

December 18, 1958

**Report of the Hungarian Ambassador in Baghdad on
the preparations for the Iraqi revolution in 1958**

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Summary:

This report by the Hungarian ambassador in Baghdad details the time leading up to the Iraqi Revolution of July 14, 1958, highlighting particularly the role of the Iraqi communist party and Brigadier General Qasim.

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Strictly confidential!

We have received the following information from Comrade Amer, member of the central leadership of the Party here:

After the unity of the Iraqi Communist Party had been restored in the second half of 1956 and especially as a result of the crackdown on the street demonstrations and protests organized during the aggression against Egypt it became clear to the Party that there was only one way out of Nuri As-Said's oppression and the Baghdad Pact; the kingdom and the ruling regime had to be overthrown by armed force.

In addition to propaganda work among the people aimed at informing and making people aware of the situation (of which I have given a detailed account in the report referenced), the Communist Party focused on the following aspects:

- 1./ Arming the people.
- 2./ Tightening cooperation with the officers of the army (with Qasim, in particular) who were ready to support the revolution.
- 3./ Winning the support for and participation of the leaders of the other political parties in the revolution which rallied in the people's front.

1. The arming of the people began in October 1956 and continued until the day the revolution broke out. It was not an easy task. The clash with the police and the army at the end of 1956 had produced some results already. However, the amount of arms received from abroad was a lot more significant. And finally, they were definitely able to rely on the comrades that infiltrated the army on the one hand, and on Qasim and his troops that were actively taking part in the preparation of the revolution.

The arms were given out only to the most trustworthy communists, and most of the arms were carefully hidden away. The arms were fully distributed only on 13 and 14 July 1958. By that time the squads set up in advance had been put on high alert. This is how on 14 July, while the division headed by Qasim occupied key points in the capital and eliminated the royal family along with its guards and Nuri As-Said, the Party and, to some extent, the armed squads of the people's front along with the people from the streets methodically surrounded military garrisons and barracks and, partly by way of persuasion and partly by armed force, convinced most of the military units to join the revolution.

These armed squads form the basis of the present voluntary national guard whose effective force is gradually growing, recruiting its members from civilians, mostly workers and students.

2. The leaders of the Communist Party got into personal contact with Brigadier General Qasim and some other high-ranking officers in the second half of 1955. Although they did not talk about taking prompt armed action together, they began joined organization work at that time. The Party's work in the army can be grouped in accordance with the following:

- a./ Theoretical debates and planning with Qasim and his officers
- b./ Establishing a revolutionary filed officer group in Baghdad
- c./ Winning the support of subordinate officers in Baghdad and in garrisons in the country
- d./ Setting up the Association of Soldiers and Officers to support the revolution

Only a few leading members of the Communist Party maintained contact with Qasim and some of his officers. When it became clear that Qasim himself, as one of the highest military leaders, liked the progressive movement and was ready to act any time for his own principles against Nuri As-Said's rule, these Party leaders gradually began to raise the idea of ousting the ruling system to him more openly. Qasim seemed willing to act but only on condition that the people's front was ready to overthrow the system in a united way and the Party was able to ensure that the people were properly prepared to support the revolution.

In the fall of 1956 - during the aggression against Egypt - the top leadership of the Iraqi army organized military maneuvers which were commanded, among others, by Qasim himself. It was suggested that this opportunity might be used for overthrowing the system. However, in view of the fact that at that time the National Democratic Party totally refused to join the revolution, the leaders of the Communist Party, in agreement with Qasim, did not find the opportunity suitable. Instead they made efforts to develop preparations further. The various military groups and organization

described above were not yet connected to one another; they had direct contact only with the leaders of the Party. However, at that time, when the detailed plans for the revolution and the setup of the government that should follow were developed the leaders of the party informed Qasim of the available forces. It should be noted that at first hearing Qasim was distrustful of the various military groups and therefore he demanded that all the officers and soldiers in these groups should make an oath of allegiance.

At the beginning of 1957 Nuri As-Said commanded Qasim to serve in Jordan with the 2nd brigade. At that time Qasim's deputy was Colonel Arif. During his service in Jordan the Party continued the preparations for the revolution. In addition to military organizations they established a civil organization, "Freedom of Fatherland" which comprised thousands of patriots under the leadership of the communist. This organization was to ensure reserves for the armed squads during the revolution. The leaders of the Party informed Qasim of the preparation every week by a messenger. During Qasim's stay in Jordan the Iraqi king and Nuri AS-Said planned a joint visit to Jordan to inspect the Iraqi armed forces stationed there. Qasim sent a message by the messenger proposing that if the People's Front was willing to take power in Baghdad he saw this visit as a good opportunity to eliminate the king and Nuri As-Said. Eventually this proposal was dismissed in Baghdad, partly because Nuri As-Said missed the inspection and partly because Qasim and his troops were away in Jordan and the party did not find the armed forces available in Baghdad sufficient. So the revolution once again had to be postponed. The people under the influence of the Party as well as the leaders of the political parties that rallied under the People's Front were all on high alert. Time was passing by and the case of the revolution was dragging on up until 11 July 1958.

Qasim as the commander of the 19th Brigade and the 20th Brigade (at that time commanded by Colonel Arif) were ordered to move to Lebanon on 11 July 1958. Making up a division, the two brigades were given their task under Qasim's command.

When informed by Qasim, the leaders of the Party decided that the time had come for the revolution and taking power by armed force. This time Qasim again stipulated that he was only willing to support the revolution with his armed force if the entire people's Front participated in it; moreover, they should be in the government to be formed after the victory revolution. Arif negotiated with the leaders of the Baath Party and Qasim himself with those of the Independence Party and the National Democratic Party on this issue. The leaders of the Baath Party and the Independence Party (Shanshall) seemed willing to agree but the leader of the National Democratic Party (Chaderchi) did not agree to participate either in the revolution or in the government to be formed after its victory.

During further negotiations the participants managed to convince even Chaderchi to listen to reason at least to some extent, who was still unwilling to participate in person but finally agreed that his party would take part in the revolution and represent itself in the newly formed government. At the same time he also promised that he would not betray the revolution although he would stay passive during the events. So, Qasim also accepted 14 July as the day of the revolution. On 11 July the units of his division were still being stationed in camps 50-80 km north and south of the capital. He officially and formally prepared his troops to execute the order given by the general headquarters to move to Lebanon. Before departure, however, he commissioned the officers as commanders who had already been involved in the preparations for the revolution.

In accordance with the plans carefully designed in advance, the Qasim division, the Communist Party and the people mobilized and armed by the People's Front overthrew the kingdom in Iraq and proclaimed the republic. The proclamation of the republic was read personally by Aref in the Baghdad radio, which was a clear source of his subsequent popularity. Five hours after the first shots had gone off Qasim, as the commander-in-chief of the revolution, was already in the Ministry of Defence giving orders to his subordinates.