

# 1958-1963, Iraq: Revolution and the U.S. Response

By Richard Becker, West Coast coordinator, International Action Center.

By the mid-1950s, Iraq was jointly controlled by the U.S. and Britain. In 1955, Washington set up the Baghdad Pact, which included its client regimes in Pakistan, Iran, Turkey and Iraq, along with Britain. The Baghdad Pact, or Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), had two purposes: (1) to oppose the rise of Arab and other liberation movements in the Middle East and South Asia, and (2) to be another military alliance (like NATO, SEATO and ANZUS) encircling the Soviet Union, China, Eastern Europe, north Korea and north Vietnam.

Iraq, the core of CENTO, was independent only in name. While the country was extremely rich in oil (10% of the world's reserves), Iraqis lived in extreme poverty and hunger. Illiteracy was over 80%. There was one doctor for every 6,000 people, one dentist for every 500,000.

Iraq was ruled by a corrupt monarchy under King Faisal II and a coterie of feudal landowners and merchant capitalists. Underlying this poverty was the simple fact that Iraq did not own its vast oil reserves.

On July 14, 1958, Iraq was rocked by a powerful social explosion. A military rebellion turned into a countrywide revolution. The king and his administration were suddenly gone, the recipients of people's justice. Washington and Wall Street were stunned. For a week, the *New York Times* had virtually no stories in its first 10 pages other than about the Iraqi Revolution.

Washington regarded the Iraqi upheaval as far more threatening to its vital interests at the time than the Cuban revolution. President Dwight Eisenhower called it "the gravest crisis since the Korean War." The day after the Iraqi Revolution, 20,000 U.S. Marines began landing in Lebanon. The day after that, 6,600 British paratroopers were dropped into Jordan. If they had not, the popular impulse from Iraq would have surely brought down these other rotten, dependent regimes.

This came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine – the U.S. would go to war to prevent the spread of revolution in the Middle East. But Eisenhower, his generals and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had something else in mind: invading Iraq, overturning the revolution and installing a new puppet government in Baghdad.

Three factors forced Washington to abandon that plan in 1958: the sweeping character of the Iraqi Revolu-

tion; the announcement by the United Arab Republic [i.e., Syria and Egypt] that its forces would fight the imperialists if they sought to invade; and emphatic support for the revolution from China and the USSR. The USSR began to mobilize troops in the southern Soviet republics close to Iraq.

**Source:** Excerpt, "U.S. corporations and Iraqi oil," *Workers World*, Oct. 31, 2002. <[www.workers.org/ww/2002/iraqoil1031.php](http://www.workers.org/ww/2002/iraqoil1031.php)>

## Kassem the Reformer

By William Blum, author of *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Operations Since WWII* (1995).

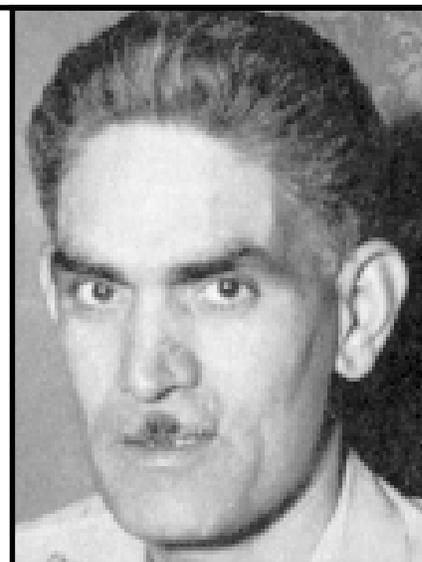
In July 1958, Brigadier Abdul Karim Kassem overthrew Iraq's monarchy and established a republic. Though somewhat a reformist, he was by no means a radical. His action, however, awakened revolutionary fervor in the masses and increased the influence of Iraq's Communist Party.

By April 1959, CIA Director Allen Dulles, with customary hyperbole, told Congress that Iraqi communists were close to a "complete takeover" and that the situation was "the most dangerous in the world today." In actuality, Kassem aimed at being a neutralist in the Cold War and pursued rather inconsistent policies toward Iraqi communists, never allowing them formal representation in cabinet, nor even full legality.

A secret plan for a U.S.-Turkish invasion of Iraq was drafted by the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff shortly after the 1958 coup. By 1960, the U.S. was funding Kurdish guerrillas in Iraq who were fighting for some autonomy.

In 1960, Kassem helped create the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, that challenged the stranglehold Western oil companies had on marketing Arab oil. In 1962, he created a national oil company to exploit the Iraq's oil.

In February 1963, Kassem told the French daily, *Le Monde*, that he had received a note from Washington



*Abdul Karim Kassem*

– "in terms scarcely veiled, calling upon me to change my attitude, under threat of sanctions against Iraq... All our trouble with the imperialists [the U.S. and the UK] began the day we claimed our legitimate rights to Kuwait." (Kuwait was a key element in U.S. and UK designs over mid-east oil.) A few days after Kassem's remarks were published, he was overthrown in a coup and executed.

The U.S. State Department soon informed the press that it was pleased that the new regime would respect international agreements and was not interested in nationalizing the giant Iraq Petroleum Company, of which the U.S. was a major owner. The new government, at least for the time being, also cooled its claim to Kuwait.

**Source:** Excerpt, *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (2000).

William Blum website: <[members.aol.com/bblum6/American\\_holocaust.htm](http://members.aol.com/bblum6/American_holocaust.htm)>

## 1959-1963: Saddam's Early Role as a CIA Hitman

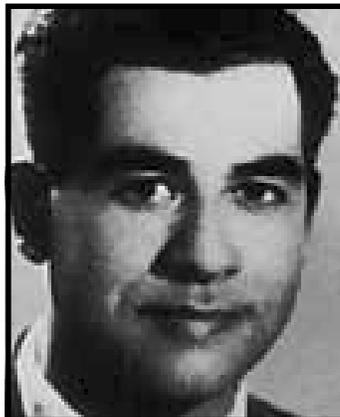
*United Press International (UPI) interviewed almost a dozen former U.S. diplomats, British scholars and former U.S. intelligence officials to piece together the following account.*

By Richard Sale, UPI Intelligence Correspondent.

In the past, Saddam was seen by U.S. intelligence services as a bulwark of

anti-communism. His first contacts with U.S. officials date back to 1959, when he was part of a CIA-authorized, six-man squad tasked with assassinating then Iraqi leader Gen. Karim Kassem. In his early 20s, Saddam was installed in a Baghdad apartment, opposite Kassem's office in the Ministry of Defense, to observe his movements.

Adel Darwish, author of *Unholy Babylon*, said the move was done "with full knowledge of the CIA," and that Saddam's CIA handler was an Iraqi dentist working for CIA and Egyptian intelligence. Saddam's paymaster was Capt. Abdel Maquid Farid, the assistant military attaché at the



"[Saddam] was a son of a bitch, but he was our son of a bitch."

CIA agent testifying to Congress.

Source: *Paying the Price*, a documentary by John Pilger, Carlton TV, 1999.

Egyptian Embassy. The assassination, set for October 7, 1959, was botched. Kassem escaped death, and Saddam, whose calf was grazed by a fellow, would-be assassin, escaped thanks to CIA and Egyptian intelligence agents.

Saddam crossed into Syria and was transferred by Egyptian intelligence agents to Beirut. While there, the CIA paid for his apartment and put him through a training course. The agency then helped him get to Cairo.

One former U.S. government official, who knew Saddam at the time, said that even then Saddam "was known as having no class. He was a thug – a cutthroat." In Cairo, Saddam

was installed...in an upper class neighborhood and spent his time playing dominos in the Indiana Café, watched over by CIA and Egyptian intelligence operatives. Saddam made frequent visits to the U.S. Embassy where CIA specialists like Miles Copeland and CIA station chief Jim Eichelberger knew Saddam.

In February 1963, Kassem was killed in a Ba'ath coup. Roger Morris, a former National Security Council staffer in the 1970s, says the CIA-backed coup was sanctioned by President John Kennedy.

The mass killings, were presided over by Saddam. A former senior U.S. State Department official told UPI: "We were frankly glad to be rid of them. You ask that they get a fair trial? You have to get kidding. This was serious business."

Saddam became head of al-Jihaz a-Khas, the secret intelligence apparatus of the Ba'ath Party.

Source: Excerpts from "Saddam key in early CIA plot," UPI, April 10, 2003. <[www.upi.com/print.cfm?StoryID=20030410-070214-6557r](http://www.upi.com/print.cfm?StoryID=20030410-070214-6557r)>

## 1963: Saddam used CIA Death Lists to Target Leftists

By Mohamoud A Shaikh

In *A Brutal Friendship: The West and the Arab Elite* (1997), Said Aburish details how the CIA closely controlled the planning stages of Iraq's 1963 coup and had a central role in the subsequent purge of suspected leftists. Aburish reckons 5,000 were killed, including doctors, lawyers, teachers and professors who formed Iraq's educated elite. The massacre was carried out using death lists compiled in CIA stations throughout the Middle East with assistance from Iraqi exiles like Saddam Hussein, who was then in Egypt. An Egyptian intelligence officer, who obtained a good deal of his information from Hussein, helped draw up the Cairo CIA station's death list. The U.S. agent who produced the longest list was William McHale, who operated under the cover

of a news correspondent for *Time* magazine in Beirut.

The butchery began as soon as the lists reached Baghdad. Even pregnant women and elderly men were killed. Some were tortured in front of their children. Aburish notes that Hussein "rushed back to Iraq from Cairo to join the victors, [and] was personally involved in the torture."

Jordan's King Hussain, who had close links with the CIA, says a secret radio broadcast from Kuwait, on the day of the coup, "relayed...the names and addresses of communists, so they could be seized and executed."

Although at the time, the Ba'ath party was a small nationalist movement with only 850 members, the CIA decided to use it because of its close relations with the army.

In return for CIA support, Ba'ath leaders agreed to "undertake a cleansing program to get rid of com-

munists and their leftist allies." Hani Fkaiki, a Ba'ath party leader, says the party's contact who orchestrated the coup was William Lakeland, the U.S. assistant military attaché in Baghdad. One coup leader, Col. Saleh Mahdi Ammash, former Iraqi assistant military attaché in Washington, was arrested for contact with Lakeland.

The Ba'ath leaders did not deny plotting with the CIA. When Syrian Ba'athists demanded why they were in cahoots with the CIA, the Iraqis compared their collusion to "Lenin arriving in a German train to carry out his revolution." Ali Saleh, minister of interior in the post-Kassem regime, said: "We came to power on a CIA train."

Source: "How west helped Saddam gain power and decimate the Iraqi elite," *Muslimmedia*, Aug. 16-31, 1997. <[www.muslimmedia.com/archives/features98/saddam.htm](http://www.muslimmedia.com/archives/features98/saddam.htm)>