

Observation no: 92 (Arab Israeli War)

Country-year: Iraq - 1947

1. Did the current regime come to power in a military coup?

No.

Iraq gained its independence from Great Britain after being admitted to the League of Nations as a member state on October 3, 1932. The Hashemite monarchy, established by the British during the mandate, was overthrown by a military coup led by four Iraqi nationalist generals sympathizing with Nazi Germany on April 1, 1941. This led Great Britain to invade the country and subsequently reestablish the monarchy that ruled until the military coup of July 1958 that declared the Republic of Iraq.¹

2. Has the country ever experienced a military coup?

Yes.

From general Bakr Sidqi's military coup of 1936, the country experienced a series of successful coups and countercoups in an attempt to undermine the British influence that still prevailed after the end of the mandate. The army had gained popularity in the early years of the 1930's by successfully suppressing tribal uprisings and discontent towards the political regime grew in the army amid influential nationalist and ultra-nationalist groups with Pan-Arab ideas. These tensions culminated with the April 1, 1941 coup that started the Anglo-Iraqi War. The result was the British ousting of the "coup d'État government" of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, the military occupation of the country until 1947, and the restoration of the British-backed Hashemite monarchy.²

3. Is the country's top leader a former military officer?

No.

When on April 1939, Iraq's second king, King Ghazi, was killed in a car accident, Crown Prince Abd al-Ilah, King Ghali's cousin, was proclaimed regent until King Faysal II would reach his majority in 1953.³

¹ Khadduri, Majid. *Independent Iraq, 1932-1958. A Study in Iraqi Politics*. London: Oxford University Press, 1960, chapters 9 & 10.

² Khadduri, Majid, pp. 76-78.

³ Khadduri, Majid, pp. 140-141.

4. Are ethnic, sectarian, or racial criteria used to exclude segments of the population from the officer corps?

No.

However, the 1932-1958 period between the mandate and the overthrow of the monarchy in 1958 by the Free Officers was marked by a rise of Sunni Arab officers from middle and poor backgrounds in the army and a reduction of officers from religious and ethnic minorities. While in the early years of the military college, the cadets originated from all parts of the population, including sons of tribal sheikhs and officers from Kurdish backgrounds, the officer corps gradually became dominated by urban Sunni Arabs from lower and middle classes mostly hostile to both the Hashemite monarchy and the British.⁴

5. Are there strict ideological requirements for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

When the Iraqi army was created, the very top ranks were filled by ex-Sharifian officers that had fought with Faysal against the Ottoman rule in the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918. One of the most notable senior officer and loyalist to King Faysal was Nuri as-Said, who served as prime minister eight times between 1932 and 1958 and was in office until March 29, 1947. On the contrary, the other senior officers were loyalists of the Ottoman Empire and had been selected because they were the only ones to have military expertise. Bakr Sidqi, who launched the first military coup of 1936 as the chief of staff, was one of these former Ottoman senior officers that greatly opposed the Hashemite monarchy.⁵

6. Is party membership required for entry into the senior officer corps?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

7. Does military training involve extensive political education or ideological indoctrination?

Yes.

After Iraq gained its independence from Great Britain in 1932, the Treaty of Preferential Alliance secured the continued influence of the British over the army.

⁴ Heller, Mark. *Politics and the Military in Iraq and Jordan, 1920-1958: The British Influence. Armed Forces & Society*, 1977, pp. 83-84.

⁵ Heller, Mark, pp. 82-83.

One of the conditions defined by the Treaty was the British exclusive control over the selection and instruction of officers. While the British emphasized the need for political education in order to support the civilian political order and national “spirit”, this strategy turned against them with the emergence of a whole new generation of Pan-Arab officers opposing foreign interference and therefore British influence in Iraq.⁶

8. Has the military been used to repress internal dissent in the last five years?

Yes.

The Iraqi army successfully repressed Kurdish rebellions led by the Barzani brothers between 1943 and late 1945.⁷

9. Has the military been used to govern the country in the last five years?

No.

In the period following the April 1941 coup by Rashid Ali between October 1941 and June 1944, general Nuri as-Said, then prime minister and minister of defense, formed three governments. Since the group that controlled the army prior to 1941 and the perpetrators of the coup had fled abroad in exile, as-Said achieved to keep the army out of politics.⁸

10. Is there a paramilitary organization separate from the regular military, used to provide regime or leader security?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

11. Is there an internal intelligence apparatus dedicated to watching the regular military?

No.

I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

12. Has a purge of the officer corps occurred in the last five years?

⁶ Heller, Mark, pp. 81 & 85-86.

⁷ Al-Marashi, Ibrahim. Disbanding and Rebuilding the Iraqi Army: The Historical Perspective. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 3, September 2007, p. 43.

⁸ Khadduri, Majid, p. 249.

No.

Again, I cannot find evidence of this in the major histories already cited.

13. Is there an institutionalized forum through which civilian leaders and military officers regularly exchange information?

No.

The fall of Rashid Ali's regime resulted in the authority to return in the hands of civilian rulers and efforts from the latter to counter military opposition.⁹

⁹ Khadduri, Majid, p. 259.