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*The Ba'ath Party's Role in Resisting the Baghdad Pact*

The Arab Ba'ath Socialist Party in Jordan was one of staunchest opponents of military alliances. This was due to reasons I've discussed elsewhere, and the fact that the party called for positive neutrality and non-alignment, while considering military alliance with either camp as one of the worst manifestations of alignment. The party felt it had a special responsibility as the broadest popular organization, capable of moving the streets. The party launched an extensive media campaign to mobilise public opinion against Jordan joining The Baghdad Pact. Tawfiq Abu al-Huda, the Prime Minister, held discussions with the ambassadors of Iraq, Turkey, Britain and the United States to clarify what Jordan would gain by signing the Pact. He didn't get far, due to the intensifying opposition and the resignation of three of his cabinet ministers. Abu al-Huda resigned, and the King assigned Said al-Mufti to form a new cabinet. The new cabinet was formed on 30 May 1955. The new cabinet announced a programme that made no reference to the Baghdad Pact. King Hussein, however, visited Britain. It became known that he made some demands, and that the British government promised to consider these demands in light of developments in the Middle East.

Once the news that the Turkish President Celal Bayar decided to visit Jordan in early November 1955 circulated, the national leadership of the party decided to call for a general strike in Jordan the day of his arrival, 2 November 1955. It was decided to make every possible effort to show the people's opposition to the pact through this visit.

Meanwhile, on the personal level, I was summoned by the Governor of Jerusalem, Hasan al-Kateb. I went to meet him in the governorate building after left instructions for the branch's leadership to hold a demonstration immediately if the governor issued an order to arrest me. The demonstration would be the beginning of mobilising the masses.

The governor received me in the presence of Adnan Yunis, his aide, and Jerusalem's Police Chief. I was surprised to find my brother Nihad there with them. Later on, I found out that the Governor summoned him to use his relationship to me as my brother and the owner of the Ibrahimeih College where I work as a teacher to pressure me to stop my activities.

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The governor Hasan al-Kateb started by saying "President Celal Bayar will visit Jordan in response to the visits King Abdullah and King Hussein made to Turkey. His visit doesn't have any political aspects." Then he said he heard of al-Ba'ath Party's activities in Jerusalem. He asked me what we intended to do and whether we are going to call for a strike. Then he spoke at length about the damage that the strike would do Jerusalem's tourism.

I said that our confirmed information is that the visit is political and aims at dragging Jordan into joining the Baghdad pact. I spoke about the dangers of the pact and our opposition to it. Regarding what we planned to do I said that was our own business.

He said, "I'm Jerusalem's Governor and I'm responsible for what happens in the city. We must discuss this issue."

I said "You are responsible officially and we are responsibly popularly and we don't discuss these issues with you."

He said "Why this arrogance? Why are you not asking for my permission? Do you have any thing personal against me?"

I said "its not about arrogance, we discuss these matters with the simplest porter in the country. We don't discuss it with you because you follow instructions without hesitation. Regarding your past, your past is a dark one."

Here he became furious and said "what is my dark past? I want to know what my dark past is? Have you heard that I took bribes or something like that."

I said, "There is no point of talking about your dark past now. A suitable day to declare it and popularly hold you accountable for it will come."

He became angrier and insisted that I clarify what I meant. The chief of the police intervened and said, "Please Sir, Let it go." Hasan al-Kateb started trying to dilute the situation again.

He said, "If there was a strike all over the kingdom is it necessary that Jerusalem goes on strike as well?"

I said, "Jerusalem is not less patriotic than the rest, it's not acceptable that Jordan goes on strike without Jerusalem."

He said "If there was no strike in the kingdom is it acceptable that Jerusalem goes on strike alone?"

I said, "Yes, at least Jerusalem should go on a strike."

Here he said, "I forbid you.... I will stop you." The interview ended and I left. Later on I learnt from brother Nihad, who witnessed the conversation as I have mentioned before, that the Chief of Police, who didn't know that Nihad was my brother, told Hasan al-Kateb "Why don't you issue an order to arrest him?" al-Kateb said "We don't want to increase the tension."

We continued our efforts to ensure the success of the strike. Hasan al-Kateb and his aides and detectives tried to foil the strike in all ways. He held meetings with hotel owners, antique dealers, chamber of commerce members and others. He spoke to them about the damages that their businesses could suffer as a result of the strike. He also attacked me personally and warned them about me specifically.

Celal Bayar arrived in Amman on Thursday 2 November 1955 to find a general strike underway. Our efforts to organise a strike in Jerusalem didn't succeed. Hasan al-Kateb managed to foil it. We announced that we have postponed the strike in Jerusalem until Saturday. It was expected that Celal Bayar would arrive in Jerusalem on Saturday.

On Friday, we went around Jerusalem's shops. Mr. Abdullah Na'was and I made a large round visiting one shop after the other. The detectives were on our tail entering every shop we entered and warned and threatened the owners against striking. It was decided that I give a speech to the worshipers after the Friday afternoon prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque to urge people to strike. At noon I lost the detectives and went to al-Aqsa Mosque. I prayed and after the prayer I stood on a bench next to al-Ka'as Wudu'. I gave a speech to the worshipers as they left the mosque. I pointed out the aim of Celal Bayar's visit and the dangers of the Baghdad Pact. I felt a hand on my shoulder and when I turned around I saw Hasan al-Kateb with the Chief of Police who arrested me. The masses scrambled to free me but I said the important thing is not stop my arrest the, the important thing is to go on strike tomorrow.

As I had predicted my arrest increased the tension in the city. On Saturday morning Celal Bayar arrived in Jerusalem and was welcomed with the strike and loud demonstrations. A week later I was released to calm the situation down.

Despite all that, Celal Bayar held talks with King Hussein and with the Prime Minister aimed at Jordan joining the Baghdad Pact. He promised to contact the British government to urge them to accept the demands that Jordan made in return for joining the Pact. He left Amman on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1955 in a very tense situation.

The communications between Said al-Mufti's government and the British government continued exchanging documents regarding the demands that Jordan made in case it joined the Baghdad Pact.

In early December 1955 a high profile British military delegation, headed by Gen. Gerald Templer Chief of the Imperial General Staff, arrived in Amman. The delegation held talks with King Hussein and the prime minister and handed an official written memo on 11 December 1955 regarding Jordan's membership in the pact. The memo had 8 articles; here is the text of some of these articles:

#### Article No. 1

1. The Jordanian government signs the Baghdad Pact
2. Following the signing the British government will provide Jordan with the following military aid... and increase the British financial aid. Jordan will provide the necessary facilities to the British military forces stationed in Jordan

4- Jordan undertakes not joining any obligations outside the scope of the Pact.

6- The two countries to facilitate receiving the two countries military aircrafts in their countries as well as their flights missions.

Said al-Mufti's cabinet was hesitant. It was put between two fires; between Templer's pressure and its fear of the popular reaction. It became clear to the cabinet that joining the pact will unleash a sea of blood. Throughout Templer's visit the popular demonstrations didn't stop and the atmosphere was very alarming.

On one side, Nuri al-Said, who filled his prisons with the opponents of the Baghdad Pact, didn't want Iraq to be the only Arab country in the Pact. On the other, Britain can't afford to fail or its chief of staff to fail and be defeated by a small nation like that of Jordan. Glubb Pasha felt that his great reputation in Britain is at stake.

Finally, Said al-Mufti submitted the resignation of his government on the 14 December 1955 after Templer, Glubb and King Hussein found a replacement in Haza' al-Majali. Al-Majali enthusiastically accepted to form a cabinet that accepts Jordan's membership in the Baghdad Pact. He declared that very clearly and with great determination.

Returning to the party's role, the national leadership held an urgent meeting in Amman lasting several hours. The meeting continued until 10 o'clock in

the evening. The discussion focused on evaluating the situation and whether the party and the other national Jordanian forces can, by throwing their weight in the battle to resist the Baghdad Pact, bring down Haza' al-Majali's government and to stop Jordan from joining the Baghdad Pact? We reached the conclusion that it is possible. Based on that we decided the following:

1. The party will throw its entire weight in the battle no matter how many sacrifices it will cost. All the party's members will take down to the streets, including government employees, and the demonstrations, political and media activities will continue until the pact is brought down.
2. Abdullah al-Rimawi, the national Secretary General, and Abdullah Na'was, member of the leadership, to meet immediately with the other parties: the National Socialist Party, Arab Nationalists Movement and the Communist Party as well as some independents, to notify them with the Party's evaluation of the situation, its decision and to ask them to unify efforts to confront the situation.
3. In the light of the possibility of the arrest of all the members of national leadership, Bahjat Abu Gharbeih to go underground and to form a secret leadership to continue the battle.

Abdullah al-Rimawi and Abdullah Na'was went to the office of the National Socialist Party where the parties were meeting headed by Suleiman al-Nabulsi. I went with the rest of the members of the leadership to Suleiman al-Hadidi's, the member of the national leadership, house. There we waited to be joined by Abdullah al-Rimawi and Abdullah Na'was to inform us of what has been agreed with the other parties.

Our meetings and movements were conducted under unprecedented intensive security surveillance and pursuit. When we arrived at Suleiman al-Hadidi's house a few police and army vehicles were following us. The vehicles camped in front of the house.

We waited for our comrades for a long time. Then there was knocking on the door. It was a security officer who said to Suleiman al-Hadidi "we want Bahjat Abu Gharbeih." He asked for me specifically and not any of my other comrades. I asked Mr. Suleiman al-Hadidi if there was another exit for the house and he said no. I had to go out to the security officers. They put me in a car that took me to the Directorate of Public Security. At that time it was located near al-Husseini Mosque.

On the way I started analyzing the events of our last meeting, the possibility of the arrest of the leadership and what Abudllah Na'was's evaluation of Haza' al-Majali's intentions and the methods he would follow to confront the popular position. Abudllah Na'was said that he heard Haza' al-Majali criticise, in more than one occasion, the governments that don't allow demonstration, confront the demonstrators and quell protestors. He said that if protestors were left alone for two or three days without confrontation, they would grow tired and go quiet. We hoped that Haza' would follow this method and that the hole would grow too big to mend, as the proverb goes. But since he started arresting the leadership it a dangerous sign.

When we arrived at the police headquarters I was led into a room where I found Abdullah al-Rimawi and Abdullah Na'was there. I dropped my hand and thought we lost the battle before we started it.

After a while we were called into a room. There we found Habis al-Majali who was appointed by Haza' al-Majali as Head of Security. He received us with a smile and offered us coffee. Habis started speaking by saying "a field soldier is not suitable for the courts of kings." He said "but what can I do. I was ordered to ask all of you to leave Amman immediately, everyone to his own country." That was a pleasant surprise for us. But Abdullah al-Rimawi who enjoyed quick intuition said after he thanked Habis al-Majali for his kindness "we object to these measures as the constitute a violation of our personal freedom."

We had already decided that each of us would travel to his country to lead the movement from there. That's how it was. The security vehicles followed us to the outskirts of Amman. I expected that security forces would be waiting for me in Jerusalem to arrest me preventing me from going underground. So I decided to sleep over in al-Salt but I remembered I didn't know any members of the party in al-Salt. I decided to continue traveling to Jericho and stay the night there. I knocked on Abu Tawhid al-Husseini's door after midnight. He was the secretary general of Jericho's branch and a principle of one of its schools. I stayed that night as his guest. Once the day broke demonstrations started in all the refuge camps, A'qabet Jaber, E'in as-Sultan and Nue'meh. Jericho was overflowing with masses calling for the downfall of the Baghdad Pact and Haza'.

At noon I could confirm that Jericho-Jerusalem road was empty of police patrols and checkpoints. I travelled to Jerusalem and hid at the house of Mr. Abd al-Jabbar al-Ashqar, one of the one of party's officials and a colleague at Ibrahimeih College. He was a single man. I made his house in Bab al-Sahrah neighborhood into headquarters for coordination and movement.



The masses didn't need anyone to move them. The demonstrations were at their height and the police was incapable of dispersing them. Especially that the demonstrations were in all cities without exception. In Amman, the demonstrations were on a large scale. It reminded me of the violent and bloody demonstrations that took place the day the parliamentary elections (Glubb Elections) were rigged in 1954. The situation in Jerusalem took a very dangerous turn when martyr Raja' Abu A'masha was killed while she was taking part in an attack on the Turkish embassy. Curfews were imposed during the night and the army assumed the responsibility of enforcing it.

An unprecedented phenomenon emerged during the Baghdad Pact' demonstrations. Demonstrations from the surrounding villages and camps poured into each city. The various parties led the demonstrations and al-Ba'ath party had the biggest share.

Another unprecedented, yet more dangerous, phenomenon emerged. The Jordanian army, led by the English officers, took to the streets to quell the demonstrations. The army, where the Free Officers Movement had spread among its ranks, was neutralised to a great extent. The army refrained on many occasions from confronting the protestors despite receiving orders from the English officers to open fire and to use tear gas against the protestors. That didn't stop the English officers from forming and leading small-handpicked groups, after filling them with hatred against the masses. They attacked the demonstrations and opened fire at them causing many deaths and injuries.

The demonstrations continued and escalated. Blood flowed everywhere and the prisons were filled. It seemed that the demonstrations will not stop and that it will lead to dangerous consequences. On one hand, the lives of the English officers were at risk after they lost control of the army. Most of them stayed in the barracks and delegated duties to Arab officers. On the other hand, English and Arab officials feared that there will open rebellion in the army or something similar.

That's why it was necessary to calm the situation down, even if it was only temporarily. Gen. Templer left Jordan and the House of Representatives, known as the parliament of Glubb's rigged elections, was dissolved on 19 December 1955 in preparation for new elections. Haza' al-Majali's government resigned on 21 December 1955 only 5 days after it was formed. It seemed the battle for the Baghdad Pact ended.

Ibrahim Hashem was assigned with forming a new cabinet on the same day that Haza' al-Majali resigned. Ibrahim Hashem's cabinet resigned on 7 January 1956 only 17 days after it was formed. The military intelligence used

it to mobilise the army psychologically against the masses and in favor of Jordan's membership in the Baghdad Pact. Many political factions and figures worked to mobilise the public opinion to accept the Baghdad Pact and submit to the logic of force. During this period the traditional prisons were prepared and new prisons were built to accommodate thousands of detainees. The leadership of the security forces and the leadership of the army imported great amounts of tear gas and riot gear. On 4 January 1956 the decision to dissolve the parliament was annulled. The atmosphere started to intensify again and the people felt they would be subjected to a second attack more vicious than the first.

On 8 January 1956, Samir al-Rifa'ai was assigned with forming a new government. He was well known for his tyranny and was rejected the Jordanian national movement. The masses resumed their demonstration, on the day that Samir al-Rifa'ai started forming his cabinet, protesting the cancelation of parliamentary elections and reinstalling the parliament of Glubb's Elections and to demonstrate against the formation of the al-Rifa'ai's government.

It seemed the authorities were ready for a new showdown with the masses after making the necessary preparations. The army and security forces started attacking the masses with unprecedented viciousness. The intelligence offices started fabricating justifications to quell the masses. In Jerusalem for example, the intelligence organised a demonstration from Damascus Gate to the American Consulate. The demonstration passed by the British Consulate without throwing one stone at it. When it reached the American Consulate they showered it with stones and took the flag down from the mast. Immediately the security forces and the army took advantage of this situation and viciously attacked the masses all over the city not just around the American Consulate. They used tear gas and live ammunition. Many demonstrators were killed or injured and hundreds of Jerusalem's youth were arrested. Similar events took place in various places. The government announced the state of emergency in the country and imposed curfew in Amman and many other cities. The prisons and detention centers were filled with detainees. When the detention centers couldn't accommodate all the detainees the government resorted to setting up open-air detention centers surrounded by barbed wire. The detainees spent their nights in the cold and in the sun's heat during the day. They were provided with little food. The detainees went on hunger strike in many detention centers. Interrogation committees were formed. These committees summoned many political figures to investigate their role in the demonstrations. I was one of those who were summoned.



Under this thick cover of authority's violence, Samir al-Rifa'ai's government declared its withdrawal from the policy of endorsing the Baghdad Pact. Its policy statement to the National Assembly included "Its not our policy to interfere or to commit to new alliances. We will work towards achieving Arab solidarity. We believe that the unity of the Arab nation is a prerequisite and the first pillar in its life and the safety of its existence."