

IRAQ – THE LAST PHASE OF ʿABDALKARĪM QĀSIM’S REGIME

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The foreign policy of Iraq during the regime of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was basically governed by the same forces that shaped the policy of the *ancien regime* and that consisted in the main in asserting Iraq’s independence. The leading forces of the Iraqi monarchy could naturally see the value of Arab solidarity but they also appreciated the common interests with Iraq’s non-Arab neighbours, Turkey and Iran. Obviously, the principal error was in over-stressing those interests at the expense of Arab solidarity at a time when pan-Arab excitement had reached a high pitch, and in ignoring the drive towards neutralism which had dominated the Arab world, in which “Iraq remained the committed oasis in a vast neutralist desert.” The critics of such a policy stated that Iraq’s need for weapons and technical know-how could be obtained from other powers and not only from the West, and adherence to Arab solidarity would provide the necessary strength. It is clear that the opposition to the *ancien regime* originated mainly from domestic issues, but it concentrated on foreign policy because it conflicted with an ideology that had become predominant in Arab politics.

Key words: Iraq 1961-1962, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim the lonely “Sole Leader”, deterioration of the political situation, descent to a violent change of regime

ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, though he differed from the old monarchical elite in his views on domestic policy, to a large extent adopted its foreign policy. In the Proclamation of the July Revolution three points¹ relative to foreign policy were stressed which reveals that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was as much interested in

¹ The three mentioned points were: (1) co-ordination of brotherly ties with Arab and Muslim countries; (2) conformity with the UN Charter; (3) respect for agreements and pacts which were in the interest of the country, including the proposals of the Bandung Conference.

cultivating friendly relations with Arab countries as with Turkey and Iran, since he put Muslim states on an equal footing with Arab states. Shortly after ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had begun to handle problems of foreign policy he had to realize that the demands of different groupings ran contrary to the permanent factors affecting the country's foreign relations as well as to his own convictions. These groupings of contradictory ideological direction (e.g. pan-Arabs and Communists) demanded an immediate withdrawal from the *Baghdad Pact*, repudiation of the Anglo-Iraqi Agreement on military bases, and termination of the co-operation with the USA.² The pan-Arabs pressed for an immediate union with the United Arab Republic (UAR). The Communists ignored the Arab union and demanded closer co-operation with the USSR. However, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim irrespective of different pressures declared that Iraq was to respect her obligations under international agreements and concessions.³

While the monarchical regime had isolated Iraq from the pan-Arab and Soviet blocs, the regime of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim isolated Iraq from almost all Arab and Western countries. The threat to annex Kuwait, opposed by Arabs and non-Arabs alike, resulted in cutting of diplomatic relations with all countries that recognized this new state and the war with the Kurds almost led to armed conflict with Iran. The stand of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim on the oil question had angered and alarmed Britain, while the United States had been suspicious of his alleged communist proclivities all along. At the same time the Soviet government's support for him was half-hearted. The decline of communist fortunes in Iraq could not fail to cast its shadow over relations between the two countries. Also, there was a widespread feeling that Soviet economic aid was a disappointment, in scope as well as in quality: the Soviet reputation suffered in consequence, with repercussions on mutual good will.⁴

To pay attention to practical problems ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim needed to carry Iraq behind him, but he was unable to do so because he had neither a constructive programme nor a clear policy. But his policy of the balancing of power gave him no respite and he kept hoping that once the internal struggle came to an end he would be able to establish a stable regime and exploit the country's resources to achieve social and economic reforms.⁵ Despite numerous setbacks, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim appeared to emerge as a genuinely popular leader

² ʿALĪ, Muḥammad Kāzim: *Al-ʿIrāq fī ʿahd ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958-1963* [Iraq in the Era of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 101-103.

³ KHADDURI, M.: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 183.

⁴ DANN, U.: *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 357.

⁵ KHADDURI, M.: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 149.

of Iraq. Under his direction, oil revenues had been redirected towards the immediate needs of the poorer sections of society. The funds allocated for long-term infrastructural projects were reduced and were committed instead to public housing schemes and housing loans which benefited the dwellers of the poor suburbs around Baghdad in particular.

In the cultural field, the expansion in educational institutions may well be regarded as one of the most impressive achievements. The budget for the Ministry of Education was continually and considerably increased.⁶ The numbers of pupils and students at all levels of education trebled during this period and there was a burst of school-building activity. Teachers, in ever-increasing numbers, were employed from neighbouring Arab countries, Egypt in particular. However, the numbers of teachers did not increase proportionately, leading to problems in the provision of education. But this quantitative expansion in extending the benefits of education to an essentially illiterate population necessarily reflected on the quality of education on almost all levels. A similar problem existed in health care where the building of hospitals greatly increased the number of hospital beds, but the numbers of doctors and nurses, given the length and expense of their training, could not be so rapidly increased.⁷

In the countryside, where social services and health conditions had been sadly neglected, special efforts were made to provide water and electricity to distant villages and rural areas, but the main achievement for the peasants was the enactment of Agrarian Reform Law.⁸ Equally, labour laws had been introduced, designed to reduce the hours of work, raise the minimum wage and give workers some protection against accidents and unemployment. The laws also dealt with trade unions and promised to provide houses and improve sanitary conditions for workers. The quality of these laws was not very high because of their hasty enactment, but they helped to give the impression of a leader concerned about his people's welfare and genuinely determined to improve their standard of living. After three years of experience the *ICP* exposed the economic situation in the country, and bitterly criticized the permanent rise of prices of staple foodstuffs, the high unemployment and other

⁶ KHADDURI, M. Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958, p. 155.

⁷ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq, p. 167.

⁸ The main aims of the Agrarian Reform Law (No. 30/1958) summarized by the Minister of Agriculture Hudayb al-Hājj Ḥumūd. In 'ALĪ, Muḥammad Kāzīm: Al-^cIrāq fi ^caḥd ^cAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958-1963 [Iraq in the Era of ^cAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 107-111.

shortcomings of the regime.⁹

After three years in power ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim felt confident enough to release all those sentenced by the Special Supreme Military Court. This institution (known as the People’s Court and presided over by Colonel Fāḍil ʿAbbās al-Mahdāwī) had been set up soon after the July coup in 1958 to put on public trial members of the monarchical regime indicted for their “crimes against the people”.¹⁰ Used chiefly as a public forum for the condemnation of the evils of the old regime, the court had finally handed down four death sentences, despite the large numbers of politicians and officials brought before it. However, it had been kept in session to try a growing list of conspirators against, or merely critics of the government. Again, apart from his confirmation of the death sentences on the Moṣul plotters, he showed considerable magnanimity towards those who had sought at various times to overthrow him. In October and November 1961 he released all those who had been sentenced by Fāḍil ʿAbbās al-Mahdāwī, including ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif and Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī, and the rest of those who had been condemned either to death or to periods of imprisonment for their involvement in plots against the regime.¹¹ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s failings, serious as they were, can scarcely be discussed in the same terms as the venality, savagery and wanton brutality characteristic of many of the regimes which followed his own.

By the end of 1960, all hope of the establishment of democratic institutions had gone. The estrangement of the political parties and their dependent associations was complete. By early 1962, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was confident that his own clients dominated the state and that the opposition was in disarray. The two moderate parties were disintegrating and ceasing to operate in sheer resignation.¹² Of them the *National Democratic Party* (al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī) had become divided over whether or not to continue supporting ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, and had broken up into a number of factions by October 1961; the *Independence Party* (Ḥizb al-istiqlāl) had long ceased to play any effective political role, although some of its members gravitated towards the *Baʿth Party*.¹³ The *Islamic Party* had been eliminated while pretence at tolerance was maintained. The *Kurdistan Democratic Party* (KDP) had come

⁹ Declaration of the ICP, September 1961. In ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 168-172.

¹⁰ KHADDURI, M.: Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958, pp. 79-82.

¹¹ SLUGLETT, M. F., SLUGLETT, P. Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship, p. 83.

¹² DANN, U. Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963, p. 356.

¹³ ʿALĪ, Muḥammad Kāẓim: Al-ʿIrāq fī ʿahd ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958-1963 [Iraq in the Era of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 139.

out in support of the guerrilla war in the north, but had little impact in Iraq's major towns where it had few obvious allies. The Kurdish war, unprofitable and dishonourable, was a drain on state resources and was demoralizing for the officer corps, but for ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, as for rulers in Baghdad before and since, the Kurdish question seemed to be a peripheral one.¹⁴

The *Iraqi Communist Party (ICP)*, denied access to most public associations, was under constant surveillance by the regime's security agencies. Later, the *ICP* was underground, and its members were suffering persecution just short of physical extermination. The *ICP* and its organizations, the principal support base of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, had been so savaged by him and were by now so hamstrung by their own lack of direction that they could only react to events rather than initiate them.¹⁵ Political strife had almost ceased, and if political strife proved to be practically the equivalent of political life, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim may have felt that this extinction was a small price to pay after the convulsions of 1958-1959. The regime was generally disliked, and provoked ridicule and disrespect; but there was no sense of urgency, and few felt unrestrained hatred. On the other hand there was real fear of the bloodshed which was generally expected to ensue between communists and nationalists if a change was made.¹⁶ The field was now open for any group with sufficient tenacity and organizing ability to seize the crucial power centres and stage a coup against the regime. Conventional political life had virtually ceased and the following period was filled with a terrible sense of foreboding, a sense of waiting for what many knew would be the fatal blow to fall.¹⁷

In this atmosphere of paralysis and inertia of these "months of stagnation",¹⁸ it was not difficult for a determined band of conspirators to capitalize on the population's growing disillusionment with the regime and plan his downfall. Although the failure of the attempt on ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's life in 1959, had considerably damaged the *Baʿth Party* organization, it did not prove difficult to rebuild, and by April 1960 ʿAlī Šāliḥ as-Saʿdī, who had escaped to Syria after the assassination attempt, had returned to Iraq on the orders of the Baʿth National Command in Damascus to reorganize the Party with a view to overthrowing ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim.¹⁹ By May 1962, when he had become

¹⁴ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq, p. 168.

¹⁵ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 99-102; ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan: ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. Al-ḥaqīqa [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. The Truth], pp. 139-142.

¹⁶ DANN, U. Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963, p. 358.

¹⁷ SLUGLETT, M. F., SLUGLETT, P. Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship, p. 82.

¹⁸ DANN, U. Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963, p. 269.

¹⁹ DEVLIN, J. F. The Baʿth Party. A History from Its Origins to 1966, pp. 190-192.

regional secretary-general, he had built up an effective network with links to a number of groups opposed to the regime, including former members of the *Independence Party*, members of the professional associations, and, most crucially, with a number of key military officers.²⁰

The nationalists had long since staked everything on another coup. Islam may not have been slighted, but a large part of the population, which placed the interests of religion above every other public consideration, was disposed to suspect slights. Perhaps the most charitable view of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim during this period is that he simply underestimated the sticking power and desire for revenge that animated the *Baʿth Party* and the nationalists, and the extent of the polarization of political forces that had taken place. Furthermore, after the failure of the attempt on his life, the split in the *Baʿth Party* that followed the defection of Fuʿād ar-Rikābī to Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir in June 1961, and the collapse of the UAR in the same year, no obviously dangerous enemies remained in sight.²¹ The overconfidence of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was expressed in a series of unpredictable acts that gave rise to serious doubts about his sanity.

ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim showed no interest in political doctrines, but he developed his own political methods. Above all, he adopted the method of manoeuvring or plotting, as the manner in which he ousted ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif and ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf demonstrated. He displayed patience and outward calmness while he laid plots before he showed his hand and his manipulation of the ideological groupings gave the false impression that he had irrevocably committed himself to one group against the other.²² When he lured the Communists to agitate in his favour against the pan-Arabs, he gave the impression that his future had become dependent on the Communists, but very soon it became apparent that he was no Communist sympathizer. The policy of balancing forces endeared him neither to pan-Arabs nor to the Communists and it meant his eventual isolation, for in the end he was trusted by nobody. His position became increasingly precarious and his fall was expected at any moment during the latter part of his career.²³

The attitude of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim towards rival ideological groupings was once brilliantly summarized by Kāmil al-Chādirchī, when he said: “Just as the rope-dancer has to maintain his balance by swinging from side to side, so did ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim swing from one ideology to another in order to remain in

²⁰ SLUGLETT, M. F., SLUGLETT, P.: *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 83.

²¹ ABU JABER, Kamal S.: *The Arab Baath Socialist Party*, pp. 54-55.

²² ʿALĪ, Muḥammad Kāzīm: *Al-ʿIrāq fī ʿahd ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958-1963* [Iraq in the Era of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 199-201.

²³ KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 186.

power; but he himself had no leaning towards any particular ideology!"²⁴ This comment points to the fact that his principal purpose was to perpetuate the military regime over which he presided. In view of this unsatisfactory situation, it is surprising how ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim could remain in power for two more years. If his day-to-day tactics since the beginning of 1960 can be assigned any concrete achievement – beyond the feat of staying alive and on top—it must be that he had reduced the passions which had been ravaging the country, by denying them nourishment.²⁵

The official relations between the Iraqi and Egyptian governments were relatively calm from mid-1960, but full diplomatic relations were not resumed. Cairo no longer counted on the imminent overthrow of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim so the attacks of the UAR press became less fierce. A show of mutual toleration was achieved during the conference of Arab Foreign Ministers which convened at Baghdad from 30 January to 4 February 1961. Maḥmūd Fawzī, the UAR Foreign Minister, was received in Iraq and on this occasion for the first time for over two years people in Baghdad again shouted for unity and Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir.²⁶ After King Ḥusayn on 1 October 1960, under the stress of his own fears of the UAR, recognized the Iraqi Republic, a friendly relationship was developed between Iraq and Jordan. Then, during the crisis relative to Syria's secession from the UAR on 28 September 1961 ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim behaved with reasonable correctness. However, once Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir had indicated his resignation to the latest state of affairs, he made his collaboration with the new Syrian rulers the axis of his Arab policy.²⁷

Neither the superficial relaxation of tension in Iraqi-UAR relations after the Syrian secession, nor the continuation of the underlying enmity, can be said to have directly influenced the fate of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's regime. The committed enemies of his regime, the Iraqi pan-Arab nationalists, were not appeased. They had seen that Iraq under ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was rallying the forces struggling against Arab unity and supporting every movement in the Arab East opposing Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir and the UAR.²⁸ The rise of Kuwait to statehood in 1961 marked another significant stage in the evolution of Iraq's relationship with the Arabs as well as with the West. Kuwait, nominally a former district of the Ottoman province of Baṣra, consists of roughly 18

²⁴ KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 185.

²⁵ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 358.

²⁶ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 348.

²⁷ MARDĀN, Jamāl Muṣṭafā. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim al-bidāya wa as-suqūṭ [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, the Beginning and Fall], p. 122.

²⁸ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 311.

thousand square kilometres, most of which is desert and the number of its inhabitants in 1961 did not exceed half a million.

On June 19, 1961, following the conclusion of negotiations between Britain and Kuwait, notes were exchanged terminating the 1899 agreement between the two countries, which had designated Kuwait practically a British protectorate. Britain reiterated her readiness "to assist the Government of Kuwait if the latter request such assistance". Thus, the outmoded relationship between the two countries was replaced by an "internationally irreproachable Treaty of Friendship".²⁹ The exchange of notes was made public in London and Kuwait on that day and Shaykh 'Abdallāh as-Sālim Āl Šabāḥ, the Ruler of Kuwait, announced in a formal proclamation of independence that his country would apply for membership of the Arab League and the United Nations.³⁰

The relationship between Iraq and Kuwait since the Iraqi Revolution had been neighbourly and easy; if anything, the common fear of Cairo-directed subversion had given it special warmth. The initial announcements of Baghdad Radio concerning Kuwait's new status were friendly. 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's cable of congratulations to the Ruler of Kuwait contained a sign of things to come. He welcomed the abrogation of "the illegal and forged" agreement of 1899 concluded in the name of the then "Qā'immaqām of Kuwait in the province of Baṣra." It was more than a claim. It was a declaration that Kuwait no longer existed, but was a part of Iraq.³¹ However, 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's claim to Kuwait was not unprecedented. The close affinity between the peoples of Kuwait and Iraq suggested that the two countries might derive mutual advantage if they merged. Long before oil was known to exist in Kuwait, King Ghāzī (1933-1939) in the late 1930s was inspired by a few Kuwaiti dignitaries to demand its annexation.³² Early in 1958, when the Arab Federation between Iraq and Jordan was formed Nūrī as-Sa'īd invited the Ruler of Kuwait to join that union of his own free will without affecting a change in his domestic or foreign affairs.³³

Radio Baghdad began to broadcast the Iraqi view of Kuwaiti independence emphasizing that the 1899 "Exclusive Agreement" between Britain and Kuwait

²⁹ JOYCE, M. Kuwait, 1945-1996. An Anglo-American Perspective, p. 87.

³⁰ ISMAEL, J. S. Kuwait. Social Change in Historical Perspective, p. 82.

³¹ TREVELYAN, H. The Middle East in Revolution, p. 187.

³² Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid 'Abdarrazzāq: Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya [The History of Iraqi Governments], pp. 60-61.

³³ Al-ḤASANĪ, as-Sayyid 'Abdarrazzāq: Tārīkh al-wizārāt al-ʿirāqīya [The History of Iraqi Governments], pp. 223-225.

had been illegal.³⁴ At a press conference held on 23 June ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim laid claim to Kuwait as a district of Baṣra province which had been alienated for over sixty years, but which was an integral part of Iraq. He urged the shaykh to oppose imperialist schemes and cooperate in the reintegration of the *qaḍāʾ*, in his legal capacity as *qāʾimmaqām*, or district commissioner.³⁵ The substance of this claim was that in the second half of the nineteenth century Kuwait had been recognized as a *qaḍāʾ* (district) of Baṣra Vilayet in the Ottoman Empire, but Iraq did not threaten war if this demand were rejected. It must be noted, that the native Kuwaitis had never expressed a wish to be ruled from Baghdad.

There can be no doubt that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's claim to Kuwait was popular among the Iraqi public. Outside Iraq it was generally rejected, although in differing terms of disapprobation.³⁶ On 1 July British and Saudi Arabian troops entered Kuwait at the request of the government, to assist the small Kuwaiti army to repulse a possible Iraqi attack. Britain was motivated to act because of her interests in Kuwait. Their appearance added a useful argument to the Arab case against ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim: it was his greed and aggressiveness that had opened the door for a return of British occupation forces to Arab soil. It was the Arab League, in connection with the request of Kuwait to join this organization that serious decisions were taken to resolve the issue. At a meeting on 20 July Kuwait was admitted to membership of the Arab League and agreed to accede to Arab League Mutual Defence Pact.³⁷ Thereupon Iraq ceased all cooperation with the League. Then on 12 August an agreement between the shaykh of Kuwait and the League's secretary general was reached on replacing the British force by an Arab force under the command of a Saudi Colonel. The despatch of a composite Arab force of about 3,000 men followed, the first contingent of which arrived at Kuwait on 10 September and the withdrawal of the British force was completed on 10 October 1961.

ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and the Iraqi Foreign Ministry protested against the entry of foreign troops into Kuwait and never ceased to assert that the claim of Iraq would be pursued by peaceful means alone. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim scored a diplomatic victory when Kuwait's application for membership of the United

³⁴ Exclusive Agreement: the Kuwayti Shaykh and Britain, 23 January 1899. In HUREWITZ, J. C. *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East. A Documentary Record: Vol. I, 1535-1914*, pp. 218-219.

³⁵ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim* [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 99-102; ʿULAYWĪ, Hādī Ḥasan: *ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. Al-ḥaqīqa* [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. The Truth], pp. 249-253.

³⁶ JOYCE, M. *Kuwait, 1945-1996. An Anglo-American Perspective*, pp. 104-105.

³⁷ Al-MUWĀFĪ, ʿAbdalḥamīd Muḥammad: *Miṣr fī jāmiʿat ad-duwal al-ʿarabiya*, 1945-1970 [Egypt in the League of Arab States], pp. 318-320; JOYCE, M. *Kuwait, 1945-1996. An Anglo-American Perspective*, p. 108.

Nations was vetoed, on 30 November 1961, by the Soviet Union in the Security Council. The Soviet representative argued that Kuwait had remained, in fact, a British colony, and that the admission of Kuwait meant "prejudging the subject of the controversy between Arab states".³⁸ But it was ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's only achievement. In a speech on 3 December ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim threatened that "unless Britain ceased to meddle in Kuwaiti affairs a murderous war will engulf the whole Middle East."³⁹ On 26 December 1961, Hāshim Jawād, the Foreign Minister, declared that Iraq would have to reconsider her attitude regarding her diplomatic relations with countries who established such relations with Kuwait. In consequence, Iraqi ambassadors were recalled from all capitals which had received Kuwaiti ambassadors, although otherwise diplomatic relations were preserved. During 1962 the list was extended to include such friendly countries as Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia in the Arab world, and Japan, India and the United States outside.

When the Kuwaiti crisis broke speculations were advanced that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim did not really wish to annex Kuwait, but that he wanted to increase his bargaining power in other spheres. Uriel Dann argues that subsequent developments do not show that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had secondary motives and he seriously believed not merely in the historic justice of his claim, but its political feasibility as well.⁴⁰ All evidence points to the absence of any Iraqi troop movements connected with the planning of an offensive. Moreover, after the outbreak of the Kurdish war the southern half of Iraq remained garrisoned by a single infantry brigade. Washington completely approved of Britain's determination to defend Kuwait, but considered it unnecessary to share in that defence. The State Department wanted to avoid any strengthening of Soviet assistance for Iraq.

The effect of the Kuwait affair on ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's prestige was shattering. His claim inspired the shaykh of Kuwait to realize that his country's political system must keep pace with social and economic progress.⁴¹ The initial acclaim of the Iraqi public soon gave way to scoffing, and then to complete indifference. In the result, the Kuwait affair involved ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim in fresh difficulties with the West and the Arab world, just when the waters around him had begun to calm after the storms of his first two years. His obstinacy caused him needlessly to weaken his links with just those Arab states that were

³⁸ YODFAT, A.Y.: *The Soviet Union and the Arabian Peninsula. Soviet Policy towards the Persian Gulf and Arabia*, p. 9.

³⁹ MARDĀN, Jamāl Muṣṭafā: ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim al-bidāya wa as-suqūṭ [ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, the Beginning and Fall], p. 126.

⁴⁰ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 352.

⁴¹ KHADDURI, M. *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 172.

his natural allies against Egyptian aspirations.

Before the Revolution, the Free Officers had only been vaguely aware of the points of difference between the oil companies and the old regime. After the Revolution, despite the tension in Iraq and the open hostility between ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim and Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir, and even during the revolt of ʿAbdalwahhāb ash-Shawwāf in Moṣul in March 1959, no attempt was made to tamper with the passage of oil to the Mediterranean ports.⁴² During the first two years of his regime ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim stood by his initial assurances that agreements with the oil companies would be honoured. In general, their relations with the government remained unaffected for the time being. The atmosphere was first seriously disturbed in July 1960, when the government raised the port dues on oil shipments from Baṣra more than tenfold. The Baṣra Oil Company, a subsidiary of the Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC), strongly protested, and the export of oil through Baṣra, was suspended.⁴³ Negotiations on this complex issue were protracted.

Nevertheless, the government of the revolutionary regime had indicated from the first that it aspired to a greater share of the revenues from the country's greatest natural asset and in April 1961 the Ministry of Oil presented the oil companies with a twelve-point official statement of Iraqi demands.⁴⁴ The main Iraqi demands were for a participation of at least 20 per cent in the companies' share capital (point 9), for increase of the present share in net profits and their payment in convertible currencies (points 10 and 11), for the reversion to the government of that part of the concession area not undergoing actual exploitation, and for a speedier intake of Iraqi personnel (point 5).⁴⁵

In June 1961 the IPC notified its readiness to negotiate, and preliminary meetings were held in Baghdad from 24 to 28 August. The companies' representatives requested the suspension of the talks until the Iraqi demands were scrutinized in London. Negotiations were resumed on 28 September: the Iraqi delegation was headed by ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim in person and the companies' delegation was led by Mr. H. W. Fisher.⁴⁶ No agreement was reached, and at the final meeting on 11 October 1961 the Iraqi delegation presented a

⁴² SHWADRAN, B. *The Middle East, Oil and the Great Powers* 1959, p. 284.

⁴³ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 353.

⁴⁴ SULAYMĀN, Ḥikmat Sāmī: *Naft al-ʿIrāq. Dirāsa iqtisādīya siyāsīya* [The Iraqi Oil. An Economic Political Study], pp. 199-200.

⁴⁵ A twelve-point official statement of Iraqi demands. In: SULAYMĀN, Ḥikmat Sāmī: *Naft al-ʿIrāq. Dirāsa iqtisādīya siyāsīya* [The Iraqi Oil. An Economic Political Study], pp. 193-194.

⁴⁶ The other members of the Iraqi delegation were: Muḥammad Salmān, Minister of Oil, Muḥammad Ḥadīd, Minister of Finance, Ṭalʿat ash-Shaybānī, the Minister of Planning and, ʿAbdallaṭīf ash-Shawwāf, Governor of the Central Bank.

decision that the companies could continue to operate their "existing wells", and that the government would take over all remaining land by legislation. The Iraqi government declared that it would undertake all possible measures to protect Iraqi rights, since the companies failed to accept its demands.⁴⁷ The points on which ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim showed an almost inflexible position were on the increase of Iraq's share of profits, and her share participation in production.

The companies rejected both demands as contrary to the terms of the agreements, but the Iraqi government was not impressed by their arguments. On December 11, 1961, the government approved Law No. 80 "For the Definition of Exploitation Areas." This curtailed the concession area of the oil companies by more than 99 per cent, namely, to about 800 square miles undergoing exploitation, with provision made for a reserve, also of 800 square miles.⁴⁸ The oil companies protested against the new legislation, but did not dispute its validity. They demanded arbitration. However, they handed over to the government their technical data on the unexploited areas, in accordance with a provision of the law. After the government nationalized the Khānaqīn Company the oil companies responded by using the weapon of freezing the output.⁴⁹

Meanwhile, British and United States representatives interceded for the companies and asked for a renewal of negotiations. The Iraqi government rejected their proposals, which were condemned as "interference" from outside. The request for arbitration was ignored. Nevertheless the law had no further practical consequences: he had never contemplated surrendering the annual ID 100 million in royalties for oil which he knew he could not sell outside the West, and on which the government of the country depended. Nor did the oil companies intend to stop this profitable business.⁵⁰ The output of oil, at any rate, never suffered.

There is no doubt that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's handling of the oil negotiations and their aftermath did him great damage with the West. The original British view that he was a match for the communists, and in the circumstances the least undesirable of possible regimes for Baghdad, had slowly been gaining ground in the United States. Now, as a communist takeover was no longer an imminent danger, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had shown himself ill-disposed to the West. No attempt at negotiation was ever made again during the remainder of his rule. A National Oil Company was envisaged to exploit the areas over which foreign

⁴⁷ Ash-SHAWWĀF, ʿAbdallaṭīf: *Ḥawla qaḍīyat an-naft fī al-ʿIrāq* [About the Oil Question in Iraq], pp. 201-209.

⁴⁸ Ash-SHAWWĀF, ʿAbdallaṭīf: *Ḥawla qaḍīyat an-naft fī al-ʿIrāq* [About the Oil Question in Iraq], pp. 189-205. The preamble of the law furnishes the official Iraqi view of the preceding negotiations.

⁴⁹ ḤAMDĀN, Jamāl: *Batrūl al-ʿArab* [The Arab Petrol], p. 271.

⁵⁰ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 355.

companies' concessions had been cancelled. The draft of the enabling law was published in September 1962. It was due for promulgation early in February 1963, but 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's regime met its end first.⁵¹

A number of peasants had benefited from the agrarian reform, but the proportion of beneficiaries was still small in comparison with needs and expectations. The same applied to the wage earner in town and country whose lot may have undergone a slight improvement through social reform and development here and there, although no legislation with the wide scope of the Agrarian Reform Law was undertaken in the industrial sector. But if there was progress it had to surmount many obstacles.⁵² The official zeal for social reform had died down after the first few months of the revolutionary regime. A few additional social measures were approved, but after the end of 1958 the legislation was scanty, and bore the stamp of the incidental. Moreover, most social provisions legislated throughout 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's regime were hard to enforce without a much more rigidly controlled economy than existed in Iraq. Only a driving force of immense energy could have achieved the sweeping changes the regime had promised in the beginning. Yet 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's energy had been driven into different channels, partly by hostile forces, partly by loss of interest through power.⁵³

'Abdalkarīm Qāsim had taken care of the army. He was aware of the precariousness of his position and realized that his regime rested on the support of the army. He had expanded it, equipped it and further improved the terms of service were even. Nevertheless he had never been identified as the army's natural leader – except when branded as a military dictator by hostile critics. The reason has been stated previously in this work: 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim stood alone. His title of Sole Leader was no accident. He remained as disdainful of forming around himself an officers' junta as he had been of leading a political party. It was this compulsive aloofness which prevented him from being accepted by the officer corps as one of them, and earned him from that quarter at least as much mistrust and ridicule as his many definable failures had accumulated.⁵⁴ He concentrated on keeping the army immune from ideological influences by constant purging it of elements considered disloyal to him, but he

⁵¹ The Law No. 11 relevant to foundation of a National Oil Company was finally published in al-Waqā'i' al-'Irāqīya on 8 February 1964. In Ash-SHAWWĀF, 'Abdallaṭīf: Ḥawla qaḍīyat an-naft fī al-'Irāq [About the Oil Question in Iraq], pp. 210-216.

⁵² ALĪ, Muḥammad Kāzīm: Al-'Irāq fī 'ahd 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958-1963 [Iraq in the Era of 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 268-276.

⁵³ DANN, U. Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963, p. 357.

⁵⁴ DANN, U. Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963, p. 358.

could not know how far he could safely pursue the policy of constantly purging it.

The Sole Leader often resorted to foreign ventures in order to divert the attention of a divided nation from internal to foreign affairs. The claim to the sovereignty of Kuwait was a case in point. More serious was the Kurdish war, which created mixed feelings in the country. Towards the end of his regime there was a feeling that the war was unnecessarily prolonged, and it was thought that only a change in the regime would bring it to an end. His policy of manipulation necessarily led to his isolation internally and of his country externally. To break this isolation there was only one solution. The army moved to take the drastic step since there was no other way of removing him.⁵⁵ His extraordinarily ill-considered attempt to annex Kuwait in the summer of 1961 is an example of the atmosphere of almost total unreality that pervaded these last years. Apart from souring relations with Kuwait itself, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim managed to unite almost all members of the Arab League against Iraq, and damaged his reputation both at home and abroad by the palpable hollowness of his claims and the absurdity of the manner in which he pursued them.⁵⁶

The Revolutionary Government, regarding itself at the outset as a temporary regime, neither gave political parties official recognition nor denied them action. However, the political parties had not been able to present to the military a common programme of action to transform the military government into a civil one. The parties only tried to legitimize their activities on the argument that the ban imposed against them was no longer valid. In 1960, when the parties were formally permitted to be organized ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim declared himself to be above political rivalries and tried to encourage moderate groups to form the backbone of his regime. However, the two moderate parties declined to respond positively to his offer, fell in internal struggles, and ceased to operate.⁵⁷ The estrangement of the political parties and their dependent associations was complete.

In the Iraqi political arena there remained only parties with radical and ideological programme like the *Baʿth Party*, the *Iraqi Communist Party*, the *Kurdistan Democratic Party* and the *Islamic Party* (al-Ḥizb al-islāmī al-ʿirāqī)

⁵⁵ KHADDURI, M. Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958, pp. 187.

⁵⁶ SLUGLETT, M. F., SLUGLETT, P. Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship, p. 82.

⁵⁷ They were the *National Democratic Party* (al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī ad-dīmuqrāṭī) under Kāmil al-Chādirchī and the *National Progressive Party* (al-Ḥizb al-waṭanī at-taqaddumī) under Muḥammad Ḥadīd. In ʿALĪ, Muḥammad Kāzīm: Al-ʿIrāq fī ʿahd ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, 1958-1963 [Iraq in the Era of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 162-163.

which was an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had become unpopular with every class, community, or grouping of the population capable of influencing the balance of forces within the country. During the summer of 1960 the *KDP* made demands for introduction of Kurdish as an official language, the return of Kurdish officials from Arab areas, and progress on agricultural reform and industrial development, including nationalization of the oil industry,⁵⁸ but ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim ignored them.

There were no serious allegations that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was personally corrupt. The stories that circulated of his “madness” and “tyranny” were not of the type connected in the public mind with money grabbing. After ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim’s downfall revelations concerning his financial corruption did, indeed, circulate. The relative triviality of such charges against a man who could have put his hands on millions with impunity only emphasizes how little was held against ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim on this count. Most seriously, the inefficiency, chicanery and corruption of government officials was as bad as ever and reflected, of necessity, on the head of the regime.⁵⁹ In spite of his sometimes irrational and capricious behaviour, ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim lacked the viciousness and vindictiveness of those who came after him, and even they, who were anxious to paint him as the devil incarnate, were unable to make any charges of corruption or dishonesty stick. His inflated view of his own abilities and his exaggerated sense of mission do not seem to have included salting away fortunes abroad.⁶⁰

The British in Iraq before independence probably believed that Arabs and Kurds, as well as other minorities, might eventually be welded together to create a new national identity based on a territorial concept and sustained by their common interests, but their own policy made this concept unrealistic. The Arabs were unconsciously discouraged from moving swiftly towards the achievement of such an objective by at least two important factors. First, Arab society, which is divided into Sunnīs and Shīʿīs, remained too strong to be superseded by a new national identity. The merging of the Kurds – a solidly Sunnī community – with the Sunnī Arabs was considered by the Shīʿīs to weaken their position and therefore was resisted by almost half of the population of the country. Secondly, the Sunnī Arabs themselves had been deflected from merging with the Kurds by the upsurge of Arab nationalism, despite their keen interest in maintaining Iraqi territorial integrity.⁶¹

⁵⁸ McDOWALL, D. *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 308.

⁵⁹ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 356.

⁶⁰ SLUGLETT, M. F., SLUGLETT, P. *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 83.

⁶¹ KHADDURI, M.: *Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958*, p. 173.

After independence, the Arabs of Iraq were caught in the upsurge of pan-Arabism which sought to achieve an Arab union on a federal or unitary basis. This move discouraged the Kurds from uniting with a people not prepared to perpetuate the political independence of the country in which the Kurds were to be a part or accepting the (Arab) nationality with which they were to be identified. Arab failure to create a new national identity distinct from Arab nationalism was no doubt the main reason why the Kurds relied on Kurdish nationalism for survival. The Revolution of 1958 was welcomed by the Kurds because the Free Officers sympathized with the Kurds and ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim offered to co-operate with their leaders as co-partners with the Arabs within the framework of Iraqi unity.⁶²

The first sign of trouble arose from the tension between Kurdish and Arab nationalists. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was urged by the *Kurdistan Democratic Party* Secretary-General Ibrāhīm Aḥmad to include Kurdish autonomy in the Provisional Constitution. But he was also under pressure from ʿAbdassalām ʿĀrif, his deputy, and other Arab nationalists who wanted to take Iraq into the United Arab Republic. They opposed ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's apparently pro-Kurdish attitude, especially his welcome to the Kurdish leader Muṣṭafā al-Bārzanī. It is obvious that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim did not wish to bow to Arab nationalist pressure, and certainly had no intention of being the "number two" to Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir in an enlarged UAR. Nor did he wish to be stampeded into conceding too much too soon to the Kurds. He decided that Muṣṭafā al-Bārzanī was potentially a powerful counterweight to the Arab nationalists and that there was unlikely to be any love lost between them.⁶³

The Kurds soon proved their worth to ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim, helping to suppress the Moṣul revolt in March 1959 – a rising which was led by Arab Nationalist and Baʿthist officers disillusioned by the Sole Leader's betrayal of the Revolution. In practice it became a catalyst for ideological, class, tribal and ethnic tensions. Thus the Communists and Kurds helped ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim to deal with his principal challengers. In mid-July 1959 another serious disturbance occurred, this time in Kirkūk, a town waiting to explode. Once again, the spark was a rally by Communists who were preponderantly Kurdish in the north. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim held the Communists rather than the Kurds responsible for these events and he finally decided to act against them. Muṣṭafā al-Bārzanī did everything to rescue the *KDP* from the *ICP* embrace, so by late August there was open conflict between the *KDP* backed by Kurdish tribesmen

⁶² "Arabs and Kurds are considered partners in this homeland". Article 3 of the Provisional Constitution of Iraq (1958). In KHADDURI, M. Republican Iraq. A Study in Iraqi Politics since the Revolution of 1958, p. 65.

⁶³ McDOWALL, D. A Modern History of the Kurds, p. 303.

and the *ICP*.⁶⁴ In this way Muṣṭafā al-Bārzānī became strong enough to threaten the Sole Leader; therefore he became a *persona non grata* in Baghdad.

The Kurdish revolt against ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had begun on 9 September 1961 and was conducted by different groups.⁶⁵ One of these was composed of tribal chieftains and their followers who sought to reverse the Agrarian Reform Law, but the economic reasons for the revolt went beyond the interests of the rich. For at least a decade Kurdistan had been afflicted with growing unemployment. However, the fate of the rebellion lay in the hands of Muṣṭafā al-Bārzānī and the chieftains, not the *KDP*, and their objectives were different from the party's. Their main complaints concerned the Agrarian Reform Law and leftist tendencies of the regime and not so much the Kurdish national rights. They even tried to make a deal with the British falsely hoping for the same attitude as in the Kuwaiti affair.⁶⁶ When approaches to the British came to nothing, Muṣṭafā al-Bārzānī turned to the United States. In the winter of 1961-1962 the influential "reactionary" elements in the *KDP* decided that the only way of resolving their dispute with Baghdad was to change the regime. It was now clear that these elements in the *KDP* preferred Kurdish reactionaries to progressive Iraqis.

The *ICP* had already denounced the rebellion by reactionaries and the "Anglo-American imperialists and oil companies" it said were behind them.⁶⁷ They suspected the *KDP* wanted separatism, not a democratic Arab-Kurdish Iraq. Not surprisingly, *KDP* appeals to the Iraqi opposition to join in the overthrow of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim fell upon deaf ears. Inside Kurdistan, however, many Kurdish members of the *ICP* deserted to the nationalist cause. The war itself was a desultory affair, consisting of raids and ambushes by the rebels and reprisals largely in the form of air raids on villages. ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim already realized how damaging this war had become and in November 1961 and again in March 1962 he offered an amnesty and also an undertaking to make good the damage and to ensure Kurdistan received its full share of national economic development. By now the rebels felt sufficiently successful that the terms they might have accepted the previous summer were no longer enough. Muṣṭafā al-Bārzānī raised his demands to a point that amounted to a

⁶⁴ McDOWALL, D. *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 305.

⁶⁵ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm. *Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim* [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], pp. 189-190.

⁶⁶ FO 371/157671, Clarke to Foreign Office, Damascus 15 December 1961. The British ambassador informs the FO about a letter from Muṣṭafā al-Bārzānī proposing discussion about measures to be taken "so that Great Britain can achieve what it wants for the benefit of the British people and the Kurdish people likewise."

⁶⁷ FO 371/157674, the Chancery to Foreign Office, Baghdad 5 October 1961.

public humiliation which could not endure.⁶⁸

By the end of 1962 it was clear that Muṣṭafā al-Bārzanī was co-operating with the enemies of Iraq and was branded a traitor.⁶⁹ On the other hand ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was no closer to quelling the rebels than he had been a year earlier. On the contrary, the war had generally gone against him, in spite of his control of the air. His troops on the ground had little enthusiasm for a savage war in the mountains. In the meantime it was clear that ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim was becoming isolated politically, and that his downfall was only a matter of time. In fact it was imminent. Spurned by the parties which were ideologically closest to them – the *National Democratic Party* and the *Iraqi Communist Party* – the *KDP* recognized the value of establishing ties with those who might seize power. So it turned to the pan-Arab groups and to the *Baʿth Party*, largely because of their continuing influence in the armed forces, and offered a cease-fire if ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim were to be overthrown.⁷⁰ In December 1962 the *KDP* began negotiating with them. They wanted assurances that while the army was concentrated on the overthrow of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim in Baghdad, the Kurds would not exploit army weakness in the north. The *KDP* was happy to meet this requirement. It believed that in return it had received assurances regarding full Kurdish autonomy.⁷¹

These approaches to the pan-Arabists coincided with the growing confidence of the *Baʿth Party* itself. The core membership of the party remained small, but it was well placed in the state administration and in the armed forces. In 1960 a special organ, the Bureau of Iraq consisting of three members, came into being in Damascus and took in hand the task of putting the party back on its feet. The most influential member of the Bureau became ʿAlī Ṣāliḥ as-Saʿdī who by 1962 succeeded not only in rehabilitating and expanding the party, but also converting it into a guiding nucleus for the National Front. In early May 1962 he felt confident enough to call a secret congress of the party in Baghdad and arrange for the election of the leadership.⁷² The newly elected Command of the Iraqi Region proceeded to make the forces of the party ready for the overthrow of the hated regime. During 1962 the party organization had been greatly developed through a network of committees intended to bring large numbers of people onto the streets, once the military had made a decisive move.

⁶⁸ McDOWALL, D. *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 312.

⁶⁹ ḤUSAYN, Khalīl Ibrāhīm: *Suqūṭ ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim* [The Fall of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim], p. 193.

⁷⁰ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 169.

⁷¹ McDOWALL, D. *A Modern History of the Kurds*, p. 313.

⁷² 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.

The *Ba'ath Party* had realized the importance of being able to control the "street" at moments of political crisis. This was meant both to neutralize the *Iraqi Communist Party* and to provide inescapable proof of the popularity and power of the *Ba'ath Party*.⁷³

The membership of the *Ba'ath Party* at this stage was tiny; 'Alī Šāliḥ as-Sa'ūdī himself estimated that there were 850 "full members" and 1500 "sympathizers" in 1963, and even these numbers are probably an exaggeration.⁷⁴ 'Alī Šāliḥ as-Sa'ūdī, a civilian, nevertheless saw the importance of establishing links with Arab nationalist officers, like 'Abdassalām 'Ārif, recently released from prison, who shared the *Ba'athists'* concern about Iraq's isolation in the Arab world and their antipathy to communism. For them, 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim seemed to epitomize both dangers. During 1962 the Military Bureau of the *Ba'ath Party* was formed, composed of 'Alī Šāliḥ as-Sa'ūdī and a number of senior *Ba'athist* officers, such as retired Brigadier Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr and Lieutenant Colonel Šāliḥ Maḥdī 'Ammāsh. The Bureau recruited an increasing number of officers, often through their attachment to the personal following of such figures as Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr.⁷⁵ In the second half of 1962 the party command set on foot in bigger towns and mainly in Baghdad a network of "Alarm Committees" which after the coup constituted the "National Guard". Members of these committees, mostly students were, at a signal from the party, to take to the streets with their guns and other arms concealed in their civilian clothes, and to await further orders.⁷⁶

The last six weeks before 'Abdalkarīm Qāsim's downfall were characterized by a strike of university and secondary-school students in Baghdad, which began for a very trivial reason. On 27 December 1962, a secondary-school pupil who was accidentally the son of the president of the Special Supreme Military Court Fāḍil 'Abbās al-Maḥdāwī, became involved in an argument with nationalist students over his alleged distribution of communist propaganda, and was beaten up. He telephoned his father who sent his bodyguard, who in turn beat up his assailants. Thereupon the illegal National Federation of Iraqi Students staged a protest demonstration during which one nationalist student was killed. The National Federation then declared a strike which had the sympathy of many teachers from the beginning. A succession of

⁷³ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq, p. 169.

⁷⁴ 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'athists and Free Officers, p. 1010.

⁷⁵ TRIPP, C. A History of Iraq, p. 169.

⁷⁶ 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'athists and Free Officers, p. 968.

demonstrations led to further clashes with the police; during one, three more students were reported killed.⁷⁷ Many students and teachers who upheld the strike were arrested. There were mass expulsions and the detainees staged a hunger strike.

The students' strike had started as a political action by nationalist students. It soon became almost general, and sympathy strikes followed in Moṣul, Ramādī and Fallūja. Genuine feelings of solidarity and grievance undoubtedly induced many uncommitted students to participate, as did the low standing of the General Students Federation—still the official representative of the student body. In addition, strikes had been a favourite weapon of Iraqi students in the past: they had never been averse to leaving their class-rooms, especially not before mid-term examinations. The Communists were in a difficult position. They had no love for the regime, and the Communist-dominated Students Federation had had its fill of trouble with the authorities. At first, the Students Federation denounced the strike as an imperialist intrigue and called upon the students to return to their classes. When soon afterwards the popularity of the strike became clear, and when government strong-arm measures against the students had provided a decent excuse, the federation changed its attitude. Even on this occasion it is credibly reported that the *ICP* leadership remained divided on the strike issue.⁷⁸

The nationalists had long since staked everything on another coup. Islam may not have been slighted, but a large part of the population, which placed the interests of religion above every other public consideration, was disposed to suspect slights. The plans for the overthrow of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's regime were drawn up in the Military Bureau which was also intended to ensure that the *Baʿth Party* would remain dominant in the aftermath of the coup, despite having to co-operate with non-*Baʿthist* officers.⁷⁹ The actual perpetrators of the coup were a group of *Baʿthist* and nationalist officers, of whom the most prominent were the *Baʿthists* Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr, Šālīḥ Maḥdī Ammāsh, ʿAbdassattār ʿAbdallaṭīf, Ḥardān at-Tikrītī and Mundhir al-Windāwī, and the nationalists Makkī al-Ḥāshimī, Tāhir Yaḥyā and Rashīd Mušlīḥ. As two thirds of the army was in Kurdistan, the conspirators had only to seize the Abū Ghurayb and Rashīd camps and the al-Ḥabbānīya air base – in each of which there were sympathetic unit commanders – and then take over the radio station before marching on the Ministry of Defence where ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim had his headquarters.⁸⁰ After two false starts the coup was eventually launched on 8

⁷⁷ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 360.

⁷⁸ DANN, U. *Iraq Under Qassem. A Political History, 1958-1963*, p. 361.

⁷⁹ TRIPP, C. *A History of Iraq*, p. 169.

⁸⁰ SLUGLETT, M. F., SLUGLETT, P. *Iraq since 1958. From Revolution to Dictatorship*, p. 84.

February, a Friday in Ramaḍān.

Although it had no direct bearing on the 14th Ramaḍān coup, the students' strike exposed the decay of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim's regime. The simmering quarrel with the UAR flared up anew. The reactions of the general public clearly demonstrated the unpopularity of ʿAbdalkarīm Qāsim. His loss of grip on affairs and his rigidity were displayed to the full. Once more the communists dithered in the search for a response to their enemies' initiative. The nationalists were gathering confidence and strength. The end was near.

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