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ABD-AL-QADIR ISMAIL AND AZIZ SHARIF
1949-1958

Abd-al-Qadir Ismail and Aziz Sharif, two of Iraqi's most important Communists, have had amazingly similar careers. Both have resided in Damascus most of the time since 1948, having been forced to flee their own country. During late 1948-early 1949 Ismail and Sharif were separately noted as working for the creation of an Arab-Jewish "democratic" Palestine. And all during the period of their Damascus residence they have reportedly both been extremely close to Syrian Communist leader Khalid Bakdash, serving as links between the Syrian and Iraqi Communist Parties, and to the Soviet Legation (later Embassy) in Damascus, acting as emissaries to Iraq for that institution. In 1954 Aziz was described as a "friend, contact, or follower" of Abd-al-Qadir, and both were noted as being somewhat opposed to the policies of the al-Qaidah faction which was then dominant in Iraqi Communist circles. Ismail and Sharif have both, at one time or another, taken part in World Peace activities, and both were reportedly delegates to the Cairo Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference of December 1957-January 1958.

Ismail, one of the founders of Iraqi Communism, is clearly the senior of the two. Aside from being some ten years older--he is sixty-four--he has been reported as a Central Committeeman of the Syrian Communist Party ever since he arrived in Damascus and on two occasions, in 1949 and 1958, was even alleged to have taken over the leadership of the Syrian Party in Bakdash's absence. Abd-al-Qadir Ismail's age seems to have restricted his external activities in recent years, however. * When the Soviet Embassy in Damascus

* If, as alleged, he was a leader of the Syrian Party in March 1958, it would seem likely that he has been consistently in harmony with Bakdash, even if not particularly active in overt Party work.

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attempted to heal the breach between Kurdish and Arab Iraqi Communists in late 1957, it was reported to have sent one Isa Arafat to the Kurdish Unity Party and Aziz Sharif to the Communist Party of Iraq (CPI). Early that year, Sharif had also acted as Khalid Bakdash's spokesman in criticizing the CPI Central Committee for right deviationism. In 1948 such assignments would probably have fallen to Ismail, described at that time as "the liaison between Soviet Legations in Arab countries and the Kurds and between Syrian and Iraqi Communists." Ismail was active in Middle East Peace Partisan activities as of 1951, but little international front activity has been noted on his part since that time. On the other hand, Aziz Sharif appeared to have become prominent in the front field during 1957; he led the Iraqi delegations to the Colombo World Peace Congress and the Moscow World Youth Festival and was one of the two Iraqis on the Afro-Asian Solidarity Conference Preparatory Committee.

Aziz Sharif was consistently reported during the period 1949-mid-1956 to have been the leader of a group of Iraqi Communists variously described as the al-Nidhal (Struggle) group, the al-Haqiqah (Truth) group, and the United Communist Party of Iraq. This was a small group composed mainly of intellectuals--Sharif himself had earlier been a university professor. Having disagreed with the al-Qaidah group by its continued opposition to the partition of Palestine during the Arab-Israeli war in the late 1940's, the al-Nidhal group failed to unite with the regular Communist Party of Iraq until 1956, although the CPI allegedly enjoyed Moscow support. In April 1956, however, Sharif reportedly began to cooperate with the CPI, allegedly on Moscow's orders, and appeared actually to have joined that organization prior to its amalgamation with the dissident Shaghila (Workers' Banner) faction in June of that year. It is presumed that Sharif was an important factor in the at least partially successful Soviet efforts to unify Iraqi Communism. As of early 1957, Sharif, who lives in the same house with Khalid Bakdash in Damascus, was reported as being responsible for Syrian aid (nature unspecified) to the CPI. In March 1958 he reportedly left Damascus for Communist China and Japan, the reason for the trip not being stated. In May 1958, Sharif was reported directing the anti-Government activities of Iraqi refugees in Damascus.

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NOTES ON THE UNITED FRONTS OF 1954 AND 1956

With the return of overt political activity in 1953, the Left again became more active. The National Democratic Party (NDP), when it reappeared, was apparently more infiltrated by Communists and began to give open support to such front organizations as the Peace Partisans and the Democratic Youth Union. Earlier that year a group led by Jamal Haydari, calling itself the Banner of Toilers (Riyat al Shaghila) disassociated itself from the major group of Iraqi Communists and advocated closer relationship with nationalist groups. In 1954, Communists (which groups, is not stated) gave their blessing and support to the NDP-Istiqlal United National Front (UNF) and are reported even to have participated unofficially in the UNF's Executive Committee.* Again, however, the dissolution of Parliament and the banning of the National Democratic Party blocked the unity drive.

To a great extent as a result of the efforts of Aziz Sharif, the Iraqi Communists achieved a degree of unity in June 1956--apparently more so than at any time since 1947 (see above). Sharif's Communist Unity Party (al-Haqiqah, al Nidhal) group joined the al-Shaghila group and the main-stream al-Qaidah faction in a rejuvenated Iraqi Communist Party (ICP). Later, the Istiqlal and NDP merged to form a National Congress Group (NCG). The Ba'th (Resurrection) Party, now a potent power in Iraq, thereupon joined the NCG and the ICP in a new illegal National Front. The Ba'th apparently was urging the Front's High National Committee to adopt an activist policy, calling for demonstrations, and open agitation. Even when the decision was made to boycott the May 1958 elections, the Ba'th urged demonstrations in connection with the campaign. The CPI, NDP, and Istiqlal elements as of early June 1958 objected to the Ba'thi action campaign.

* Alleged Communists and Peace Partisans Kulayban Salih el-Ubli and Khaluq Amin Zaki served as labor and student representatives, respectively, on the Committee.

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ADDITIONAL NOTES ON AZIZ SHARIF - 1930-1948

Sharif, though more often than not at odds with the hard-headed leadership of the "regular" Iraqi Communist group, has apparently been the key figure in Moscow's unity-of-action tactics for many years. In the 1930's he served as a member of the "radical" (Communist) abd-al Qadir Ismail faction of the Ahali (Baghdad) group. In 1945 he organized the People's Party (Hishb ash-Sha'ab) to be a legal party with a program identical to that put out by the regular Communist Party earlier that year. After a trip to Syria that year, where he conferred with Khalid Bakdash, he called on the Communists to give up their legal status and come into the People's Party. This maneuver was unsuccessful at the time. *

In 1946 Sharif was noted as trying to draw into a united front his former Ahali (but Conservative wing) cohorts Kamil Chaderchi and Muhammad Hadid (see above), now leaders of the Leftist but non-Communist National Democratic Party (NDP). Though a faction in the NDF favored it, these offers were rejected. Close personal relationships were apparently maintained, for Sharif was noted as a participant in the successful legal defense of Chaderchi in 1946; and the NDP leadership was steadily becoming more radical. In 1947, after all Left Wing parties were declared illegal, some degree of success was achieved in the unity campaign. Apparently facilitated by the arrest of "regular" Communist leader Yusuf Suleman Yusuf (aka Fahad), a coalition was reportedly brought about between the regular Communists, the bulk of the membership of the People's

*Note: The similarity between this device and the Tudeh (Workers) Party in Iran is substantial--however, in Iran the Communist Party had no independent existence in the war years, and there was, therefore, no problem of "liquidationism" to complicate the concentration of forces in the new front party.

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Party, the "progressive" (extreme Left) faction of the NDP, and another Communist splinter group that had been advocating unity with non-Communist elements, called the National Revolutionary Committee.

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