

Hashemite Iraq's Relations with Africa (1953-1958)

Dr Elizabeth BISHOP, Texas State University (USA)

Abstract : During the Cold War, Iraq's policies with regard to Africa can best be understood as developing within the context of a rivalry between the Hashemite monarchy and Egypt's « free officers» revolution. This entailed a geographic shift, from East to North Africa, from Ethiopia to Algeria. This also entailed struggle for control of the Arab world's message, as both nations launched broadcast stations, then clandestine stations. It became clear over time that the Hashemite monarchy used the issue of Algeria's national liberation struggle, to mask the political priorities of Iraq's national opposition.

Résumé : Au cours de la guerre froide, les politiques de l'Irak à l'égard de l'Afrique peuvent être comprises dans le meilleur des cas comme étant dans le contexte d'une rivalité entre la monarchie hachémite et la révolution égyptienne "des officiers libres". Cela impliquait un changement géographique, de l'Est à l'Afrique du Nord, de l'Ethiopie à l'Algérie. Cela impliquait également une lutte pour la prise de contrôle du message transmis par le monde arabe, puisque que les deux nations avaient lancé des stations de radiodiffusion, puis des stations clandestines. Il s'est avéré avec le temps que la monarchie hachémite utilisait la lutte de libération nationale algérienne afin de voiler les priorités politiques de l'opposition nationale irakienne.

1. Introduction

In Addas Ababa, the National Archives of Ethiopia includes a series of letters, over the signature of King Faisal II of Iraq. The earliest, introduces «to your imperial majesty and to the Ethiopian government His Excellency Sayed Najib al Rawi [as] our extraordinary envoy and minister plenipotentiary hoping that he will receive from Your Majesty the assistance and support particularly when he will report to Your Imperial Majesty our firm cordiality and high appreciation» (19 August 1949, 1.2.55.03). Also on stationery with its gold coronet is a second letter, affirming: « Having already had ample experience of al Sayid Najib al Rawi's talents and zeal for our service, we doubt not that he will fulfill the duties of his mission in such a manner as to merit your majesty's approbation and esteem,

and to prove himself worthy of this new mark of our confidence» (25 November 1950, also 1.2.55.03).

Recognizing that Hashemite Iraq developed a policy toward Ethiopia, this essay addresses the different forms Iraq's «Africa» policy took, as it moved—like Ambassador Najib al Rawi—from Imperial Addis Ababa, to republican Cairo. This essay recognizes that Iraq's «Africa» program can be best understood in a context in which Egypt's military leaders, and the national liberation struggle of Algeria, were crucial elements. Sayed Najib al Rawi later served Iraq's Hashemite monarch as his ambassador toward Egypt («Premier Nuri Al-Said Addresses People», Baghdad, Iraqi Home Service, 16 December 1956).

During the mid-1950s, African Egypt became Asian Iraq's rival for leadership of the Arab world. Differences in forms of governance and reigning ideologies characterized the two states. After an attempted coup in Iraq during 1941, that country's Hashemite monarchy kept that particular nation's military on starvation rations (Fieldhouse, 2008: 109), and restricted investment in it during a Cold War decade (Central Intelligence Agency, 1953, 9-10), when military budgets around the world boomed (Accordino, 2000: 18). In Iraq, tribal leaders on the national legislature passed laws to protect their thousand-acre estates from any form of taxation, while diplomats negotiated turn-over of the Habbaniya and Shaibba air bases from Britain (with the Royal Air Force retaining the right to send bomber squadrons into and out of these bases at will). Meanwhile, the military officers who ran Egypt (after its 1952 *coup d'état*) declared a republic.

Egypt's military leaders were in the midst of nationalizing the former royal family's estates, in order to institute a redistributive real estate law. They had adopted a confrontational stance *vis à vis* the colonial powers, while making connections with the world of state socialism. As some Egyptian diplomats were negotiating to remove British forces from the Suez Canal bases, others were arranging to

pay for the most advanced weapons on a barter basis. Meanwhile, a new constitution granted the suffrage to all adults, regardless of class origin. [ADD CITATIONS]

2. Support for Algeria

The most obvious element of an Africa policy (toward Ethiopia, then toward Egypt, and with regard to Algeria) was the two nations' support for North Africa's national liberation struggle. Algeria's seventh president had enjoyed a long stay in Cairo after World War II (Ottaway, Ottaway, 1970: 167).

November 1954 witnessed a significant moment for Algeria's national liberation struggle, when Premier Pierre Mendès France (Radical-Socialist Party), declared in France's National Assembly: « One does not compromise when it comes to defending the internal peace of the nation, the unity and integrity of the Republic; the Algerian departments are part of the French Republic. They have been French for a long time, and they are irrevocably French. ... Between them and metropolitan France there can be no conceivable secession.» This speech was broadcast to North Africa by radio; in response, the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) was formed.

FLN *maquisards* (guerrillas) attacked military and civilian targets throughout Algeria in what became known as the *Toussaint Rouge* (Red All-Saints' Day) during the early morning hours of 1 November 1954. From Cairo, the FLN broadcast a proclamation calling on Muslims in Algeria to join in a national struggle for the « restoration of the Algerian state -- sovereign, democratic and social -- within the framework of the principles of Islam.» From Baghdad, al-Rikabi observed, « France announced its surprise regarding the boldness of the inhabitants of Algeria and their resolution for revolution, because it had said previously that Algeria constitutes an indivisible part of the French homeland» (*Baghdad, Iraqi Home Service - 1954-11-04*, Israel Called 'Pampered Child of U.N.,' Daily Report, Foreign Radio Broadcasts, FBIS-FRB-54-216 on 1954-11-05).

3. Broadcast Rivalry

Analyst Robert S. Fortner draws attention to radio's significance in public diplomacy (Fortner, 1995: chapter 2). Radio Baghdad's coverage of Algeria's national liberation struggle represents only one aspect of Africa's relations with Hashemite Iraq. During this early, formative period of the superpower conflict, Iraq challenged the developing leadership Egypt's «Free Officer» leader Gamal Abdul Nasser, his national media, and the leaders of Algeria's national liberation movement («Papers Seized from Wafd,» *Egyptian Gazette*, 8 January 1954).

The more devious element of an Africa policy, toward Egypt, and toward Algeria, was a battle of the airwaves between these Iraq and Egypt. At the time, radio was an important means of communication within the region. Three services were established during the 1930s: those of Egypt, Iraq, and Palestine. In the following analysis, I will follow a model Andrea Stanton established, when she drew attention to the varying types of information services characteristic of these services, as when broadcasts from Jerusalem were intended to reach specific demographics, described internally as «peasants» and «music lovers» (Stanton 2013).

Iraqi radio developed its own distinctive broadcast style. Listening to the radio was understood to be a political act; a contemporary described «a man would seek his employer's recommendation to enable him to buy a wireless set on hire purchase; if he was illiterate, as he probably was, this was his best source of information... a middle-class employer would be proud of the growing social awareness of his protégé» (Caractacus, 42). In an attempt to recreate the «received pronunciation» of the BBC's Home Service, Radio Baghdad hired trained actors as on-air personalities. While there were only 66,000 licensed receivers in Iraq during the 1950s, with a population of five million, that worked out as approximately one for every 75 residents (Central Intelligence Agency, 1951, 20), coffee-house radios extended the listenership for ten hours a day of news, vocal music, and Qur'an readings. As His Excellency Sayed Najib al Rawi might have appreciated, radio in Iraq was an exclusive rarified form of political consumption.

Egyptian radio developed its distinctive broadcast style, as well. Radio became an intrinsic part of the Nasserite era (Anne Cooper-Chen, 2005: 83); it was the only medium that could reach people in remote areas Cairo invested in shortwave transmitters, establishing a *Sawt al-Arab* station on 4 July 1953, one year after the country's military coup (Boyd 1999, 28). The «Voice of the Arabs» was an indigenous response to the BBC World Service (Hammond, 2007: 207). Along with its short-wave service, Cairo Radio's Main Program became Africa's important means of reaching Egyptian supporters in other Arab countries. Employing broadcast journalists who spoke in their national vernaculars programming grew from an initial 30 minutes of programming a day, to 7 hours per day by 1954 (Boyd, 1999: 21, 28). In short: radio in Egypt was populist and revolutionary form of political activism.

The first years after the FLN was established, even Baghdad's minister of defense Nuri es-Said was reported to have turned on Cairo Radio's «Voice of the Arabs» program (Birdwood, 1959: 243-245). As prime minister, he personally appealed to the US ambassador in Baghdad for 100-Kw medium- and short-wave transmitters (Boyd, 1975: 649). Meeting with the British Foreign Secretary and U.K. ambassador, es-Said crowed, «Iraq would soon have new strong transmitter» to assist in «combat Cairo broadcasts which were all 'big lies'» (Department of State, Central Files, 780.5/3-1056; Gallman, Telegram from the embassy in Iraq to the State Department; *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1955-1957, Near East Region; Iran; Iraq, volume XII, no. 101: 252). This new transmitter augmented the official broadcasts of Radio Baghdad with a new, clandestine radio station. As historians Lawrence Soley and John Spicer Nichols observe, with the boom in petroleum income which Iraq began to enjoy during 1953, « clandestine stations which broadcast to the Middle East during the late 1950s and early 1960s were primarily directed against Egypt's Abdul Nasir» (Soley and Nichols, 1987: 72).

Iraq's clandestine station was the «Voice of Free Egypt.» On the air for an hour a day (from 4 until 5 pm), announcers broadcasting over 'Free Egypt' frequencies on the 42.6 meter band claimed to serve as

mouthpiece of ‘the free Egyptian people who wish to overthrow the present regime»(*Jerusalem (Israel) - 1955-04-05*; ‘Voice of Free Egypt’ Begins Broadcasts, Daily Report, Foreign Radio Broadcasts FBIS-FRB-55-067 on 1955-04-06). They «proclaimed a ‘state of organized resistance’ against Nasser and his ‘gang’» in a «daily... program of denunciation of Egypt’s Revolutionary Command Council» (Central Intelligence Agency, «Current Intelligence bulletin»1954). Announcers at «Free Egypt» articulated the political positions associated with Egypt’s underground communist party and its Muslim Brotherhood, the station appeared to have no appreciable audiences within Egypt; «apparently, it has most of its listeners abroad» (Marsian, 1955). When it emerged that the «Voice of Free Egypt»was broadcasting from the south of France (De Gaulledonated a transmitter once used by the French resistance) («Mahmoud Abu Fath Admits That He works For France,» *al-Ahram*, 29 December 1957), ¹Egypt responded in kind.

A «Voice of Free Iraq» began broadcasting during the third week of April, its broadcasts «more abusive than the *Sawt al-’Arab [Voice of the Arabs]*» (Podeh 1995).Its announcers attacked Iraq’s Crown Prince as a «servant of imperialism,»accused him of murdering the late King Ghazi (*Jerusalem (Israel) - 1955-04-26*, ‘VOICE OF FREE IRAQ’ STARTS BROADCASTS, DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-55-081 on 1955-04-26).In response, the Hashemite foreign ministrycomplained that the ‘Voice of Free Iraq,’«abused the leaders of Iraq, its legislative councils, its organizations, and its press» (*Baghdad, Iraqi Home Service - 1955-05-05*; RADIO ‘FREE IRAQ’ EMANATES FROM EGYPT; DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-55-089 on 1955-05-06). Radio Baghdad noted, « With deep regret, technical and other investigations reveal this latest abusive voice emanates... from Egypt» (*Baghdad, Iraqi Home Service - 1955-05-05*; RADIO ‘FREE IRAQ’ EMANATES FROM EGYPT; DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS,

¹ I’m grateful to Yehia Hafez for drawing this citation to my attention. I’m grateful to Leila Asadi and Nickolas Spencer for their comments on a previous draft. All remaining errors are my own.

FBIS-FRB-55-089 on 1955-05-06). Diplomats responded to the broadcasts with an official complaint.

Iraq's newly-appointed ambassador to Egypt al-Rawi informed his diplomatic colleagues in Cairo that the « Voice of Free Iraq » was based, under Egyptian military occupation, in the Gaza strip, a charge the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied (Marsian 1955). The Hashemite monarchy took extreme measures, first jamming the 'Voice of Free Iraq,' then recalling ambassador al-Rawi for consultations. Finally, the foreign ministry refused to accept the credentials of a newly appointed Egyptian ambassador in Baghdad, as a protest against the ongoing broadcasts of the «Voice of Free Iraq» (Podeh 1995).

Before it could cause a break in diplomatic relations between Egypt and Iraq, the «Voice of Free Iraq» announced that it was suspending its services (*Limassol, Sharq al-Adna - 1955-06-13*; 'FREE IRAQ' RADIO SUSPENDED; DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-55-115 on 1955-06-14). During the brief period of «the battle of the clandestine stations,» the Hashemite monarchy made a bid for the leadership of Algeria's national liberation struggles, first by criticizing France's ongoing occupation, and then by decrying the extralegal practices of which this occupation consisted. Just before the leaders of the U.S., U.K., and France met at the Bermuda summit during December 1953, Radio Baghdad reported that a «disease» was «the reason for the continuous failure of French policy—failure in Syria, failure in Lebanon, failure in Indochina, and failure in North Africa (*Baghdad, Iraqi Home Service - 1953-05-28*, DECADENT FRANCE GRASPS FOR FORMER GLORY, DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-53-104 on 1953-05-29).

Closure of the 'Voice of Free Iraq' coincided with the FLN's emergence. Radio Baghdad political commentator Ali Haydar al-Rikabi continued, « In Arab North Africa, the French imperialist campaign continues its march to repress liberties and suppress every attempt by the nationalists to defend their legal rights; French courts continued to pass sentences on dozens of nationalists, and French prisons are still filled with hundreds of them» (*Baghdad, Iraqi Home*

Service - 1953-09-24, COMMENTARY SURVEYS EAST-WEST RELATIONS, DAILY REPORT. FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS, FBIS-FRB-53-188 on 1953-09-25).

4. The National Opposition

While supporting the nascent liberation movement, Radio Baghdad's broadcasts in support of Algerians' national liberation struggle can be understood as the Hashemite monarchy's attempt to diffuse the arguments of the local national opposition, as well. By invoking the colonialism's ills in distant North Africa, Radio Baghdad covered its failure to criticize the British armed forces' access to facilities in Iraq, reframing the terms of political debate from Iraqi nationalism to Arab nationalism.

The legally-registered opposition started with the National Democratic Party (*al-Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati*, which A.J. Toynbee described as «leftish») (Toynbee, 1955" 200) party, led by Kamil al-Jaderji (Toynbee 1953, 115). While Jaderji's principles of «democratic socialism» recognized private ownership, limited free enterprise, promoted nationalization of industry, and state ownership of essential utilities (Khadduri,1973: 138), a number of commentators stress the futility of analyzing the parties as anything but patronage networks. The NDP served as political home to a large number of the urban bourgeoisie, including left-to-center intellectuals, students, and professionals. On the one hand, it's been observed that during «the 1950s, the party came to articulate far more distinctly the interests of entrepreneurial capitalists, especially the manufacturing sector» (Haj, 1997: 87).On the other hand, it's been noted that: «simply because the National Democrats spoke the language of reform did not mean that they could therefore be taken at face value as a reforming party» (Elliot,1996: 27).

Kamil Samarraï led the Independence (*Istiqlal*) political party, another other member of the opposition (Rush and Priestland 2001, volume 11: 117).Formed after the Second World War as a nationalist group, this became a rightist, anti-Communist party that abhorred the Soviet Union but supported a neutralist position in the cold war

(Eppel, 2004: 106). Strongest in Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra, its newspaper the *Flag of Independence (Liwa al-Istiqlal)* was most influential in cities and in tribal areas (Harris, 1958: 92). One of the party's founders, Muhammad Mahdi Kubba, was pan-Arab in his views (*The Encyclopedia of Islam*, volume III, 10). The *Istiqlal* was credited with transforming vague socio-political unrest among students and lower civil servants, mobilizing waves of demonstrations and riots (Eppel, 1998:194). The Independence party was well-represented among military officers, and identified with their interests (Ghareeb and Dougherty, 2004: 104).

As historian Hanna Batatu points out, the name of Salah Jabr's *Umma* Socialist party was misleading: «one-time Prime Minister Salih Jabr christened his party, which was anchored on landowners and semi feudal tribal sheikhs, the 'Socialist Party of the Nation.' he was only one of the many who in that decade wrapped themselves with the cloak of socialism in the hope of borrowing a little of its popularity» (Batatu, 1978: 466). And indeed, resistance to the ongoing British military presence in the country joined such unlikely political allies as the National Democratic Party with its urban/liberal base, the rural landowners who supported Salah Jabr's *Umma* Socialist party, and the varied constituencies of the Communist left.

According to the *Centre national des Archives* in Algiers, the National Liberation Front (FLN) established a diplomatic office in Cairo (DZ/AN/2G/042/02/027), and Ahmed Ben Balla later recalled, «the first Suez Canal proceeds after nationalization were presented to us, the FLN leaders, by Gamal Abdul Nasser; how could I not be a Nasserist?» (Alexander, 2005: 82). The funds were followed by additional material support (as on 20 October 1956, when France captured the Egyptian vessel *Taulus* transporting weapons to the ALN) (Kroening, 2010:70).

5. Conclusion

In Algeria's *Centre national des Archives*, it is clear from the remaining documents that the GPRA maintained diplomatic representation to the Hashemite monarchy («*Correspondence du directeur de cabinet du ministre des affaires exterieuse destine au minister des affaires*

culturelles transmettant un message du rebrepresentant tu ministere affaires etrangers a Baghdad,» DZ/AN/2G,024/01/018), and the first appearance of the green-shite-and-red national flag alleged to have been at a «friendly» soccer game in Baghdad («Algeria’s Patriot Games,»*The Irish Times*, 6 June 2014).

Christopher Lee’s recent edited volume, *Making a World After Empire; The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives* (2010), sets an example in its invocation of «complex foundations, experiences, and aftereffects of the modern history of colonization and decolonization during the 20th century» (Lee, 2010: 2). This essay recalls that Ben Balla (as well as other FLN leaders) maintained strong diplomatic connections with Egypt’s rivals in Hashemite Iraq.

The question of «heads of state in the Arab world» is one that hangs on periodization. During the decade leading up to and following World War II, most Arabs lived under the circumstances of political colonialism; the heads of the states under which they lived were not Arab. After the British withdrawal from Aden during November 1967, the political colonization of Arabs outside Palestine ended; the period of time that Kerr (1971) addressed is precisely this period of national independence (which historians of Africa call the era of the «new nations»). It is to the complicated period between World War II and the end of Britain’s overseas empire, that I would like to draw attention.

Discussions of these provide an opportunity to shift Malcolm Kerr’s «Arab Cold War» argument in an earlier period. As the political scientist and former president of the American University in Beirut explained, the Arab world of the 1970s witnessed two cold wars: the first, a superpower conflict (in a speech that defined the foreign policy doctrine of his administration, Eisenhower pledged ‘to secure and protect the territorial integrity and political independence’ of middle eastern countries ‘against overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism’) («The Eisenhower Doctrine on the Middle East, A message to Congress;»*The*

Department of State Bulletin, XXXVI, No. 917, January 21, 1957, 83-87), the second (what Kerr called the 'Arab cold war') included conflict between Gamal Abdul Nasser and other Arab heads of state («Papers Seized from Wafd,» *Egyptian Gazette*, 8 January 1954).

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