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*Steadfast and Rejectionist Front of Arab States:
Iraq's 14 July 1958 Coup and the Unraveling of the Arab Union*

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Abstract:

Wm Roger Louis' *Revolutionary Year* addressed Egypt and Syria's union. According to Malcolm Kerr, the region witnessed an 'Arab cold war,' and as Charles Tripp pointed out, the United Arab Republic "represented a defeat for the pro-Iraqi party in Syria, and brought Nasser's influence to the very borders of Iraq." This paper addresses a Hashemite union that balanced Nasser's UAR. On 14 February 1958, King Faisal II of Iraq and his cousin, King Hussein of Jordan, united their realms. Three months later, Iraq's parliament ratified a constitution for the new Arab union, transferring defense to it. This 'Arab cold war' gave rise to conflicted loyalties: as *when al Jaridah* reported twelve Jordanian officers were arrested for attempting a *coup d'état*.

Keywords: *Amman, Arab Union, Baghdad, Iraq, Royal Hashemite Court.*

I. INTRODUCTION

1958 did not begin as “a revolutionary year.” In what one wit called a “steadfast and rejectionist front of Arab states” (Gotlieb 1982, 37), Iraq and Jordan signed an economic cooperation agreement 14 February 1958 which joined the two Kingdoms into the Arab Union (Dann 1989, 79). “In a brief ceremony at Baghdad's Palace of Flowers, the two Hashemite kingdoms were united” (Morris 1959, 171). The Union's new leaders were first cousins, King Faisal II of Iraq and King Hussein of Jordan, both members of the family Britain sought as allies during World War I (“Iraq-Jordan,” 12 December 1955).

The Arab Union offered opportunities for both “adherence” and “allegiance”, beyond the two monarchies; as we shall see, these were tested by an alternate set of loyalties. The Arab Union Constitution governed: “the Kingdom of Iraq and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan,” with both states retaining independent international personalities and governing systems. The Union was a transnational organization, with a: “membership ... open to any Arab State wishing to join.”

1. The Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq

In his oath of office, King Faisal II of Iraq had pledged to: “safeguard the Constitution and independence of the country and be loyal to the country and the people,” of whom there were five million at the time (Love, 3 May 1953). Editors of a daily newspaper reminded the young monarch he'd “had assumed his Constitutional powers and sworn to do his duties ... to safeguard the country's independence and achieve its aspirations,” emphasizing: “those in power should exchange obsolete methods for new ways to reinstate faith and confidence...” (“Iraqi Press Roundup,” 8 May 1953).

“Loyalty” was key to both Hashemite monarchies in Amman and Baghdad (Shmuelevitz 1995, Karsh 2003, Ingram 2013). Ibrahim Hashim joined the government of King Abdullah of Jordan during the 1920s, from experience in the Ottoman civil service. A perennial caretaker prime minister in charge of various interim governments, Ibrahim Hashim was a holder of the MBE (Member. Order of the British Empire; Tal 2002, 132).

1.1. Loyalty

Baghdad Radio announced Iraq and Jordan's foreign ministries had informed all countries' diplomatic representatives they were now fully accredited to the Arab Union (even though the Arab Union had not yet officially appointed diplomatic representatives to them). A joint committee consisting of four members “representing both parts of the Union” would meet soon to select new ambassadors (“Arab Union,” 8 July 1958). U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had already expressed his “respect for the Iraqis for having recognized the needs of 'interdependence'” (Eisenhower Presidential Library).

1.2. “Steadfast and Rejectionist Front”

The “steadfast and rejectionist front” promised one foreign policy--and a single Minister of Defense, responsible for support services in both regions. King Husain of Jordan immediately requested support from Iraq's Army, “for strong military aid... as soon as possible” (de Gaury 1961, 187). Both nations' militaries resisted the union. In Jordan, units of Iraq's Army were local command, with an Iraqi deputy commander (Brewer, 17 October 1956). Jordanian Army officers attempted a coup, in which the king's confidante Captain Ali Abu Nuwar, and the chief of military intelligence, were implicated.

II. Methods and Materials:

In this article, I revisit these issues, focusing on Juan Romero's statement "had the Jordanian part of the Iraqi-Jordanian Arab Union not experienced the destabilizing effects in early July of the efforts to realize Arab unity, the Iraqi Army would not have taken action against the Nuri regime on 14 July." Part of a larger work on the "Atoms for Peace" program in monarchical Iraq, this research report uses a positivist historical methodology, drawing on documents in the custody of the United Nations Archives and Records Management Service, the U.S. and U.K. National Archives, as well as the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, daily newspapers, and memoirs. My goal is not so much to present new quantitative data—which can emerge only with sustained and detailed examination of public and private sources in Arabic, Kurdish, and English—as to raise compelling questions about regional and nation-state identities. In particular, I seek to engage Romero's assertion, "like.. efforts by both the Iraqi monarchy and the United Arab Republic to achieve Arab unity before the Iraqi Revolution destabilized the Arab Union, these attempts also caused deep divisions in Iraqi society after the revolution, owing to competing interpretations of Arab unity among military officers, party activists, and Arab intellectuals" (2011, p. xix). Even a tentative assessment of Arab union can be accomplished only by recreating and restoring the larger regional contexts.

III. Results and discussion :

Jordanian media reported --apart from the radio station-- rebels held few points in Baghdad (Stevens, 1958). King Hussein claimed the "steadfast and rejectionist front's" joint throne ("Hussein Takes," 15 July 1958). Had he succeeded, Amman would have gained control of the Baghdad Hashemite's Iraq Petroleum Company revenues. At the same time, in the public spaces of Iraq's capital city, crowds of civilians, "urchins, the juvenile delinquents in striped dishdasha, the porters, the beggars, the loafers, the women in black abayas, the hungry, homeless and dispossessed" gathered, dispersed, and gathered again (Wheeler, 18 August 1958). Over the next days, citizens reassessed their loyalty to the Hashemite house and its Arab Union, as they reconsidered affiliation to Iraq's national institutions.

A key incident occurred on the second day of the coup, when two military officers and two intelligence officers of Iraq's Army parked a Jeep and a limousine in front of the Baghdad Hilton, "the most luxurious and most expensive [hotel] in this part of the world" ("Iraqi Soldiers," 22 July 1958), "plushiest in the Mideast" ("How Mob," 22 July 1958). Their security procedures were lax--when a hotel guest heard noises through the door; he: "locked [it], turned out the lights and did not answer when the soldiers pounded on the door. They went away" ("Iraqi Soldiers," 22 July 1958), and when a foreign executive's female companion: "told a young Iraqi officer she had a baby upstairs who needed her and was permitted to go back to the lobby. There was no baby" (Carter, 22 July 1958).

IV. Conclusion:

The four officers were searching for a general and three cabinet ministers with the Arab Union (*Congressional Record*, 31 July 1958, 14485), and the hotel manager led them to the Jordanians ("Iraqi Soldiers," 22 July 1958), including 80-year-old deputy premier Ibrahim Hashim (Birdwood, 1959, 269) who served as Prime Minister of the Arab Union, and 66-year old defense minister Suleiman Toukan of Nablus ("Amman Announces," 23 July 1958). They and others were marched through the lobby and into the idling cars ("How Mob," 22 July 1958), and the convoy started off for the Ministry of Defense (Birdwood 1959, 269).

Passing by the coup's command center in the radio station (Hailey, 27 July 1958), the soldiers may have dropped off some of the Jordanians ("Iraqi Soldiers," 22 July 1958). Later, Major General Sadik Sharaa and other officers were permitted to drive back to

Amman("Jordanian Officers," 25 July 1958).), where they briefed King Hussein ("Jordanian Officers," 24 July 1958). If so, these men's loyalty to the transnational Arab Union did compromise their safety.

While nationwide, "only 20 or 30 Iraqis [were] believed to have died" in the coup ("Calm returns," 26 July 1958), contingencies endangered other Arab Union servitors. Perhaps a vehicle stalled in front of the Ministry of Defense on Rashid Street (*Congressional Record*, 31 July 1958, 14485). Perhaps a driver turned into a side street where a crowd had gathered (Hailey, 27 July 1958). Civilians--not Iraq's Army--menaced Arab Union officials. Reports agree: "about fifty [Iraqis] closed in [on the convoy]. They pounded the foreigners with stones, sticks, and clubs" ("Iraqi Soldiers," 22 July 1958), ripping the Jeep's canvas covers Jeep and pulling the Jordanians through holes in the canvas ("Iraq, After," 4 August 1958).

Challenged by Iraqi civilians' reaffirmed loyalties to their nation, the transnational Arab Union unraveled. Even as the driver shouted at the crowd to stop, and a soldier fired shots in the air; a stone hit the deputy Prime Minister in the head and he died instantly; finally, "someone got the gates open," and the rest of the Hashemite diplomats abandoned the convoy for a government building's comparative safety (*Congressional Record*, 31 July 1958, 14485).

On open frequencies, Baghdad Radio broadcast instructions to the 5,000 troops outside of the country: "from the Iraqi general command to al-Hadicolun in Jordan: the Army Chief of Staff has ordered the following: all units ... should immediately return to [the Iraqi Petroleum Company's pumping station] H-3 [on the Iraqi side of the border]" ("Iraqi Troops," 14 July 1958).

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