadcasting of the first proclamation.²⁹

The signal for action was given when three planes left al-Ḥabbānīya air base, situated to the west of the Euphrates, and attacked the ar-Rashīd Camp. At 9.05 a.m. on 8 February a *Hawker-Hunter* jet fighter-bomber of the Sixth Squadron from al-Ḥabbānīya accompanied by two *MiG-17* fighters appeared over ar-Rashīd military airfield to the south-east of Baghdad, and attacked the runway with bombs neutralizing the airfield there and destroying many planes of the Ninth Squadron on the ground. The leader of the assault was Flight Captain Mundhir al-Windāwī, who thus committed the first act of violence during the coup together with Flight Lieutenants Fahd ʿAbdalkhālīq as-Saʿdūn and Wāthīq ʿAbdallāh Ramaḍān.³⁰ It is doubtful how effective the damage to the runway might have proved if the pilots with their *MiG-19* fighters had been determined to join battle. Whatever the reason, the Ninth Squadron did not take to the air.

On that Friday ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif left his home in al-Aʿzamīya early in the morning, “for prayers”. At about 8 a.m. he arrived at the headquarters of the Fourth Tank Battalion at Abū Ghurayb, west of Baghdad. There he met Colonel Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, and the two clambered into a tank put at their disposal by the commander. The battalion set out from Abū Ghurayb and both of them returned to Baghdad, safe from interception at least by a light patrol, and drove to the Broadcasting House near the right bank of the Tigris.³¹ Some

²⁶ HUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūf ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 341; Al-JUBŪRĪ, Šālīḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāf 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 135.

²⁷ KHAYŪN, ʿAlī. *Dabbābāt Ramaḍān Qiṣṣat Thawrat 14 Ramaḍān 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq*. [The Tanks of Ramadan. The Story of the 14th Ramadan Revolution in Iraq], p. 108; HUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūf ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 341-342.

²⁸ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihī al-akhīra*. [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], p. 122.

²⁹ HUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūf ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 343.

³⁰ ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿalā ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 103.

³¹ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 366; According to another version a member of the Baʿth leadership, ʿAdnān al-Qassāb called for ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif in his house and accompanied him to the radio transmitter at Abū Ghurayb where they arrived at 10.30 a.m. In Al-JUBŪRĪ, Šālīḥ

of the officers in command of the guard there were in the plot, the rest readily acquiesced. The conspirators took over the building and its services and prepared to announce to the world that the revolution had come. They had been joined by a few of the Ba'ṯhī civilian leaders. Here in the Broadcasting House joined them Staff Colonel Khālīd Makkī al-Hāshimī no sooner than at 11.30 a.m. the present leaders appointed him commander of the armoured forces in Baghdad and he immediately returned to Abū Ghurayb.³² When the cumbersome column of the Fourth Tank Battalion rolling through Baghdad had reached its target areas the revolution was ablaze.

Within a few minutes of the attack on ar-Rashīd airfield the first air attack was concentrating on the Ministry of Defence compound. But 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim had not been in his headquarters that night and had spent the night at home. The General Staff was located there and the ministry was in every sense the heart of the regime, heavily fortified, well provided with arms, and garrisoned by more than two thousand troops from the Nineteenth Brigade. The first detonations from ar-Rashīd airfield had waked 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim from his sleep at his house in 'Alwīya quarter. It is said that his first action was to order the Ninth Squadron to bomb al-Ḥabbānīya base, but his message was intercepted and diverted by a nationalist telephonist at ar-Rashīd exchange. At 9.45 a.m. Brigadiers Ṭāhā ash-Shaykh Aḥmad and Waṣfī Ṭāhīr arrived at the house and presented some ideas how to crush the uprising; then they proposed to move immediately to their headquarters.³³ Then the three, accompanied by an aide-de-camp, rushed by armoured car along ar-Rashīd Street to the Ministry of Defence and entered through a side gate. It was 10.30 a.m. when 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim arrived and the bombing, begun more than an hour before, would continue with interruptions all day till the evening.³⁴ 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim immediately began to issue orders to loyal officers to counter-attack. Most of the addressed commanders and officers promised to fulfil his orders, but they preferred to wait and not to move.³⁵ Telephone cables had not been cut deliberately so as to let 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim receive discouraging replies from some of the disaffected military units.

Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al- 'Irāq. Nihāyat ḥukm 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 155.

³² FAWZĪ, Aḥmad: *'Abdalkarīm Qāsim wa sā'ātihi al-akhīra*. ['Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], p. 116.

³³ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad: *'Abdalkarīm Qāsim wa sā'ātihi al-akhīra*. ['Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], pp. 112-113.

³⁴ Al-JUBŪRĪ, Ṣāliḥ Ḥusayn: *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al- 'Irāq. Nihāyat ḥukm 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 148.

³⁵ 'ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan: *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā' 'alā 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 108.

Soon after the air attack on ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s headquarters began, the tanks and armoured cars of the Fourth Tank Battalion that started from Abū Ghurayb, under the command of Staff Colonel ʿAbdalkarīm Muṣṭafā Naṣrat, got hold of the tank ammunition storage and the radio transmitting station at Abū Ghurayb.³⁶ Then the battalion split into smaller units of which the one under ʿAbdalkarīm Muṣṭafā Naṣrat, proceeded towards Baghdad to the Ministry of Defence. The second unit under Colonel Dhiyāb Muḥammad al-ʿAlkāwī proceeded to occupy the Radio Broadcasting House in the western part of Baghdad. The third unit moved through Baghdad to the ar-Rashīd camp.³⁷ With the first bombings, the signal to go ahead was given to the Baʿthī militia, who for the first time donned their green al-Ḥaras al-qawmī (“National Guard”) armlets that they had kept in readiness; at least two thousand men, many armed with submachine-guns, poured out of al-Aʿzamīya. After blocking the entrance to al-Aʿzamīya against a possible communist assault they took up positions along the highway to al-Ḥabbānīya and Abū Ghurayb, from where military support was expected.

The force, under ʿAbdalkarīm Muṣṭafā Naṣrat, then passed through ar-Rashīd Street heading toward the Ministry of Defence. On the way the tanks were subjected to surprise assaults by Communists and some of them were stopped; the Communists attacked the tanks, killed soldiers and dragged them through the streets and hampered the advance of the tanks.³⁸ They nevertheless continued and four of the tanks that reached the square outside the Ministry of Defence began to storm the heavily fortified compound, but at first they were not able to get through in the face of its superior resources. They forced their way to the main gate, but they soon were immobilized outside the compound.³⁹ They effected a link-up with the men of the National Guard and proceeded to deal with the Communist-led crowds. At first they tried to pacify them but in the end resorted to violence, sweeping them away. ʿAbdalkarīm Muṣṭafā Naṣrat then left his tank and returned to Abū Ghurayb to collect the remaining 50 tanks of the battalion and lead them into the battle.⁴⁰ The other unit with three tanks marched south east, under the command of Staff Colonel Ṭāhir Yaḥyā, and threw a cordon around ar-Rashīd camp. The first tank with Ṭāhir Yaḥyā

³⁶ KHAYŪN, ʿAlī. *Dabbābāt Ramaḍān. Qiṣṣat Thawrat 14 Ramaḍān 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq*. [The Tanks of Ramadan. The Story of the 14th Ramadan Revolution in Iraq], p. 106.

³⁷ ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿala ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 77.

³⁸ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 978.

³⁹ Al-JUBŪRĪ, Šālīḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāt 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 143.

⁴⁰ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihi al-akhīra*. [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], p. 117.

was commanded by Major Anwar ʿAbdalqādir al-Ḥadīthī, the second by Staff Brigadier Rashīd Muṣliḥ and the third by Lieutenant ʿAdnān Khayrallāh Ṭalfāḥ.⁴¹ The camp housed the headquarters of the Fifth Division and the Nineteenth Brigade, as well as the Military Prison with the most important concentration of political prisoners in Iraq. In all probability the cordon would have proved illusory, had the troops inside attempted to break it; but they did not.

No sooner had the radio fallen into rebel hands when a National Council of Revolutionary Command (NCRC) was set up by the Baʿth Party to replace the ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim Government, and the radio station building became its temporary headquarters. The Council, at ʿAlī Ṣāliḥ as-Saʿdī's insistence, appointed ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, who had made his way to the radio station upon hearing the news of the uprising, as temporary President of the Republic, pending the establishment of a permanent constitutional regime.⁴² At this stage the NCRC disclosed no new revolutionary principles, for its main purpose was to turn public opinion against ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, who had betrayed the goals of the July Revolution. The Ramaḍān Revolution was, therefore, regarded as the vindication of the July Revolution. Not even the names of the Baʿth Party or its leaders were mentioned in official communiqués; only ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, whom the public had known to have challenged ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's rule and whose name was identified with pan-Arabism, was announced as the head of the new regime.⁴³

The first act of the NCRC, while ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's force was still fiercely resisting the attack, was to issue at 9.20 a.m., shortly after the attack began, the first proclamation to the nation which was broadcast from Baghdad Radio: *"Honourable citizens of Iraq, with the help of God, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's regime is ended. His regime suppressed liberties, stamped upon dignity, and deceived and oppressed our trustful citizens. The Revolution of the 14th July [1958] took place in order to bring about a democratic way of life for the people to enjoy. But God's enemy and your enemy, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, exploited his position and used all sorts of criminal means to establish his black regime. He pretended to seek unity while he isolated Iraq from the*

⁴¹ KHAYŪN, ʿAlī. *Dabbābāt Ramaḍān. Qiṣṣat Thawrat 14 Ramaḍān 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq*. [The Tanks of Ramadan. The Story of the 14th Ramadan Revolution in Iraq], p. 107; ʿULAYWĪ, Ḥādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿala ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 92.

⁴² KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq*, p. 193.

⁴³ AL-JUBŪRĪ, Ṣāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāʿ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 156.

procession of liberated Arab states and crushed the aspirations of the people.

Citizens, our striving for the security of our homeland, the unity of our people, the future of coming generations, and our belief in the Revolution of July 14th has made us assume the responsibility of destroying the corrupt group who took over the revolution of the people and the army and stopped it from moving forward. We have put an end to corruption with the help of the armed forces and the support of the people.

Citizens, this revolution of the people and the armed forces must achieve two goals: first, realize the people's national unity; second, to achieve the participation of the masses in guiding and organizing the regime.

Citizens, the National Revolutionary Council is working toward establishing a National Government of sincere people. The Revolutionary Government Command will work in accordance with the goals of the Revolution of July 14th to establish democratic liberties, support the principle of the supremacy of law, and achieve national unity, with a stronger Kurdish-Arab brotherhood, in order to secure national interests and strengthen the common struggle against imperialism. The Revolutionary Government will respect the rights of minorities and enable them to participate in national life.

*The Revolutionary Government will adhere to the principles of the United Nations and maintain international commitments, treaties and charters. It will support peace and fight imperialism by following a policy of non-alignment by adhering to the decisions of the Bandung Conference, and the principles of developing national movements."*⁴⁴

At 9.45 a.m. another revolutionary proclamation was broadcast: "*Sons of the valiant people, units of our valiant army, listen to this good news: after our heroes, the eagles of the air force, destroyed the den of the criminal traitor, and after all our military units moved forward proclaiming the revolution... our brothers, the officers and troops of the Defence Ministry, rose up and killed the criminal traitor. He is dead.*"⁴⁵ When this proclamation was broadcast 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim was still stubbornly resisting the assailants in the Ministry of Defence. It was done with the purpose of frustrating the Communists.

Further proclamations followed in rapid succession. Communiqué No. 2 broadcast at 10 a.m. announced the retirement of seventeen high ranking army officers, supporters of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's regime, and requested them to surrender themselves to the nearest police station.⁴⁶ Communiqué No. 3 announced the establishment of the National Guard to help the army to protect the people and the fatherland. Communiqué No. 4 appointed Staff Colonel

⁴⁴ Cit., In ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūf 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Fall of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 331-333.

⁴⁵ Cit., In ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūf 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, p. 334.

⁴⁶ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūf 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, p. 334.

‘Abdalkarīm Muṣṭafā Naṣrat commander of the National Guard units and imposed a curfew from 3 p.m. All the time messages of support from army units, individual officers and civilians were broadcast, but most of them not authentic.⁴⁷ Getting hold of the Radio transmitter in Abū Ghurayb had decisively influenced the outcome of the coup. Firstly, most of the military commanders loyal to ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim who had listened from the beginning to the communiqués presumed that the revolutionary forces had already decided the power struggle in their favour and that diminished their response and led to tacit support for the uprising. Secondly, the radio broadcasting was used as a device to direct the movements of the units to the chosen targets. There can be no doubt that their attitude was influenced also by the rebel broadcasts which gave out false reports of ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim’s death. Thirdly, the NCRC managed to rally all their supporters who did not know anything about the coup before, and to rush immediately on the hated regime.⁴⁸

When the citizens of Baghdad had been listening to the detonations for nearly one hour, during which time armed civilians bearing green armlets were swarming through the streets and wild rumours were sweeping the city, the tidings of the revolution came onto the air at last. After the insurgents began to broadcast over the radio – with the martial music and the strains of “Allāhu akbar” that had accompanied the Revolution of 14 July – there were immediate demonstrations in support of ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim all over Baghdad, and poor people poured into the streets in a desperate effort to defend his regime. The *Iraqi Communist Party*, despite its uneven relationship with ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim, mobilized its members, bringing thousands into the streets to defend the regime. They converged on the leader’s headquarters at the Ministry of Defence, hoping to forestall the coup by taking over the streets of the capital.⁴⁹

The army precautions against possible Communist countermeasures came none too soon. The Communists had not been entirely surprised by the coup, as many people in Baghdad with a sense for political atmosphere had felt for weeks that some dramatic development was impending. But the Communists were mistaken in their assessment of the popular force which stood behind the officers’ rising. Rumours of British and American intrigues to overturn ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim had led them to expect a putsch by a narrow clique of officers, with massive Western aid in money, material and, perhaps, airborne

⁴⁷ According to ‘Abdassattār ad-Dūrī, one of the Ba‘thī activists in the Abū Ghurayb radio station, the broadcast news of ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim’s death and telegrams of support for the uprising were fabricated. In FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim wa sā‘ātihī al-akhīra*. [‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], p. 123.

⁴⁸ ‘ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā’ ‘ala ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ‘Abdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 86-87.

⁴⁹ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 169.

troops. They were not prepared for the appearance of an armed mass militia.⁵⁰ Equally important, they may not have realized the extent to which Communist influence had been extirpated from the army and police. The nationalist officers could give their orders and have them obeyed; most police stations, within an hour of the first communiqué, had their complements of National Guards ready to withstand any assault on the armouries. Lastly, the Communists had been sapped in strength and spirit; most of their leaders were in prison or exile, their cadres were spied upon and broken, their organization dislocated.⁵¹

The crowds that gathered outside the Ministry of Defence begged the Sole Leader to give them arms, but, presumably counting upon some deep-seated belief in his own capacity to find a way out of the situation, he refused, believing to the end that his own forces could deal with the problems.⁵² As a military officer he could not bring himself to hand out weapons to the public, despite the fact that he had been willing to use the same public on previous occasions to discourage thoughts of a coup within the military. The bitterest resistance took place in the poorer parts of the city, and especially in the area around the Shīʿī shrine in al-Kāẓimīya, where fighting continued until the next day; crowds fought the tanks with sticks and pistols. However, the Baʿth Party and its allies were not so easily discouraged. Their own popular organizations also took to the streets, well armed and intent on clearing the streets of their political opponents. In the meantime, the military units under the command of Baʿthist and Arab nationalist officers headed straight for the Ministry of Defence, brushing aside civilian resistance.⁵³ Most of those who had gathered outside the Ministry of Defence were killed in the course of the day, either mown down by the tanks of the Fourth Tank Battalion or shot by members of the Baʿth National Guard.⁵⁴

The al-Ḥabbānīya military camp and especially its air base played a vital role in the success of the coup because from there were realized the repeated air attacks on important targets. Commander of the air base, Flight Staff Colonel Ṣādiq al-ʿAzzāwī, promised Captain Mundhir al-Windāwī, that the planes would be fully prepared at dawn of 8 February, but he did not keep his promise and almost spoiled the action. The commander of the wing stationed there, Flight Staff Lieutenant Colonel ʿĀrif ʿAbdarrazzāq, a non-Baʿthī nationalist,

⁵⁰ AL-JUBŪRĪ, Ṣāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 139.

⁵¹ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 369.

⁵² GOMBÁR, E. *Revolučně demokratické strany na Blízkém východě*. [The Revolutionary-Democratic Parties in the Middle East], p. 49.

⁵³ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 170.

⁵⁴ SLUGLETT, M. F., SLUGLETT, P. *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 84.

did not know anything about the coup beforehand. Lieutenant Hāmid Jawād informed him about the action only after the three planes at 8.40 a.m. left the base. From that moment on he went into the operation room, and sat behind the control devices to direct the air traffic.⁵⁵ At 9.30 a.m. the retired Staff Colonel, °Abdalghanī ar-Rāwī, arrived at the headquarters of the Eighth Mechanized Infantry Brigade at al-Ḥabbānīya, where he had commanded a battalion until the previous year. °Abdalghanī ar-Rāwī identified himself as the envoy of the impending nationalist revolution, and stated that he had been empowered by the National Council of the Revolutionary Command to take charge.⁵⁶ The officers in the plot joined in his representations to the brigade commander, who was unenthusiastic and uncooperative, but offered no resistance. The three Regiments of the Eighth Mechanized Infantry Brigade then departed for Baghdad under °Abdalghanī ar-Rāwī at about noon.⁵⁷ The First Regiment under Staff Lieutenant Colonel Amīn Shāhīn was entrusted to occupy the al-Karkh area of Baghdad, the Second Regiment under Colonel °Abdaljabbār °Alī al-Ḥusayn was entrusted to neutralize the saboteurs and rioters in Baghdad and al-Kāzīmīya. The Third Regiment under Staff Lieutenant Colonel Muḥammad Yūsuf Ṭāhā was sent to the Ministry of Defence with the task to help the fighting force.⁵⁸

The initial response to the new revolutionary regime was favourable; but all opposed to pan-Arabs, especially the Communists, naturally saw grave danger to their very existence in the downfall of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim. The Communists, it is true, had often been subjected to restrictive measures and were by no means fully satisfied with °Abdalkarīm Qāsim's methods, but their influence was steadily declining owing to the revival of pan-Arab activities.⁵⁹ Long before the Ramaḍān uprising, the Communists seem to have realized that if °Abdalkarīm Qāsim were ever exposed to danger caused by a pan-Arab coup, they should come to his rescue by rallying the elements opposed to pan-Arabs in his support, since seizure of power by the pan-Arabs would doom the Communists in Iraq for years to come. They had instinctively perceived the peril to their party.⁶⁰ Thus, as soon as tanks and armoured cars were seen in the Rashīd Street heading towards °Abdalkarīm Qāsim's headquarters, the

⁵⁵ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. °Abdalkarīm Qāsim wa sā'ātihi al-akhīra. [°Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], pp. 119-120; HUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūṭ °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Fall of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 371-373.

⁵⁶ HUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūṭ °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, p. 374.

⁵⁷ HUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūṭ °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, p. 376.

⁵⁸ °ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā °ala °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 114; FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. °Abdalkarīm Qāsim wa sā'ātihi al-akhīra. [°Abdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], pp. 122-123.

⁵⁹ KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq*, p. 194.

⁶⁰ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 976.

Communists swiftly called on the masses to rush to police stations and seize arms for a battle with the pan-Arabs. Earlier ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had given instructions to some of his supporters to arouse elements favourable to him in al-Kāẓimīya and ar-Ruṣāfa to attack pan-Arab centres. The Communists' call, in a proclamation issued to the people, seems to have quickly brought their followers to ar-Rashīd Street and led to clashes with pan-Arabs.⁶¹ The Communist proclamations, issued on 8 February, called on the great Iraqi people to fight against the treacherous conspirators stating that the masses of the people have all of Baghdad and the rest of Iraq under their control. In their proclamations they said:

*"An insignificant group of reactionary treacherous officers made a desperate attempt to gain power for the purpose of returning our country to the hands of imperialism and reaction. They have control over the radio transmitter in Abū Ghurayb and are trying to instigate a massacre between our valiant soldiers in order to carry out their mean goal to seize power.... Destroy the treacherous conspirators and imperialist agents without mercy! Get hold of arms from police stations or any other place and attack them! They are making air attacks on the ar-Rashīd military camp, the Ministry of Defence, and all the other military camps which are held by loyal soldiers and officers.... In order to preserve independence and democracy, it is of utmost importance to destroy the conspirators. Determination and courage are needed. You should exercise your democratic rights fully. The atrophy of democratic rights gave them the opportunity to conspire against us. To arms, attack the conspirators everywhere in Baghdad and Iraq and destroy them!"*⁶²

The Communist demonstrators started to muster at about 10 a. m. in different quarters of the capital where the ICP had retained some power. They tried to force their way down Abū Nūwās Street to relieve the Ministry of Defence. Hastily they distributed mimeographed handbills calling on citizens to rise against reaction and save the country's independence – the latter danger was heavily emphasized. But the appeal could not blot out the course that events had been taking.⁶³ They were poorly armed and worse led; hundreds were mown down by the army and militia. Their intervention made no impact on the events of the day.

The NCRC after issuing a set of proclamations which were broadcast to the nation began to operate as the de facto Government whose jurisdiction was to

⁶¹ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihi al-akhīra. [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], pp. 134-135.

⁶² ʿABDALKARĪM, Samīr. Aḥwāʾ ʿalā al-ḥaraka ash-shuyūʿīya fī al-ʿIrāq. [The Lights on the Communist Movement in Iraq].

⁶³ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 979.

apply presumably in the area which came under its control. Some of the proclamations embodied general directions to the public, including a curfew in the capital and the closing of airports and frontiers; others were issued to counter a proclamation issued by the Communists calling on people to take arms from police stations; still others to declare that the Sovereignty Council was abolished and to appoint ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif as President of the Republic.⁶⁴ The new head of state ordered Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr to form a new Government. Other orders dealt with allowing officers whom ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had dismissed to return to service, and placing on the retired list officers who had been closely identified with the Qasim regime.

Fire was exchanged between the besiegers and the besieged. The leader tried twice to send a tape-recorded appeal to the people for broadcasting, but the officers carrying the tapes were captured by the besiegers.⁶⁵ The tanks of the combatants were not supplied with shells for their cannons, but the crews had plenty of rounds for their heavy machine-guns. The main danger to the uprising was coming from hostile civilian crowds rather than from the entrenched garrison, so the absence of shells did not prove a serious drawback. However, the siege cordon was not tight, a fact which worked against ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim; it is estimated that of the original 2,000 troops stationed in the ministry compound, more than half found an opportunity to sneak away during the midday hours.⁶⁶

A new air attack of larger dimensions, which was carried out from al-Ḥabbāniya by the Sixth Squadron of *Hawker-Hunters*, led by Flight Captain Ḥamīd Shaʿbān, and *MiG-17* fighters, began at 1.30 p.m.⁶⁷ The assailants were soon afterwards joined by two more planes from al-Ḥabbāniya and also by Flight Staff Lieutenant Colonel Ḥardān at-Tikrītī in a *MiG-17* from Kirkūk. The attack lasted for about two hours, the aircraft continually returning to their bases to refuel and load ammunition. All-together, eighteen planes made 44 sorties and shot 72 missiles at the compound. The anti-aircraft guns at the Ministry of Defence were active, and one aircraft was shot down.⁶⁸ The

⁶⁴ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 337-338.

⁶⁵ AL-JUBŪRĪ, Šālīḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 150; ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿala ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 109-110.

⁶⁶ ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿala ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*, p. 108.

⁶⁷ FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihi al-akhīra*. [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], pp. 121-122.

⁶⁸ It was the *MiG-17* fighter flying in a low altitude, however, the pilot, Flight Lieutenant Fahd ʿAbdalkhālīq as-Saʿdūn, could save his life by jumping by parachute. In AL-JUBŪRĪ, Šālīḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-ʿIrāq. Nihāyat ḥukm ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution

ministry buildings suffered considerable damage from the bombing attack; most-important for the success of the operation, both telephone and radio communications were put out of action.⁶⁹

At about 2 p.m. during the continuous bombardment ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim got in touch with ʿAbdalmajīd Jalīl, director of public security and dictated him the text of a proclamation, asking him for its immediate printing and distribution. In the proclamation he appealed to the people not to respect the curfew imposed by the NCRC from 3 p.m. and to fight the rebels everywhere. At three o'clock he was looking with anxiety to the streets around the Ministry to see the effect of his appeal, but he could only see that the streets were empty except for soldiers and men of the National Guard.⁷⁰

After 3 p.m., the units of the Eighth Mechanized Infantry Brigade were deployed, and provided the National Guard with vital stiffening. Detachments of that brigade entered ar-Rashīd camp, joined the revolutionary forces under Staff Colonel Ṭāhir Yaḥyā at their head, and persuaded the commander of the Nineteenth Brigade, Staff Brigadier Fāḍil ʿAbbās Ḥilmī, to join the revolution. In the camp there were two regiments of the brigade, the third regiment under Colonel ʿĀrif Yaḥyā al-Ḥāfiẓ was in the Ministry of Defence.⁷¹ Important prisoners like the Baʿth secretary general ʿAlī Ṣāliḥ as-Saʿdī, Staff Lieutenant Colonel Ṣāliḥ Mahdī ʿAmmāsh, and many others were released – their presence so far had remained a dangerous pledge in ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's hands – and Colonel ʿAbdalḥādī ar-Rāwī was appointed camp commander.

At 3. p.m. three *Centurion* tanks arrived to the main gate of the Ministry of Defence and began shelling the compound but as there were no infantry units, they had to retreat after a while. In the meantime ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif appointed Staff Colonel Khālīd Makkī al-Ḥashimī commander of armoured troops in the Baghdad area,⁷² who sent the Third Regiment of the Eighth Mechanized Infantry Brigade under Staff Lieutenant Colonel Muḥammad Yūsuf Ṭāhā coming from al-Ḥabbāniya straight to the Ministry of Defence to decide the battle. The regiment entered the battle at 4 p.m. The hardest resistance was coming from the military police forces under Brigadier ʿAbdalkarīm al-Jidda. The revolutionary troops around the Ministry were commanded by Staff

of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 157; also FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihi al-akhīra*. [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and his Last Hours], p. 120; also ʿULAYWĪ, Ḥādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿala ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 157.

⁶⁹ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 367.

⁷⁰ ʿULAYWĪ, Ḥādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā ʿala ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*, pp. 112-113.

⁷¹ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 378.

⁷² FAWZĪ, Aḥmad. *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim wa sāʿātihi al-akhīra*, p. 116.

Colonel Muḥammad Majīd ; at 5 p.m. he was put in charge of the operation by the NCRC with orders to end the resistance and occupy the compound.⁷³

As hours of fruitless waiting passed, °Abdalkarīm Qāsim began to realize that the rebellion had become serious and tried to contact the rebel leaders, first °Abdassalām °Ārif, to arrange an understanding with them, who demanded only unconditional surrender, then with Khālīd Makkī al-Hāshimī, who even refused to speak to him, so his attempts were to no avail.⁷⁴ In the afternoon a would-be intermediary visited the Ministry of Defence; this was Yūnis aṭ-Ṭāī the publisher of the daily *ath-Thawra*, who was known equally as a fervent trumpeter of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim's greatness, a communist-hater and a supporter of an all-Arab rapprochement.⁷⁵ He managed to see °Abdalkarīm Qāsim, who asked for a possibility to settle the problem with the plotters. Yūnis aṭ-Ṭāī left the Ministry and went to the ar-Rashīd camp, where he met Staff Colonel Ṭāhir Yaḥyā and informed him of a coming telephone call from the leader. The telephone rang and °Abdalkarīm Qāsim said that he would like help in leaving the country. This Ṭāhir Yaḥyā refused and said that he would have to bear responsibility for his deeds before a trial.⁷⁶

This conversation served to testify to the fact that °Abdalkarīm Qāsim had begun to grasp the gravity of his situation. He suggested to Major General °Alī Ṣāliḥ al-°Abdī to leave the compound and save his life. He did and surrendered to the revolutionaries. The battle around the Ministry of Defence began with new intensity and as darkness fell, at about 5.30 p.m., the tanks and armoured cars under the command of Muḥammad Majīd burst into the compound and obtained the surrender of the six hundred officers and soldiers who had so far remained at their posts. However, the real fighting fell to the lot of the infantrymen commanded by Muḥammad Yūsuf Ṭāhā.⁷⁷ The Defence Ministry had fallen, but the revolutionaries still did not care to comb all of its inner recesses. Night was falling and the commanders stopped further fighting for fear of unnecessary losses.⁷⁸

Clashes between Communists and pan-Arabs became increasingly fierce during the day in many parts of Baghdad and the casualties on both sides were high. However, it was not the storming by tanks but bombing by air that

⁷³ °ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā °ala °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [Attempts of Killing of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 113.

⁷⁴ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 981; °ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan: *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā °ala °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, p. 115.

⁷⁵ Al-JUBŪRĪ, Ṣāliḥ Ḥusayn. *Thawrat 8 shubāṭ 1963 fī al-°Irāq. Nihāyat ḥukm °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*. [The Revolution of 8 February 1963 in Iraq. The End of the Reign of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 157; DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 371.

⁷⁶ °ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā °ala °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, pp. 115-116.

⁷⁷ BATATU, H. *The Old Social Classes*, p. 980.

⁷⁸ °ULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan. *Muḥāwalāt al-qaḍā °ala °Abdalkarīm Qāsim*, p. 120.

paralysed resistance, which continued until sunset (about 5.30 p.m.), the time of fast-breaking, when the counter-attack by 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's force seems to have stopped. Despite the fierce battle which was fought in the streets, the Communists lost because the bombing of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's headquarters decided the issue.

The first day ended without a decisive victory for either side, although the NCRC claimed to have reduced 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's forces and issued a premature message to the public declaring that the regime's forces had collapsed, but in fact the fighting stopped only during the night. Both sides tried to obtain reinforcements during the night when bombing stopped, and the fight was resumed with almost equal vigour next morning. 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim and a few of his intimates stayed for some hours barricaded in the main building. At about midnight 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim left the compound through an unguarded side door and entered Sha'b Hall, adjacent to the north. He was accompanied by Fadil Abbas al-Mahdāwī, Ṭāhā ash-Shaykh Aḥmad and Lieutenant Kan'ān Khalīl Ḥaddād, his bodyguard. Brigadier 'Abdalkarīm al-Jidda, commander of the military police, and Waṣfī Ṭāhir, 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's principal aide, lay buried under the debris of the ministry.⁷⁹

Shelling of the Ministry of Defence compound was resumed early the next morning (9 February) and 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's bodyguard showed greater initial resistance than in the latter part of the first day. But continuous pounding showed the futility of resistance and 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim offered to surrender with conditions. He was told, however, that his demands would be considered by the NCRC only after he had surrendered unconditionally. At noon 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim finally agreed to surrender and half an hour later he was taken to the headquarters of the NCRC at the Broadcasting House.⁸⁰

The following account of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's last twelve hours is based on the testimony, direct or indirect, of his enemies and killers. He and his companions were arrested inside the building and conducted in two armoured cars to the Broadcasting House. There they were confronted by 'Abdassalām 'Ārif, Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr and other Free Officers. 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim tried to persuade 'Abdassalām 'Ārif to let him leave the country. But 'Abdassalām 'Ārif and the Ba'ṯh leaders, fearful of a possible counter-coup, said that the matter would be decided by the NCRC. A court martial, appointed by the NCRC ('Abdassalām 'Ārif was not one of the tribunal), summarily sentenced 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim, Fāḍil 'Abbās al-Mahdāwī, and Ṭāhā ash-Shaykh Aḥmad,

⁷⁹ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 371.

⁸⁰ KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq*, p. 196.

to death by execution. °Abdalkarīm Qāsim seems to have defended his policy with courage and took pride in the achievements of the July Revolution, for which he was responsible. The three and Kan°ān Khalīl Ḥaddād were lined up against a wall and killed by submachine-guns. The time was 1.30 p.m. °Abdalkarīm Qāsim was buried at night in an unmarked grave.⁸¹

This is the story. There is no reason to doubt that it is true. The circumstances of the overthrow and death of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim in many ways epitomized the structural problems of Iraqi politics which he had encountered, but which he had also compounded. Power to decide the fate of government lay in the hands of a successful conspiracy within the officer corps, just as his own power had depended upon his ability to command the loyalties of key units of the armed forces. The undoubted personal popularity of °Abdalkarīm Qāsim among many Iraqis and the mesmerizing strength of his personality counted for something. In fact, his enemies acknowledged this when they displayed his bullet-riddled corpse on Iraqi television in order to prove that he was dead.⁸²

Majid Khadduri concludes that it has been conjectured by some military experts that had °Abdalkarīm Qāsim left the Ministry of Defence and led the force at his disposal in an attack on his opponents, a larger number of armed forces would have come to his support and his chance of success might have been greater. Staying as he did inside the Defence Ministry, he necessarily remained on the defensive and enabled his opponents to overcome opposition in the capital and its suburbs and eventually to be encircled with his bodyguard and forced by continuous shelling to submit. °Abdalkarīm Qāsim may have preferred to remain within the compound because he believed that his bodyguard was strong enough to repulse the rebel attack until loyal forces would rally to suppress the uprising. He may have also feared that if he left his headquarters and took part in the fighting, he might be killed by a chance bullet and that resistance would soon collapse in the absence of leadership. Judged by the inglorious way his life ended, it might have been preferable if he had fallen dead while fighting, however slim his chance of success may have been, rather than dying in humiliation at his enemies' hands.⁸³

⁸¹ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem*, p. 372.

⁸² TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 170.

⁸³ KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq*, p. 195.

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