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Iraq - 1959-61

4 May - 16 Nov. 59

Travelogue, Humphrey (British Embassy, Iraq,
Baghdad)

- 3 letters to D.H., 1959
- 1 letter from D.H. - 1 -



CONFIDENTIAL

May 4, 1959.

Dear Dag.

I have not written to you since I came here except about the Arab development proposals which have now become totally submerged in the political war between the U.A.R. and Iraq. It is a most difficult situation here. The abortive Mosul revolt gave the Communists the best chance they have had since the revolution. They have taken full advantage of it and have greatly increased their influence, though not yet to the extent of gaining complete control or completely depriving Qasim of all powers of resistance. The technique is to infiltrate into the Departments, to terrorise, and to demonstrate that they already run everything. The leaders seem clearly to want to bring about the adherence of Iraq to "the camp"; their attacks on Tito show that they wish to suppress every manifestation of "national Communism". Their technique, in Baghdad and Basra at any rate, is to overawe their opponents and make them despair. The ranks of the right-wing nationalists are disordered and temporarily, at least, shattered. The Army has been largely neutralised by the recent arrests. The National Democrats are the one force which may still be capable of standing up to the Communists and they are now receiving some accession of strength from all non-Communist elements which are frightened of a Communist victory. But their political organisation is poor and in this kind of game organisation counts for much. Qasim himself is still something of an enigma. He has undoubted elements of weakness and naiveté, but he can be ruthless and has a certain cunning and obstinacy without which he would have succumbed completely before now. It is perhaps a weakness of the Communists that they have built him up to an extent which may make it difficult for them to do without him, though there may come a moment when they will try. A serious difficulty for them must be that the prosperity of the country is dependent upon the continuance of the sale of oil in Western Europe and on the expansion scheme of the Iraq Petroleum Company to take place in the next few years. I do not see the Communist bloc being able to provide means to remedy the financial dislocation which must result from expropriatory measures against the Company.

2. In all this Nasser has played a somewhat unhappy part, as the Yugoslavs say. I agree with their view that he was totally misled by Fahmi, the Ambassador here, and Faiq Samarraï, the Iraqi Ambassador in Cairo, into believing after the revolution that there was a majority in Iraq in favour of union with the U.A.R. The plots to overthrow Qasim have been inefficient and easily defeated. After those of December and March there was, I fear, irrefutable evidence of Nasser's

/ participation.

His Excellency
Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld,
Secretary-General of the United Nations.



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participation. After the March plot I think that Nasser made another tactical mistake in himself attacking Qasim violently. Qasim let the attacks on Nasser be made in the streets, in the court and in the press, but said nothing himself. The nationalist pressure aided and abetted by Nasser has pushed the political power here steadily towards the left and if Nasser goes on, may well ensure the Communists' victory. As a senior Foreign Ministry official here said the other day "If Nasser does not shut up, we shall be Communist within a year". I believe that it is essential that there should be a truce, the initiative for which must be taken by Nasser. If this can be maintained for some time, an accommodation might then be possible. Hashim Jawad has told me that if there should be a truce, he would be prepared himself to talk to the Egyptians, as the Iraqis have no desire to be out of harmony with the Arab world. Whether his own position here is sufficiently strong ~~enough~~ to enable him to do this is another question.

3. We are being accused by the Egyptians of playing with the Communists because of our pathological dislike of Nasser. This is of course nonsense and is presumably put out mainly for tactical reasons, though I fear the Egyptians are beginning to believe it. The present disaccord between Nasser and Qasim has a deplorable effect on the chances of peace in the Middle East, and the establishment of a Communist base in Iraq would most seriously add to the dangers and instability of the whole area. We are not starry-eyed here and see all the dangers in the local situation, but it would be the height of foolishness for us to do what Nasser seems to want, to come out wholeheartedly against Qasim as a tool of the Communists. That would finally push him into their hands. We must continue to try and encourage Qasim to remain independent and neutral, so long as there is the slightest chance of his being able and willing to do so. We are not, I hope, going to be frightened by the Communists into giving up here before the game is manifestly lost. We should not yet cut the links between Iraq and the West, thus giving the Communists a free field.

4. In these conditions of instability and tension, anything is possible and there may at any moment be a development which will require us to think again. I only wish that I could have a few hours with Nasser and Fawzi at this moment. But that really would cause a sensation here! I have been told that Fawzi has gone to ground in the last month or so and I fear that Nasser has recently been badly advised.

Yours sincerely,

Hamphrey.



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May 11

P.S. Since my letter had to wait for the weekly bag, I should like to add a postscript on our decision to sell Qasim the arms for which he has asked. We have thought all round this question and always come back here to the conclusion that it is the right thing to do. To have refused them would be to have declared ourselves Qasim's enemy and to make him feel that he had nowhere to turn except to the Communists. That we must above all avoid this feeling is the view held by a number of my Arab colleagues who want to see peace restored in the Arab world. We cannot say how far the decision on arms will influence the situation nor what the outcome will be. When I told Qasim, he was obviously pleased and talked about a new page of friendship between the Iraqi and British peoples. But there are many warring forces, external and internal, which will affect the issue. I believe that whatever the outcome, this was the only possible policy for us to adopt at this time. I hope that Fawzi has shown some understanding of the realities of the situation in his discussions with you at Geneva. I should like to have been there.

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(1013/454/59)



BRITISH EMBASSY,
BAGHDAD.

PERSONAL

October 23, 1959.

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Dag,

I am delighted that we have Jens Malling here. It was, if I may say so, a very wise appointment and he is admirably qualified to hold the fort in a very difficult time. I have of course very close relations with him and we often exchange views on this rapidly changing situation. I have also discussed with him how I could help him in an emergency, on the lines which I talked over with Andy before I left New York. He tells me that you would like to hear from me again about the Iraqi position, and so I shall do my best to let you know how it looks from here.

2. The essential nature of the situation has not changed. The Nationalist forces which were behind the revolution split soon into their component parts and since then there has been a struggle for power between the left and the right with Qasim and the National Democrats, sometimes but not always together, holding some sort of a balance. The Communists took full advantage of the opportunities given to them by the Mosul revolt and, during the month or two after it, reached the highest point of power and influence in Iraq which they have yet attained. But it went to their head and they overplayed their hand. Their activities caused virtual anarchy among the peasants and labour. They pressed for participation of the Party in the Government and for the formation of a national front under their control, which would quickly have enabled them to obtain power. At the same time they initiated various forms of subversive activity. They were widely believed to be responsible for the Kirkuk massacres, they plotted to get control of the Armed Forces, they prepared for violent action against their opponents in Baghdad and Basra, and they attempted to dominate the countryside by terror. All this caused a great revulsion against them throughout the country and caused Qasim himself to act against them, when he felt his own position threatened. With at least his permission, the non-Communist elements in the Military Government supported by the National Democrats, took effective action against the Communists' organisations if not against their leaders. Security was restored throughout the country and the responsibility for it put back into the hands of local officials and the police, and the plots in the Army were squashed. The power of the "democratic" organisations and of the Communist committees in the Government departments were substantially curtailed, the

/ Popular

His Excellency
Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld,
The Secretary-General of the United Nations,
New York.



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Popular Resistance Forces were virtually abolished and penal action was initiated against those responsible for the killings in Kirkuk and elsewhere. At the same time there were signs of a policy of conciliation of the Nationalists. Qasim had by this time found out, if he did not know it before, both the numbers of Nationalists interned after Mosul and the brutalities inflicted upon them by Communist officers. All Nationalists except those charged with serious crimes were released and the Nationalist newspapers which had had their presses sacked after Mosul, began to reappear. The Nationalists recovered their spirit and the climate of free discussion which was never really lost during Nuri's time, reappeared.

3. At this time it seemed that Qasim had everything in his hands. He had a real chance of bringing back under his leadership the moderate Nationalist opinion which had been alienated during the period of Communist power in the spring and he seemed on the way to consolidating the Army as a non-political force behind him. At the same time there were signs of a move towards a possible détente between him and Nasser. He was understandably anxious not to get into Nuri's position of suppressing the Communists and was indeed somewhat naive in believing that he could obtain the co-operation of all Parties, including the Communists, in some sort of political system which would leave him with the ultimate power. He had been often attacked throughout the Arab world and elsewhere of being Communist, but although he seemed to think often in Communist terms particularly on issues which did not concern Iraq and somewhat naturally felt far more confident in his relations with the East than with the West, most observers believed that his fundamental motive was not to promote Communism but to keep himself in power. He seemed to have a reasonable chance of doing this, though we believed that the struggle between the two factions would be long and even at this time did not commit ourselves to prophesying that when finally a relative stability came to Iraq, it would be under Qasim's leadership.

4. From the middle of August the situation again changed. Qasim seems to have had information, whether true or false, that the extreme Nationalists supported by the United Arab Republic, were again plotting against him. He chose unwisely to retaliate by staging another Mosul trial directed principally against the senior officers who had probably been on the fringe of the plot but had not openly committed themselves to it. This gave Cairo the opportunity to make them out as persecuted patriots which did them no service and presented Qasim with the dilemma that he must either have them acquitted and appear to be giving way to Cairo, or condemn popular and respected senior officers of an Army the officer corps of which was probably still predominantly Nationalist. The assertions of the principal prosecution witnesses that their statements before the investigating committee had been obtained by torture led

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him to believe that there was a concerted political move to attack the Court and to give his unqualified support to Mahdawi, the man most hated by the non-Communists in Iraq today. At the same time Mahdawi was used as he had been previously, to conduct in the Court a violent political propaganda campaign against the United Arab Republic which further worsened relations between Qasim and Nasser. These actions led to Qasim losing considerable support among the moderates both in the Army and outside it. In spite of the doubtful nature of the evidence, underlined by the subsequent prosecution of members of the Court's investigating staff, and in spite of the split vote among the judges, the Court sentenced the principal accused to death and the executions followed. We believe that Qasim was greatly affected by the murder at Beirut airport of the man who was coming to Iraq to give evidence in the Court for the prosecution and that he got into his mind that he must strike back against his enemies inside and outside Iraq and at the same time eliminate possible rivals. His reason for including the four members of the old régime who had been in prison for a year and who had been Nuri's instruments against the Communists, was probably in the main the effect of the taunts by Cairo Radio that he was executing the Nationalists and letting the old traitors go free. The result of the executions was further to widen the gulf between the right and the left and further to deprive Qasim of much of the support from moderate elements that he had regained from his conduct in the preceding months. The policy of conciliation had now failed. Bitterness was greatly increased. The two wings swung towards the extremes and by hitting both sides Qasim seemed to have left himself with very little support. The National Democrats were strongly opposed to the executions but unable to influence the decision. They disliked remaining in the Government while actions were being taken of which they disapproved, but feared that if they resigned they would give an opportunity to the Communists to move into their places.

5. For a brief period there was surface calm but underlying instability. Action against Communist organisations was still being taken throughout the country, security remained good, but a large section of the population seemed to have lost confidence in Qasim, to be uncertain in which direction he was moving and to believe that the uneasy calm could not last. It was a situation curiously parallel to the times in pre-revolutionary Iraq when suddenly public opinion decided that the Government was dead and must be changed. But under the revolution there was no way to change it peacefully. There ensued the attempt on Qasim's life on October 7. For the first week stories were put about from most reliable sources that the Communists were involved, but it soon began to look as if it was some form of right-wing plot. The general Iraqi opinion seems to be that this attempt has not increased Qasim's prestige or following and no-one seems to regard the situation as any more stable than before or to have any greater confidence that Qasim will be able to hold it.

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The Army is by no means consolidated as a force loyal to him. The Communists still support him for tactical reasons and will take every advantage they can out of this event, but they are no more popular in the country. The National Democrats, including of course Hashim Jawad, are doing their best to maintain Qasim in his middle line, but clearly fear the baleful influence of Mahdawi who now seems openly committed to the Communist cause and who is shortly to be let loose again in the Court to try the plotters and in absentia those who fled to the United Arab Republic after the Mosul revolt. The Communists and Mahdawi, who is patently anxious to increase his own power, will probably try and involve the Americans and ourselves as well as Nasser. The economic situation is bad, the chaos in the countryside in the spring coupled with the hasty measures to carry out agricultural reform have reduced crops to fifty per cent of normal and there is probably considerable unemployment in the towns. Development has virtually been at a standstill for many months. The country is going through a very bad patch. It is not absolutely out of the question that Qasim can recover himself, but it is going to be very much more difficult for him than a few months ago and stability seems further away than ever.

6. This is, I am afraid, a gloomy account, but in the long term Iraq has excellent prospects provided only it can acquire a reasonable amount of stability and somehow achieve a truce with the United Arab Republic. I only wish I could see some way of using your diplomacy to improve the situation, but I fear that the temperature is too high at the moment. If we get over these difficulties and reach a point at which a détente between the two countries seems possible, then your initiative might well be necessary to bring it about. If Malling and I think at any time that the point has come, we shall of course advise you. Meanwhile, I am glad that you were able to have a talk with Hashim Jawad. When I saw him last week, he had not yet been able to talk to Qasim about the remaining prisoners under sentence of death, but he will be able to impress upon Qasim the important international effect of his decision on the fate of these unfortunate people. On the whole, I am still hopeful that they will not be executed since they are in a rather different category from the four whom Qasim hanged last month. I remember Nasser telling me the story of how he refused to execute Farouk on the ground that a revolution which begins in violence ends in violence. I am afraid that that lesson has not been learned here and the violence of July 14, 1958 is still bringing violence in its train.

Yours ever,

Humphrey Jewell

PERSONAL



BRITISH EMBASSY,
BAGHDAD.

November 16, 1959.

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Dag,

This is a brief appendix to my recent letter to you on one point. Reports coming to us from a number of sources from Egypt show that some there who should know better have a completely ridiculous idea of our relations with the Iraqis. In terms no cruder than the kind of story that reaches us, they appear to think that Qasim owes his continued existence to British support and that if I made it clear that we no longer supported him, he would fall at once. This is of course a wholly false idea of our influence here. Qasim is certainly not resting on our support. His position depends upon the struggle of the conflicting forces in the country and on his ability or inability to give a lead which will secure him solid support. Our position is that while Qasim is Prime Minister, we do business with him as we would with any other Prime Minister and do our best to encourage him to keep somewhere near the middle of the road. It would be foolish, indeed impossible, for us to adopt any other policy, and the idea that we are engaged in a conspiracy against Arab nationalism, and the United Arab Republic in particular, is of course nonsense.

2. Since I last wrote, Jawad and Hadid have shown in conversation with me that they are aware that Qasim cannot go on in his previous course of what might be called negative balance, hitting one side and then the other and failing to build up the positive support of the moderates for his leadership. They are pressing for a new lead, for a strong and precise declaration of policy, for a reorganisation of the Government and for control over the actions and declarations of individual Ministers. Whether Qasim is capable or willing to act in this way is yet to be seen. Hashim Jawad declares himself to be hopeful, but many people are very doubtful whether he and the National Democratic Party will succeed in what they are trying to do.

Yours ever,

Hamphrey

His Excellency
Mr. Dag Hammarskjöld,
The Secretary-General of the United Nations,
New York.

23 May 1959

I have just received your letter which by a curious coincidence reached me when I had made up my mind to write to Jawad in order to offer him a meeting when I come to Europe late in June or early in July. Your letter, which was most welcome and helpful, strengthened me in my conviction that this is the time when I should give him a chance to play such a card, if he wants to do so. Naturally, I have phrased my letter in such a way as to give him a completely free hand to invite me or to neglect my initiative.

You may guess that my conclusion and my step in relation to Jawad has, as part of its background, my talk with Fawzi in Lausanne. This talk showed that an initiative of mine in relation to Baghdad, if carefully timed, would not be unwelcome. Certainly, you may be right that there has been a period when Fawzi has been more or less brushed aside, but, if so, I got the feeling that he is now back in the picture - as always seems to be the case when Nasser has burned his fingers on a spree of his own. Anyway, our friend Fawzi was very self-assured and obviously had a very broad mandate, although he said that I certainly realised that lemons at this season in Egypt were small and hard and without much juice. I may have a chance to check this personally as, naturally, I would not go to Baghdad without visiting Cairo on the same trip. (Fawzi knows about my letter to Jawad).

It was very good to hear from you also because I have given quite some thought to yours and Lady Trevelyan's life in Baghdad under present circumstances. I conclude from your letter that, whatever difficulties you have, the significance of the task just at the present juncture gives you very full compensation. Sorry not to have had a chance to talk matters over with you; it would have been enormously helpful.

As regards the arms deal, I should add that it worried Fawzi but not overmuch, and that he seemed to understand well the rationale of the move. As you know, he is working in the direction of a normalisation of relations between Cairo and Baghdad, and then the present move, of course, adds some difficulties. However, he seems to rank the repercussions over Bureimi, via Riyad, roughly equal with the arms deal as a complication of the picture. (As a matter of course, I took my chance to brief Selwyn on this and related matters when I saw him in Geneva).

H.E. Sir Humphrey Trevelyan,
c/o Foreign Office,
London, England.

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