

‘Blown Away by the Winds Like Ashes:’ Biopower in Egypt’s #25Jan and Iraq’s 14 Tammuz

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Abstract: *Citizens of the Arab Middle East have taken part in a wave of democracy movements; in Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia at least, their protests have resulted in regime change. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s personal experiences in one of these countries, and informed by his concept of “biopolitics,” this essay connects Egyptians’ current liberation struggle with their earlier revolution in 1952, in order to compare these experiences with Iraqis’ 1958 Tammuz revolution. Were new social media as important, as the level of funding dedicated to the military? And what is the role of diplomacy in a revolutionary moment?*

Keywords: Arab Spring, Coup, Egypt, Iraq, new social media, radio, revolution

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Introduction

Citizens of Arab Middle East are taking to the streets of large (and not so large) cities to call for civil rights and human dignity. Over the past two years, these demonstrations brought down four regimes (of Tunisia's Ben Ali, Libya's Gadhafi, and Egypt's Mubarak and, now, Morsi). These struggles for political liberation in the Mediterranean region have, however, proved expensive when assessed in terms of the number of civilians who lost their lives in street protests. In Egypt, 840 were killed and 6,000 wounded before the military intervened in public affairs 11 February 2011;¹ with regard to Libya, the interim health minister estimated 30,000 people were killed and 50,000 wounded bringing down the Socialist People's Arab *Jamahiriyah*² and, finally, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates 70,000 Syrians died since the day graffiti condemning the regime first appeared in Dara'a during April 2011.³

The "Arab Spring" movement began in Tunisia, and the processes by which political concerns transfer across time and space will be important to our discussion.⁴ A previous wave of demonstrations culminated during 1968; it might be helpful to remember that, during those turbulent and hopeful days, Michel Foucault was teaching at the University of Tunis' Department of Philosophy, where he continued to endure criticism of his *Les Mots et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines*.⁵ In particular, his approach was considered: "totally ahistorical... Sartre, in particular, complained that Foucault had replaced the motion picture of history with a series of static lantern slides".⁶

Nonetheless, recent experiences influenced Foucault's subsequent iterations. A year and a half earlier, a large number of students successfully staged a demonstration, protesting the Tunisian government's paternalism and pro-American foreign policy.⁷ Foucault later recalled, "I witnessed student riots, very strong, very intense... the police entered the university and beat students, badly wounding many and taking them to jail; there was a trial, during which some students received sentences of eight, ten, fourteen years in jail".⁸ Having observed students' experiences in Tunis and Paris, Bob Jessop writes that Foucault's writings of the mid-1970s came to address: "the state (and/or states) as a juridico-political instance, a calculating subject, an instrument of class rule, or an epiphenomenon of production relations".⁹

Over a series of works (*Society Must Be Defended*¹⁰; *Securité, territoire, population*, and *Naissance de la biopolitique*¹¹) Foucault clarified his position that power should be studied from below, "in the heterogeneous and dispersed micro-physics of power," remaining aware of "specific forms of its exercise in different institutional sites".¹² He offered a more comprehensive paradigm of sovereign violence in *Discipline and Punish*.¹³ Of this work, Thomas Lemke notes while sovereign violence was identified as the ability to inflict unbearable pain to the point of death, Foucault deployed the term 'biopolitics' in a variety of ways.¹⁴ Ayhan Aytes adds that that Foucault read mechanistic conceptions of the human body in two registers, which Aytes deems the: "anatomico-metaphysical" (as constituted mainly through the Cartesian mind/body duality) and the "technico-political" (that was constituted by empirical methods of the state for disciplining operations of the body through military service, education, and biomedical care).¹⁵

While Sartre had disparaged *Les Mots et les choses* "lantern slides," Roberto Esposito generalizes that Foucault was in the process of identifying the end of the modern epoch as-- not a point or a line that interrupts an epochal journey-- rather the disruption of its trajectory. Writing on Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, Esposito emphasizes: "If the present isn't what (or only what) we have assumed it to be until now," a new set of historicist implications becomes possible. "If its meanings begin to cluster around a different semantic epicenter; if something novel or ancient emerges from within that contests the mannerist image; this means, then, that the past, which nonetheless the present derives form, is no longer necessarily the same".¹⁶

Aims of the Research

While secular humanist value for the sanctity of human life backs away from imposing any "correct" number of martyrs, a discussion of events in postcolonial Egypt and Iraq extends a

discussion of Michel Foucault’s concept of “biopower” (1977). While Foucault identified exclusively-European experiences (from the 16th century territorial monarchies, to 16 and 17th century development of new forms of ‘statistical knowledge, “and, finally, to the rise of mercantilism, cameralism, and *Polizeiwissenschaft*”¹⁷ as the origins of the modern order, we can identify similar factors in the Arab world’s transformative politics. The following narrative--comparing Egyptians’ struggle to oust the Mubarak regime and Iraq’s *Tammuz* Revolution of 1958--deploys concepts regarding “biopower” in a chronicle of roots for revolution.

Questions of the Research

1/ Can the loss of life, and role of post-print communications technologies, be compared in terms of transfer of sovereignty?

2/ Did comparative levels of funding to national militaries, play identifiable roles in the transfer of sovereignty?

3/ What role did/does formal diplomacy play, replacing loss of life in the transfer of sovereignty?

Egypt’s # Jan 25 Revolution

In Egypt under the Sadat and Mubarak regimes, emergency measures curtailed civilians’ rights. Law 40 of 1977 was amended by law 36 of 1979, law 144 of 1980, laws 30 and 156 of 1981, law 46 of 1984, law 2 of 1987, and (finally) law 108 of 1992 required citizens to obtain official authorization in order to gather in public places. Yet, according to international NGOs, many Egyptians (women and men, among them striking workers) experienced violence at the authorities’ hands. Keeping in mind Foucault’s observation that “politics is war pursued by other means”,¹⁸ many citizens felt as if their state was waging war on them. Internet-savvy members of the 4 April youth movement had been able to evade the Ministry of the Interior’s controls on public assembly, using Facebook to express support for striking workers in el-Mahalla el-Kubra during the last years of the Mubarak regime.

So, too, did the Ministry of Social Affairs regulate and restrict registration of new political parties. During the summer of 2010, the story of Khaled Said struck a deep chord with many Egyptians from a wide variety of political positions. This twenty-year-old resident of Alexandria allegedly videoed police officers as they divided up proceeds from a drug bust; was said to have posted images to YouTube; eyewitnesses reported police officers dragged the youth out of an internet café and beat him to death. The first coroner’s report, however, listed “asphyxiation” as the primary cause of death, and authorities claimed the man had choked while he attempted to hide marijuana.

Subsequently, images of a mangled face (compared to Khaled’s) circulated through the Internet. His youth, education, the fact he was performing a citizen’s obligation to report wrongdoing—all struck a deep chord among young and old, rural and urban Egyptians. A wide variety of concerns (from such immediate issues as flawed polling for the December 2010 parliamentary elections, to structural concerns such as the continuing “state of emergency” laws, high unemployment, inflation, low wages, and police brutality; also incorporating the struggle to establish independent labor unions) motivated citizens.

Postprint communications technologies would prove key to the citizens’ ability to organize. The 4 April Youth Movement and the “We are all Khaled Said” group on Facebook, called for public protests on “Police Day” during 2011, so that Egyptians’ first demonstrations took place on 25 January 2011. Citizens gathered to protest in Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and Port Said’s public spaces; in Ismailia and Kafr el-Sheik; and in al-Mahalla al-Kubra.

Egypt’s Military and the # Jan Movement

The ‘Arab Spring’ revealed the underlying political, economic, and societal structures of *les*

anciens régimes; Egypt's military is a case in point. Restricted by the terms of the 1979 Camp David peace treaty, its spears dulled, Egypt's military has built an empire of bakeries, restaurants, and resort hotels from the labor of conscript soldiers.¹⁹ As Sherine Tadros reported, "the Egyptian military control anything from 15% to 40% of the [national] economy".²⁰ No country in Africa can equal the *matériel* of the Egyptian armed forces, as it continues to carry out a series of biannual maneuvers with the United States and other foreign powers under the title "Operation Bright Star".²¹

When Hosni Mubarak resigned the presidency in February 2011, Egyptians welcomed the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) as a relief from police oppression. Yet, over the following months, SCAF proved reluctant to lessen its grip on power; rather, the armed forces maintained the same forms of governance by which Mubarak had supported himself. Journalist Mohammad Sabry observes: "One of the complaints against Mubarak's regime was that it silenced dissidents by quickly prosecuting them in military court; the caretaker government that took over after Mubarak's resignation has done little to alter the practice".²² Since January 2011, some 12,000 Egyptian civilians have been tried before these courts in which, typically, groups of 25 to 30 defendants face a courtroom, with their trials taking no more than 20 to 40 minutes.²³

Accusations of abuse of authority recurred when the army intervened during the February 2011 to clear crowds of citizens in downtown Cairo. Through the gates of the Egyptian Museum facing Tahrir Square, soldiers dragged dozens of citizens into confinement. Most of those detained were men. In the museum, 23-year-old musician Ramy Essam reported "the torture took four hours; they removed my clothes, [and] used sticks, metal rods, wires, ropes, hoses, and whips; there was also electrocution." Seventeen women were: "beaten, given electric shocks, subjected to strip searches while being photographed by male soldiers, then forced to submit to 'virginity tests' and threatened with prostitution charges".²⁴

At the same time, 20-year-old hairdresser Salwa Hosseini was arrested and taken to a military prison outside the capital "where she was made, with the other women, to take off all her clothes and searched by a female prison guard, in a room with two open doors and a window" while male soldiers looked in and took pictures with their cell phones. The judiciary proved unable and unwilling to check the military's abuse of its powers. A military court subsequently acquitted the army doctor accused of forcibly administering such 'virginity tests' on female detainees, on the basis of "contradictory testimony from witnesses".²⁵

Diplomacy of the # Jan 25 Revolution

While Egypt's diplomats may have expressed their individual sympathy for the movement, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs continued its technical work as if nothing had ever happened on Tahrir. When Egyptian Copts condemned demolition of a church by marching up Galaa Street toward the Ministry of Information's building (the "Maspero demonstrations" of October 2011),²⁶ when they reached the Ramsis Hotel the army attacked them. Cell phone videos recorded two armored personnel carriers chasing individual citizens and crushing them; soldiers also fired into the crowd, killing (reports differ) between 24 and 27 civilians. The name of Mina Daniel joined that of Khaled Said among the ranks of the movement's martyrs.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Amr Rushdi affirmed the Egyptian government's determination to deal with the events with the utmost seriousness and to adequately investigate the reasons and causes behind them. Yet, despite the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' pious declarations of intent, three days after the massacre, General Mohamed el-Assar of the Supreme Council of Armed Forces insisted Army personnel were unarmed and, conversely, the protesters had attacked them. A military investigation pursued the fate of the 14 citizens killed when struck by APCs; a civilian investigation pursued the deaths of eight from live ammunition. The military prosecutor sentenced two 21-year-old conscripts to two-year jail terms, and their 22-year old colleague to three years, all on charges of "involuntary manslaughter."

Subsequently, the civil trial closed the case due to "lack of evidence," and legal

responsibility for the “Maspero” deaths was transferred to 31 civilians, among them blogger Alaa Abdel-Fattah, who (because he refused to answer military prosecutors’ questions) was jailed for two months. Accepting U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s telephoned condolences to the victims of the Maspero violence, Minister of Foreign Affairs Amr Mohamed assured Clinton that the events “do not in any way reflect interrelationships between the various factions of the Egyptian population, which was apparent during the January revolution.”

Historical Roots of Egypt’s # 25 Jan

The 4 April Youth Movement and the “We are all Khaled Said” group on Facebook, called women and men to gather on Tahrir on 25 January 2011, to pay ironic tribute to the government holiday. “Police Day” is an official commemoration mourning the 50 Egyptian police officers, killed when they refused British demands to evacuate the Ismailia police station during 1952 (at a time when Egypt’s was one of the region’s five reigning monarchies).

The police officers’ deaths were the beginning of the end of Egypt’s monarchy, and, later, other monarchies in the region as well. The ironic significance of the public holiday wraps the experiences of the present in dynamics of the past, recalling when the events and discussions of Egypt’s public sphere led those around the region. Ruling since 1953, the Hashemite kings of neighboring Iraq and Jordan were cousins; Iraq’s King Faisal and Jordan’s King Hussein studied together at Harrow, then assumed their thrones on the same day.²⁷ Imperial and neo-imperial bonds continued to tie both to Great Britain. When King Saud assumed the throne of Saudi Arabia later the same year, his country depended on the U.S.; from income from ARAMCO, to the N.A.T.O. air force base at Dhahran. The U.S.’s other ally in the region, King Idris of Libya, had been ruling since 1949, and the Strategic Air Command maintained Wheelus Air Force Base outside Tripoli.

During 1952, when Egypt’s King Farouk annulled elections to the armed forces’ ‘Officers Club’ governing board, army officers began to plan their *coup d’état*. On 23 July, a group of ‘Free Officers’ succeeded in taking control of Egypt’s Ministry of Defense and Interior’s command posts and means of communication, broadcasting their ‘Communiqué no. 1’ over Cairo Radio. This ‘Free Officers’ *coup* opened new possibilities for Egyptians, as well as for others across the region. First, Egypt’s armed forces cut their ties to Britain and the U.S., obtaining advanced weapons systems from the Soviet Union. Second, Palestinians (refugees since 1948) began to seek a greater political role in Hashemite Jordan; third, Palestinians and Shi’ites in Lebanon (both marginalized by the “National Charter” which allocated parliamentary seats and cabinet portfolios between the native Maronites and Sunni populations) sought to take part in the politics of their host country.

Historical Roots of Iraq’s 14 Tammuz

Just as Egypt’s King Farouk had annulled elections to “Officers Club” governing board, Iraq’s Crown Prince, Prime Minister Nuri-Said, and Interior Minister Said Qazzaz suspended civil liberties for the population as a whole in order to dictate which candidates obtained legislative office “unopposed” in 1954 elections. As a consequence, some Iraqi citizens looked to political developments in Egypt with a degree of admiration, such that the British ambassador wrote dismissively: “Bagdadi lawyers and coffee-house politicians seem to regard it as almost a matter of honor to have a *coup d’état*... the Bagdadis are hanging their heads in shame, they have not even murdered a Prime Minister.”

The region’s increasing polarization between Egypt’s “Free Officers” and foreign-backed monarchies became acute on 26 July 1956. That summer evening, “Free Officer” Gamal Abdul Nasser made a three-hour speech, broadcast over Cairo Radio, in the course of which he declared that the assets of the Suez Canal Company had been seized. Nasser announced in real time to an emotional audience in Alexandria, “now, while I am speaking to you, Egyptian brothers of yours are taking over the administration and management of the Canal Company”.²⁸ Following a series

of failed covert operations to oust Egypt's leader²⁹, the October 1956 tripartite aggression of Britain, France, and Israel attempted military action to remove Nasser from power.³⁰

Nasser's political concept--that national authorities should own national resources--was resisted by the monarchies, which retained their commitment to securing international assets.³¹ Even as a new Iraqi Petroleum Company pipeline pumped Kirkuk crude through Syria, to the Lebanese port of Tripoli, Iraqi citizens protested their own government, indicating their support of Nasser with a successful general strike.³² The same British Army which sought to defeat Egypt's leader, continued to provide "technical assistance" (effectively, limited their purchases) to the Hashemite Kingdom's armed forces.³³ While enlisted and officers in Iraq's armed forces "shared the ideas and aspirations of their civilian contemporaries",³⁴ "the grip of [prime minister Nuri-Said's] regime was so tight as to render practically impossible any participation of the army in the country's political affairs".³⁵

1958 Hashemite Monarchy's Military

If Iraq's citizens looked to Egypt, the country's leaders looked to the north where Turkey's military was thriving—thanks to its NATO membership, and military assistance from the United States. From 1947 to 1953, Turkey received U.S. military assistance (from anti-aircraft guns to aircraft) denominated at \$1 billion. In order to equip the Turks who fought in Asia, the national military received machine guns, radar installations, tanks, and warships.³⁶ By the end of the Korean War, the Turkish Air Force gained four Thunderjet fighter-bomber wings, and a fifth of Canadian-built Sabrejets; all six armored brigades of the Turkish army were being re-equipped with US M-47 Patton tanks.³⁷ The Korean conflict's end hardly slowed aid to Ankara; the US prepared to disburse an additional \$500M.³⁸

A foreign intelligence officer described the barracks and camps of Iraq's army as "neglected".³⁹ A foreign medical advisor described its material condition as "deplorable;" "its boots were mostly unfit for wear in marching, its supply of clothes short, its leave long overdue, its pay meager and its rations had been reduced to a figure a thousand calories below the minimum considered necessary by European medical men for Eastern troops".⁴⁰ The armed forces were still being punished for the Anglo-Iraqi war of 1941. During the summer and autumn of Suez, a journalist toured the Baghdad Staff College; he noted that officers published praise-poems in local newspapers dedicated to Nasser.⁴¹

While Britain had traditionally organized, trained, and equipped Iraq's military forces, a bilateral treaty with Turkey and an agreement between the U.K. and U.S. meant Iraq's military began to receive weapons transfers from America. These began with eight British-manufactured Centurion tanks paid for by the U.S..⁴² Next, Iraq received surplus SCR-299 truck-mounted shortwave transmission stations (such as those which had been used at D-Day for field communications). While outdated, they were thrifty (powered by a 12 volt battery), and could be remotely controlled (from up to a mile away, using two field telephones and a wire kit).

1958 Hashemite Arab Union

The transnational politics of 2011 led commentators to question the transmission of political motive across boundaries. Scholar Clement Henry cautions contemporary observers to avoid conflating Tunisia and Egypt, as "two countries have their own unique set of political and economic conditions".⁴³ During the 1950s, in an attempt to stabilize their positions in the region, the two Hashemite monarchies of Iraq and Jordan attempted to form a constitutional union.

Five years after Egypt's "Free Officers" coup and a year after the Suez war, King Hussein of Jordan dismissed Sulayman al-Nabulsi, founder of Jordan's army, and declared martial law. King Hussein's political future would be secured through a new Arab Union tying the two Hashemite thrones together. Its constitution duly ratified by both Parliaments, the new Union also linked Jordan's foreign policy and defense functions with those of Iraq. Iraq (with its population of

5 million) was represented by the same number of delegates as Jordan (with a population of 2 million); Iraq’s sudden petroleum wealth would aid impoverished, refugee-filled Jordan.

While Iraq’s deputy premier Tewfiq al-Suwaidi called it a “blessed step,”⁵³ opposition politicians called on Iraqi voters to stay away from the polls when the agreement was presented for ratification. While Britain’s ambassador spoke approvingly of “how important it was for Iraq that Jordan should not be swallowed up by Colonel Nasser,” Waldo Drake reported to *Los Angeles Times* readers, “rebellion has been imminent in Baghdad since November 1956, when Nuri Said imposed martial law on the country and jailed socialist leaders because they gave King Feisal a petition seeking Nuri’s dismissal”.⁴⁴ Of the Arab Union, Turkey’s government was the first to extend diplomatic recognition; Nasser flew to Damascus to denounce this “false” union, which he predicted: “will be blown away by the winds like ashes.”

Following declaration of the Union, diplomats posted to Baghdad reported a two-week crackdown on the Iraqi Army, in the course of which at least 60 officers and NCOs were arrested. The night of 13 July, its 3rd division’s 19th and 20th brigades had been ordered to Jordan, to support King Hussein in his new capacity as commander-in-chief of the united military forces of both states; in an unprecedented oversight, both units had been provided with ammunition.⁴⁵ An anonymous commentator later confessed: “\$25,000,000 worth of British military supplies and equipment, handed over to the Iraqi army, was used to overthrow the pro-British and pro-Western regime”.⁴⁶

Arriving in the capital, commanders of the 19th and 20th brigades seized the airport, Ministry of Defense compound, railroad station, and surrounded the Royal Family’s residence. There is evidence the military’s civilian allies in the country knew of the coup plans. Saddik Shanshal had checked into the Hilton the night before: “I stayed at the Baghdad Hotel that morning, until 1 o’clock; then I decided that nothing was going to happen and went home to bed”.⁴⁷ An Iraqi student in Arizona received a letter from home; booking his ticket back to Baghdad, he observed that important political events were about to happen in his country.⁴⁸

1958 Communications Technologies

If any aspect of the current Arab revolutions is widely-recognized as “new” and “novel,” it’s the role of post print media and the extension of political agency to previously-marginalized populations.⁴⁹ Dennis Campbell’s book declared, “social media and Twitter helped topple a brutal, dictatorial regime in just 18 days”.⁵⁰ Social media’s forms of communication even inspired authors to develop new forms of printed text, such as Alex Nunns and Nadia Idle’s edited volume, *Tweets from Tahrir*. Indeed, the volume of communications strained the capacities of the new social media: there were so many tweets between 27 and 29 January (and again between 4 and 8 February) TwapperKeeper’s archives were unable to keep pace.⁵¹

After Suez, did radio serve Iraqis the same way Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have been serving Egyptians, Libyans, and Syrians since 2011? During the Cold War, radio remained an important means of communication in the region, until television displaced it during the 1960s.⁵² Iraq, “large as California,” had a population of 5 million.⁵³ Coffeehouse radios blared ten hours a day of vocal music and daily Qur’an readings to everyone within earshot. There were 66,000 licensed receivers in the country, approximately one for every 75 residents.⁵⁴

Ownership of a radio was marginalized population’s first step into political agency. 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”.⁵⁵ With the multiplicity of political interests within Iraq, and foreign countries’ shortwave services broadcasting about the country, *Tammuz* came to signify information overload. Events in Iraq “started a flood of questioning;” one contemporary confessed, “I have been watching Middle Eastern crises for thirty-three years, and this was the only occasion when the public, politicians, and newspapers really started asking questions about what had been going on among the Arabs”.⁵⁶

Events of 14 Tammuz 1958

The coup of 14 July 1958 started when a small group of army officers proclaimed a new republic over the radio.⁵⁷ At 7 a.m., a broadcast began: “Noble Iraqi people, relying on God and the support of the loyal sons of the people and the national armed forces, we have begun to liberate the beloved homeland from the domination of the corrupt clique that was installed by imperialism to rule the people, toy with their fate, and serve imperialist interests and personal aims.” Speech continued to roll over the airwaves to early-morning listeners in coffeehouses, the homes of middle-class employers, and the homes of illiterate working men: “Brethren, the army which is from you and of you has risen to do as you wanted it to do and has removed the tyrannical clique which flouted the rights of the people”.⁵⁸

To one listener, the voice which spoke the words of this “*Communiqué* no. 1” was: “carried away by his emotion”;⁵⁹ another described it as “harsh and rough”.⁶⁰ In a series of communiqués interspersed with recorded martial music, the military authorities broadcast their appeal for “watchfulness, consciousness, and complete calm” among the civil population. Citizens were reminded, “foreign embassies and legations are entitled to hospitality and residence;” a ban was placed on firearms and “offensive weapons of all kinds.” A journalist characterized the man whose voice carried out over the radio, Abdul Salam Arif, as a “vigorous, rough-mannered, obscurely sinister soldier, like a heckler at an open-air rally, or a waterfront intimidator”.⁶¹

The radio provided the means for the crowds of citizens to gather.⁶² Radio Baghdad invited the capital’s residents to take a role in public affairs, to establish ownership of them, and to share responsibility with the armed forces. Groups of citizens began to arrive at the Palace “in busses, on lorries, on anything they could lay their hands on”.⁶³ As Aref spoke, his co-conspirators sealed the country’s airports and placed checkpoints at its borders.⁶⁴ The army closed the Ar-Ramaylah oil fields, Az-Zubayr wells, and al-Faw pumping station to all who did not show an oil company ID.⁶⁵

In Baghdad, a doctor heard the radio announcements. He reported that he recalled the student riots six years earlier⁶⁶ when “there had been no satisfactory organization for the reception of casualties ... the sixty police and civilians with gun-shot wounds having [been] placed on the floor of the crowded ward,” and likewise mindful of the experience of caring for those wounded in the public demonstrations following the Suez war, he drove as fast as he could to the Royal Hospital. He ordered all wards “emptied of non-acute cases in an hour and teams of surgeons and anesthetists put on duty in rotation. Thus we awaited the expected casualties”.⁶⁷

Broadcasts crossed international boundaries, as “content [poured] in from radio stations around the world”.⁶⁸ Cairo Radio’s “Voice of the Arabs” shortwave broadcast reported Baghdad events, followed by a “special newscast” recounting the entire sequence of reported developments. Moscow’s TASS news agency identified the name of Baghdad broadcaster, and proclaimed a new Republic to listeners in Europe. After Damascus Radio’s on-air journalist read a telegram of congratulations (including one from Lebanese opposition leader Sayib Salam), its producers took their microphones to the streets to broadcast an early-morning public celebration in Syria’s capital, returning to the studio to read more telegrams. Damascus Radio reported similar “jubilation” across Jordan, leading the authorities in that country to order all café radio sets in the kingdom seized and destroyed.

Coup or Revolution? 14 Tammuz

While Abdul Salam Arif’s voice came through Baghdad Radio, Colonel Abdul Karim Qassem was in command of the 19th brigade, moved into a new position just outside the capital. As historian Eric Davis points out, “existing ‘narratives of revolution’ have placed excessive emphasis on the two main coconspirators of the July 1958 Revolution, [Colonel Abdul Karim] Qassem and Colonel Abdul Salam Arif; but focusing on these two central personalities causes us to lose sight of the many important changes that took place”.⁶⁹

Of Qassem, a journalist wrote: “in his early forties, [he] had established a reputation some years ago as one of the few battalion commanders in the Iraqi Army of real competence who was also fair and just with his men.” Qassem had graduated from the military academy in Baghdad during 1934, then taught there, until the 1948 war when he served in Palestine. After the coup had proved successful, Qassem recounted-- from the day he received his commission-- “he had been convinced that public life in his country was going from bad to worse.” Later, he himself would observe, “under the old régime there was no law or justice in Iraq.”

Of the entire group of plotters, the same journalist wrote they represented a variety of political commitments: “some of them were Rashid Ali’s men [supporters of Rashid Aali-Gaylani during the 1941 Anglo-Iraqi war], and had played their part in his rebellion. Some were Communists. One or two were sensible liberals. All had been in the political gutter for a long, long time”.⁷⁰

Regional Diplomacy of 14 Tammuz

Any partnership between army and “the street” in cities throughout Iraq, would not have survived without swift and innovative diplomacy,⁷¹ since the ownership of government assets inside and outside Iraq was at stake. The most immediate threat came from King Hussein of Jordan, according to its constitution the deputy for his cousin, the recently-assassinated King Feisal II. Radio broadcast pressed the Jordanian government’s interpretation of events, that the plotters had encountered local resistance: “The brave Iraqi people in Baghdad and other parts of Iraq,” a journalist declared from Ramallah on the West Bank, “are resisting the rebels who want to destroy the independence, freedom, and dignity of the people.”

At his palace in Amman, King Hussein held emergency meetings with political and military advisors. The King declared that he had assumed full powers at the head of the Arab Union “in view of the absence” of his cousin Faisal; a Palace announcement added he was taking over as the Commander-in-Chief of the combined Arab armies of Iraq and Jordan. In London, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd consulted hastily with Washington and the Baghdad Pact capitals.⁷² Tariq al-Askari, the ambassador representing the Arab Union at the Court of St. James, instructed the Bank of England not to release Iraqi assets without authorization.

East Berlin radio warned that King Hussein of Jordan would move his troops into Iraq. Recalling the tripartite military intervention in response to Egypt’s nationalization of the Suez Canal two years previously (as well as the Jordanian Arab Legion’s invasion of Iraq after the 1941 coup), Jordan’s move would permit the former Imperial powers to: “avoid appearing once more as aggressors after the defeat over the Suez Canal.” In his newly-claimed powers, King Hussein went on local radio to state, “Our Hashemite family stands as strong as a mountain and remains firm in the face of the forces of evil and atheism.” The West Bank responded with a loyal oath: “His Majesty King Hussein is confident in himself and in the future, and considers it his responsibility to establish peace and order and to restore things to normalcy, being the head of the Arab Union and the supreme commander of the Arab army and all the armed forces of the Arab Union government.”

Between military marches, Arif’s voice returned to Radio Baghdad, to announce a new cabinet of ministers. “Oh brave people,” he enjoined his audience, “who are the new ministers? Examine them carefully; they do not hold the titles of ‘excellency’ and ‘highness;’ such titles have now perished.” The United States had called an urgent session of the Security Council “to consider the situation in the Middle East,” and the new cabinet in Iraq would meet the following morning: “We are the sons of the people; we are from you and for you, and at your service,” Aref spoke into the microphone. By the time Abdul Salem Aref’s voice went out on Baghdad Radio’s home service, both Cairo Radio and its sister service in Damascus had already announced the success of the *coup d’etat*.

When members of the Communist Party’s central committee heard “*Communiqué no. 1*,”

they proclaimed their unchecked support for the new government, pledging to “continue to struggle to preserve our Iraqi Republic... for the sake of an honorable, free, democratic life for the Iraqi people and for the sake of Arab unity, peace, and progress”.⁷³ Broadcasting House in Baghdad continued to receive a ‘flood of messages’ over the following days from ‘all strata of the Iraqi people’ expressing full support for the revolution. Telegrams conveyed congratulations from all faculties of Baghdad University, others from the ‘Kurds in as-Sulimaniya,’ and former *mufti* of Palestine, Amin al-Husayni.

As the sun set on the new Republic, Baghdad Radio ordered the 12,000 Iraqi troops in Jordan to regroup inside the border. The newly-proclaimed cabinet then announced its “immediate” withdrawal from the union with Jordan, “also regards itself as no bound by all the financial, military, and other obligations imposed on Iraq as a result of the establishment of this union.” By 10 p.m. the United Arab Republic had reciprocated by recognizing the new Iraqi Republic, and the programming director for the “Voice of the Arabs” shortwave service added, “we do not want bloodshed! We want peace! This is the call of the people!”

Biopolitics of 14 Tammuz

At 9:30 the morning after the coup, two soldiers parked a desert patrol car in front of the luxurious Bagdad Hotel. Iraq’s Development Board and Hilton Hotels International had partnered in building this \$8 million, 12-story facility, on the Tigris’ east bank. Designed by Welton Becket Associates of Los Angeles (architects of the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills), the Rusafa guesthouse boasting 300 air-conditioned rooms. As the soldiers climbed out of their jeep, in the dining room Robert Alcock (an industrial engineer based in Los Angeles) was finishing breakfast with George Colley (executive vice president of San Francisco’s Bechtel Corporation). Later, it was said that Alcock arrived at the Baghdad Hotel from Iran the previous evening,⁷⁴ and Colley had been in Iraq to inspect oil company projects.

A black limousine followed the desert patrol car. The two soldiers in their jeep and two civilians with the limousine sought four Jordanians (three cabinet ministers and a general) representing the Arab Union in Iraq’s capital.⁷⁵ Entering the hotel lobby, two of the four forced local taxi drivers, bellboys, and doormen against a wall with their hands over their heads. The hotel employed “a large number of European waiters, desk clerks, and other employees;” they, too were searched. Inside the hotel manager’s office, the remaining two soldiers ripped out telephones, flipped the desk, and threw furniture against the walls. Intimidated, the Swiss manager surrendered a list of foreign guests and keys for the hotel’s station wagon to his tormentors. Then, soldiers went upstairs to search the rooms. The first three turned up empty.

All the Jordanian ministers were found in the fourth.⁷⁶ These included Ibrahim Hashim, the Arab Union’s 80-year-old deputy premier, and Sulieman Toukan, its 66-year-old Minister of Defense. The Jordanians were marched downstairs, through the lobby, and hustled into the limousine.⁷⁷ A few of the remaining foreigners clustered in the lobby; one of the civilians ordered American and European bystanders to come along. Two of the foreigners claimed, as Americans, they were exempt from local authorities’ orders; they were also hustled into one of the vehicles. One was Russian-born Eugene Burns (53 years), who had gained credentials as a *Washington Post* staff writer during World War II; a “Holy Land Foundation” (to promote Arab Union tourism and “expand the two nation’s economies”) justified his presence in Iraq. The second was Cuban-born José Carabia (48 years), collector of orchids for the New York and Missouri botanical gardens, in Iraq as an “expert on plants of the Bible.”

As they loaded Alcock, Burns, Carabia, Colley, and others into the vehicles, the soldiers did not take particularly effective steps to secure the site. Mrs. L. J. Killian was among the foreigners “shoved toward the cars; she 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”.⁷⁸ Two Britons already seated in one of the vehicles “asked and got permission to go back into the hotel for a drink of water. Inside, they mingled with the hotel staff and escaped.” One hotel guest had been watching events from a screened balcony. Hearing boots in the corridor, he locked the door to his room, turned out the lights, and sat silently on the floor while the soldiers pounded on the door; they

soon walked away. With the Jordanians and the few foreigners who were still in custody, the convoy of three vehicles set off for the Ministry of Defense.⁷⁹

Mobbed streets slowed the convoy. A young man who had taken part in public events told a foreign reporter: “I am a peace-loving man; I don’t hunt, I cannot bring myself to kill or even to curse an animal”;⁸⁰ if his testimony was any indication, the crowds were peaceable. It is clear that, all the while, Iraqi civilians remained safe. Baghdad residents continued to enjoy essential services: “it has been possible to buy food, of which there has been no shortage, electricity has never failed, and vendors who supply the means of cooking and heating have called regularly. Even the railway and telephone services are working.” Only the banks closed their doors.⁸¹

The lead vehicle’s driver drove to the radio station, where the soldiers left some of the Jordanians.⁸² According to one report, a stalled car on Rashid Street brought the vehicles to a halt in front of the Ministry of Defense;⁸³ another, the lead driver lost his way, and took a turn into a side street where a crowd of demonstrators waited.⁸⁴ A crowd of “about fifty Iraqi civilians” started pulling the Jordanians and foreigners out of the vehicles, and “pounded the foreigners with stones, sticks, and clubs.” Reports are mixed about the army and this particular crowd. According to one report, the truck’s driver shouted at the crowd to stop, and a conscript fired shots in the air; according to another, an unidentified officer claimed he would no longer protect the remaining foreigners, telling them “because you Jordanians killed so many of our people in 1941”.⁸⁵

The crowd, not the Army, deployed lethal force. A stone hit the Arab Union’s 80-year-old deputy premier on the head; he died instantly. A young “German or Swiss of about 30 [was] grabbed by the head and pulled down by the mob; eight people started slashing and stabbing him and beating him with rods.” The last sight of Alcock, Burns, and Colley, they were in the hands of the citizens.⁸⁶ An Egyptian, a second German, and a Syrian were able to break away from the crowd. “Someone got the gates open” and the foreigners who could, stumbled to safe haven in the Ministry of Defense building.⁸⁷ All three were “badly beaten and with their clothes in shreds.”

Deputy commander of the Arab Union’s army, Major General Sadik Sharaa, reported their Iraqi colleagues offered him and eight other Jordanian officers emergency medical assistance. At sunset, they were transferred to a military hospital.⁸⁸ Having received medical attention, the entire Jordanian military delegation was loaded into Baghdad taxis and set onto the highway home. In Amman, they reported on Iraq’s insurrection to their King, broadcasting an expurgated version of the day’s events over Radio Amman.

During the following days, Iraq’s army’s search failed to find any trace of the missing Americans. C. J. Killean “searched all hospitals and morgues in the city,” coming to the conclusion that the missing Americans had been buried in a common grave “with about 15 Iraqi victims of the revolution.” In its formal note, Iraq’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated no documentation had been found of Alcock’s entry (questioning whether he had been in the country during its revolution). Nationwide, the 1958 revolution had cost only 30 citizens their lives.

International Diplomacy of 14 Tammuz

The new government’s struggle for self-determination transferred to New York, informing the Secretary of the United Nations of the change in power. Baghdad’s home service stated, “at its meeting this morning, the cabinet decided to recall Abdul Majid Abbas, Iraqi permanent representative to the United Nations and permanent delegate to the Security Council, and appoint Hashim Jawad in his place.”

That same day, at the United Nations building in New York, Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld convened a meeting of the Security Council (of which Iraq was, at that time, a member). According to the provisional rules of procedure, rule 15: “the credentials of representatives on the Security Council and of any representative appointed in accordance with rule 14 shall be examined by the Secretary General who shall submit a report to the Security Council for approval.” Hammarskjöld hedged: the communication he received had been signed ‘Ministry of Foreign Affairs;’ not by a person. Noting King Hussein’s declaration that he had assumed the head of the Arab Union, “I have not felt that this cable was in order as credentials”.⁸⁹

Article 51 of the Arab Union’s constitution empowered the head of the Union with the

power to appoint the Union's diplomatic representatives. Amman's cable reached New York, stating "representation of the state of Iraq in the security council or in any other United Nations body must be authorized by His Majesty [King Hussein in his capacity as head of the Arab Union] and any persons purporting to represent rebel government in Iraq have not any constitutional basis to do so and that any credentials they may present to your Excellency from rebel government in Baghdad are not legally valid".⁹⁰

On Friday 19 July, Secretary Hammarskjold convened a second meeting, acknowledging he had received a signed letter, withdrawing Abbas' credentials and transferring them to Jawad; dated three days before, he had received a cable dated the previous day, declaring the Republic's cabinet had withdrawn from the Arab Union. The Secretary General relented, in the face of pressure from other Arab states' representatives.

Tunisia's permanent representative telegraphed his recognition of the Republic on 22 July; by 6 August, Hammarskjold acknowledged Jawad's credentials were in order,⁹¹ and Abdulmajid Abbas submitted his resignation as Iraq's permanent representative.⁹² To all appearances, the transfer of sovereignty from the Hashemite monarchy and its representatives was complete.

Analysis

Egypt's 'Police Day' had been made a national holiday to commemorate (under the perverse circumstances of colonial occupation) the illegal death of the state's licensed agents. These brought attention to the foreigners living amidst Egyptians, whose lives and property were not subject to local laws. The 'Free Officers' coup was a move toward the return of legality to Egypt; a "sentiment of doing good" which inspired citizens across the region who were constrained by similar factors. Not guided by any constitution move toward legality is difficult to conceptualize in binaries; the postwar irony which could not be sustained was that citizens of the region's monarchies lived under colonialism, yet enjoyed constitutional protections. Resurrected in 2011, a similar irony moved citizens to demonstrate against the regime of Hosni Mubarak for civil rights and human dignities that their constitution protected insufficiently.

The contrast with Egypt's current revolution could not be greater. Over the decades following the 1979 Camp David accords, the army of the Arab Republic of Egypt enjoyed greater and greater access to the latest in the world's military technologies (at a time when their defensive function was constrained by the terms of the treaty). Building an empire of hotels rivaling Conrad Hilton's, both the armed forces and their legal wing retained the capacity to inflict unbearable pain on the living being through torture to the point of death, a capacity they have continued to exercise since the ostensible end of the Mubarak regime. Citizens' action has proved as ineffective, in terms both of dislodging the country's 'deep state,' as in extricating Egypt from the global neo-liberal economic order.

Iraq's Hashemite monarchs were regional rivals to Egypt's 'Free Officers.' As a result of the 1941 Anglo-Iraqi war, the monarchy's armed forces were underfunded and under-supplied; as the means to inflict unbearable pain on the living grew worldwide, Iraq's army was (in a number of ways) exempted from most developments, other than new communications technologies. While, on 14 July 1958 (with the persistent question of its debt to the Egyptian 'Free Officers' and their seizure of power) Iraq's Army called on the population not to carry firearms or "offensive weapons of all kinds," they invited the general citizenry to assume the place of powerlessness to which they were accustomed. For Foucault, "bio-politics" consisted of the state's regulatory controls and interventions to manage the population; I note the revolutionary circumstances, which granted the power of life and death to groups of citizens.

During the post-war decade, the unaccountable executive branches (such as Britain's military intelligence service, MI-6, and the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency) gained powers, which complemented or even exceeding the armed forces'. A careful examination of the Baghdad Hotel violence suggests unexpected conjunctions. With a minimum of force, the Army extracted a

number of foreigners from the security they enjoyed in the Hilton; questions persist regarding these multinational corporation’s “guests” and their possible extra-legal linkages to the state organizations of a foreign power. Caught in traffic, foreigners were exposed to local residents’ means of inflicting pain; these people, however, did not exceed the Army’s ban on firearms, nor the protections extended to credentialed foreign embassies and legations “entitled to hospitality and residence.”

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