

Saddam Hussein, the Fighter, the Thinker and the Man

Part One

A FIGHTER'S JOURNEY ON THE ROAD TO REVOLUTION

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Chapter 1

Humble Beginnings

There is something about the desert, which always leaves us with a feeling of contradiction. How quickly is this limitless expanse broken, however distant its horizons, where the sky meets the earth or the earth meets the sky. How soon does this clarity, bright as the blade of a sword, become shrouded in obscurity, like the cloak of a wandering Beduin. How readily is this gentle warmth, this cordial familiarity, this glowing intimacy replaced by a savage loneliness like the loneliness of a dying man and a cruelty as hard and rough as a grindstone and a sullen, dull, gloomy and cold indifference. That deep peace and all-pervading silence and tranquility is but the mark of eternity and has no permanence. For how easily is it thrown into confusion by winds and raging storms, as though by the Last Trump. The desert is the greatest hidden being, its outward appearance is not its inner reality and what shows on its surface is not necessarily what goes on in its depths.

It would perhaps not be fanciful to suggest that the desert poses all the universal questions, which have troubled the consciousness of man since he first appeared

on the earth. Nor would it be astonishing if all the great monotheistic religions had sprung from its seething heart. For here it was, surely, amid these sandy wastes that the first explanation of life was revealed to man, and here too that he formulated his final tentative theories about how the world might be changed. But this is no ordinary desert, for there lie stored in its memory, stretching back thousands of years, recollections of the most illustrious of ancient human civilizations, a civilization which used its discovery of writing to record, on tablets of clay, the sum of human experience in regulating the individual's relations with society in the laws of Hammurabi: the civilization of Summer, Assyria and Babylon.

Although the desert enfolded in its bosom all these civilizations and has kept them to itself for hundreds of years, years of intellectual and creative drought, this does not mean that the idea of civilization here is at an end. Far from it. It was rather as though it had withdrawn into a kind of mystical seclusion, where the hard road of suffering and endeavour will lead it, not to dissolution and decline, but towards a greater and more profound and complete union with struggling humanity, where man alone would ultimately achieve the highest goal.

And so it was that with the appearance of Islam bearing the torch of revelation this stretch of desert quickly came to life, witnessing the Abbasid era, the most brilliant period of Arab civilization. Indeed it became the center of Arab civilization at its zenith. And when, in due course, Baghdad became one of the most important and opulent centers of civilization in the whole world, this was only the logical expression of the laws of nature, society and man, which are manifest, in essence, in the forward march of progress..

But by this progress we do not mean an automatic and constant advance in a straight line. The road which history follows is full of twists and turns; and though progress may be the final destination there are bound to be many temporary setbacks on the way, long or short in their

duration, according to the many factors and circumstances involved. Thus, when Arab civilization had reached the peak of its perfection and the Arab nation, within its orbit, had achieved a greater degree of unity and integration than at any time in its history, Hulagu and the Tartars were at the gate. A raging human sandstorm, hostile to civilization, came to flatten, destroy and annihilate the most sublime and noble of man's works, and the desert, which had been hiding its face behind the rich cornfields and flower gardens of the Abbasids, returned to cover with its sand dunes the heaps of human skulls, and the Tigris, with which the Abbasids had managed to tame the desert, quenching its thirst with its waves, was now stained with blood and ink. For the recorded memories of the human race, stored in the libraries of Baghdad, had been tossed by the Tartars into the river, where they had been transformed into a black torrent and the two colours, red and black, at that fateful moment in human history, had acquired a profound and eternal significance for concord and unity between men.

A long period of darkness now ensued marked not only by a decline in material and cultural wealth and in the nation's level of civilization. For its dismal manifestations included not only a realignment of international trade routes so that they by-passed the formerly flourishing Arab cities, leaving them to atrophy, or the influx of the crusading hosts, the Tartars from the west into the heart of the Arab homeland. Worse than any of these was the break-up of the Arab nation itself. For although the Caliph an-Nasser, one of the last of the Abbasids, strove to restore some semblance of unity to the mutilated Arab state, the time for this was past, for history could no longer bring back what had been lost. It was to be several centuries before, out of the pain and suffering of a long and bitter struggle against the anfractuositities of history, a star appeared to herald a new time of travail. The moment of awakening had come.

It was at that very moment in Arab history that Saddam Hussein was born. It was perhaps more than pure chance, which ordained that his birth should coincide with that historic moment of awakening. For once the scene had been set and the leading role was waiting for a hero to fill it, Saddam Hussein was already standing in the wings ready, and worthy, to answer history's summons.

His birth in 1937 was not a joyful occasion, and no roses or aromatic plants bedecked his cradle. He was born an orphan, his father having died before he was born, and a poor boy of peasant stock. Like the great majority of true leaders in history, he was obliged, from the moment he first became aware of himself, to face the challenges of life and to fashion his own existence. It was in the spring, on the twenty-second of April 1937, that Mrs. Sabhah Talfah al-Musallat gave birth to her son in the house of her brother al-Haj Khairallah Talfah and it was his paternal uncle, Hassan al-Majid; who gave him the name of Saddam. The house is situated in the region known as "al-Harah", a place in which Saddam Hussein has many relatives. In that little town, lying on the right bank of the Tigris which derives its name, Tikrit, from its earlier Latin name Meonia Tigrides, meaning "fortress on the Tigris" and which is surrounded by an octagonal wall with four gates. The Department of Islamic Education says that this town was known in the old Syriac writings as "Tijrit" and Baladhuri mentions that it was liberated from the rule of Byzantium in the year 20 A.H. (644 A.D.) by the Arab general 'Uqba bin Farqad.

However, nobility of descent is not necessarily associated with wealth. Saddam Hussein, born in this house of mud resting like most of the houses in this little town on wooden piles hardly able to support its weight, the offspring of poor peasants, belongs in fact to one of the most illustrious families in Arab political and religious history. If Arab historians were interested in constructing family trees, a study of the family tree giving the descent of Saddam Hussein would show us that it goes right back to the noblest family of all, whose greatest scion was the Imam' Ali bin Abi Talib. He himself has never mentioned this fact in any of the

conversations, and meetings the author has had with him, possibly because he scorns to lay claim to religious and historic lineage in

the presence of those who can make no such claim, and is striving to give a secular and contemporary meaning to the traditional concepts of nobility and honour, viz. that a man's nobility stems from the nobility of the country whose citizen he is and that a fighter's honour derives from the honourable nature of the revolutionary struggle in which he is engaged. But at a moment of bitter and agonizing confrontation with those who had sought to betray him when he had become the foremost revolutionary leader in his country, he said in a speech, famous at the time (1): "We are the descendants of 'Ali."

And no doubt this expression had for him a personal significance, unsuspected by the thousands who heard him, just as great as its historical and political import.

Saddam Hussein's childhood was not easy. He was moved back and forth during the first ten years of his life between the house in which he had been born, which belonged to his maternal uncle, and the house of his paternal uncle, al-Haj Ibrahim, who had married Saddam Hussein's mother after the death of his father, as was the custom in such circumstances in that part of Iraq. He had, from his early childhood, to fend for himself. A sense of his own orphanhood might either have driven him to introversion and a melancholy self-sufficiency or led him to seek solace and compensation for his loneliness beyond himself in the company of others. Fortunately, and social and geographic environment doubtless played a part in this, Saddam Hussein refused to withdraw into his shell and chose to face up to life, hard and difficult though it was. For even at a tender age, his temperament was that of a man, and a fighter to boot. The difficulties of life, which surrounded him in his early environment, where a poor peasant's land withholds a crop as often as it yields one, taught him certain basic virtues, which were to remain with him throughout his life. Patience, endurance, tenacity, self-reliance, courage, the ability to face and overcome danger, grim determination, the ability to appraise accurately his own feelings, moral discipline, and above all, affection for the poor and sympathy with ordinary people.

Such inferences as can be drawn from studying his early childhood and listening to the testimony of those who were in daily contact with him at that period of his life, indicate that he possessed, even at that early age, the basic qualities, mental and moral, which go to make up the picture of an Arab paladin, preparing himself, or being prepared by Destiny, to play the role of leader of his country. As he himself once said: "No man's political doctrine can remain unaffected by his previous history, or by his birth, or by his life, or by the circumstances of his life."

One of those who were close to him in his early childhood, his elder brother, Adham (he was in fact the son of Ibrahim al-Hassan, his mother's husband, and his relationship with Saddam was that of a full brother because they lived as children in the same home) tells how he was always surrounded by a troop of children whose leader he was and to whom he was constantly attached and who were constantly attached to him, so that the neighbours, as well as members of his own family, would immediately say, when they heard the children shouting, "Here comes Saddam".

But he was never rough or domineering with his early "mass following". The local people thought that he was, on the contrary, a friendly, well-behaved boy. But to his young followers he was perhaps more than that-altruistic, often putting their interests before his own; and when he saw one of his playmates wearing a jacket which was worn or torn he would take off his own jacket and give it to him, and go home jacket-less; and when he was asked where it was he would simply say, as though he had only done his bounden duty: "I gave it to my friend because his jacket was no good." He would take no notice of any resultant scolding,

remembering, even at that early age, the words of Christ: "Whosoever hath two, let him give one of them to him who hath none."

But the small child who had so taken to heart the chivalrous ethic was a real horseman. Nothing delighted him more than to ride his horse. His horse was the living creature nearest to his heart. He would get on its back and gallop through the neighbouring countryside until it tired, for it was fond of him too. A relationship between man and animal can sometimes be more affectionate, intimate and unselfish, than a relationship between two human beings. But the young boy was to suffer a cruel blow, the first in his life. His horse died. He heard the news of its death when he was in the fifth class of the primary school and living with his uncle in Tikrit. His horse was at Qaryat al-' Aujah waiting for his return on Friday during the spring and summer holidays. For the first time he was unable to control his emotion. Man is always powerless in the face of death. It is a time of loneliness and a deep and pervasive sense of loss and deprivation. His hand suddenly became paralysed and remained so for more than ten days. His people treated him with folk-remedies until the circulation returned once again to his forearm. A dark cloud descended on his soul that day, suffusing his bright eyes with tears.

Chapter 2

From Country to City

Poor peasant families did not at that time usually send their children to school. A boy had to grow up in the village, learning just the rudiments of farming so as to help his family, and acquiring a trade by which to earn his living. Schools were not numerous or widespread in that agricultural region of Iraq. The thousands of children who had it in them to become scientists, philosophers, artists and political leaders were in those years transformed into mere pawns in the army of poor and illiterate peasants, always forgotten in the plans and schemes of the reactionary politicians in the distant capital.

Every circumstance and environmental factor bid fair to make Saddam Hussein, as an orphan perhaps more than others, just one more of this forgotten and lost generation, so that the thirsty earth and the fierce encompassing desert would have utterly swallowed him, snuffing out the flame of his intelligence, had not a capacity for resisting circumstances and for striving tirelessly to overcome them, been among his virtues.

In 1947, when he was ten and living with his uncle, al-Haj Ibrahim, in a village called ash-Shawish, they were visited by a child of the same age, a relation of his mother.

This visit, and its consequences, was an important landmark and watershed in his development.

In the open space in front of the mud house the two small children would sit chatting, and one day Saddam heard his friend say something, which he had never heard from his other friends. The boy told him that he was going to school every day, that he was in the second primary class, and that he could already read and write. He then proceeded, with his finger, to write his name in the dust. Then he looked at him and explained the letters of the alphabet, and then the numbers.

The young Saddam was entranced. A new, fascinating and astonishing world unfolded before his eyes in that instant. He too must go to school and learn to write his name and how to memorise the multiplication tables and learn the rudiments of arithmetic. His eyes took on a look of intense determination, which puzzled his companion.

The next day he decided to put the matter to his family. Of course the idea was turned down. Every day, which passed, seemed to him to be irreparably lost. The schools opened and pupils were being enrolled for the new school year. He could think of nothing but those school benches and the fortunate pupils sitting on them. He suggested that he should go to his uncle, al-Haj Khairallah, in Tikrit, but this idea too was brusquely rejected. But he was not to be deflected from his course. He resolved to break off negotiations with his family and to adopt other measures. When night came, the little ten-year-old boy slipped out of bed and, with his few belongings in a bundle on his back, set out, alone as always, to face his destiny. He made for a place called al-Fatha, where he knew he would find some of his cousins who worked as watchmen for a local company. He was sure that they would tell him the way to Tikrit. Al-Fatha was only two hours' walk from his village and he arrived before sunrise. His relations were surprised to see him at such an early hour. "What is it, Saddam, " they asked, "what has happened?"

He told them that he had decided to go to school, but that his people would not hear of it. So he was on his way to Tikrit where he would be able to do what he had set

his mind on. He reminded them that they themselves had been to school and that their people had forced them to leave. His relations raised no objection. Indeed they encouraged him. They took him to the taxi stop and put him in a taxi, which would take him as far as the crossroad: instructing the driver to put him in another taxi for Tikrit. The relatives did not forget to provide him with something with which to ensure his safety on the road-a revolver! It was the first revolver he had ever had in his life.

When he arrived at Tikrit he knew the way to his uncle's house, since he had helped them move from the old house to this one four years earlier, when he was six. So he was able to find his way to his uncle's house unaided. He found the door open and walked in. Once more his arrival caused surprise. In reply to their eager questioning he said, quietly but resolutely: "I want to go to school."

This time he met with no rebuff. On the contrary his decision met with general approval and encouragement, "Well done, Saddam", they said. "Your people are mistaken. Of course you must go to school. You must enroll tomorrow, and keep at it. " It was the first time he had heard this kind of talk. A new chapter in his life had begun. Indeed the impression he had made on his uncle was to play an important part in deciding his future. His uncle, who was the senior male member of his family, was, as luck would have it, an educated man. He had qualified as a teacher and then entered the Military Academy and passed out from the Officers College, although he had not remained long in the army. He had been arrested at the time of Rasheed ' Ali al-Kilani's rebellion and had spent five years in prison. For this reason, Saddam, like all the members of his family, held him in high regard, as an example to be followed, and he still mentions how, when he was living with his mother he would often ask: "Where is uncle? Why has he gone away?" And they would tell him where he had gone and why. In this way he learned his first lesson in patriotism and hatred for the reactionary rulers, the agents of imperialism and for British colonialism whose troops desecrated the soil of Iraq at that time. The lessons would often reach back further into history, when she would tell him how, in the agricultural region of Iraq, his ancestors had resisted the Turkish occupation and Ottoman oppression. His family had furnished a whole company of martyrs, among them his mother's grandfather and two of his great uncles, one of whom had been only fourteen years old and another sixteen, on the day when the Turks came across them and killed them all. Their struggle against the Turks never ceased, but after this it acquired a new meaning, namely that of revenge for the family and tribe. Later they killed a group of Turkish officers and soldiers; the leader in this encounter was his mother's father. Hordes of Turks fell upon them, burning all their houses, and they fled to the mountains in the north of Iraq, returning after a while to

continue the struggle. The stories told to him in childhood were stories of struggle and resistance, arrest and imprisonment, stories which were to crystallize in his awakening consciousness into basic concepts which would direct and guide him throughout his life: hatred of colonialism; hatred, no less bitter, of reactionary and oppressive authority; resistance in order to liberate the home-land; struggle in order to free his fellow-countrymen from poverty, degradation and dishonour.

He pursued his primary studies at Tikrit and when his uncle moved to Baghdad he remained alone in Tikrit in his uncle's house for two years to complete his studies there. Then, having completed the sixth year at the primary school and one year at the intermediate school, he also moved to Baghdad where he entered the Karkh secondary school. This school was a stronghold of nationalism and was always to be a human arsenal ready to explode in the face of the forces of occupation and their agents and lackeys. In its explosive atmosphere this young lad, whose fierce vibrant patriotism made him ready, at any time, to sacrifice his life for his country, found a fitting environment in which his political ideas and his latent qualities of leadership could develop to the full. On every level of national life the time was ripe for change as Saddam Hussein successfully pursued his studies in the fourth class of his secondary school.

With Baghdad poised on the rim of a volcano, another role awaited him.

Chapter 3

The Fourteenth of July.

A Gamble that Failed.

If anyone doubts the unity of this nation and of its destiny, he has only to recall the picture presented by the greater homeland in the fifties to be convinced that the strongest and deepest feeling among its masses, and the idea most firmly and widely held among its younger generation, are the feeling and idea of unity. So that when Gamal ' Abdul-Nasser, from Cairo, called upon Arabs to "rise up and free and unite our homeland", Arabs everywhere, from Iraq to Algeria, became as one man, with one voice and one goal.

In the mid-fifties, after Bandung, the Arab Liberation Movement gathered strength, and it was in Egypt that the decisive moment in the battle drew near. America refused to arm the nationalist regime in Egypt after it had intensified its campaign against the colonialist Baghdad Pact, and Dulles had withdrawn the offer to finance the High Dam, and Cairo revealed that it had breached the arms monopoly by concluding the famous arms deal for the first time with the Socialist Camp. Gamal ' Abdul- Nasser earned for himself the title of hero of Arab Nationalism by proclaiming, on Egyptian Revolution Day 1956, that revolutionary Egypt had, from that day, regained possession of the Suez Canal, thus taking completely by surprise not only the obsolete and crumbling colonialist world, but the whole world, and demonstrating that it had pushed wide open the door to the modern age and to a future worthy of their past.

An unimaginably deep sensation of victory took possession of Arabs everywhere at that moment. Political leaders in Europe and America have recorded in their diaries and memoirs how great and complete was the confusion, which prevailed at that time in the ranks of the old colonial powers, England and France. The Suez campaign, launched by the two colonial powers, abetted by their ally and factotum, "Israel", was but the futile and despairing gesture of powers whose knell had already been sounded by history, and for whom nothing remained at Suez but to collect their death certificates. Perhaps the reaction of the Arabs and of the

nascent third world at that time may be counted as one of the positive results of this sorry episode, if indeed anything positive for the peoples of the world can be found in the death-bed follies of a moribund colonialism. The prospects for the whole Arab world seemed at once to have been transformed and all its aims and aspirations to be capable of realization now that colonial imperialism had been shown, by the judgment of history itself, to be a paper tiger. It was in this heady atmosphere that Saddam Hussein, the revolutionary political leader, was born. News of the tripartite aggression against Egypt carried by the radio and the press had transformed Baghdad into a battlefield in which chanting crowds, shoulder to shoulder and with clenched fists, confronted with unexampled vehemence the forces of Nuri al-Sa'id's reactionary puppet regime, demanding that the Baghdad Pact and the regime which existed to further the schemes of the colonialists should be overthrown and that support and assistance should be given to Egypt in its hour of struggle. The consciousness of the youthful fighter had begun to take form, as little by little, with firm and confident steps, he approached the stage which awaited him and on which he was to play his historic role.

In not more than a few months Saddam Hussein was enrolled in the Arab Baath Socialist Party. At that time the whole of Iraq expected the explosion at any moment. In the inner councils of the political parties the outline of a united front had begun to take shape by February-March 1957. There were, at this time, five political parties in Iraq, viz. the Arab Baath Socialist Party, the Iraqi Communist Party, the Istiqlal Party, the Patriotic

Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan. The "Front" was composed of those five parties.

What were the Front's aims? Its minimum aims, "unanimously accepted by all the patriotic forces and by the masses of the people, may be summarized as: Complete liberation from colonial influence and the construction of an independent, prosperous and progressive national economy; complete liquidation of feudalism; removal of the monopoly capitalism associated with colonialism from its dominant position so that it would no longer be able to oppress the working class and would be subjected to progressive national planning; creation of a democratic system of government suited to the nation's circumstances; strengthening of national unity between Arabs and Kurds on a firm democratic basis; creation of strong fighting forces and their preparation for the battle for Palestine and other usurped parts of the Arab homeland; effective contribution to the Arab struggle against colonialism, Zionism and reaction and the realization of a practical and effective form of unity with the liberated Arab countries (2)."

On 14th July 1958 the volcano erupted and the sound of its eruption was heard throughout the world. This historic Arab victory was achieved by a fighting union between the Iraqi people, through its political parties, and the national army. The reactionary puppet regime fell and the people sent its leaders to the gallows. One more citadel of colonialism in the Arab world had fallen and it seemed that all the main centres of the Arab east would soon be free. Gamal ' Abdul-Nasser, who was at the time on a visit to Yugoslavia, decided to return at once to Cairo. He had been profoundly moved by this historic event. The regime which had been his enemy and which had made its territory a base for attack on Egypt had been trampled under the feet of the Arab masses. But President Tito advised him not to return from Yugoslavia direct to Egypt via Hungary, as he had come. For colonialist fleets, provoked by the events, were on the move in the Mediterranean Sea. So from Brioni ' Abdul-Nasser went to Moscow and from Moscow to Cairo, and in the capital of the United Arab Republic its leader declared that "any aggression against the Republic of Iraq would be aggression against the United Arab Republic".

These were, for the Arabs, the most glorious moments in their contemporary history. After the union between Egypt and Syria in February 1958, another new and brilliant star seemed about

to be added to the new constellation. Unity seemed no longer unattainable by any country whose fighting forces decided to fight colonialism to the end. Unity was just another facet of liberation and the struggle for liberation involved essentially a struggle for unity.

At the time of the revolution of July 1958, its leadership largely reflected on the one hand the situation in which the Arab nationalist movement found itself, and, on the other hand, the particular form of the political national movement within Iraq. The nationalist stamp which characterized the revolution at its outset did not stem only from the strong national tendency in the militant political movement within Iraq, but drew its moral strength, its logic and its exuberance from the nationalist tide, which flowed strongly on every Arab, shore, making each country's individual struggle part of a general struggle for the whole Arab homeland.

The most prominent feature of the nationalist stamp which the revolution bore in its early days was its declared commitment to linking the future of the country with that of the Arab nation and its commitment also to the Arab nationalist aims of the people of Iraq. This was reflected by the markedly nationalist tendency discernible among the members of the first government formed after the revolution, whereas the Communist party depended for its representation on certain "democratic" elements affiliated to it (3). It is worth enquiring at this point: What were the ingredients of the various political parties which participated in the revolution as reflected in their attitudes and in their fighting record? After the revolution, five different attitudes reflected five different ingredients. The difference between them quickly turned to antagonism, then to conflict and finally to outright war, which became day-by-day more bloody.

The Iraqi leadership of the Arab Baath Socialist party regarded the revolution as having realized Arab nationalist aspirations so far as Iraq was concerned. Foremost among them at that time was the strengthening of relations with the youthful Arab United Republic and the achievement of a degree of unity with it. In this the party was true to its central ideological concept, viz. that the growth of a revolutionary Arab movement in any country could be realized, at the level aspired to, through the revolutionary Arab movement and that the federal state represented, at that period, one of its historical forms, since regional self-sufficiency would mean that the revolution would atrophy, wither and ultimately die because it would fall an easy prey to local reactionary forces, led by the bourgeoisie, which would see in unity a threat to its interests, and it would also be threatened by imperialism and its agents who would seek to confine, contain and strangle it.

A secret internal publication, put out by the Secretariat General of the Iraqi Leadership of the Arab Baath Socialist Party in March-May 1959, expressed the idea in this way: "Liberation from reactionary colonialism qualifies the Iraqi region to join the federal state (4)." It stated, "It is not only the differences created by regionalism which prevent this but the reactionary political and economic interests within the region and colonialism. It is these, which must be resolutely and intelligently resisted (5)... Unification is a revolutionary operation, which can only be accomplished by disregarding all local considerations and the interests associated with regionalism. (6)"

But these ideological assumptions did not prevent the party from viewing in a patriotic light the internal problems weighing on the masses of the people within the Iraqi region, such as the need for radical agrarian reform which had been one of the aims of the patriotic forces before the revolution and its concentration on the demand for political democracy, in addition of course to the other aims on which all the patriotic forces were agreed.

But the Iraqi Communist Party, whose assessment of the situation within the region proceeded from different ideological assumptions, held views on what was theoretically desirable and what was practically possible, which were completely at variance with those of the Arab

Baath Socialist Party. From the outset, the Iraqi Communist Party rejected the watchword of unity with the United Arab Republic which had overwhelming support in Iraq and wished to substitute for it the pallid slogan of "federal union" to which it did not forget to add "and friendship with the Soviet Union (7)". Then it proceeded to water down "federal union" into something even more anaemic, acceptable even to the reactionary states, viz. " Arab solidarity". By way of compensation it proposed a seemingly brilliant internal slogan: "Our duty is to guard the Republic and national independence (8)" as though Arab unity constituted a threat to the Republic or a diminution of national independence. The Communist Party regarded that slogan as the fundamental principle from which all other principles should be derived and from which all executive measures should proceed, even on the level of changing the internal social structure itself; Amer ' Abdullah, a member of the Political Bureau of the Iraqi Communist Party wrote, early in 1959: "No useful purpose is to be served at the present time by talking too much about a single Arab state, although it may be useful to talk about a liberated nation, able to defend its independence. To realize the Arab dream of a united Arab nation is no easy matter, neither is it within reach at present. . The Arab countries are not moving at a uniform pace either as regards their general development or as regards their progress towards unity. The facts show that the Arab countries will continue to follow their own numerous and diverse paths (9)." He then goes on to draw his own theoretical conclusions upon which were based all the attitudes subsequently taken up by the Communist party: "Fragmentation is a fact. Special circumstances cannot be ignored. The experiment in Syrian-Egyptian unity has given a negative result in halting Syrian rapid progress towards general development and has put her many steps back (10)." Indeed, in a statement issued on 3 September 1958, the Political Bureau of the Iraqi Communist Party said: "The masses of the people are alarmed at the thought of joining the United Arab Republic, because accession will not offer the Iraqi national economy and capital an adequate chance of prosperity and development and will not afford fair conditions for economic co-operation between Iraq and the United Arab Republic, in view of the disparity in their respective levels of development (11)."

It seems clear from the last two quotations that the Iraqi communists, as represented by their official party, regarded regionalism as an insuperable "fait accompli", and the mere thought of joining an already existing Arab union between two countries in differing stages of development was something calculated to alarm the masses of the people. But which masses did they mean? The masses which feared that unity would threaten their economic ambitions? The masses of national Iraqi capital? It is odd to find the Communist Party defending capitalist ambitions. And even odder to expect the " Arab bourgeoisies" to achieve their own development and prosperity in such a way that it would be possible to think of Arab unity in any form which could accommodate the earlier concept. No one can believe that the masses of the people are the capitalist or bourgeois masses, even if we were to add the epithet "national" .For the real masses of the people are the toiling masses who have nothing to lose now or in the future and thus have no cause to fear unity. It is futile to imagine that any popular Arab union could be based on a bourgeois Arab union in which the component parts were at an equal stage of development. At the best, it could be no more than a union of exploiters exploiting to the utmost "the masses of the people".

Although this concept of unity adopted by the Iraqi Communist Party is derived essentially from the Stalinist concept of nationalism and unity which regards nationalism as a manifestation of capitalism and unity as a bourgeois aim, in the manner of nineteenth century Europe, the Iraqi Communist Party in fact imagined that, by rejecting unity and supporting and encouraging the individualistic tendencies in' Abdul-Kareem Qasim, it would be able to get closer to the seat of power and to share or eventually monopolize it. Its rejection of the watchword "unity" found a soothing echo in the title of "Sole Leader" bestowed upon Qasim at that time, but more important it gave encouragement to and set a seal- of approval on those

who supported him. The leadership of the Communist Party at that time imagined that they could achieve their ends by linking their destiny with that of Abdul-Kareem Qasim and proceeding direct to socialism without passing through a bourgeois phase, a view which was in clear contradiction with their apparently basic concept which rejected a unity proceeding from a position of unequal development as between the Iraqi bourgeoisie and the other Arab bourgeoisies, invoking in support of this view, statements made at the twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party of 1956, the validity of which there had, as yet, been no opportunity to test in practice, viz. "It is not necessary for backward countries to pass through a capitalist phase of development, which can be by-passed by the working class leadership and its Communist Party(12) ."

For this reason the communists neglected to seek the Support of the other patriotic parties within Iraq for their alliance, nor did they bother to re-affirm their adherence to the National United Front after the revolution had taken place. They were mainly concerned with what they called: "defending the Republic's national independence", so that in their reply to the demand of the patriotic parties for radical agrarian reform they said: "This essential demand must be subordinated to a greater and more important task, viz. the task of defending the independence of the Republic, and any measure in the field of agrarian reform shall be subordinate to this basic task (13)." In their reply to the patriotic parties' demand for. political democracy in order to achieve the people's social objectives for the sake of which the revolution had been brought about, they wrote: "These differences and conflicts of interests and ideas are definitely of secondary importance so far as the course of the revolution and the progress and independence of the country are concerned. Such disputes as may arise in the rural areas between peasants and landlords, and in the towns between employers and workers, will remain secondary and can be resolved within the framework of the common interest and in the interest of defending the security and stability of the Republic (14)."

The Communist Party was subsequently to acknowledge, once more, that it had "adopted isolated, leftist attitudes in handling the democratic situation in the country and had fallen into the error of over-estimating its own strength and under-estimating the role of authority and of the nationalist forces in defending the Republic since it had considered itself and' Abdul-Kareem Qasim as being alone, capable of defending the Republic. It had thereby excluded the patriotic forces from any effective role in influencing the course of event (15)". But this self-criticism, which the Communist Party leadership did not begin to take to heart until after it had been issued, had come too late. The rift was already all too apparent, the bridges were already down and the chapter of tragic disasters was already under way. Unfortunately, the leaders of the Iraqi Communist Party failed to realize at that time, mesmerized as they were by the prospect of power and intoxicated as they were by their fleeting and illusory authority over the mass political organs, how heavy the price would be, and that it would have to be paid, not by Iraq alone, but by nationalist and progressive forces throughout the Arab east.

As regards the Istiqlal Party, its intellectual sterility and ideological emptiness caused it to lose its balance and lapse into paralytic confusion under the pressure of events, so that it seemed that its role in history had ceased with the revolution, as what remained of its leadership rushed to join the Baath Party. For the Patriotic Democratic Party, the revolution had, for the time being, offered an opportunity for growth and relative expansion, representing as it did the capitalist middle-class. Although it saw, in the growth of the Communist Party, a strategic danger and a threat to what it imagined to be its class interests and ambitions, it regarded the call to Arab unity as a danger much more serious and imminent, so that its conflict with the Baath was pushed into the forefront while that with the communists was, for the time being, put into cold storage. But it lacked clear ideological cohesion and was not always able to present a unified political stance, even in its higher echelons.

Such then were, in general, the distinctive attitudes of the five parties, which were active in the political arena in Iraq after the July 1958 revolution. The sum of these attitudes was a rift in the Front leading to its dissolution.

An attempt was made in November 1958 by the nationalist forces to draw up a charter of joint action, which would ensure the continued operation of the Front. It enshrined the following political principles:

1. That Iraq is part of the Arab nation and that it should strive to establish the best possible links with the United Arab Republic in the future, with a view to comprehensive Arab unity.
2. That the Front should strive to apply the terms of the provisional constitution of 27 July 1958 relating to the national rights of the Kurdish people.
3. That the Government must pursue a patriotic policy and satisfy the people's demand for political and economic liberation from colonialism.
4. That support for the Republic and the revolution should be affirmed and that the need should be acknowledged for a sound democratic life, which would give the political parties the right to function openly (6).

Nevertheless, what was the practical result of this charter? The Arab Baath Socialist Party had advocated support for the common struggle and a closing of the ranks of all the parties, bodies, ethnic groups and creeds on the basis of the principles and aims of the revolution.

But the attitude of the Communist Party was negative. It received the charter coolly, clinging to its illusions which led it to believe that it could hold Abdul-Kareem Qasim in check and secure power for itself through an absolute personal dictatorship. For at that time no other political party, with the possible exception of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan, could muster enough weight to turn the scales.

The gamble that failed had begun. Crazy mobs poured into the streets, like serpents crawling through jungles untrodden by human feet. The sun of revolution was setting. The hour of crucifixion had come. Iraq was to bleed to death.

Chapter 4

The Revolution's sinking sail

There have been many revolutions which have followed a violent course and which have involved the spilling of blood. But the violence has been directed against the revolution's enemies and the bloodshed has been, in a sense, necessary in order that the revolution should take root, grow and bear fruit.

But what happened in Iraq, during that tragic and melancholy period of its history, was more like some dreadful nightmare. It is impossible to imagine how men's mental processes can become so distorted and ossified and fall so completely under the sway of their own ready-made phrases that they are driven in their thousands into new forms of savagery and collective carnage.

The strange thing is that all this took place in the name of the finest and noblest concept to which man can aspire: socialism. All humanity, and most of all progressive humanity, will never forgive Stalin the crimes he committed in the name of democracy and freedom against those among the masses of his people whom he described as the enemies of socialist

development, notwithstanding all his achievements within his country and in the Second World War. The report delivered by Khrushchev at the secret session of the twentieth congress of the Soviet Communist Party, in which he revealed for the first time the scale and magnitude of those crimes, fell like a thunderbolt on all those whose minds and hearts had been drawn to the socialist paradise over which Joseph Stalin had presided on behalf of the International. The breakdowns and schisms which ensued in many Communist parties all over the world were a tragic and vehement expression, both on the collective and "individual levels, of a keen awareness among socialists everywhere and of their sudden discovery that they had been worshipping a body without a soul and that man lives not by bread alone, but also by freedom and democracy.

Nevertheless all this had taken place within the framework of an historic experiment, which had challenged the servitude of man for the first time. And although this does not justify its denial of what was supposed to be its essence, it can at least be advanced as an explanation- and how many explanations have been advanced- of the abuse which has been leveled at that historic experiment. But what was it which drove the liberating Iraqi revolution, within a few months of its having been successfully accomplished, months of solidarity between the nationalist elements and cohesion between the parties, into morass? Why did it rush, or allow itself to be pushed, so quickly into that bloody quagmire? And how did all its noble aims and ideals of freedom, unity and socialism- all facets of the same jewel, lose themselves amid those endlessly rancorous and bitter struggles between armies defending the same positions and dreaming the same dreams?

It would take an accomplished writer of horror stories or a great historical tragedian to describe what happened in Mosul in March 1959 and again in Kerkuk in July 1959.

It was not feudalism, reaction or monopoly capitalism, nor even the colonialist oil companies, which were the victims of these blood baths. On the contrary it was the patriots and the nationalists who fell victim to the demented mobs and whose desecrated corpses lay about the streets, while the feudal landlords clung to their estates, and capital, monopoly and the colonialist oil companies continued to flourish unmolested.

The Communist Party tried to organize in Mosul a grand review of its forces under the title "Grand Festival of Peace", on the sixth of March 1959 and thousands of people flocked thither in a special free train which left the capital bearing a placard on which was written "Peace train to Mosul". It went on publishing in its newspapers inflammatory slogans like "Come to Mosul to take part in the Grand Festival of Peace", "To the heroic city, city of revolutionary glory", "Peace train leaves Baghdad this evening"(17). Of course, world peace was not at risk, nor was world war imminent.

The Festival was a manifestation of a bitter and unjustifiable struggle against other patriotic and nationalist forces. Naturally (for that indeed was its purpose), there were clashes between the communists and the nationalist forces in the city. The army officers subsequently met and instructed the officer commanding the fifteenth brigade, Staff-Colonel ' Abdul-Wahhab ash-Shawwaf, to go to Baghdad, see' Abdul-Kareem Qasim and give him a picture of the situation in Mosul, so that he might take prompt action to quell the disturbance before it got out of hand. But Qassam's mind was on other things. He was happy to see the patriotic forces exhausting themselves in a struggle against one another, in order that he might, as he imagined, strengthen his hold on the reins of government. He did nothing. Nor did he offer any solution to the tense situation, other than a few unhelpful platitudes. And, so the tension worsened.

Once more ash-Shawwaf went to Baghdad to see Qasim. But as before he returned without any decision which might have restored the situation, although he had, in his suitcase, a

picture of the "Sole Leader" on which the great man had written: "To my noble brother, Abdul-Wahhab ash-Shawwaf." Meanwhile Mosul was in turmoil and tremors had begun to be felt in Baghdad itself. Ministers were resigning; senior officers were asking to be placed on the retired list. The "Popular Resistance" was beginning to sharpen its swords on the people's necks. Colonel Fadhil ' Abbas al-Mahdawi, President of the Peoples Court, was turning his court-room into a theatre in which the drama of the struggle against the nationalists in Iraq and against the United Arab Republic was staged each night.

Ash-Shawwaf went to Baghdad for the third time. Again he met Qasim, who, brushing aside the urgent matters which ash-Shawwaf had come to see him about, whispered that he would tell him a secret, which he had never yet divulged to anyone. He then thrust into ash-Shawwaf's pocket a medal on which was inscribed the words "We will return." "Return?" asked ash-Shawwaf, "Return where?" "To Palestine, of course." "When will that be, Leader?" asked ash-Shawwaf. "I shall announce it at the proper time"(18), was the enigmatic reply.

This playful little scene was, in itself, an indication that the ship of state was without a captain and that Iraq was heading for, or was being propelled by unseen forces towards, an unknown destination.

In the streets of Mosul, the nation's forces were divided against themselves. One section had allowed itself, either by some spiritual affinity with the "Leader" or with his wickedness, to be persuaded that he was capable of crushing the others and of "eliminating" all those who stood in his way.

What happened subsequently was the natural result of its tragic prologue. The grand festival was held in that tense and critical climate. The Sole Leader's office sent

a telegram to ash-Shawwaf telling him to keep the army units in their barracks on the two days, 5th and 6th of March, while the "Festival" was being held. On the 7th of March a further telegram was sent asking the officer commanding the military region to continue to keep the army units in barracks.

After the Festival was over and the participants had dispersed, the nationalist forces attempted, in their turn, to organize some manifestation of their real presence in the city. The communists objected and asked that the military forces, which had had orders to remain in barracks during the Festival, should be called out to disperse the nationalist gathering. But the nationalist demonstration went ahead in the city, its numbers increasing. Then shots rained down on it and fires were started at bookshops, cafes and other premises owned by elements sympathetic to the nationalist movement. A counter-demonstration, led by the communists, tried to encircle the first demonstration. In a quarter of the city called Bab al Baidh, which was completely under nationalist control, the communist demonstrators began to get out of hand. Some of them started attacking houses, dragging out the occupants and subjecting them to all kinds of violence. The army had no alternative but to begin to do its duty. It came out on to the streets and imposed a curfew, but only after much burning, looting and bloodshed.

In a country without an effective government, the officers who had joined with ash-Shawwaf after the curfew decided upon an armed uprising, in the belief that they alone were capable of keeping the country on a proper course. On the 8th of March, ash-Shawwaf, at the head of his armed division, declared his first, and last, uprising.

This action had not been precisely planned, nor had it any organization to ensure that it would be supported by the military forces in other parts of the country. As ill luck would have it, the circumstances were not propitious. Qasim sent his air force to nip the rising in the bud and ash-Shawwaf was wounded in an air raid. He tried to reach the hospital to have his wound

dressed, but on the way he was shot at and killed, and his body was hung up for all to see, a melancholy witness to the tragic culmination of the bloody struggle between communists and nationalists.

The prompt suppression of ash-Shawwaf's rising was the signal for an indiscriminate campaign of terror to be unleashed against those suspected of having supported it. Doors were broken down, houses were wrecked, old men, women and children were strangled, bodies, among them the naked bodies of young girls, were hung from electricity pylons. Meanwhile, demonstrating mobs poured on to the streets of Baghdad, not satisfied with what had happened at Mosul, and chanting "Kill them, kill them". The newspaper "Ittihad ash-Sha'ab", the Iraqi Communist Party's mouthpiece, came out with the following item on its front page: "After the corpse of, Abdul-Wahhab ash-Shawwaf had been dragged through the streets of Mosul, on Tuesday night it was the turn of the others, when the indignant masses dragged their dead bodies through the streets as an example)." A short while after came a call from the trade union organizations affiliated to the Communist Party, saying: "We will turn the whole of Iraq upside down, so that every town and village, every inch of Iraqi soil, will teach anyone who dares to thwart our Republic a harder lesson than they learned at Mosul (20)." Then, two days later, "Ittihad ash-Sha'ab", assessing the "revolutionary" experiment conducted by the communists at Mosul, published a salute to the "fighter al-Barazani", the feudal Kurdish

Leader, in which it said: "The presence of the fighter, al-Barazani, in Kurdistan during the mutiny by al-Shawwaf's traitorous band had a great influence on the readiness of the Kurds to help in crushing the mutiny and in nipping ash-Shawwaf's conspiracy in the bud (21)."

After the festival of terror and murder in the streets and alleys, another festival began in al-Mahdawi's "court", where the proceedings, for all their intensely tragic character, at times degenerated into something bordering on farce. For in no criminal court in the world, not even in the trials of the second world war criminals at Nuremberg, have the crowds stood yelling as though crazed with fury: "Kill them! Kill them!" while a group

of nationalist officers who, whatever their offence in the eyes of the regime, were nevertheless out and out patriots, stood in the defendants' cage waiting while the president of the court heaped abuse on Arab nationalism and unity and on the United Arab Republic and Gamal ' Abdul-Nasser until, amid the cheers and acclamation, he pronounced sentence of death upon them.

In U mm at- Tubul Place, in the capital Baghdad, a gallows was erected to rip off the heads of the finest and noblest of those who had borne arms in the Iraqi army in defence of the honour of their country and the dignity of their fellow-countrymen.

What occurred after that in Basra was more than matched by what happened in Kerkuk. Both were tragedies after the Mosul pattern. Even Abdul-Kareem Qasim himself, at a meeting with a delegation from professional organizations and trade unions affiliated to the Communist Party, told its members, in disgust: "I will now hand round a few pictures to show you the chaos which has been created among our Turcoman brothers and fellow-citizens. Look and see whether any of you would permit himself to take the law unto himself and to attack his fellow countrymen and commit these atrocities against them. Those who stand for freedom and those who stand for democracy do not perpetrate these acts of savagery. The events of Kerkuk are a disgrace to Iraq. Did Hulagu, even, do anything like this? Is this the twentieth century? (22)"

Nevertheless, the "Ittihad ash-Sha'ab" could still write: "The show-down in Kerkuk is another splendid example of the only effective method of crushing the enemies of the republic (23)." And again: "The republican forces demonstrated their overwhelming strength and struck a

decisive blow in Kerkuk, by the same shrewd method that was used to crush ash-Shawwaf's conspiracy (24)."

Karl Marx, who said: "Man is the most valuable form of capital (25)", must have turned in his grave during those unhappy days, when so many crimes were being committed in his name. He no doubt repeated once more the famous phrase by which he used to disclaim association with those who sought to lay their crimes at his door. "If these are Marxists, then all I can say is that I am not a Marxist (26)."

Chapter 5

A Break in the Clouds

Who was the winner? Who had anything to gain from this bloody contest?

The nationalists were intended to be the sacrificial lambs, to be offered to' Abdul-Kareem Qasim on the altar of his personal dictatorship, so that the communists alone should be the keepers of the temple and its high priest. But it did not escape the "Sole Leader" who, at that stage, was an adept at the game of "divide and rule", that the communists imagined themselves capable of manipulating him just as he imagined himself capable of manipulating them. Although he had supported them in their attack on and their attempt to liquidate the Baathists, there was a limit beyond which he would not allow them to go, since he was determined to retain in his hands the balance of power. Despite all their efforts, the communists were unable to obtain a formal share of power. It is true that, but for them, the political arena was empty after the Patriotic Democratic Party had declared its political activity suspended in protest at their improper conduct. But this vacuum did not turn out to be in their interests, because it made them alone seem responsible for the state of political and economic collapse in the country.

This moment represented, for the nationalist forces, a political low water mark. They were to wait in vain a genuine turn of the tide. The peacock, inflated with his own conceit strutted alone on the summit of his power, while the masses of the people, at every level, continued to suffer their everlasting pains, rendered more acute by the anarchy prevailing throughout the land.

About this time, a man called Sa'dun an-Nasiri was killed in Tikrit. He was one of the most enthusiastic and devoted henchmen of' Abdul-Kareem Qasim, and the security organs could find no one on whom to pin the responsibility for his murder other than that quiet and level-headed young man who used to go back to his village at the end of term to share the life of a peasant with his relatives: Saddam Hussein. It was not that there was any real case against him, but merely. that he was a Baathist militant, well known in the neighbourhood.

He now entered prison for the first time in his life, the Sarai Prison, where he, as a young member of the Arab Baath Socialist Party, was to welcome successive batches of his comrades. The prison had become the only place in which militants were safe from random acts of murder and terrorism on the streets. The prisoners would even plead with the wardens to let their fellow militants come in with them behind bars. They would spend the day in safety and then creep off home under cover of darkness, until sunrise when they would again seek asylum behind bars.

One day he was told that his case had been transferred from the court martial to the revolutionary tribunal, i. e. al-Mahdawi's court. He was certain that they would execute him along with his relatives and friends who were accused with him. Saddam's first reaction was

to try to escape by force from the trap that had been set for him. He arranged with a man called 'Awni Rifa'i to bring him revolvers while they were going for questioning. With the help of these they would try to escape before the trial began, and he, with his comrades became tasty fodder for al Mahdawi's guillotine. He explained to his fellow accused what he was planning. One was his mother's cousin and the other his own cousin, both young men like himself. He did not take into his confidence his two uncles, who were also accused. But, on consideration, he -postponed carrying out his plan, since he feared that the authorities would deal with his uncles separately and that they would be unable to get away. A short while after, when the nationalist tide had again begun to flow, the papers in the case were returned to the first court martial and he gave up his plan to escape trial by the use of force. He remained in prison for six months after which the court released him, having found him innocent of the charges made against him.

He went back to his village, and every evening he would go out and write Baathist slogans on the walls of houses and company buildings. Every morning people going from al' Aujah to Tikrit could read fresh slogans written by some unknown hand. Some of these graffiti are still to be seen on the walls of Tikrit.

One day a party comrade named' Ata Hussein as-Samarra'i, from' Aujah (where he still lives with his uncle and his mother) came to him and said: "The party wants you in Baghdad."

The next day he set out for Baghdad where he went to the house of his party superior, at that time' Abdul-Khaliq as-Samarra'i. But the latter had no clear idea of what the party wanted of him, nor of the task which it wished to entrust to him. As-Samarra'i told him: " Ahmad Taha al ' Azuz will call on you. All I know is that he will take you to the party organization, which has asked for you. They will tell you what you will have to do."

An hour later, Ahmad Taha al' Azuz knocked at his door and took him to see another man called Iyad Sa'id Thabit. Ayad looked at him intently and said in a quiet, serious, but clear voice: "Your task is to kill' Abdul-Kareem Qasim. Are you ready?" Saddam Hussein replied at once, a ring of gladness in his voice: "Of course I am ready."

He regarded it as an honour to be entrusted with this task. For such an important assignment, entrusted to so recent a recruit to the ranks of the party's militants, could only mean that he was held in especial esteem.

Abdul-Kareem Qasim was in the habit of passing along Rasheed Street on his way to and from his home in al Alawiya and his office in the Ministry of Defence. Therefore Rasheed Street had to be the scene of operations. The party hired an apartment in Rasheed Street in which it installed Saddam Hussein along with his comrades who were to help him in carrying out the plan.

Another man was to be stationed outside to watch the road and find out which route Qasim was to take. If he came from the direction of al-Bab ash-Shari the code word was "Shukri" and if from the Ministry of Defence it was to be "Mahmud". The difference between the two was the side of the road along which the "Sole Leader's" limousine would pass, in order to pass directly under the trajectory of the shots from the automatic rifles.

On the seventh of October 1959 a group of young men were standing on the pavement in Rasheed Street, along which traffic passes in the direction of al-Bab ash-Sharqi, their eyes fixed on the passing vehicles, their fingers on their triggers. Among them, one might have picked out a slender young man wearing a long jacket, which looked as though it did not belong to him (which indeed it did not). It was his uncle's jacket, which he had borrowed from his wardrobe without even knowing whether it would be long enough to conceal the sub-

machine gun he was carrying at his side. This young man's task was to give covering fire to his comrades who were to open fire on the "Leader's" car, and to cover their retreat after they had carried out their task. He himself would be the last to leave.

But when he found himself face to face with the dictator, he was unable to restrain himself. He forgot all his instructions and immediately opened fire. Bullets rained down on the car from the other sub-machine guns and automatic rifles. There were five of them. But two of the sub-machine guns jammed. The other three spewed out on to the "Sole Leader's" car all the venom stored up in the hearts of the masses. "This for the martyrs of Mosul! This for the martyrs of Basra! This for Kerkuk, this for Baghdad! This for the old men, women and children who died a gratuitous death, sacrifices to the lust for power! And this for the terror which stalks the land, making it unfit for human beings to live in! And this finally for the re-awakening of this nation, for its freedom, its unity, and for a better future, so that ordinary people may live lives unblighted by poverty, fear and humiliation!"

Did he die? He was riddled with bullets from the young men's machine guns so he must have met his end. The firing party got away, Saddam after them, pursued by shots. One of the traffic policemen guarding the car fired at them. He turned round, but before he had time to fire the policeman fired and hit him in the leg. But at the time he did not feel it. He was concerned only with ensuring the safe withdrawal of the group to the car, which awaited them in a side road, which cuts across Rasheed Street and al-Kifah Street. One member of the party had been hit and was bleeding from a wound in his chest and hardly able to walk.

When they reached the spot where the car was supposed to be waiting for them, they found the car but no driver. They waited a moment, which seemed like eternity, with them Sameer an-Najm, bleeding from the chest. Saddam Hussein looked at one of the group, Kareem Ash-Shaikhli, and said: "We can't wait any longer. We must take one of these cars. " So he pointed his sub-machine gun at one of the drivers who stopped, terrified. Just then their own driver, Ali Hassun, arrived. They quickly lifted Sameer an-Najm into the car. Kareem Ash-Shaikhli got into the front seat and Saddam Hussein took the seat behind the driver.

They did not know where to go. ' Ali Hassun knew a hideout where, according to instructions from the leadership, they would be able to hide. But Samir, who was in great pain, said, "I am dying. Take me to the hospital. " His companions seemed inclined to agree. The driver himself began to turn off the road as though he too agreed to make for the hospital. Suddenly Saddam realized what they were doing. "Where are you going?"

He asked. "To the hospital", said' Ali Hassun. Saddam struck him sharply on the back and said: "Drive straight to the hide-out or I'll shoot you in the back."

To have gone to the hospital would have been sheer madness. They would have been discovered immediately, which would have been a disaster not only for them, as individuals, but for the whole party organization. Even if death awaited them, or some of them, at the hideout, they would certainly all have died if they had gone to the hospital. For that reason Saddam decided to go straight to the hideout and to ignore his comrade's pain, lest the whole party should be endangered.

The car stopped in front of a house surrounded by a wall, number 721 al-Karradah ash-Sharqiyah in a suburb of Baghdad and its occupants got out. They entered the house, which was a two-storey building with four rooms on the ground floor and one room on the upper floor. On the left hand side of the house, where one entered the garden, there was a cellar in which weapons were hidden: a collection of machine guns, Thomson Weston and Stirling. As they entered the hall they found a member of the Arab Baath Socialist Party leadership, Khalid ' Ali Saleh, waiting for them. After a short while they were joined by two more who

had taken part in the operation with them, but had not come with them in the car, Hatim Hamdan al' Azzawi and Ahmad Taha al' Azuz.

Sameer an-Najm's condition had become worse. He was bleeding from the chest and the doctor who was supposed to join them had not yet arrived, and, in fact, never did. There was nothing for it but to face the situation bravely and, as it is sometimes necessary in such circumstances, with a granite-like hardness. This isolated house in a side street in this quiet district now held five young men who had faced death at the roadside. It had missed them but here it was again, pursuing them into every corner of this numbed city. What were they to do now? Supposing their operation had failed and not one out of all those bullets had delivered the fatal blow to the body of the "Sole Leader". The dark night would not be over and the first glimmers of dawn would still be far beyond the horizon. In an atmosphere of hysteria charged with anxiety the radio stations would announce that the "Leader" had escaped the attempt on his life. The Military Governor-General would impose an absolute curfew until further notice. The eyes of both the overt and secret police would probe every wall in every street, lane and alley, seeking the authors of the "great conspiracy" to assassinate the "beloved leader". And tomorrow all the Government papers would say: "The dastardly assassins' bullets aimed yesterday by traitorous conspirators, agents of colonialism, at the faithful son of the people, the leader Abdel-Kareem Qasim, were but a warning of the plot now being hatched against the Republic (27)." They would then add this advice: "The frontiers must be closed to the fleeing conspirators. The nationalist front is a gang of traitors in the service of the colonialists and the covetous, nationalists and enemies. The crime of the Baath Party and its conspiratorial plans. The Baath and the rulers in Cairo are tools in the hands of the conspirators..." etc., etc.

They would, of course, ignore the thousands of crimes committed against the masses of this people by its "faithful son" and those around him who nourished in him the lust for absolute and personal power; the gallows at Mosul; the victims at Basra; the martyrs of Kerkuk and Baghdad; the thousands tortured in prison; the arrests; the ugly scenes of gratuitous killing on the streets. Who now remembers the fires of hell by which the whole people warmed itself?

These young men, in the springtime of their lives, were they really reckless conspirators, set on a path of personal terrorism? Not one of them thought, or was capable of imagining for an instant, that he was wresting power from the hands of the dictator to bestow it on himself. They were deeply conscious of the enormity of the tyranny, which had overtaken them. They imagined only that they were creating a new dawn for their country. But above all, they were a disciplined band of comrades, committed to the party, the supreme leadership of which had given them its orders and they saw the order as being more important than the reality behind it.

Whenever al-Mahdawi's tribunal sat and the curtain went up on the tyrant's court poets, vying with each other in their panegyrics to their "sole" dictator and in hurling insults at his adversaries, the voice of the Baath would not hesitate to take responsibility for the operation, irrespective of the points of view of those who advocated something better.

"It is through the people's struggle that the party works, and this struggle may entail acts of revolutionary violence, even murder. This goes without saying. But naked murder, as in the case of a political assassination, is contrary to the beliefs of the party and threatens to divert it from its proper course. The party, whenever an assassination attempt miscarries, nevertheless expresses its appreciation of the heroism of the comrades who have courageously taken part in it, especially if their comportment during the trial does not prevent them from showing their tenacious adherence to the party's beliefs and their loyalty to its objectives (28)."

Nevertheless, and however one may assess that operation from the general political point of view or from the particular ideological standpoint of the Baath Party, there is one thing that

cannot be denied, namely that the attempt carried out so heroically by these young men shook to its foundations this dictatorial regime which had imposed its yoke on the necks of the people, and was to be the first nail in its coffin. It raised, once again, hopes long frustrated in the possibility of deliverance. It pulled the cork out of the bottle, releasing the demon imprisoned inside. It created, at the very least, a yawning fissure in the wall "of fear, allowing the first radiance of the coming day to filter through.

Chapter 6

Journey Of The Wounded Knight

Saddam Hussein was not able to sleep until morning. An hour before sunrise he suddenly jumped out of bed with a burning pain in his leg. It was a terrible pain, the like of which he had never felt before. He realized that it was the bullet in his leg, which was the cause. Where was the doctor? What doctor was likely to come here, or could he go to. There was no point in waiting. He must be his own doctor. With his iron will he at once decide to perform the operation himself.

His companions, who had gathered around him, when they heard his suppressed groans, were astonished at the thought of his removing the bullet himself. He told them in a quiet voice, punctuated by spasms of pain: "I am not waiting for any doctor." Then he looked at Ahmad Taha al' Azuz. "Will you do it or shall I do it myself? It would be best if I put my leg up here and let you do it. But if you can't, I'll do it myself." "But how can I do it?" protested Ahmad, "and with what?" Saddam looked at him with his steady gaze, as though talking about someone else. "Get a new razor blade and a pair of scissors. Start by making an incision in the shape of a cross in the flesh covering the shot. Then sterilize the scissors, put them in the wound and pull out the shot. That's all."

When Ahmad Taha al' Azuz had finished the operation his hand was shaking and he felt unable to look Saddam in the face. He poured some iodine on the wound, put a piece of cotton wool inside, wrapped it round with several layers of muslin, breathed a sigh and stood motionless. Saddam Hussein had fainted with the pain.

A few moments passed. It seemed like an age. His comrades watched him intently. But it was not long before he opened his eyes and said: "It's all right now."

After a short while he struggled to his feet and said to them: "I am not staying here any longer." He suggested that they should all leave the hide-out, except Sameer an-Najm, who was in no fit state to leave, and one man who should stay with him as a patrol, not necessarily in the hide-out, but perhaps keeping an eye on it indirectly, like sitting opposite the house, disguised as an itinerant vendor and looking in now and again to see if anything was wanted. In any case it was impossible to stay in this hideout because the chances were that it would be raided by the police. It would be better; indeed it was their duty, not to let themselves be caught easily since they might have to have another try.

He did not wait for them to overcome their hesitations, but said what he had to say and left. He went out into the road, walking normally and gritting his teeth, trying to ignore the acute pain in his leg. He made for his uncle, al Haj Khairallah Talfah's house. This was the first time he had slept away from the house and it was only natural that they should ask awkward questions. "Where have you been? Why are you late? Where did you sleep last night?" He replied quietly: "There was a curfew and I couldn't get back, so I slept in a hotel. " But they noticed that he was limping slightly. "I was running to get home in time and I fell down. But I didn't make it anyway.

It still hurts a bit, " he said, rather unconvincingly. He brushed aside their further questions and went up to his room on the first floor to sleep.

Suddenly, as he was trying to stretch himself out on the bed, the door opened and in walked his uncle, ' Abdullatif.

"Well," he said, "was he killed?"

"Who?"

"Abdul-Kareem Qasim, of course."

He was so taken aback that he could hardly speak. But he pulled himself together and said, as though the matter was no concern of his: "How should I know?"

"Saddam, don't try to lie to me. I saw you myself from Hazim al Bakri's balcony in Rasheed Street, wearing my jacket and firing at Qasim. Do you deny that?"

It was nothing but pure chance that had led his uncle to that spot to visit a friend just at that moment; he had seen everything with his own eyes; had seen his young nephew shoot the Prime Minister as he passed along the street. Saddam said: "Since you saw me I'd be glad if you would help me. I need an injection of an antibiotic for my wound. I'll tell the orderly that I've got tonsillitis. "He actually began to take the injection to relieve the pain.

He had to go back to school so as not to draw attention to himself by his absence. At least he went to begin with, and then asked to be allowed to go home because he felt unwell. He was then in the top form of the secondary school. He could not remain at his studies as usual for fear of having to answer awkward questions from his schoolfellows about the wound in his leg, which was still very painful.

He was just outside the school, carrying his books, when he ran into' Abdul-Khaliq, who said: "Do you know Iyad Sa'id Thabit?"

"No"

"Do you know Khalid ' Ali Saleh?"

"No"

"Do you know Sameer an-Najm?"

"No".

"Good. I don't want to ask you now who you know or don't know. I just want to tell you that all these were in a hide-out in al-Karradak ash-Shurqiyah when it was raided by the police. They were all arrested. So if you have had anything to do with any of them, you had better watch out."

What had happened was that an hour after he had left the hideout, his companions, as might have been expected, had been picked up by the authorities'. What was to be done? He hurried home and went straight up to his room. He got out his photograph album, which contained many photographs of himself with his friends. Then he went into his cousin Adnan Abdullah's room and got out his album too, which also contained group photographs, and burnt the lot. Then he decided that he must leave the house at once. He left, and a quarter of an hour later a party 'of police raided the house.

He made for the Martyrs' Bridge with a view to hovering round the little hotel where' Abdul-Khaliq as-Samarra 'i, his party contact, lived, in order to enquire from him about the possibility of helping him to get away. On the way he bumped into a schoolmate who was standing on the platform of a bus. He jumped off the bus and came over and greeted him in a loud voice, instead of whispering, as he knew nothing of what was happening. At that moment some young man came running up out of breath and muttered something from which he concluded that the police had raided his uncle's house. After that there was nothing to hide. He gave, Abdul-Khaliq a general idea of what had happened and asked him to go to a house near his uncle's house and then to send a woman to the house to fetch his identity card, because the curfew which was still in force and the inspection posts, scattered about the streets, might mean that he would find himself in a police station. After calculating the distance and the time it would take, he said: "I'll see you at the cafe in forty minutes. If I'm not there before then, you won't find me."

These were the longest forty minutes in his life. It was daylight. Everyone was on the look out. Anything was possible. Forty minutes passed and he did not come.

He left the cafe and went his way.

He did not know where to go. Suddenly he remembered a distant relative who lived on the outskirts of Baghdad. He used to go there shooting with his uncle. Without further hesitation he made for that direction. His cousin's wife opened the door. His relative was not at home. He asked if he might wait. When the man came, he was surprised at first, but seemed pleased to see him. Saddam blurted out: "Look, uncle. You know that the situation is complicated. The innocent are mixed up with the guilty and people are being accused right and left. This means that I must get away from Baghdad.

I would like to get to Tikrit without anyone knowing. Will you let me sleep here tonight?"

Next morning he asked the man to lend him his oldest clothes. He took off his jacket and put on an old and worn dishdasha, which is a kind of long shirt worn by Iraqi peasants. On his head he put a no less threadbare headband and head-cloth. Over all this he threw a black cloak, full of holes. He plastered his shoes with mud to make them look old and, having borrowed a small knife saying that he might need it on the way, took his leave.

He stopped a taxi and told the driver to take him to as-Salikh, a place on the outskirts of Baghdad, on the road leading to Tikrit. The driver, who had been scrutinizing the reflection of Saddam's face in the driving mirror, asked him what he was doing in Baghdad. "I've been doing a labouring job there, " answered Saddam, in his country accent. A look of incredulity appeared on the man's face. "A labourer, eh! And riding about in taxis?"

"You're quite right," said Saddam, "but I've got some relations at as-Salikh and I'm not sure where it is, so I decided to take a taxi. " "All right, son, I'll take you to the place where the as-Salikh bus stops. That'll be best for you. "He paid his fare and got on the as-Salikh bus. When the bus reached as-Salikh he alighted and looked around him for the road to Tikrit.

It was winter and the fields at the side of the road looked dark green in the sunset. The cold night would soon descend. His wounded leg exuded pain at every step. Suddenly he heard a horse neighing not far off in an adjacent field. He went towards it. There seemed to be no one with it. He stood waiting for its owner to appear. After a while the peasant who owned the horse came along. He seemed taken aback when Saddam offered to buy the horse, but after some hesitation he agreed. Saddam paid him the seventeen dinars he asked, and mounted the horse. He followed the road, which runs parallel to the river Tigris, having first made sure that it would take him to Tikrit.

He bought himself some bread and dates and barley for the horse--rations for the journey. He rode from sunrise to sunset, stopping at nightfall. To have traveled by night might, have attracted the attention of the inspection posts along the road, and he had no identity card. The first night he knocked on the door of one of the Bedouin and said: "Brother, I'll be your guest tonight. " He slept deeply, better than he had slept for days. Early in the morning he brought out his horse and continued his journey. The second night he did not come across any Bedouin houses so he decided to sleep by the roadside. He took the horse's halter in his hand and stretched out on the ground, exhausted, until sunrise, when he rose from his resting place and continued his journey. The third night he had better luck. He stayed with a Bedouin in a tent of goat's hair in the hills overlooking Samarra. There had been a wedding feast and a sheep had been killed, so there was mutton for supper, very welcome after a few days on dry bread and dates. At dawn he threw on his tattered cloak, loosened the horse's bridle and entered the outskirts of Samarra. He had left the town before the sun had reached its zenith and found some peasants selling watermelons. He bought a few to slake his and the horse's thirst.

Just as the sun was about to set, he came to a valley south of ad-Dour, between Samarra and ad-Dour. He felt worn out and chilled to the marrow. Suddenly two cars drove up, blinding him with their headlights. He was unable to stop and went on riding as though ignoring them. Then he heard a voice: "Stop or I'll shoot you."

Then he realized that these were Government cars and that he would have to stop. Nevertheless he tried to turn his horse in the direction of the rough country in the surrounding hills, but it was tired out and did not respond. Soon the cars were hemming him in on both sides, and machine guns were being pointed at him.

"Even so, "he told himself, "perhaps they are not after me, and I must hold out until the end." He drew his cloak over his leg to hide the bandage and looked at them calmly and with complete composure without saying a word. The officer in the car shouted: "What are you running away for, boy?" He realized at once that they were not after him and said quickly: "Why have you stopped me?"

"We're on the look-out for smugglers," said the officer.

"They've sent you to watch the road for them." "You have no right to stop me. I'm not a criminal, "he said more confidently. "If you have any doubts about me you'd better take me to the police station for the night. Then I'll show you where my people live." "All right," said the officer, "show me your identity card." "Come off it," he said, "we're Bedouin around here, we don't carry identity cards. I'm not going to the city so why should I carry an identity card?" The officer's features relaxed.

"All right, I understand now, "he said. But Saddam stuck to his assumed role and said, with a touch of derision in his voice: "Understand what? You take me to the station and you'll soon find out. "But one of the men came up to him and said: "Look, son, get going. But promise that if you meet anyone on the road you won't tell them you've seen a patrol. " With that they got into their cars and drove away.

He mounted his horse and rode off, without looking behind him, making for the little town of ad-Dour, which lies on the river opposite al-'Uwainat, only a few miles from his village of al-Aujah where his family lived.

It was eleven o'clock at night when he entered the town, which he had not seen for four years, and he immediately found himself face to face with the policeman standing in front of the police station. For a moment he was seized with apprehension. He could not, as he well knew,

turn round and go back the way he had come. So what could he do? He decided to deal with the situation as he always did, by attack. He urged on his horse until he was opposite the guards. He greeted them and they, in their astonishment, returned his greeting. He continued as far as the riverbank, where he found a cafe in which there were still a few late-night customers.. He dismounted and asked one of them where the ferry was. The man pointed to another of the customers who, it appeared, was the ferryman. Saddam explained that he wanted to cross over with his horse and gave the ferryman half a dinar. The fare was only 50 mils. The man looked up and replied, rather grumpily. "I can't. It's not allowed at night.

Haven't you heard about the curfew?"

"Look, friend, here's a dinar."

"NO."

"A dinar and a half, then."

"NO".

The man was adamant. Saddam was reluctant to offer him more for fear of arousing suspicion. He went to the riverbank alone and stood for a moment, thinking. It would take three strong men to work the ferry. What was to be done? He had to be in his village before dawn in order to arrange to get across the frontier before it became too dangerous and escape became impossible. He looked again at his horse, and then at the distant bank of the river, still shrouded in darkness, except here and there, where the stars were reflected in the water. At all costs he must be over there within a few hours at the latest. He let the horse's bridle fall from his hand, stroked its head, and left it to go where its fate might lead it. He had decided that he, too, would trust to his fate. No ordinary man could hope to swim across the river on such a cold night and with a painful wound in the leg.

But he had no choice. He stripped off all his clothes, gathered them up into his cloak, rolled them into a ball above his head and fastened them round his neck with cord. Then, placing his little knife between his teeth, he dropped into the river. Only God knows who gave him his superhuman strength in those critical hours as he struggled against the waves with the pain in his leg and the bundle of clothes, heavy with water above his head, threatening all the time to thrust his weary body into the depths. But he struggled on, stubbornly, resisting the waves, defying them to do their worst, doggedly clinging to life, by sheer force of will. How much farther to go? How heavily this darkness weighs upon body and soul! Little by little his strength ebbs, as he drags his wounded leg behind him. But he will not give up. He refuses to die. This rope around his neck, securing the bundle of tattered clothing, which has concealed his body, and his identity, all the way from Baghdad, why not cut it and rest from the burden! Is there no end to this river? This is not the Tigris, which he knows so well, but some desert of ice. But even so, he must hold out and overcome the powers of death.

He was just about to take the knife from between his teeth and cut the cord from round his neck when his feet touched something hard and he realised that the river was getting shallower and that his tenacious will to live had triumphed. The shore, which had seemed so far away, as far as the distance between life and death, was now within reach.

He raised his head above the water and filled his tired lungs with the cold night air. He heard the barking of dogs in the nearby fields and soon his naked body was trembling with the cold as he trod once again on dry land.

He threw himself down on the muddy bank of the river to recover his breath. Then he remembered that he could not walk along the bank naked as he was and he proceeded to put

on his wet clothes. A little further he came upon a small mud hut. He knocked on the door and entered without waiting for permission, as is the custom with country people in these parts. A dumpy woman of about fifty, wearing a black dress and with green tattoo marks on her face, appeared. Finding herself face to face with a young man in dripping wet clothes, obviously shivering with cold, his teeth audibly chattering, at this late hour, her instinctive reaction was to shout: "Thieves, thieves, kill them!" Then from the interior of the hut rushed a man brandishing a thick stick which he was about to bring down on Saddam's head when Saddam, forgetting in that instant the cold and hunger and fatigue, and gathering his wits, shouted: "Here, what's all this about? What sort of a man are you? Aren't you an Arab? You see a man in this state and you start shouting "thieves! thieves!" He turned, as if to go, but the man, who by this time had grasped the situation, refused to let him go and insisted on his remaining.

They lit a fire and he took off his outer garments and dried them. His underclothes looked clean and out of keeping with his old and shabby outer garments. The woman spotted this strange contrast and began to eye him with suspicion. But with instinctive cunning she remarked, commenting on his appearance: "Everything comes from God, my boy. It is He who raises up and He who brings down. "He answered her in the same vein:

"Everything is from God, Auntie."

The blood had returned to his veins and he was feeling himself again. He thought he had better put on his dry clothes and leave. He noticed that the bandage round his leg had slipped. The man saw the wound in his leg and then looked at the woman. Then she looked at him, as though they both understood how things were. They asked him where he was going. He said he was going to his family. They said: "So you didn't hurt yourself jumping off the water sheel, like you said just now. You swam across the river. You're running away from some great calamity. We won't let you go until morning so that we can find out the truth about you. "Surely, he thought, he had not come through all this so that this old woman and her man should hand him over, an easy prey, to the police. Concealing his exasperation, he said in a quiet voice: "Well, supposing what you say is true and that I have committed serious crimes against some tribe or other and they are after me and may catch me here at daybreak and kill me. Would you, who have no connection with me or them, want to take the responsibility?" "No, son," they said, in unison, "No, by God. Go now and God's peace be with you."

He left before dawn, continuing on his lonely way towards the primary school at al-Uwainat where he had heard, when living in Baghdad that his brother Adham now worked as caretaker. He did not know the way, but he must go on until he found it. Suddenly he saw the school name-board. He knocked at the door and from inside came the sound of his brother's voice:

"Who's there?"

"It's me, Saddam."

Adham, recognizing his brother's voice behind the door, opened it, and seeing Saddam, embraced him with tears in his eyes. "Come on now, " said Saddam, "this is no time for tears. We are going back home. I'll go one way and you'll go the other. Look and see how the land lies. You know everything, of course. It's possible that the police will have raided the house. I'll see you in the woods near the house. If the police are about, I'll go and hide somewhere else."

Adham had no precise idea of what had happened. All he knew was that there had been an attempt on Qasim's life and that the police had come and searched the house and had not

found whoever it was they were looking for. All Saddam told him was that he had taken part in the operation. No more.

Adham went to the house of his father, al-Haj Ibrahim, Saddam's uncle and his mother's husband, and astonished his father with the news of Saddam's arrival, and of what he had told him. "Where is he?" his father asked.

"Waiting in the wood to see whether the house is surrounded." "There's no one about," said his father, "call him."

When Saddam entered, his mother embraced him, trying to keep back her tears. But al-Haj Ibrahim kept his feelings well under control. Strong and grave, trying to master the anxiety, which they all felt, he knew that this was no time for displays of emotion. "Have something to eat and drink," he said, "and at four o'clock, just before sunrise, go to Turks Redoubt (a military strong point built by the Turks during the Ottoman occupation) and wait there until seven o'clock this evening. Then don't come straight here. Wait in the corn field until I come and bring you to the house after I've made sure that the coast is clear."

Saddam agreed to his uncle's plan, but before he left at four o'clock he said to Adham: "When it's light, go to Samarra and look for a man called 'Ata Hussein as-Sammara'i or 'Ali an-Naqeeb; if you find either of them, say that Saddam is here."

At day-break, Adham unscrewed a piece of a water pump which they owned and took it with him, as though he were going to Samarra to get it repaired, in case anyone should ask him. He went to 'Ata as-Sammara'i's house, but he was not there. He would be back at five o'clock, his wife said. He waited. When 'Ata came, he whispered his news. "We've been looking for him for days", he said. "You can relax now. You've done your job."

At seven o'clock a military jeep arrived, driven by 'Ata Hussein as-Sammara'i, accompanied by three other men, Abdul-Khaliq as-Sammara'i, Hamud al-Awadi and Hussein Jasim. It stopped some distance away on the edge of the village. They sent his brother to Saddam to bring him to them.

His uncle came and said goodbye. His mother embraced him and invoked God's blessing on him. As he was leaving the house he glanced at the mulberry tree, which he had sown nearby, and the date palm he had planted had begun to put out its green fronds.

His companions told him that there was another comrade who would go with them to the Syrian frontier, because he too was wanted by the police. His name was Fatik as-Safi.

They did not take the road to Syria at once, but remained in hiding for a few days. They had to find a guide to show them the way. There was a man in the neighbourhood called Muhammad Sultan who lived in hiding under an assumed name in the village because the police wanted him on a murder charge. For this reason he was known only to a few close associates by his real name. The local people knew him as 'Abdullah Abu Najm. Since the Syrian frontier was not far away, Muhammad Sultan knew the way and used frequently to cross it in both directions on his motorcycle.

On this occasion he went to Syria to see whether the road was clear, but on the way he was stopped by the police. He told them that he had been to recover sheep, which had strayed over the frontier. They knew that people sometimes employed guides to take them across the frontier, so they let him go. "See that this time you go alone and come back alone," they warned him.

He repeated the exercise. But the police were still spread out along the road. He advised them to let him take Saddam on the back of his motor cycle to the Tharthar area, which is also close to the Syrian frontier, but in another direction, and from there the guide would take him to the frontier on horse-back because it would take six days on foot.

Abdullah mounted his motorcycle, with Saddam, Hussein and Faik as-Safi behind him and they set off for al Tharthar where they found the guide who had agreed to take them to the Syrian frontier. His name was Daham ash-Shamran, and Abdullah an-Najm had arranged everything with him. He paid him forty-five dinars and bought two horses, one large and one small. He also provided them with bread and dates and wished them good luck. The little convoy set out for the Syrian frontier, following an unfrequented route across the desert, known only to guides such as these.

They traveled at night, steering by the stars. If you keep Capricorn over your left shoulder, you will be on course for the Syrian frontier. They did not move by day for fear of running into police patrols. This time the night was the safest traveling companion.

They were seven days and nights in the desert. Daham rode the big horse and Saddam and Fatik the small one. Sometimes one of them would dismount and go on foot. They had many alarms. The lights of police cars would pierce the darkness, which concealed them. Daham himself, who was unaware of their identity, would often expose them to risk when he caught the whiff of fresh bread or the aroma of coffee coming from a Bedouin tent.

For seven days and nights they endured the chill of the desert and meager rations. The Syrian frontier seemed like a distant shore on which they longed to cast their anchor. On the seventh night, Adham, from his lofty perch on his big horse's back, suddenly said: "Give me a handful of earth. Let me see what it's like." Faik said:

"It's got gravel in it and..." Daham did not wait for him to finish. "We're over the frontier," he announced.

He was right. They were there at last. They made for the nearby Bedouin tents. They were Syrian Bedouins and they spent the night as their guests. The next morning, traveling by daylight for the first time, they made for Albukmal, the first center of habitation on the Syrian side of the frontier. From there they went to Deir ez-Zor where they contacted Amin al-Hafiz, who was the military commander of the eastern region. He received them immediately for he had been notified of their impending arrival. Daham was able to eat fresh bread and drink Arab coffee, but not this time in a Bedouin tent.

Saddam Hussein stayed three months in Damascus. On the twenty first of February 1960, he left Syria and stepped out of the aeroplane, which had brought him to the capital of the United Arab Republic, on to the tarmac of Cairo International Airport.

Chapter 7

Hope revived

Cairo was then, as it has always been, a capital for all Arabs, wherever they came from, opening its arms to them, embracing their cause and sympathizing with their hopes for an end to coercion, exploitation and subservience to foreigners in their own countries and for the establishment of a great new democratic and socialist Arab state, stretching from the Atlantic to the Gulf, and nursing within its ample bosom one people, free and happy.

Most of them have passed this way and have known and been known in its cafes, clubs, hotels, squares, thoroughfares and delectable purlieus and have made friends among its warm hearted people. Former and future leaders, military commanders, statesmen, thinkers, writers, poets and artists have all tasted the generous hospitality of this venerable city and, in their turn, have been unstinting in its praise. And when they have returned to their own countries they have cherished fond and enduring memories of days spent on the banks of the Nile.

Saddam Hussein spent more than three years of his life in Cairo. He traveled the length and breadth of Egypt from north to south, from Alexandria to Luxor and Aswan. He was now twenty-two, a tall, slim, good-looking young man, smartly dressed, with dark, piercing eyes, sparkling with intelligence and alertness. Circumstances in Iraq had not allowed him to complete his secondary education. He therefore entered the special Qasr an-Nil school in the fifth class in order to obtain his matriculation. He lived with a number of his Iraqi comrades, fugitives, like himself, from sentence of death, in a house which they had rented in the ad-Duqqi quarter. Thus began a new chapter in his life.

Unlike some of his contemporaries, he did not allow himself to be distracted by the manifold pleasures and opportunities for enjoyment offered by a great city. He was mostly serious to the point of severity, immersed in an almost melancholy preoccupation, at times with his studies and at other times with the shifts and turns of politics, so much so that he would go alone to the Qasr an-Nil Casino where he would sit and contemplate the fuscous waters of the river as they flowed inexorably by. Or he would make his way to a park and spend perhaps an hour or two strolling in the shade of the trees, before returning home to resume the regular tenor of his life, like the hands of a clock. The only relaxation he really enjoyed, apart from reading, strolling in the parks and visiting the places associated with Egypt's ancient past, was playing chess. It is hardly strange that he was a skilful player, since the history of this game is full of the names of leaders in the East and West (among them Gamal Abdul-Nasser) who have excelled at moving their "forces" on these little squares as though practicing to move them later on real battlefields and in real theatres of war. This apart, Saddam would sometimes sit alone writing the occasional letter, to be taken by some trusted traveler to Iraq, to his uncle, al-Haj Ibrahim and his mother or to his uncle al-Haj Khuirallah Talfah, or to one or other of his brothers.

A few months after his arrival in Cairo he sent a message to his uncle saying that he wanted to get married, and that his choice had alighted upon his cousin, Sajidah Khairallah Talfah. When al-Haj Ibrahim got the letter and he learned its purport, he said: "God has put the idea into the boy's mind. " For in all traditionally minded families in our country, marriage, especially early marriage, is regarded as a protection against the evils of temptation.

Al-Haj. Ibrahim thrust the letter into his pocket and, putting his trust in God, made his way to al-Haj Khairallah's house and asked for the hand of his daughter. Al-Haj Khairallah at once gave his consent. "They shall, be married, God willing, when he returns to Iraq, he said. For the time being, she is his betrothed." Al-Haj Ibrahim felt relieved. At least he had not refused him, and he hurried to tell Saddam's mother the news. As for Sajidah, she was filled with a deep joy. Two tears rolled down her cheek, but she wiped them away so that nobody should see them. Saddam had been her childhood companion ever since the day when he left his uncle's house in the village and came knocking at their door, eagerly asking to be allowed to go to school. He was then nearly ten and he had never left their house except to return to it. She had grown up with him, and had moved with him, or he with her, from Tikrit to Baghdad, and had seen him grow to maturity and had watched his struggle as he developed in awareness, and had long cherished for him a deep feeling of respect and admiration, even if, as is the custom with girls in old-fashioned families, she seldom expressed them openly. When she had learnt, after a few months, that he had managed to cross the frontier safely after

the attempt on Qasim and that he was out of danger, she experienced a deep sense of relief and looked forward to his triumphant homecoming. And now she was his betrothed, waiting only for his return.

The exile did not have many years to wait. Just beyond the horizon a beacon was soon to appear, guiding the traveler to a safe anchorage. He himself had an intuitive feeling that the day was not far distant. For he trusted his people and had complete faith in his party and he realized, above all, that this was the will of history.

However, a true fighter never ceases to struggle, in whatever place he may be compelled to pass certain years of his life. So it was with Saddam Hussein. As soon as he set foot on Egyptian soil he placed himself at the disposal of the party organization in Egypt. The higher he rose in its ranks, the greater became his devotion to its cause, until he became a member of its committee of leadership, which supervised not only the organization in Egypt, but also the other organizations scattered about Arab North Africa, the Gaza strip, the Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula.

It was inevitable that his activities, and those of the cells and groups which he organized, should attract the attention of the Egyptian security apparatus. Unfortunately at that time this apparatus was spreading with cancer-like rapidity and seeking, by virtue of its expansion, to exert its influence and authority, sometimes quite independently of the central control exercised by the State, by means of coercive measures directed at Arab militants who had sought refuge in Egypt from the oppressive acts of tyrants in their own countries. Although these oppressive measures affected also the Egyptians themselves, their character and the way in which they were applied to Arab militants were especially repugnant and distasteful.

From time to time, Saddam would return to his house to find that it had been thoroughly searched and his papers read and perhaps copied. Now and again one of his companions would be summoned to the hated secret police headquarters in the Ministry of the Interior and interrogated, threatened with incarceration or expulsion, until Cairo seemed to them to be on the point of becoming just another prison. An end had to be put to all the stupidities perpetuated by the public security apparatus. Five of those condemned to execution in Iraq decided to approach the Office of the President of the Republic and tell them what was happening. They drafted a letter, couched in unmistakably threatening terms, saying that if the police persisted in their incomprehensible campaign of harassment, they would hand themselves over to the Iraqi authorities to carry out the death sentence. The letter was signed by Saddam Hussein, Kareem ash-Shaikhli, Hatim al-' Azzawi, Taha Yasin al-' Ali and Midhat Ibrahim Jum'ah. Shortly afterwards Kareem ash-Shaikhli, representing his companions, was received by a representative of the President's Office who said what is usually said on these occasions, viz. "Of course, we know nothing about it. It's all a mistake on the part of the police. They are acting without instructions.

Certainly you are at liberty to come and go freely in your own homeland, etc. " The important thing was that after that, the trouble became less oppressive. At least it was more civilized or more discreet than it had been before (29).

Not long after that, Saddam Hussein was returning from a trip with his Faculty, the Faculty of Law, to Luxor and Aswan. He went into the bathroom and had just turned on the shower when the telephone rang. Then Kareem ash-Shaikhli knocked at the door, shouting:

"Saddam, Saddam." He opened the door a few inches and peeped out. Kareem was holding the receiver and shouting at the top of his voice: "Saddam, there has been a revolution in Iraq! A revolution in Iraq! Can you hear me?"

Chapter 8

Wanted: A Wise Leader

When discontent had begun to show itself in certain army units with the arbitrary and dictatorial rule of Abdul-Kareem Qasim, it had encountered no military opposition. For Qasim had retreated, with a handful of officers who were loyal to him, to the Ministry of Defence where a limited action (the only one) had been fought between his supporters in the Ministry and the entire military and civilian forces, which had risen against him.

His regime had collapsed under the weight of its internal contradictions. None of the glorious aims of the revolution had been realized, except for an insignificant fraction, and even the insignificant fraction was threatened, balanced precariously on the edge of a precipice. Of the patriotic forces within the country, none remained but the Iraqi Communist Party, or rather its leadership, the patron of Qasim's rule and his only supporter, mistakenly believing that it could hold him in check and then steer the regime from the side-lines and render the pressure of fear, away from the control of the nationalist forces, and more particularly of the Arab Baath Socialist Party, in the event of the collapse of his rule and the settlement of accounts which would inevitably follow.

When that moment seemed imminent and it became clear that Qasim's regime was poised to fall about his ears at one blow from the Baath forces alone, the communist leadership, perceiving the danger of their situation, committed a fatal error. It was an error of such magnitude that its effects were to be felt for many years to come until, long afterwards, the Communist Party corrected its ideological viewpoint.

The Communist Party leadership put out its famous ukase in which it stated:

"Fellow countrymen! To arms to crush the reactionary colonialist conspiracy, Masses of our mighty people fighting for freedom! Workers, peasants and intellectuals and all patriotic and democratic forces, An insignificant clique of reactionary officers and conspirators has made a desperate bid to seize power in preparation for handing our country back into the clutches of colonialists and reactionaries, They have gained control of the broadcasting stations at Abu Ghraib and are trying to incite a massacre among the men of our heroic army to further their base aims.

To the streets, proud masses of our fighting people! Let us sweep our country clean of renegades and traitors.

To arms, in defence of our national independence and of everything our people have won, Form committees to defend our national independence. Forward! The people, under the leadership of the democratic forces, will inflict an ignominious defeat on this base conspiracy; we call upon the Government to arm us. Forward! On to the streets to crush the conspiracy and the conspirators. "(30)-(31)

Certain' communist formations did in fact respond to these frantic appeals. Some of them managed to get hold of light arms and directed their fire at army detachments loyal to the incipient revolution in order to give a measure of encouragement and support to the resistance. But these were merely random and suicidal undertakings, unjustifiable by any standards, for to defend the Republic and national independence was by no means the same as to defend Qasim and his personal dictatorship. And, what was more important, national independence was not at risk and the Republic was not, at that time, in danger of collapse, It

was only 'Abdul-Kareem' Qasim who was in danger and only his arbitrary reign of terror which was about to collapse, to be followed by a counting of heads.

What was the meaning of that desperate throw on the part of the communist, doomed as it was in advance to failure? What was to benefit? Qasim himself was trying, from behind the scenes, to manipulate the forces on the political stage as a puppet-master manipulates his puppets. He was intent only on remaining in power and staying on his throne. The proof of this is that he tried more than once, and by a variety of methods, to strike a blow at the communists themselves. But they, deluded as they were, and confident as they were of the strength which they did not possess, went on playing his game, lost in the desert of his despotic power, chasing mirages which vanished at their approach. The result of all this was an orgy of collective self-destruction.

How do the great tragedies of history come about? Is there any virtue, when all is done and a tragedy has occurred, in finding out its causes, its origins and the motives of those who played a part in it? Could one thereby prevent its recurrence? Perhaps. But what was the crime of the victims who fell in the hundreds and thousands on the sidewalk of history with no witness even to point out their graves? Who can now tell the names of those who fell at Mosul and Kirkuk, Baghdad and Basra, in bloody uncalled for combat between citizens of one homeland? Who will make up to the country for its lost sons, however much it may repent, regret or atone for the handful of misguided and perverted creatures who were forced into the abyss by their errors, perversion or even their crimes?

Nevertheless history, lavish in its contrasts, seems sometimes to behave in a way, which is almost frivolous. Those into whose hands were thrust the Communist Party's recklessly inflammatory pamphlets on the morning of the 8th of February 1969, telling of conspiracy, treason and colonialist intrigues and calling on their members to take up arms against them and crush them, were themselves ten years later to invite the leaders of the

Iraqi Communist Party to sit down with them and conclude with them in July 1973 the Charter of the National Patriotic and Progressive Front. It is inconceivable that, the "conspirators", "traitors" and "agents of colonialism had in those ten years so repented of their sins as to eschew their conspiracies, renounce their treason and repudiate their colonialist connections, in order that the leaders of the Communist Party might consent to join them in the "patriotic", "national" and "progressive" front. Indeed, the Charter stated that it was under their leadership, i.e. the leadership of the Arab Baath Socialist Party.

History is, as Hegel said, essentially tragic. Even so, how exorbitant is the price, which the peoples, the masses of ordinary people, are always called upon to pay.

Michel 'Aflaq, Secretary-General of the Arab Baath Socialist Party, once defined (on 20.2.63) the attitude of the Baath towards communism:

"Our attitude towards communism as a creed and as an international movement is not a negative one and our view of Marxism is one of appreciation, for we, as socialists, have borrowed a great deal from Marxism. But co-existence with communist parties in Arab countries is quite another matter, for these parties have proved, on many occasions, that they do not understand the Arab Nationalist Movement and have many times stood in the way of this popular movement. The truth is that these parties, in relation to the movement for liberation and socialist unity, cannot be classed as belonging to the Left; indeed they belong to the Right, because they obstruct the liberation and progress of the masses.

"The communists have been openly hostile to unity, which is what the masses demand, and have used barbarous and savage methods to arrest this current. I therefore say most

emphatically that the party, the Arab Baath Socialist Party, must be very wary of sliding into a position of hostility towards communism because this is the best way of letting in colonialism and reaction to exploit the situation (32).”

As for Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, who was Prime Minister on 8.2.1963, he announced that "the stand of the Revolution takes vis-a-vis those who opposed it by Force, does not mean that the Revolution is fighting communism as a creed". He went on to say:

"Once the Revolution broke out, the Iraqi Communist Party issued a statement calling on its members and supporters to carry arms against the Revolution, and inciting them to kill and annihilate. The response of the Revolution was one of self-defence. We had either to stand firm against apostasy, or to give up all our values and principles because the communists had resisted the Revolution. We chose the first stand because it was the logical and sensible solution."

"We are not fighting communism as a creed. We only take precautionary measures against a specific political organization in a specific country which experience has shown to be against the Arab revolution and Arab unity.

"As Arab leftists, we fight against colonialism. We do not forget the friendly attitude taken by the Soviet Union to certain Arab questions, especially in the latest stages of our national history, but we insist on setting up our own socialist experiment (33).”

However that may be, the revolution, in its short life, has gone on trying to cut a road for itself among the rocks, to fight on more than one front and to realize the objectives for which it was made.

"It had stressed the importance of going forward along the path of transforming society along socialist lines on a basis of democracy and mass participation, and it had regarded the workers, peasants and intellectuals, revolutionary soldiers and civilians and the petty bourgeoisie as the forces in alliance with which the socialist revolution in its early stages will be created.

"It had also stressed the importance of democratic control by the workers of the means of production and have considered the agrarian revolution to be an indispensable step, in order that the economy shall grow rapidly. I have been aware that the admission of the peasants as participants in carrying out the agrarian revolution is an essential condition of its success.

"It had also stressed the importance of freedom for popular organizations-of workers, peasants, professional people and women, and of their independence of government control as a necessary condition for the protection of such groups and classes.

"Furthermore, the few months which have elapsed since the Revolution have been crowded with achievements in the fields of agrarian reform, industrialization and planning and also with many projects carried out by the people themselves with the help of workers, peasants, the armed forces and the revolutionary intellectuals. The Revolution has been anxious to promote the interest of the toiling masses, and more particularly of the working class, by means of progressive legislation and by protecting these classes from exploitation and the arbitrary use of power (34)."

But despite this, the revolution was unable to continue. It had not gone more than a few paces before it stumbled and fell. It tried to walk on a tight rope strung across a yawning chasm: economic blockade and misrepresentation. For the information media in socialist Europe, overt as well as clandestine, under the weight of information supplied to them by the Iraqi communists and the influence of the struggle being waged between the communists and the

nascent revolution, did not cease to attack the regime, which was still in its infancy, to say nothing of course of the attack launched against it by the forces of colonialism and reaction. Little by little the revolution found itself hemmed in between its frontiers, the walls around it getting higher day by day. On the other hand, the new government, in which the Arab Baath Socialist Party assumed control for the first time, trying to apply its ideas and to set up an experiment in the political and ideological sense of the word, was day by day losing its unity of leadership and becoming a prey to the creeping evils of disintegration, sectarianism and schism. It lacked a wise leader and, perhaps at the same time, a resolute leader. So it began to slide down the steep and slippery slope and over into the abyss. This was on the eighteenth of November, when ' Abdulsalam ' Arif turned against the Baathists and seized power for himself, riding roughshod over those who had raised him up, trampling on those who, nine months earlier, had confirmed upon him the high office of President of the Republic.

Once more, history had revealed itself as essentially tragic.

Chapter 9

A Non-binding Decision

When Saddam Hussein landed at Baghdad after the revolution, the party made him a member of the Central Peasants' Bureau, where he continued to work until, Abdulsalam ' Arif coup on 18 November 1963.

In the last few months of the short-lived revolution he was able, by virtue of his intelligence or of his acute sense of history, to pick out phenomena floating on the surface of political life, which struck him as odd. Then it would not be long before what had seemed odd began to appear suspicious and his suspicion would deepen to a profound conviction that the revolution was set on a course, which could only lead to disaster.

He was greatly alarmed by the lack of a wise and resolute leader and was troubled by a feeling that the revolution was rushing headlong towards an unknown but preordained fate. These feelings were strengthened by the character of the discussions at the Baath Party's fifth regional conference, which was held at Baghdad at about that time. It was apparent to him that the leadership was divided. Worse, the division was not on matters of principle or ideology. The magnitude of the Impending disaster was revealed to him when the conference failed to resolve the feud brewing in its midst, notwithstanding the presence of its sessions of representatives of the national leadership. It was not a conference capable of decision. The national leadership also was clearly irresolute. Indeed the two protagonists obtained an equal number of votes in the election at the end of the conference. The only meaning to be inferred was that the revolution was in the grip of two equal and opposing forces and there was no leader capable of decision or of throwing his weight into one scale or the other or to decide which side adhered the more closely to party's principles and traditions, and that a split down middle was now inevitable.

He could do nothing but remain silent. He was an ordinary party member with no hand in the ship. But at least he had courage and ability and impartiality, which enabled him to rise above squabbles. Nevertheless his words began to ring strangely in his listeners' ears. Who was this man who come to such a conference armed only with his principles and attack sectarianism, factiousness, personal and spite, and speak in this objective tone of party as if he were an evangelist, come to call an erring to prayer.

He assumed this role at all the party conferences attended until he reached the regional conference, but spite of the circumstances surrounding the conference he managed to secure

election to the conference. In this he was helped by that very game in which the others had immersed themselves also by the votes of conservative members who at critical and bewildering time were beginning to feel and alienated by the irrelevant feuding which was on around them. When he appeared at the conference in Damascus, he found that the diagnosis the situation, which he had made at Baghdad, was valid. He let fly at the person whom he responsible for driving the revolution on to the rocks, Saleh as-Sa' adi, the regional secretary. Saleh as became obvious to him in the conference hall, was a childishly impetuous and irresponsible individual, master of idle revolutionary claptrap, with an especial fondness for that most overworked specimen of revolutionary claptrap, "the spirit of the revolution".

One day, Saddam Hussein stood up in front of the national conference and uttered these prophetic words:

I do not believe that when the next conference is held, will any longer be a revolution in the Iraqi region. "Not more than a month and a half were to elapse before Abdulsalam ' Arif struck his treacherous blow and the gates of the. prisons and concentration camps opened to receive the Baathists and Arif set about in a frenzy of enthusiasm to liquidate the Baath and possess himself, by means of his coup, of the keys to power.

The few days preceding the coup were full of omens of what was about to happen to him. Four days before the coup, he was sitting in the Peasants' Bureau with a few colleagues, among them Ahmad al-' Azuz, Muhsin Sha'lan and Sayid Hussein Jabr when two men walked in and trained their sub-machine guns on them. They put up their hands and surrendered. Then, with the speed of lightning, Saddam drew his revolver, which he always carried, and pointed it at them. What was it all about?

No one answered. It was obvious that any exchange of fire at that short range would have fatal consequences for all concerned. The intruders could do nothing but run for it, firing as they went. They hit a peasant called Yasin Kamal, a member of the Baghdad Peasants' Federation. When the story was published it was falsified to make it appear that it was Saddam who had fired on the National Guards, wounding one and killing another.

Two days later he was riding in his Volkswagen going in the direction of the Peasant Bureau's headquarters in al Karkh, on the other side of the river, with Ahmad Taha al-' Azuz sitting beside him, when a National Guard stopped the car and once more pointed a sub-machine gun at him. "Stop!" When he had stopped, Latif ad Dulaimi came up to him (it was the first time they had met) and spoke to him. Then Dulaimi noticed that he had someone with him in the car. He told the National Guards who were standing around not to say anything abusive. Latif got into the car with them and took them to General Staff Headquarters without giving them reasons for the order to arrest Saddam Hussein and Ahmad al-' Azuz. But there was no one there. He stayed there, sitting in his seat with his companion without Ahmad saying a word. Then a comrade, Hatim al-Azzawi, who had taken part with him in the assassination attempt on Abdul-Kareem Qasim, came into the Headquarters dressed in National Guard uniform and carrying a pistol. He said: "I want someone to tell me what Saddam has done." Nobody answered. He then said:

"I take it then that there is no problem about him. " Again nobody answered. He looked at Saddam and said to him:

"Come with me then. "They went out into the road and he became more certain than ever that this terror-charged atmosphere must presage some outrageous act. Only two days later, Abdulsalam Arif's guns were trained on the party's heart.

On 19 November a flying column of the tank squadron known as the 14th Ramadan took up a position at the crossing between the Republican Palace and the Broadcasting Headquarters. One of its officers was Adnan Khairallah, son of al-Haj Khairallah Talfah, Saddam's uncle and father-in-law. Adnan was a second brother to Saddam having been brought up with him in the same house and having lived with him most of their lives, in Tikrit or in Baghdad. Before the coup Saddam used often to visit him at the squadron's headquarters, he got to know a number of his brother officers. It was only natural that he should turn to them as they were guarding the important road between these two points, on the day following the coup. He explained the situation to them frankly. "This is not a corrective exercise as you are trying to make out. Correction is a matter for the Party itself. Whatever the errors of the leadership, it is up to the Party to keep going and try to correct its errors from within. This is clearly a conspiracy against the Party." They were all convinced. "We are ready," they said. "All we want is a decisive stand." But he was not in a leading position such as would have enabled him to make that decisive stand.

The next day he was able to meet "Abu Haitham" (Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr). He explained the feelings of the officers and their readiness to protect the party and strike against the conspiracy. Later he met Hardan Tikriti and told him: "They have used you today. Tomorrow they will have no further use for you." He wanted them to break with Abdulsalam Arif, Tahir Yahya and Rasheed Musallah. After a discussion lasting two hours, Hardan was convinced. He went to the conference of officers held in the Military Intelligence Directorate and entered into an altercation with Arif.

Hardan said: "This is an internal matter for the Party. The Baath Party will remain." Arif rounded on him with the words: "This is a people's revolution. The Baath Party is finished."

After this Saddam, in collaboration with Abu Haitham, steered Hardan directly towards rallying the members of the Party with a view to having it restored to legality. But they were overtaken by events. It was decided to transfer the first tank squadron to Basra. They thus lost the only force, which might have sustained their hopes of doing anything useful. **(There is a main link in the revolutionary struggle, which has not hitherto been known. When comrade Naji Majid was aide to Tahir Yahya and the people in power, including President Abdulsalam Arif and members of the Council of Ministers, were holding some meetings in the National Assembly, a plan was drawn up for Saddam Hussein to lead a commando group of Party members. Naji Majid was to facilitate their safe entry into the National Assembly through the outer gate. When they stormed the debating chamber and opened fire on those present, the Party was to declare the revolution throughout the country. But this plan was not carried out because First Lieutenant Naji Majid was transferred from the Prime Minister, Thir Yahya's office.)**

But hope is never totally extinguished in the hearts of true revolutionaries. On the contrary, the challenge kindled a fire in the heart of Saddam Hussein. He went on in the dark, groping for a way to give new substance to his hopes. He approached a number of his comrades urging them to join and stay together to rebuild the party. Among these were Faik as-Safi, Abdullah Sallum and Hatim al-'Azzawi. He had got together a group of fifteen comrades, as the time approached for holding the seventh national conference in Damascus, and they decided to attend the conference clandestinely, slipping across the Iraqi-Syrian frontier. This was to be the beginning of a new underground phase of his life, but this time within the frontiers of his own homeland.

In Damascus he met the founder of the Party, Michel Aflaq, and talked with him about the situation in Iraq and what had happened to the Party there. Ali Saleh as-Sa'adi was also there. It looked as though the conference was going to get bogged down in sterile debate between diversant and indeed conflicting points of view. It seemed unlikely that the conference would

be able to arrive at a decision, which would ensure the continuance of the Party in the Iraqi region. Saddam suggested that the Iraqis should not attend the conference in force. Michel Aflaq, convinced that this was the proper course, readily agreed.

Saddam Hussein had a further meeting with the founder and told him that he would go back to Iraq and continue his work. He would take with him the necessary printing equipment to enable the struggle to be carried on underground, and would try to form provisional leadership nuclei until the national leadership had decided what kind of leadership was needed to direct operations within Iraq. He suggested that he should not be a member of such leadership, for those who had split the party would concentrate all their attacks on him and he did not want even a single supporter to be lost for the sake of Saddam Hussein. But he assured Aflaq that his services would always be at the disposal of that leadership if required.

He slipped back over the frontier to Baghdad, where he began to establish secret contacts with Abu Haitham and threw himself enthusiastically into the work of reforming the party organization. When a decision of the national leadership failed to reach him he issued a statement in the name of the "Provisional Regional Leadership", announcing the dismissal of Ali Saleh as-a'adi and Hazim Jawad and laying down directives for the next stage. It soon looked as though the tide of dissention was on the ebb and that things were moving rapidly in the right direction. Then an order came from the national leadership appointing a new regional leadership, to consist of Abdul Kareem ash-Shaikhli, as secretary, and Saddam Hussein, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, Muhammad Sabri al-Hadithi and Hassan al- Amiri. The leadership was thus complete. ' Abdul Kareem ash-Shai-khli had it one time been Assistant Military Attache in the Iraqi Embassy in Lebanon. When' Arif's coup took place he left his post and went to Syria whence he crossed over into Iraq and took over his position in the new party leadership.

Particular responsibilities were allotted to each member of the new leadership. Ash-Shaikli was Secretary. He had no other responsibilities. Abu Haitham, as former Prime Minister was under close surveillance and this meant that his movements were restricted. Muhammad Sabri al-Hadithi took over responsibility for the Labour Bureaus and foreign contacts. Hassan al-Amiri was made responsible for the Baghdad branch. Saddam Hussein's responsibilities were many and various: the Peasants' Bureau, the Central Military Bureau, the Baghdad Military Branch, and External Liaison with Military Organizations outside Baghdad. In other words all military organizations in addition to the Peasants' Bureau. A bureau was later set up for party members and supporters in the Officers' Reserve.

They set to work. Once again the regional leadership's statements were being published and statements by the national leadership were being reprinted in Baghdad.

With the financial support given by the national leadership and from their own financial resources within the region, they began to buy arms and acquired two "centres", one for the storage of arms in the house of Hussein Mahmud and the other for purposes of concealment in Talal al-Faisal's house, where Abdullah Khalil was living.

Hope of revolutionary action against the regime of Abdulsalam Arif revived with the rapid growth of organizational capability and the leadership met to study their plans and to assess the situation.

They asked for arms from the national leadership and began to manufacture homemade hand grenades out of some TNT, which they had managed to get hold of.

Saddam Hussein and Abdul Karim ash-Shaikli made them with their own hands out of materials collected by a comrade named Ghalib Mahmud, a fisherman and a brother-in-law of Saddam Hussein. His younger half-brother, Barzan, helped in this operation.

The plan called for an attack on the Republican Palace. Control was to be obtained of the guard units who were then to be used to encircle the Palace itself. They had party members inside the Republican Guard. Saddam went with a comrade named Abdul Kareem Mustafa Nasrat and confided the plan to a party member who was an officer in the tank squadron of the Guard. He agreed. His task was to make it possible for Saddam's group to enter the guard, and then it would be up to them. Zero hour for the operation was fixed. A shipment of was supposed to be arriving from Syria just before, i.e. before the 5th of September 1964.

Suddenly the plot was discovered. A lightning was made on the members of the Party themselves on the fourth of September, i.e. one day before the date. The shipment of arms did not arrive until the sixth when it was intercepted. The authorities were themselves with rage for they realized that the Guard had been penetrated. A savage campaign launched to arrest the leadership; some of those arrested having informed on it under the threat of torture. The party organization broke up as a result of this sudden blow and had to be built up anew.

One evening Saddam Hussein was sitting with Abdul Kareem Shaikhli studying the situation and reconsidering their strategy. It was just one o'clock in the morning Saddam got up and was about to leave. "Where are going?"

"To sleep in the hide-out where the arms are hidden.

"The police patrols are very active these days," said Abdul Kareem. "Better spend the rest of the night here." That very night there was a raid on the arms cache. Saddam Hussein had been saved by pure chance. But neither Saddam nor Kareem knew that the hideout had been raided and the arms seized.

The next day Saddam went himself to the hideout. It was the main hideout containing the printing center and Abdul-Kareem ash-Shaikhli's secret headquarters.

With him in the car were Abdul-Kareem ash-Shaikhli himself and Talal al-Feisal. He got out of the car, went to the door and rang the bell. Suddenly a sub machine gun was pointed at him, and behind the door a voice shouted, "Stop". "Don't move." Thus did this valuable prey fall, an easy victim, into the hands of his enemies? But Saddam, who had strong nerves and a cool head, asked, as if nothing had happened: "Isn't this Muhammad's house?" Once more the voice shouted from inside:

"I tell you, don't talk. Put up your hands." With the same icy self-control and in a voice devoid of emotion Saddam replied: "My dear fellow, what's all this about? Machine guns? Is there no government? Has the world stopped turning?" At the same time he quickly put his hand on the revolver he was carrying. He placed his finger on the trigger and shouted at the policeman to drop the gun. The policeman was taken by surprise and jumped out of the way. But no shot came. He aimed again, but again there was no shot. When the policeman realized that the revolver had let him down, he returned to the charge, certain that he had him beaten. But in his astonishment he had forgotten to draw his sub machine gun; Saddam began to retreat in the direction of the car in which Kareem and Talal were still sitting. No sooner did they see him in this predicament than, in their astonishment they began to move the car away from the house. Talal jumped out of the car carrying a pistol, which he had forgotten to load. Saddam fired a third time at the policeman, who was pursuing him, but again there was no shot. He began to run with the revolver in his hand until he was some distance away from the policeman, and drew a fourth time; but instead of aiming at him, he decided that he would not

hit him as he was now out of range. So he fired above his head, the policeman running back towards the shelter of the house. Saddam jumped into the car and drove off with his companions.

The government now took stern measures against such members of the Baath Party as they could lay their hands on. One by one the leadership were arrested: Abu Haitham, Abdul-Kareem ash-Shaikhli, Hassan al-' Amiri, and with them most of the party's foremost cadres and enormous numbers of members and supporters. All this placed a great strain on Saddam Hussein, but he never lost his determination or his daring or his hope. He would start work at dawn and go out on to the road with the workers on their way to their factories until just before eight o'clock in the morning. At night, when it was dark, he would be out until just before midnight. At that hour security patrols were less conspicuous and it was easier to move about quickly. He was in any case adept at disguising himself, so that even some of his close associates were unable to recognize him until he revealed himself. He brought some old cars and changed their number plates, using them in rotation.

Once when he was crossing Republic Bridge on his way to al Bab ash Sharqi in a black Ford Zodiac he encountered a police car carrying an officer of the rank of Lieutenant Colonel, who looked at him intently and then spoke on his radio transmitter. Immediately all Saddam's instinctive alertness and vigilance came into play. He always carried with him in the car a sub machine gun, and two hand grenades as well as his revolver, from which he never allowed himself to be parted. He said to his comrade, Ghalib Mahmud who was with him: "Look out! Get the gun ready and open the window a little. But don't fire until I tell you. " The car proceeded on its way and, parallel to it, the police car. When they reached a pedestrian crossing the officer shouted at a traffic policeman to stop Saddam's car, but the policeman went up to the officer and saluted him. In an instant, Saddam's car shot forward, accelerating rapidly and, vanished in the crowded street, leaving the unfortunate policeman to face the oburgating of his irate superior.

Tension increased and the security forces stepped up their attacks on houses where they thought he might be. He for his part kept moving from one hideout to another, but his sang-froid, confidence and hope never deserted him for one moment. About that time a message arrived from the national leadership telling him to leave Baghdad and go to Damascus as not to fall into the hands of the regime's secret police and be put in prison. This was an order.

Saddam looked at the national leadership's emissary and said: " All my life I have been in the habit of obeying orders, but this is an order which I do not feel myself to be bound by. To do so would be to harm those party members who remain and damage their morale, at a time when they are more than ever in need of someone to support and encourage them and keep the flame of hope burning in their hearts. That is my reply, comrade, and give my regards to the national leadership.

But the national leadership, in the face of this unyielding attitude, proposed to him that he should record a message in his own voice to be broadcast from Damascus radio as though he were speaking from there. The idea appealed to him, but instead of saying that he was in Damascus he said that he was in Baghdad and that the recording was being broadcast from Damascus. It was heard by the Baathists under arrest and helped to raise their morale in their prisons and concentration camps.

The siege was intensified and the security forces set about their search for him with a new frenzy. They searched every corner of the country, leaving no stone unturned. Armoured cars, equipped with radio, were stationed at street corners and in squares. Everyone was suspect. Hundreds and thousands of people were interrogated, cajoled and terrorized. At last one of them, unable to withstand this inhuman treatment, revealed that Saddam Hussein was in the

house of one Tariq Jihad, where he soon found himself surrounded on all sides. Had the moment at last arrived for him to fall into the enemy's snare? Was everything over and was there nothing for it but to throw up his hands and let them put the handcuffs on him?

He knew he ought to resist. But was there any point in resisting? Wishing to test the strength of the forces surrounding him, he fired a few shots from his revolver, which were answered from every direction by a hail of machine-gun bullets. No. Resistance was useless this time. It would only lead to innocent policemen being killed in addition to the punishment, which would be unleashed on the owners of the house who were sheltering them. In a loud ringing voice he called out: "Down with Abdulsalam Arif and long live the Arab Baath Socialist

Party," and surrendered.

When the soldiers reached the upper floor where he was standing, some of the officers began to display their lack of breeding by using insulting language to a fifteen-year-old girl and her mother, the sister and mother of his comrade Tariq Jihad. He shook like one possessed, and picking up a hand grenade which had been placed unnoticed in a paper bag on a nearby table, he shouted at the officer: "If you repeat that insolent expression, you see this grenade, I'll kill all of you-and myself, " The officer in charge of the raid, realizing the seriousness of the situation, ordered his subordinate to desist from his obscene language.

Saddam went into his room, dressed, got out two packets of Rothman cigarettes which he had by him and gave them to one of the police, "No," he said, with a deprecatory gesture, "you will need them yourself, "

"I don't think' so," he replied, "there'll be no more smoking for me.

Chapter 10

Until all the bars are broken

In the Public Security building, the Director General, Rasheed Muhsin, walked up and down in his room, rubbing his hands with glee, for the last victim had just dropped into his net. When Saddam was brought in he tried to compose himself, to appear calm and perhaps even nonchalant. "Saddam, " he said, "why did you give the policeman your cigarettes?"

"So that you should not push a cigarette under the door for me."

"Well now, Saddam, everything is over. Your fellow leaders in the party have been talking quite frankly to me.

I don't think we need to hear what you have to say. Nonetheless, Saddam, I think you should explain to me how all this happened. Eh?"

"If you know everything, Rasheed, how will anything I say help you? I will tell you something for which I don't think you will now care. You may think it's impossible, but you will understand later what I mean. It's a little story I heard when I was small. I have never forgotten are you listening? In Ottoman times a man was accused of killing a favourite of the Ruler. They seized him and took him for interrogation. They used every method of torture that they knew. They even flayed him alive and pulled out his finger and toenails, but they couldn't make him talk. They took him to court and the court set him free. The man was from Mosul and when he came out of prison he went to the public baths at Mosul for a bath. There was another man having a wash who said to him: "Would you like some jilani?" (A kind of red clay, which was used instead of soap.)

"Yes, please," he said, and he took a piece. Then the man said: "Would you like me to help you wash your back?"

"Yes, please," he said. So the man washed his back. While he was doing so the man asked: "What's this? Why is your back like this?" (It bore clear traces of torture.) "Oh, aren't you so-and-so?" "Yes," he replied. Then the man asked him: " And won't you tell me how you killed that fellow?" The former prisoner turned and gave him a slap on the face. The other people who were bathing with them shouted: "Here, what sort of a fellow are you? This man helps you and you slap his face?" The man looked at them and said: "You haven't heard the story. Why did I strike him? This man wants me to tell him what the government was unable to find out from me after torturing me for a whole year!"

"Now, do you understand, Rasheed? I have told you this story, and now you must try and see what you can do. But if you use those methods with me and you then ask me my name, I shall not tell you. I shall not even tell you my name."

"No, no. You must have heard some exaggerated stories. We're not like that at all. Your fellow leaders confessed without any pressure or compulsion. You shall see Kareem ash-Shaikhli for yourself. He will tell you that everything was quite normal."

Kareem ash-Shaikhli had been subjected to cruel torture and had broken down under interrogation. They imagined that if he spoke to Saddam this would persuade him not to stand up to them and submit himself to torture. Indeed, even Kareem himself imagined that he would be able to spare his comrade the cruelty of torture and persuade him not to stand up to them. They did actually arrange a meeting between them, but Saddam wanted to meet Kareem for a quite different reason, namely to find out from him what had happened, and how much the comrades inside the prison knew about what was going on outside and to raise his morale which had suffered during his interrogation. After the meeting, Saddam was led once more to Rasheed Muhsin's room.

"Ah, Saddam."

"I still stick to what I told you last time. Do you remember the story I told you?"

"Saddam, look, Tahir Yahya wants to see you."

"Tahir Yahya?" Tahir Yahya was the Prime Minister.

"Of course you can take me to him by force. I mean, put the handcuffs on me and take me to his office. But I tell you that I have no wish at all to see Tahir Yahya. I regard them all as traitors, Tahir Yahya, Abdulsalam Arif. Look, I once took a sub-machine gun and fired at Abdul-Kareem Qasim and hit him in Rasheed Street. I didn't hate him. I have never hated anyone in my life. But tell ' Abdulsalam Arif that I do hate him, because he smashed in the skulls of those who raised him up. He is a person without morals or principles."

"As you please, Saddam."

Here the dialogue ended. The policeman conducted him to the bottom of the Public Security building where he was placed in solitary confinement, seated on a small chair, his hands tied behind him with an iron chain, one end of which was tied to the bars of an upper window for seven whole days.

Seven whole days in that condition he did not say a word. They found that it was no use going on so they took him to at- Taji prison where the usual interrogation began.

During the interrogation he won over the interrogators. When the interrogator' Abdulqadir al-Janabi asked him: "Were you preparing a revolution?" He said: "Yes, but the responsibility for that was mine alone. Ahmad Hasan al-Bakr had nothing whatever to do with it. Indeed, we regarded him as a friend of' Abdulsalam Arif, and so we didn't trust him with secrets. If you have heard otherwise you are certainly mistaken. " He wanted, so to speak, to free that man whom he loved and respected of any suspicion and to take upon himself any accusation which might have been made against him. All serious charges he took upon himself, accepting the sole responsibility.

Prison is a human melting pot. Any precious or base metal in a man is quickly revealed behind its bars and locked doors. It is seldom that a militant enters prison, if he is of sterling quality, without his virtues being confirmed. Indeed his hardness and brilliance may show more than hitherto when he is alone and under siege.

When Saddam entered prison it was as though it was already familiar to him and that there was nothing repellent to him about its grim, gray walls, its dismal black bars and its narrow windows set high up in the wall and out of reach. It was here that his paternal instincts came fully into play. He was not the oldest among his comrades in years; indeed he was one of the youngest. But he began to think of them and to treat them as though he were a father, bound to his sons by bonds of affection, guiding, instructing and sometimes chiding them.

When he entered his cell for the first time and he heard the melancholy sound of the heavy bolts clanking behind him, a strange vague feeling came over him, an intuitive conviction that he was not going to die. The idea of death had never entered his mind. Even when the possibility of his being sentenced to death had occurred to him, he had always comforted himself with the thought that unless they executed him quickly, he would escape.

But when his friends abroad sent him messages saying that they might be able to engineer his escape and that they would help him to get away he refused, saying that if he were to escape he would not do so alone and leave his comrades in prison and that they would do better to bide their time. His plan (he always had a plan) centered on freeing the Military Bureau, the Baghdad Military Bureau. The plan was actually prepared and the members of the Baghdad Military Bureau escaped. After they had escaped it was decided to transfer all the remaining prisoners (a number of them had already been released) to prison Number 1.

There were seven prisoners left. As is the custom with political prisoners all over the world, they began staging a hunger strike to obtain better conditions and to be allowed newspapers, books and visits. The regime, which was on the point of collapse due to internal pressures, acceded to most of their demands. The long days behind bars began gradually to shorten, by way of intellectual journeys through the masterpieces of world literature. Saddam's days were passed in reading-novels and books on philosophy and art.

But his mind was still occupied with thoughts of escape. He immediately set about reconstructing the organization within the prison and building up morale, and confronting authority's representative within the prison, the prison governor Ali ash-Shaqr, with a wall of granite. The leadership within the prison, headed by Saddam, issued an order that the comrades should not respond to' Ali ash-Shaqr's sly questions when he asked them whether they had any problems. This is a method used in prisons, everywhere, to break the spirit of prisoners and then to single out the vulnerable ones until, by degrees, they become dependent on the authorities.

Suddenly the governor found himself dealing with one man who spoke with one voice. Saddam Hussein, the prisoner in Number 1 prison, told him: "' Ali ash-Shaqr, you must understand that even in here we are a party. We have our organization, our tradition, our

orders and our discipline. From now on, none of the comrades will answer your questions, so you may save yourself the trouble." From that day on, Ali ash-Shaqr sensed that something had happened to these prisoners.

Then it was decided to put into effect the plan for escape. They had been able to win over the prison guards, so that they allowed them to have the inner doors, i.e. the doors to the cells, open all night. So the comrades were able to meet at night to discuss and make their arrangements. A message was sent to comrades outside to have saws for sawing through the iron bars brought in by the women when they came on visits. Actually a woman named Umm Muhammad Isma'il, sister of the late General Hammad Shihab, brought the saws. Then the bars began to fall.

The sound of the radio was used to drown the noise of the bars being sawn through, especially at times when there was heavy rain and a howling wind outside. It was done secretly so that even some of the comrades knew nothing about it. When a bar was removed it would be left in position until the other bars had been removed. The plan was that after the sawing was finished, two of the strongest comrades should jump on the guard standing beside the window, take away his rifle, and drag him inside. Then the rest, one by one, would cross the courtyard, jump on to the roof of the second block and lower themselves on to the other side. They were to take a mattress with them to throw over the barbed wire and then scramble over. It was decided that they should in order of seniority in the party: the leadership first, members of the special organization, then the officers, and so on.

Everything would have gone almost according to plan, but for a spate of amnesties, including the detained officers, following a vigorous campaign for the release of the prisoners, which had been mounted, from abroad and a growing sense of discontent and resentment in the army.

They decided to defer execution of the plan until the rest of the officers and others who might be included in the amnesties had been released, so that only seven of the seventy detainees would remain. **(Seventy lawyers had volunteered to defend them and actually attended the first few sessions of the Court.)**

The Authorities decided to transfer them to another block and it became clear that their escape plan would no longer be feasible.

They began to work out a new plan, relying this time on getting round the guards who would accompany them on the way to the court. By this time the organization had begun, to some extent, to resume its activity outside so that there were at least a few comrades there who could help in arranging the escape. Fortunately also, the prisoners were now entitled to more frequent visits from relatives. These were now allowed every fortnight, later every week.

Sajidah did not come alone to visit Saddam, Udai came with her, although he was only a few months old and did not know that every time he came to visit his father he was performing a service for the Party. Abu Haitham, who was now outside, would put a message for Saddam in the little child's clothes and when Saddam took the baby in his arms he would quickly extract the message and, without any of the guards noticing, would replace it with another message. In this way communication was maintained, via little Udai who could not talk yet, between the party inside and the party outside.

By means of this exchange of messages a new escape operation was organized, this time with Sa'dun Shakir. Saddam wrote to him saying: "After continuous and arduous brainwashing we have managed to get round the guards. On the way to the court we shall present them with a fait accompli. You must wait for us at the designated time and place." That day they were on

the way to the court, Saddam Hussein, Kareem ash-Shaikhli and Hassan al-' Amiri. They had managed to persuade the soldiers to go to al-Jundul restaurant in Abu Nuwas Street for lunch. They agreed with Sa'dun Shakir to wait for them with his car outside the door at the side of the washroom, which opens directly on to the street. The doors of the car were to be open, and if the soldiers offered resistance at the last moment their guns were to be taken from them by force. Then they were to make their get-away.

The three had agreed that only two of them should escape to begin with. The third should stay behind with the soldiers and try to persuade them to disappear also, with a promise that if they consented they would be suitably rewarded after a successful revolution. If they do not consent, he would go back with them to the prison. Hassan al- Amiri was chosen as the third man. When the back door of the restaurant, the washroom door, was opened, Sa'dun Shakir's car was standing there with the doors open. Saddam Hussein and Kareem ash-Shaikhli quickly got in, the engine started and off they went. The third, Hasan al- Amiri's guard, had emphatically rejected the idea of escape and insisted on taking him back to the prison.

In the crowded streets of Baghdad in the rush hour, nobody noticed a yellow Opel car with a black top, carrying three young men, two under sentence of death, as it traveled at break-neck speed towards an isolated house in the Yarmuk quarter. There it halted briefly and one of them, Kareem ash-Shaikhli, got out. It then moved off again, equally quickly, after Saddam had refused to take refuge in the new hideout with his friend, calculating that it had been marked by the police. Soon the car stopped and the man who thought he could fend for himself this time, leapt out.

But how? Where should he go? He must find a police known to nobody. Suddenly a picture of Sajidah and Udai flashed through his mind. But where could they be? The last time she had visited him behind bars he asked her how things were with her but she would not tell him. When he insisted she told him that the landlord of the house she had rented to live in with the child put her furniture out on the street when they learned that an order was out for her husband's arrest, and had told her that they did not want to have the family of a political outcast living in their house for fear of what the authorities might do. The furniture had stayed out in the street all day and they would not let her bring it into the house again. In the end she had taken her things and gone to live with her child in her father's house, until her, husband should return. Although he felt intensely what she too had suffered, he could not now go to see her and the baby. True, he was free, but it was the freedom of a fugitive. His freedom was a burden, which he had to bear alone as he roamed the streets of this great prison. It was a freedom deferred, in pawn until all the bars were broken. and all the walls pulled down; until the whole society recovered the liberty, which had been taken from it by force. His freedom was not something, which could be separated from the freedom of society. His freedom was the freedom of the people as a whole.

He awoke from his meditations to find himself near the house of an old friend of the Party, who had remained true to that friendship without ever becoming a member.

Perhaps his house would offer safety during these critical hours. It was late afternoon on the 23rd of July 1966 when he knocked at the door of Faruq Abdsa'id as-Samarra'i.

He had broken his own fetters and was now preparing to break the nation's fetters. At this moment was to begin another epic chapter in his epic life, in which he was to rebuild the party organization and purge the party doctrine after a new storm, blowing this time from

Damascus had shaken it violently and almost torn it up by the roots.

Chapter 11

When dawn approached

In the political report issued by the eighth regional conference of the Arab Baath Socialist Party we find the following passage:

"In order to assess objectively the nature and scope of the Party's political activity before and after it assumed authority on 17 July 1968, it is necessary to look again at the state of the Party in the Iraqi Region and in the Arab homeland in the period 18 November 1963 and 17 July 1968.

The Arab Baath Socialist Party, on both regional and national levels, suffered bitterly during the period referred to, from dissention and from the effects of the failure of the Party's attempts to wield political power in Iraq and Syria, in addition to carrying out its permanent tasks, viz. the struggle against the forces of colonialism, Zionism and the forces of reaction and dictatorship and the forms of persecution to which it has as a result subjected in all parts of the homeland.

On 18 November 1963 the Party's experiment in the Iraqi Region, on which the Party and the masses in the Region and in the Arab homeland had pinned their hopes, collapsed. This tragic collapse was a severe psychological shock both to the Party and the masses, as was also the loss of the revolution's not insubstantial gains and of many of the party militants who lost their lives heroically resisting reaction.

On 23 February 1966, a little more than sixteen months after the first set-back in the Iraqi Region, the Party suffered a second severe shock when the February clique in the Syrian Region dared to arrange a military coup against the Party, representing itself as the national leadership. With the defection of 23 February there arose for the first time an extremely serious and complex emergency. This was that the government, foisted upon the Party by armed force and by trickery, deception and falsification, claimed at the same time, noisily and with much ado, to represent the Party and to embody its declared principles in the realms of organization, ideology and politics.

These two setbacks were followed, on 18 November and 23 February, by a serious vertical and horizontal split which spread to the whole party, provoking in its ranks acute struggles over matters of organization and theory and dangerous confusion. The organizational, political and psychological effects of these dissensions on the branch of the party in the Iraqi Region were particularly grave and dangerous (35)."

It was in this unpromising atmosphere that Saddam first breathed the air of freedom after his escape from prison. It is strange that when he was still behind prison walls he foresaw the action of 23 February 1966 in Syria. Indeed at that time he called for a delegate from the regional leadership and was visited by Shafiq al-Kamali, to whom he said: "There will be a coup against the national leadership. It will be led by Salah Jadid and his military group." This was a clever deduction based on his analysis of information appearing in the Beirut press at that time and on his assessment of certain "technical errors" or technical cover-up information given to them by the national leadership on the measures which it proposed to take, which included the formation of an administration to be headed in due course by Salah al-Bitar. When this administration was formed it was absolutely certain that a coup was inevitable.

What was now very clear to him was that the party in Iraq was rent asunder organizationally and psychologically and was living through an acute ideological convulsion and was divided against itself from within, even though the division was concealed from the outside observer by a transparent veil of unity. The majority, as he perceived at the leadership and grass roots

levels, would follow in the wake of the 23 February group. The Leadership itself was not sufficiently united to steer a straight course in the required direction. The leadership was, at the time, known as the "Committee of Organizational Abdul-Khaliq Leadership" and included among its members as-Samarra'i, Hassan adh-Dhahab, Hussein as-Samarra'i, Sameer an-Najm and Ja'afar Qasim Hamudi. There had formerly been two other leaderships. One consisted of the Secretary, Tariq Aziz. It had lasted only a few weeks. The other had consisted of Abdul Khaliq as-Samarra'i, Shafiq al-Kamali, Faik as-Safi and Shukri al-Hadithi. The Committee of Organizational Leadership was supposed to be under the supervision of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein in their capacities as members of the national leadership. Saddam had been elected a member of the national leadership while he was in prison. One day he received a letter from Tariq Aziz, who was then Regional Secretary, telling him that he had been nominated for the national leadership. He replied saying that the question of the leadership was not a question of prestige or show: "I can do nothing for you at the moment as a free comrade would do. I am in prison. And even if they don't execute me it is probable that I shall not be out for a long time. In these circumstances I cannot be of any use to you, somebody who can do some actual work for you. His excuse was not accepted. His name was put up at the conference and he was made a member of the National leadership while still behind prison bars.

Taking as he did such a pessimistic view of the state of the party, he could not do anything but work with tireless determination and unflagging zeal, as was his wont. He at once got together with Abdul Khaliq as-Samarra'i and Kareem ash-Shaikhli and they came to the conclusion that it was necessary to dissolve the Committee of Organizational Leadership and announce the formation of a "regional leadership" without reference to the national leadership which at that time was "invisible" or non-existent after the coup of 23 February. This was their duty. Moreover two members of the national leadership were in Iraq and capable of representing it until such time as it was again fully effective. The new regional leadership consisted of the three members above-mentioned plus Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr that had often been unable to attend organizational meetings because of strict police surveillance.

The new leadership soon faced a large-scale campaign on the part of the authors of the Syrian coup to split the unity of the party after their failure to secure full control of it. The leadership immediately proposed that an extra-ordinary national conference should be held to be attended by all the contending parties, to give its views about the measures to be taken by the national leadership before 23 February and also to give its views on the coup of 23 February itself, and to determine the future of all the factions.

The regional leadership knew very well that this "basic logic" would not be accepted by those who had seized power in Syria. But the document expressing this viewpoint, which was circulated within the party secured the approval of the great majority of the party cadres. However, the Syrians took no notice and began to send their delegates to Iraq on the assumption that they themselves were still the legitimate national leadership and demanding to be treated as such. The situation was indeed critical. The party organization in Iraq was on the point of closing its torn and strife-ridden ranks and moving rapidly in the direction of organizational and ideological concord. The effective rulers of the country, the Arif clan, were waging war against it with every means which their security forces could bring to bear.

The official government of Syria, which claimed to be the sole legitimate representative of the national leadership, was co-coordinating with Arif's authorities plans for combating it, as well as spending state funds and all the resources of its organs of information on a psychological campaign of intimidation, accusing it of the crime of traditionalism, an accusation always leveled by rightist and reactionary subversives against their adversaries.

To begin with, the regional leadership employed a large measure of flexibility in its efforts to bring about conciliation between the contending factions within the party organization and to restore to it some semblance of ideological unity. The violent attack launched by the Syrians, which led rapidly to open confrontation with them, meant that the split within the organization was accelerated. Such a situation is a gamble. One can establish the principle, but lose the case.

It was not long before pressure from Syria increased and their delegates began to arrive in Iraq one after the other bearing the slogan: "Elections within the organization in

Iraq." Saddam Hussein had expected the Syrians to come out with this slogan and had discussed the matter with his colleagues in the leadership, ' Abdul Kareem ash-Shaikhli and Abdul Khaliq as-Samarra'i but a meeting with Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr was difficult for special security reasons. It was only fifty-four days since they had left prison.

Many members of the party were opposed to the idea of an election, but Saddam Hussein told them clearly:

"Anyone who opposes this slogan now will be, and all those who share our point of view will be with him. Some want the election in good faith, they want to have a clear and definite idea of what political and organizational line is. Others of course want it as a cover for sabotage. But in any case the will depend on how active the leadership and its supporters are. " Finally it was decided to summon the regional leadership, the popular leaderships and the main leaderships and advanced cadres in general and put a picture before them, clearly and frankly. It was to form a committee, from the ranks, to supervise elections, so that no elections could take place without its knowledge or be regarded as valid without its approval.

Anything done otherwise would be regarded as nugatory, and in that case the regional leadership would be regarded as dissolved until the election had been held.

Although this leadership included two members who were also members of the national leadership they not allowed, under the rules of the party, to step down and offer themselves for re-election within the Iraqi region. Saddam Hussein insisted that the situation now no longer warranted strict adherence to organizational and legal niceties and that what was at stake was the existence of the Party itself in Iraq.

After that, no meeting, council or conference of members of the party was held anywhere during the preparations for the election, at which Saddam Hussein did not appear, notwithstanding all the provocations and attacks to which he was subjected by the Syrian delegates and their Iraqi allies and their shameless attempts to overcome his determined stand. He bore it all with a marvelous forbearance and imperturbability and a will fortified by his confidence in final victory. At that time he was not enjoying perfect or even normal health. He once attended a meeting during the election period, suffering so severely from gastroenteritis that he imagined he had cholera, which was prevalent at that time in Iraq. He insisted on being carried to the car and taken to the house of Salah 'Omar al- Ali where the meeting was to be held, and remained stretched out on a couch, saying that if he felt strong enough to speak, he would do so, but otherwise he could at least listen. But when he arrived he found himself in the midst of an animated discussion. From somewhere within him he found a remarkable strength and went on speaking until the meeting ended, having achieved the desired result.

The elections had reached a decisive point: the Baghdad branch. The result was quite contrary to what the Syrian delegates had wanted. A list was elected which professed allegiance to the tendency represented by Saddam Hussein. The Syrian delegate left in a state of alarm. But he

could not help saying to Saddam: "By God, you're a hard lot. " Saddam replied, without the least sign of malice: "Abu Riadh" (that was his name) "we are hard on the side of the Party, not against it."

It was now necessary to hold a regional conference to elect the new regional leadership. This was held at night in the house of Abdurrahman Suhail at Abu Ghaib, under the chairmanship of Saddam Hussein. At the conference was a group of members who had been influenced by the leaders of the Syrian coup and approved of their line.

There had not yet been any official split between the organization in Iraq and its counterpart in Syria. There was a wide-ranging discussion about whether or not to attend the "national conference" which the Syrians now wanted to hold and it was agreed that Iraqi delegates should go and put forward their views about holding an extra-ordinary national conference, to be attended by all the contending factions, where each of them could say what it had to say about everything. In fact, the tendency represented by Saddam Hussein which, as a result of the election, had become predominant, wanted to take advantage of this proposal, but only for a while. For he was convinced that the election which had taken place would not satisfy the Syrians and that the two leaderships which had been elected would not meet with their approval, and the likelihood was that the Syrian leadership, which claimed to represent legitimately the national leadership, would find it impossible to do anything other than to dissolve these elected leaderships and appoint others more acceptable to it.

This is exactly what subsequently happened. A new regional leadership was elected that night consisting of: Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, Saddam Hussein, Kareem ash-Shaikhli, Saleh Mahdi Amash, Taha al-Jazrawi, Abdul Khaliq as-Samarra'i, Salah Omar al-Ali, Izzat Mustafa and Abdullah Sallum.

Since Saddam Hussein was under no illusions that night as to the effect, which these results might have on the Syrians, he put a resolution to the conference in the following terms:

"If the regional and national leaderships differ, and if that difference leads to the national leadership ordering the dissolution of the regional leadership, this leadership in the Iraqi region shall not be regarded as dissolved, except in the eyes of its own conference. On this basis it shall call an extra-ordinary regional conference and ask it to elect a new leadership."

It is interesting to note that the whole conference, including those who had been in favour of the line taken by the Syrian leadership, approved this resolution. The practical outcome was that the self-styled national leadership no longer had any authority over the party organization in Iraq.

Only six weeks after the end of the conference the members of the newly elected regional leadership heard the news of their "dismissal" from radio Damascus. Striking while the iron was hot they held, as had been agreed at the previous conference, an extra-ordinary conference, which re-elected the same leadership.

The new leadership henceforth declared, its open and official hostility towards Damascus and its government, and the split in the party also became official. Campaigns were begun to enlighten and educate members of the organization in the new doctrine.

The distribution of functions among members of the leadership at that time was: Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, Secretary. Saddam Hussein, Deputy Secretary, responsible also for the Baghdad branch and the women and peasants' organizations. The military organization included Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, Saleh Mahdi ' Ammash and Taha al-Jazrawi. Salah 'Omar al- Ali took the Labour Bureau and' Abdul Khaliq as-Samarra'i became responsible for the External Liaison Bureau, Izzat Mustafa for the Professions Bureau. But responsibility for the

Special Organization, later to be known under the name of "Hanin", was constituted differently as a "shock troop" consisting of civilians who would play a specific role, in carrying out the revolution. It was headed by Saddam Hussein himself.

The party now went forward on a new path, preparing for the approaching revolution in Iraq, relying on its own strength and on carefully chosen alliances and on insinuating itself into the mass organizations and institutions foremost among which were the armed forces of the state, and above all upon its principles and clearly defined Ideology. Gradually the countdown began and zero hour approached.

Chapter 12

The seventeenth of July and the Trojan Horse

All revolutionaries seek power. But for a true revolutionary, power is not an end in itself. Power is always a mean, a necessary precondition, and an instrument, which enables revolutionaries possessed of a comprehensive and integrated vision, to change society in a comprehensive and integral way. Every road which leads to power is, in this sense, legitimate and justified, so long as it can help in the end to realize the principles and give concrete form to the dream.

In all the revolutions which have happened up to now, be they bourgeois or socialist, it has never been 'the masses marching alone which have overturned the old order and erected a new order on its ruins. There has always been, in successful revolutions at least, an avant-garde leadership, which, in the moment of revolution has borne the biggest and heaviest burden. The masses without leaders are like a body without a head. And just as no head can function without a body, so no body can function without a head. A revolution's vitality, like that of the human body, depends on an organic unity between its summit and its base and is in direct proportion to the depth of the fighting commitment between the controlling center and the responding extremities.

The party leadership in Iraq, in those crowded days of 1968, was fully convinced, on the basis of scientific analysis of mass opinion, that the existing regime was about to collapse from within as a result of its sharp internal contradictions and that the revolutionary movement within the country was now able, by its own exertions, to shoulder the burden of political and social transformation. All that was now needed was a wise and resolute leadership to plan, take decisions, enter into temporary or lasting alliances and bring about the revolutionary solution of those glaring contradictions. But its wisdom must not consist only in a profound theoretical understanding of the contradictions existing at the moment of the revolution, but what is no less important, in the ability to master the art of revolutionary methodology itself, i. e. how to make a revolution in practice.

The method chosen was to bring down the regime from the inside, from quarters in whose loyalty it trusted and from the quarter, which trusted it. Therefore temporary "allies" were sought among the very pillars of the regime, who would help in the task of transformation, while at the same time concentrating on building and sustaining the organs of the party.

At about this time Hardan al- Tikriti arrived in Baghdad from Europe, where he had been living since' Abdulsalam Arif expelled him. It was agreed that Hardan should be the mediator between the party and Ibrahim ad-Dawud who was the commander of the Republican Guard which, according to the leadership plan, was to be the focus of revolutionary infection within the regime itself. The choice of Hardan, who had no formal connection with the party, was reassuring to such temporary allies, who in their other roles, i. e. as pillars of existing

authority, are governed by the nature of the personal interests which they serve and the private goals to which they aspire.

At the same time important and parallel operations were carried out. The leadership finished putting together the "Special Organization" composed of well-trying and personally known party activists. Arms were collected. Slowly and patiently the military clothing was purchased, to be worn by members of the leadership and of the Special Organization when the Republican Palace was stormed. It was all hidden away in secret hiding places in the houses of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein.

As a necessary smokescreen and in order that the attention of the regime should not be attracted by any unusual activity on the part of the Party, the plan provided for most of the members of the Party organization to be engrossed in arranging meetings at which questions would be discussed of the kind which were being bandied about in Iraqi political circles at that time, such as: "Should we participate in government or not? For and against." Various members of the leadership would attend these meetings in order to direct the debate in the direction of non-participation in government.

At this time another exercise was mounted with great speed and in great secrecy. A certain number of comrades were gathered together in three specific places, viz. the houses of Adib al-Mafni, Kareem an-Nada and Sa'ad ar-Rawi, to be ready to go into action when the signal would be given to start. The Special Organization decided that its members should foregather at the "Casino" in Karkh on 14 July. But this timing was cancelled, as was also that part of the plan relating to the holding of meetings and discussions, and a new zero hour was fixed.

On the 16th July 1968, the members of the leadership were sitting in Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr's house studying carefully together the final draft of their plan, twenty-four hours before putting it into effect. It was exactly eleven o'clock in the morning. While they were discussing, one of them said: "Let us leave the execution of the plan to the military members. They are better able to handle it." Saddam Hussein objected: "No", he said, "the plan was drawn up by the leadership as such and it bears the responsibility, whatever happens. I say this, not because I lack confidence in the military members, but because it is the leadership organization's job to plan everything and to take the responsibility for everything." And this in fact is what happened.

But another very important subject was raised, this time by Saddam Hussein himself. This was the need for the leadership to be, not only a planning body, but also an executive body, that is that all its members should share in carrying out the revolution from the time it began until power had actually been seized. He was strengthened in this conviction by two considerations. Firstly, the need to stimulate the greatest possible enthusiasm among the rank and file, and secondly, and perhaps more importantly, to prevent the revolution, if it succeeded, from becoming as it were the personal property of a small number of army officers, for them to boast about to others. For the echo of questions raised after the revolution of Ramadan 1963, in the unhealthy atmosphere which then prevailed, still rang in his ears: "Where were you at the time of the revolution?" "And where was this or that member of the party?" Questions like these, which members of the leadership were throwing at one another at that time, must not be asked this time or be raised again. Therefore all the members of the leadership were to be in the front line. They themselves must be instrumental in carrying it out. Its fate was to rest in their hands, and they would face its consequences.

Notwithstanding certain trivial objections raised by certain members to what they called "the leadership's gamble" on the failure of the revolution, he adhered to his point of view, which was then accepted and cast in a form which made it incontrovertible. The elements of the plan were then quickly reviewed: A number of designated comrades were to foregather at four

assembly points, while the members of the special organization were to meet in the garden of the Casino in Karkh on 14 July. At zero hour the comrades at every assembly point were to receive their orders and the leadership, in full strength, was to head the operations. They should all proceed in the direction of the Republican Palace. At the gate a squadron of tanks belonging to the Republican Guard would be waiting for them. Sa' adun Ghaidan would be the officer of the guard on that day and would make it easy for them to open the gates and storm the Palace. Thus the tanks, which they were to take over in order to train their guns on the Palace, would not have moved and Abdurrahman ' Arif would be forced to surrender to the revolutionary forces.

But should' Arif be killed or not? That question should be decided between Saddam Hussein and the late General Hamad Shihab. Hamad Shihab was the General Officer commanding the tenth armoured brigade, which was regarded as a trump card in the hands of the Iraqi army. Among the officials of that brigade the Baath Party had a number of members and friends. The commanding officer himself, Hamad Shihab, had close personal relations with some of the party's leaders, notably with Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr and Saddam Hussein. But when he was approached on the subject of the revolution, he displayed great hesitancy. He had moral scruples, which he placed above all other considerations. He had given his undertaking to Abdurrahman Arif that he stand by him in the event of any move against him. Every time Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr had raised with him the question of his participation in a revolution, he had the same reply. But Saddam asked al Bakr's to discuss it with him himself. He went to him and put the matter to him in such a way as to try and free him from his moral dilemma. He said: " Abu Ra'ad, I wonder you won't agree to take part. You told him it's Abdurrahman Arif. I agree. But why not side with the Iraqi people who have been slighted, torn asunder and subjected daily to all kinds of humiliations. Surely the dignity of this people, its history and its future as a revolutionary force in the service of the Arab nation, after the shameful defeat it suffered on the fifth of June, has the right to ask that you should free yourself from your obligation to a man who has already renounced it himself. Surely there is a difference between one obligation and another especially when the other party renounces an obligation for the sake of the highest values and the noblest ideals. What obligation does Abdurrahman Arif acknowledge towards these values and ideals? Anyway, for the sake of the promise you made to him, we shall spare his life and do him no harm. It is enough for us that he should be prevented from doing further evil and that he should be stripped of his power so that things may take their natural course and the revolution may go its way. What do you feel about that, Abu Ra'ad?"

Hamad Shihab looked at him and said: "Will you give me a definite promise that you won't kill Abdurrahman Arif?" "On my honour," replied Saddam Hussein, and went back to tell al-Bakr that Hamad Shihab had agreed, that the tenth armoured brigade would take its part in the planned revolution when the time came and that the promise to spare Abdurrahman Arif's life must be honoured. The participation of this brigade in the execution of the plan was to be a decisive factor in its success. The brigade was stationed at a place called al Warar, a long way from Baghdad. It was agreed that, on being informed of the date fixed for the revolution, the brigade should move towards the capital and surround it.

But Saddam Hussein, in one of his moments of clairvoyance, foresaw the possibility of some of the revolution's temporary allies trying to move this brigade away from Baghdad under the pretext that the revolution had succeeded and that it should return to its original position when it was no longer needed. That could then be the signal for a counter-stroke on their part aimed at taking over the revolution. So he told al-Bakr, in confidence, to impress upon the tenth armoured brigade the necessity to continue to advance on Baghdad even if someone or other were to tell it that the revolution had succeeded and that it should return to its former position.

There was perhaps an element of inspiration in this foreknowledge of what might happen, because the prophecy was to be fulfilled a day later, just as he had surmised.

Everything was now complete and the plan ready to be put into effect. The comrades were prepared. Zero hour had been fixed. In a few hours' time the order to begin would be given. But then the doorbell rang. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr went to see whom it was ringing the doorbell at that critical moment. He came back after a short while with a look of desperate anxiety and intense fatigue on his face, threw down in front of the assembled Leadership a letter and said: "Just read this letter which Ahmad Mukhlis, an officer in military intelligence has brought. " It said:

"Dear Abu Haitham, I have been informed that you are to mount a revolution in a few hours' time. I wish you every success. I would also like to take part." The letter was signed by Abdulrazzaq an-Nayif, Director of Military Intelligence!

They stood aghast. Their heads swam. The ground shook under their feet, as though they had been struck by a thunderbolt. It seemed that everything had been in vain. All their high hopes were dashed in an instant. All the planning and scheming and the long struggle were as chaff in the wind. Indeed, the more they thought about it, the more disastrous the situation came to appear. The whole party was now threatened with utter extinction, quite apart of course from the fate of those sitting there, who would very soon face the death penalty.

Some of them got up and began to walk up and down the room, as though in a cage. One of them, seeing before him, as clearly as the few peremptory lines contained in that letter, the terrible end that awaited him, launched into a vehement condemnation of those alliances of which he had approved a moment before, but which had led to this ruinous consummation. It was ad-Dawud, Commander of the Republican Guard, who divulged the secret and brought about this catastrophe.

But what was to be done now? This was no time for regret and apportionment of blame. Impotence, after all does not beseem men about to embark on a revolution.

There must be a way out, but who was to find it?

Then Saddam Hussein spoke. Putting a stop to the discussion which was degenerating into an orgy of penitence and mutual recrimination he said, with decisiveness which was required but which had been lacking: "I propose that we accept his participation."

They all looked at him, tongue-tied. But he continued, as though announcing decisions already taken: "I propose that comrade Ahmad Hassan should go to him with Hardan at-Tikriti or Saleh Mahdi Ammash, or both, and say to him-'We accept, God bless you. If only we had known before that you wanted to join us.' Then offer him any position he likes after the revolution-except President of the Republic. But there is one condition? That is that he should be liquidated immediately during, or after, entry into the tank squadron. When I suggest this I realize that we would not be able to do it if the man had worked with us in a progressive way and if we had been convinced of his patriotism and that he wanted to help in saving the people. But he was imposed on us and he wanted to stab the Party in the back in the service of some interest or other, as Abdulsalam Arif had done. It was therefore legitimate and a moral necessity that the Party should not be betrayed a second time, and that it should be protected from harm whether he accepted or refused.

I am diffident about putting myself forward at any time for any particular task, but this is a task about which I feel no diffidence. I propose to you that comrade Saddam

Hussein is nominated to carry out this task without further discussion, and let him choose the opportune moment, either during or just after the entry of the tank squadron, to liquidate him, and by any means, which he thinks fit. This decision is final and will not be open to discussion in the future."

When he had finished speaking, those present got up as though he had just saved them from drowning, and raised their hands in unanimous approval of his decision.

The meeting was adjourned-until the revolution-an hour later.

Chapter 13

The Revolution reigns but does not rule

During those early hours of the 17th of July 1968, Saddam Hussein opened up the secret hiding place in his house and began to bring out the military clothing and arms and hand grenades. Sajida stood beside him, helping. Even little Udai was wide-awake. This time he had no messages concealed in his clothes, but ran around picking up the hand grenades which were rolling all over the place and bringing them to his father, thinking they were toys.

The comrades designated by the leadership were at their allotted assembly points, awaiting the order to start. The members of the leadership itself had joined those in Kareem an-Nada's house whence the first attacking party were to leave, in a few minutes, for the Republican Palace. They were all dressed in military uniforms, real or faked, and among them was "Lieutenant" Saddam Hussein and just behind him "Lieutenant" Barzan, his eighteen-year-old brother, who had insisted on accompanying him. At 2:45 a white Mercedes car driven by its owner, Hardan at-Tikriti, with Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr beside him and Saleh Mahdi Ammash behind, moved off from in front of an-Nada's house. Immediately behind was a military lorry carrying Saddam Hussein and the other members of the leadership as well as a small group of other party members, including Barzan, Ja'afar al-Ja'afari, Dhiyab al- Alkawi and Izzat ad-Duri, who had claimed to be an expert tank driver in order not to miss taking part in the attack on the Palace. Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr led the attack and was at the head of the convoy.

As soon as the convoy approached the gate of the tank squadron Sa'dun Ghaidan could be seen standing there waiting for them. Suddenly he called to the guard on the gate: "Stop. This is our party. Open the gate and let them through. " The gate was opened. They were inside. They went towards the tanks, which were in their shade. The comrades began to start them up and hand them on to others, and return quickly to start up some more. When they heard the sound of the tanks, the officers and soldiers in the neighbouring hall got up and came running out. Suddenly Saddam Hussein, with Barzan behind him, called out: "Form them up and march them back to the hall." Then they returned quickly and got on to the back of a tank along with Dhiyab al- Alkawi. Suddenly Barzan spotted a soldier carrying a Kalashnikov rifle. He knocked him to the ground and wrenched it from him. Saddam saw him and said: "Give the revolver to Abu Khalil. Abu Khalil is on our side. You really are with us, eh my boy? Lieutenant Barzan didn't know that you were on our side. Barzan pulled out his revolver and gave it to the soldier whose gun he had taken. The soldier did not seem in the least perturbed and they discovered, as luck would have it, that he knew how to drive a tank.

He drove the tank for them. On the road between the squadron's gate and the gate to the palace there was a tank. It began to fire and Saddam Hussein then learned how to fire the guns of a tank. The soldier, whose rifle had been taken from him so unceremoniously, taught him. Saddam said to him: "You see, I'm just an infantry officer, I don't know how to use a tank. Tell me, how do you fire the gun?" "You just pull it out like this, Sir", said the soldier. "Then

you press it. That's the way it is usually. " But the soldier who had no idea of what was happening asked again: "Sir, what's going on?" Saddam said: "Tahir Yahya (the Prime Minister) is staging a coup against Abdurrahman 'Arif, against the President, and we're going to raise the siege." "God bless you," said the soldier.

When the tank got near to the gate of the Palace it began to fire at the Palace building. At the same time Hardan al- Tikriti was talking on the telephone to Abdurrahman Arif, calling upon him to surrender. After a short while, Abdurrahman came out and surrendered. In keeping with the promise that his life would be spared, the firing ceased. At dawn the Iraqi Republic radio announced to the Iraqi people and the Arab nation and to the whole world the news of the glorious revolution of 17th July in the Iraqi Region in the first statement signed by the revolutionary leadership council, and "President" Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr moved to his office in the Republican Palace.

The new cabinet was formed in accordance with the plan worked out beforehand. Abdurrazaq an-Nayif assumed the office of Prime Minister, Ibrahim ad-Dawud Minister of Defence, Hardan at- Tikriti, Chief of General Staff, and Saleh Mahdi Ammash Minister of the Interior.

Saddam Hussein took off his lieutenant's uniform and put on an ordinary civilian suit, and exchanged his submachine gun for an ordinary 13-caliber revolver.

The moment was not opportune for liquidating Abdurrazaq an-Nayif. Reactionary officers held most of the positions in the Palace. While the tenth armoured brigade was encamped at Abu Ghraib on the outskirts of Baghdad, having refused to obey Abdurrazaq an-Nayif's order to return to its former position as Saddam Hussein had accurately foreseen, Hardan at- Tikriti began, in his capacity as Chief of Staff to make various changes in military appointments. Dependable non-commissioned officers were transferred from the provinces to Baghdad where they were joined a little later by another batch of non-commissioned officers in new posts in the capital, which improved the situation to some extent.

During these days Saddam was more anxious and worried than he had been at any time in his life. He met with members of the Baghdad branch and impressed upon them the need for party unity. He pointed out that the party was not the only element in the revolution and that there was one element, which was at odds with the party. He did not explain what that element was, in order not to give rise to arbitrary speculations.

But Hammad Shihab was also worried. For although he commanded the tenth armoured brigade he was not a member of the Revolutionary Leadership Council. Saddam noticed his state of mind during the early days of the revolution as they were sitting in the Palace. They went out into the outer vestibule where they walked up and down. Saddam asked him: "Why aren't you a member of the Revolutionary Leadership Council?"

They are having a meeting just now. Go in and tell them that either you must be a member of the Council or you'll raise hell. If they agree, all well and good. If they refuse, no matter. " Hammad went into the Council room immediately and came out a member of the Council.

Nevertheless the worries remained, and fear for the future of the revolution never left him. True his friend Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr was President of the Republic, but those who insinuate themselves into a revolution in a latter-day Trojan horse, openly on this occasion, represent new risks for the revolution and, at the same time, a real threat. They strengthen their foothold with every minute that passes. Every moment they are there is a moment less in the life of the revolution. Moreover, their dubious record casts a shadow across the revolution and transforms it in the mind of the public, which does not know what has happened or what is going to happen, into just another military coup. Furthermore, and even more undesirable,

their continued presence may well mean simply that the revolution is rendered barren, its growth stunted. Indeed it may be pushed into reverse. For Abdurrazaq an-Nayif was now demanding openly in the Council of Ministers that the National Petroleum Company, founded in the days of Abdul Kareem Qasim, should be dissolved.

What would remain of the revolution after that? And how many of the goals for the sake of which it was made, would it be able to realize? One does not attain power for the sake of power itself. How could the party in which Saddam Hussein had struggled for decades, sacrificing the lives of hundreds and thousands of its members in that struggle, in which he had studied, planned, made decisions, led and shared in the leadership, how could it remain the captive of a few intruders and interlopers, parasites, not on the revolution alone, but on the Iraqi people itself with its despised and humiliated masses, looking to the revolution for their final deliverance?

Anxiety mounted within him day by day. Every hour, every minute, new misgivings regarding the revolution and its future presented themselves to his prescient imagination. His wife, amazed, would look at him and say: "The revolution has succeeded, but you do not look like a man who has won. What is the matter?" But he would not reply. Then he would go out and a neighbour would come up to him and say: "This Abdurrazaq an-Nayif is up to something, isn't he?" He would brush the question aside, without answering.

But how long could this go on? And what guarantee was there that these "others", the intruders, the interlopers and their camp followers, were not even now hatching their schemes to get rid of the real authors of the revolution. Time is on the side of him who acts first. If the revolution did not strike, their enemies certainly would. But then, who can wash his hands of blood and who can pluck from his heart the thorn of remorse? Is there no mercy for those who stand face to face with history?

Chapter 14

The Revolution restored to the People

For a fortnight he slept only uneasily and intermittently. He soon awoke and opened his eyes in the darkness and it was as though he were trying to banish a nightmare that had troubled his sleep. Those were the cruelest days of his life.

No. There was no point in waiting any longer. Patience was at an end.

He left the house early in the morning and called a quick meeting of the regional leadership. After a short while all the members of the leadership were sitting in their places except the President, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, whose new office prevented him from leaving the Palace at that time, and Izzat Mustafa and Abdullah Sallum who had gone to Cairo before the revolution and when they knew about its timing, each of them having pleaded urgent business there which could not be postponed.

The meeting was short, only a few peremptory words being exchanged. Saddam Hussein said: "I have not called you together, comrades, to discuss again the decision we made on the day before the revolution concerning the liquidation of Abdurrazaq an-Nayif. That decision is not open to discussion. I just wanted to tell you that the time has come. The question is the technical one of how to do it quickly. " They were in complete agreement and told him to choose a time which he thought suitable. "Tomorrow", he said, and the meeting broke up.

After the meeting he contacted a group of party members whom he trusted personally and told them to be at the Republican Palace on the following day before noon. They included Barzan, Ja'afar al-Ja'afari, Sa'dun Shakir, Salah Saleh, Kamil Yasin and Ajjaj al-Ahmad al-Hazza'. Then he contacted the guards on the outer gate of the Palace and asked them to allow them in at the appointed time. The night passed slowly. The sun had hardly risen on the thirtieth of July when Saddam set off for the Palace. He went at once to the office of the President of the Republic, Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, and told him what had passed at the meeting of the leadership on the day before. Saddam explained to him in outline what was to happen after lunch that day.

There was stuffed venison for lunch that day, shot by Hamad Shihab. He brought it to the Palace, but when they went into lunch Saddam Hussein stayed behind for a moment with Hamad Shihab, and drawing him aside said to him: "Abu Ra'ad, this is to be the day. Today I am going to get rid of this lot." Abu Ra'ad said, with a laugh: "Have you fixed everything?" Saddam replied that everything was indeed fixed. Then he looked at him straight in the eyes and said, quickly and resolutely: "When we come out of the dining room and you see me going into the President's Office, don't come in. There's no need. Go at once to the tenth armoured brigade and surround the Palace. Bring a squadron of tanks inside the perimeter fence of the Palace, because' Abdurrazaq an-Nayif must not get away. If he tries to escape, I will kill him. There may be complications, so that we shall be killed here. He is surrounded by Palace units who are all loyal to him including the guards inside the Palace, as well as his personal bodyguard of twelve men armed with sub-machine guns. If these complications arise we shall be killed here. In that case you can take over the Government with what is left of the Party. God be with you."

They sat down to lunch, President Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, flanked by Abdurrazaq an-Nayif and Hardan at-Tikriti, then Saddam Hussein, Hammad Shihab, Sa'dun Ghaidan and Saleh Mahdi Ammash. Said Hammad Shihab, with a laugh: "There's a whole deer for launch".

Lunch was over. They came quickly out of the dining room. Hardan at-Tikriti walked to one side. He did not know. Saddam Hussein looked at him and said: "Abu Sa'ad, today the matter will be concluded." Hardan said: "Today?" Then he said: "Abu Udai we understand each other." They went up the stairs leading to his office and sat for a while. Saddam looked at him straight in the eyes and said: "Abu Sa'ad: the matter doesn't call for any understanding." Hardan said: "Good." But he was not expecting it to be done today. Nevertheless he went on:

"Abu Udai, you want to do it today. Brother you will kill us. How can it be done this afternoon?" Saddam said: "Everything's been arranged."

He left him sitting in his office thinking that he had persuaded him to put off the operation until some other time, and went quickly down the stairs. Turning neither to right nor left he entered the aides' room. He looked at the comrades whom he had told to be there. Without looking in their faces, he told them to follow him. He walked rapidly through the secretary's room. Sa'dun Ghaidan was standing next to the secretary. He went straight into the President's office. Al-Bakr was sitting at his desk with Saleh Mahdi Ammash sitting in front of him Abdurrazaq an-Nayif was sitting with his back to the outer door of the room.

Saddam drew his revolver and, facing Abdurrazaq an-Nayif he said: "Put your hands up." An-Nayif turned to him and said: "Why?" When he saw the revolver pointed at him he put his hands over his eyes and said: "I have four children." Saddam said: "Don't be afraid. Nothing will happen to your children if you behave sensibly. Abdurrazaq, you know you forced your way into the revolution and that you are a stumbling block in the way of the Party. We have paid for this revolution with our blood, and now it has come about. The decision of the Party is that you should be put out of the way."

He took his revolver from his side and heard his comrades' revolvers being loaded. Saleh Mahdi Ammash, wishing to relieve the tension, rose from his seat and said: "Let us see if we can come to some understanding", but Salah Omar al-Ali motioned to him to sit down. He did so, and made no further attempt to intervene.

After a few seconds' Abdurrazaq an-Nayif said: "what do you want of me?" Saddam took him by the arm and drew him into the adjoining room, and said: "Abdurrazaq, we are not going to kill you. This is what you must do. You must not try to do anything that would force us to kill you. You must leave Iraq. So where do you want to go? To which Embassy?"

An-Nayif said: "I'll go to Lebanon."

"No", said Saddam.

"Well," said an-Nayif, "to Algeria."

"No," said Saddam.

"Then to Morocco."

"Agreed", said Saddam.

Saddam picked up the telephone. "Yes, sir," answered the operator. He immediately put down the receiver and looked at Barzan and Ja'afar al-Ja'afari saying: "You stand here beside him and do not move on any account. If he tries to get up or if you hear the sound of firing outside or resistance, shoot him at once.

Do you hear, Abdurrazaq

"Yes I hear".

He left the room, locking the door behind him, and went to the President's room. He took Saleh Mahdi Ammash by the arm and took him out of the office into the secretary's room. His eyes met those of Sa'dun Ghaidan. Saddam rushed towards him and embraced him. "Abu Udai," said Sa'dun, "what has happened?"

Saddam said: "We've finished with Abdurrazaq an-Nayif, as we agreed. Abu Samra, go with Saleh Mahdi Ammash to the tank squadron and stay there." They left. Taha al-Jazrawi had gone to the Ministry of Defence since he had been informed by Saddam Hussein that his duty would be in the Ministry of Defence building, while General Hammad Shihab was encircling the outer perimeter of the Palace with the tanks of the tenth armoured brigade.

Everything was going smoothly, quietly and rapidly, like a scene in a film. Saddam hurried to his comrades.

Abdurrazaq an-Nayif's bodyguard was still in the Palace courtyard and Saddam had instructed the comrades to arrest and disarm them. In no time all of them had been thrown to the ground with their hands tied and their weapons taken away.

All that had been done, but Hardan at- Tikriti did not know that everything was over. Saddam saw him coming hurriedly down the stairs from the upper floor and called to him: "Hardan, where are you off to?"

I thought you had gone to Air Force headquarters.

Everything is over now. Go and send off your aircraft."

Abu Sa'ad hurried to the aides' room and telephoned Air Force headquarters and a few minutes later the aircraft of the Air Force were in the air over Baghdad.

Up to this moment everything had gone like clockwork. But how were they to move Abdurrazaq an-Nayif from the Palace? How could that be done without alerting the Republican Guards, who were loyal to him, or any of the soldiers in the tank squadron, that something out of the ordinary was happening to him, at least until that night when he would be safely out of Iraq?

Saddam Hussein turned to Hardan at- Tikriti and said: "Get an aircraft ready for us at Mu'askar ar-Rasheed to take our new ambassador, Abdurrazaq an-Nayif, to Morocco." Then he went to the room where an-Nayif was sitting and said: " Abdurrazaq, you and I are now going to leave the Palace, and remember that my revolver is under my jacket. We shall pass the guard on the way out. They will salute you and you will return their salute in the usual way. We shall then go to your official car carrying your personal flag. We shall get in, you first and I beside you. You know of course that any movement or word from you in the car will mean that you will be a dead man. Agreed?"

"Agreed," said an-Nayif.

Abdurrazaq an-Nayif and Saddam Hussein walked out of the room quietly, side by side. The guards saluted the Prime Minister and he returned their salute with military punctilio. They did not know that this was the last time in his life that he would receive such a salute. At the outer door, the doors of the car stood open. He entered first and Saddam Hussein took his seat beside him. In the front seat, beside the driver, sat Salah Omar al-Ali. Meanwhile a group of comrades had gone to Mu'askar ar-Rasheed to accompany his Excellency the Ambassador to his new post in Morocco.

At Mu'askar ar-Rasheed the aircraft's engines had already started. By the steps stood Barzan, Sa'dun Shakir, Ja'afar al-Ja'afari and Adnan Sharif, awaiting the traveler who was never again to return to Baghdad.

Abdurrazaq an-Nayif mounted the steps and entered the aircraft. The comrades took their seats around him. Before Saddam left the aircraft he took Abdurrazaq an-Nayif's revolver out, which he had taken away from him, and handed it to him, saying: "Here is your revolver. Sa'dun Shakir will give you the rounds when you get there."

As the aircraft rose into the Baghdad sky, Saddam Hussein took out his handkerchief and wiped away some tears. The nightmare had gone, far away, up into the clouds, and on earth the Revolution had regained its soul.

The car took him back to the Republican Palace. He looked at it and said: "There is still Ibrahim ad-Dawud. " Ad-Dawud was not in Iraq at the time. He was in Jordan inspecting units of the Iraqi Army, which had been there since 1967. Hardan at- Tikriti contacted a former Baathist officer, Hassan an-Naqib, and told him to arrest Ibrahim ad-Dawud. But an-Naqib, who knew nothing of what had taken place, pretended not to hear. Saddam at once decided to send an aircraft with a number of comrades, led by Salah Saleh, to arrest him.

Then he sat down in his chair in front of the President's desk quietly took out of his pocket and placed in front of Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr a piece of paper. It contained the declaration of 30th July, which he had prepared in advance.

The President took the piece of paper and read it, and began to write out the declaration again in his own handwriting. But he noticed that the signature was " Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr,

President of the Republic and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, " and he asked: "What does this expression mean?"

Saddam said: "I was not under the impression that either Hardan at- Tikriti or Saleh Mahdi ' Ammash was Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces. " Al-Bakr went on writing the declaration. Then both men rose and walked out of the room and went together to the broadcasting station. Then, at seven o'clock precisely in the evening of 30 July 1968, the masses of the Iraqi people, the Arab nation and the whole world heard that the Revolution of 17 July had been purged and that the Arab Baath Socialist Party in Iraq had restored the Revolution to the people.

Notes of part one

1) Saddam Hussein's speech, 8-8-1979.

2) Tariq , Aziz, Thawrat at- Tariq al-Jadid (The Revolution of the New Way), Baghdad, Oar al-Thawra, 1974, p. 94.

3) Abdul-Amir Ma'ala, Harakat as-Siyasa wal-Mujtama'a fil-Iraq Wa Dawr Hizb al-Baath al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki Khilalaha (The Movement of Politics and Society in Iraq and the Role of the Arab Baath Socialist Party), unpublished, Vol. 1: 1'hawrat 14 Tammuz: Mu him mat uha wa Tatbiqat uha (The July 14th Revolution: Its Tasks and Application), p. 21.

4) Ibid, referring to Nidhal Hizb al-Baath al-Arabi al-Ishtiraki abr Bayanat Qiyadat ihi al-Qawmiyya 1955-1962 (The Struggle of the Arab Baath Socialist Party through the ommuniques of its Leadership (1955-1962), Beirut, Oar at-Tali'a, p. 55.

5) Ibid.

6) Ibid.

1) Samir Abdul-Kareem, Adhwa' ala al-Haraka ash-Shuyu'iyya fil-Iraq (Light on the Communist Movement in Iraq), Beirut, Oar al-Mirsad, second edition, p. 55.

8) Itihad ash-Sha'ab newspaper (mouthpiece of the Iraqi Communist Party at that time), 3-3-1960.

9) Amir Abdullah, from a lecture given in The Iraqi Party Members' Club and published in Itihad ash-Sha'ab, 16-2-1959.

10) Ibid.

11) From a communique issued by The Iraqi Communist Politburo, 2-9-1958.

12) Itihad ash-Sha'ab, 26-1-1960.

13) Ibid. 2-2-1960.

14) Ibid. 2-12-1959.

15) Resolution of the extended meeting of The Central Committee of the Iraqi Communist Party held in July, 1959 (see Itihad ash-Sha'ab, 23-8-1959).

16) See Adhwa' ala al-Haraka ash-Shuyu'iyya fil-Iraq, p. 18, referring to an internal publication of the Arab Baath Socialist Party entitled Hawla al-Mithaq al-Jadid li-Jabhat al-Itihad al-Watani (On the New Charter of the National Union Front, dated 20-11-1959).

- 11) Itihad ash-Sha'ab, 2-3-1959.
- 18) See Adhwa' ala al-Haraka al-Sbuyu'iyya, p. 66.
- 19) Op. cit., 11-3-1959.
- 20) Ibid., 13-3-1959.
- 21) Ibid., 17-3-1959.
- 22) Ibid., 5-8-1959.
- 23) Ibid., 20-7-1959.
- 24) Ibid., 22-7-1959.
- 25) This was not only said by Marx, but also by most Marxists throughout the world. Some, however, contradict it.
- 26) The Chosen Works of Marx and Engels, Moscow (French version), Oar at-Taqaddum, Vol. 3, p. 506.
- 21) Itihad ash-Sha'ab, 8-10-1959.
- 28) Nidhal al-Ba'ath (The Struggle of the Baath), Vol. 7, p. 135.
- 29) Some of those who were close to the republican leadership in Cairo at the time confirm that these harassments were carried out by the Egyptian General Intelligence Organization without the knowledge of those in power. Some add that Fuad al-Rakkabi, who split from the Arab Baath Socialist Party, played a major part in inciting The Organization against his former colleagues.
- 30) From the Iraqi Communist Party's communique issued in Baghdad on 8-2-1963.
- 31) From another communique also issued by The Iraqi Communist Party on 8-2-1963.
- 32) The Iraqi newspaper, al-Jamahir, 20-2-1963.
- 33) Ibid., 14-4-1963.
- 34) Ahmad Hassan al-Bakr, in his speech on the anniversary of the 8th February, 1963 Revolution, published in ath- Thawra newspaper , Baghdad 9-2-1970.
- 35) at- Taqrir as-Siyasi lil-Mu'tamar al-Qutri ath- Thamin Am 1974 (The Political Resolution of the Eighth Regional Conference 1974), Baghdad, Dar al-Thawra, 1974, pp. 19-20.