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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Office of Current Intelligence
8 February 1963

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Background on 8 February Revolt in Iraq

1. On the morning of 8 February Iraqi military elements launched a coup attempt against the Qasim government. Although fighting was apparently still going in Baghdad, as of 0800 EST, the odds seemed definitely in favor of the new revolutionaries, most of whom are Baathists.

2. The Baath Party was formed in Syria in 1954 by Michel Aflaq and Akram al-Hawrani. It is "socialistic," pan-Arab, anti-West, anti-Communist, and the most widely organized political party in the Arab world today. However, it is rent with dissension and divided into pro- and anti-Nasir factions. In Iraq, the party pays lip service to Nasir's pan-Arabism, but it has no wish to see Iraq's identity submerged in a Nasir-controlled state. While anti-Communist, we would not expect the Baath to reverse present Iraqi policy toward Moscow in such fields as arms procurement and trade. However, the Baathists would favor a more neutral policy between the Soviet Bloc and the West than has Qasim.

3. Several of the key leaders of the present revolutionary group have been identified as Baathist army officers. They had been reported conspiring against Qasim for some months.

4. The move against Qasim was sparked by a number of factors. Qasim has attempted persistently to crush the Baath. (The Baath in October 1959 nearly succeeded in killing him and he was hospitalized for two months.) His strongly pro-Communist policies, his unsuccessful 20-month-old campaign

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against the Kurds, his bitter feud with Nasir, and the loss of face caused Iraq by his insane antics were further incentives to revolt. The immediate stimulation for today's move was probably the arrest of Baathist leaders on 5 February, this coming on top of Qasim's recent dismissal of a number of anti-Communist army officers.

5. The USSR has suffered a setback in Iraq. There is little doubt that the new revolutionary regime will do its best to crush the local Iraqi Communists for good. A blood bath is likely. Street fighting between Communists and anti-Communists is going on in Baghdad now.

6. Nasir will be given a great boost by the success of the coup--he will do his best to capitalize on this. Instability is likely to increase in Syria and Jordan as pro-Nasir elements in those countries are heartened.

7. Even if the revolution succeeds, the Baath will not, at least at the outset, be completely dominant. The immediate outgrowth is likely to be a provisional coalition government bringing together a variety of anti-Community nationalist elements. In any event, an accommodation with the rebellious Kurds in Iraq will be attempted, and probably also a reconciliation with Kuwait.

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