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The Iraqi Communist party continues to work behind a "popular front" facade and appears to be attempting to entrench itself in a government still headed by Qasim and containing other elements. Moscow has apparently been concerned that open manifestations of Communist control in Baghdad would invite possible retaliation, as well as harm Soviet relations with other Arab and Asian countries.

Communist gains have been accompanied by a sweeping campaign of purges and arrests of non-Communist elements and central and local government officials. Estimates of the number arrested since 7 March run as high as 15,000. Key army officers, suspected of complicity in the Mosul affair, or of independent, nationalist attitudes, have been arrested or displaced.

Despite Qasim's personally cordial attitude, American Embassy personnel are being subjected to new "security" controls and harassments; several Iraqis employed by the embassy have been arrested, and American staff members are under recurrent surveillance. Foreigners in Baghdad conclude that "the iron curtain is descending."

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I. THE COMMUNIST BLOC (No Back-up Material)

II. ASIA-AFRICA

Communist Strength in Iraq

The American Embassy in Baghdad, assessing local Communist strength, believes 1959 will be "the year of the bear" in Iraq. It sees grave danger that "in the short run" Iraq will come under preponderantly Communist control and, in view of events since the Mosul revolt, thinks it highly doubtful whether Qasim, in spite of his popular standing, could reverse the trend even if he wished to.

The Communists now dominate the press, radio, and the growing and proliferating "mass organizations," such as trade unions, students' unions, the teachers' association, and the league for women's rights. They appear to have almost complete control of the Popular Resistance Force, which has shown itself willing and able to defy civil and military authority in some parts of the country.

Already strongly entrenched in the ministries of Economics, Development, Agriculture, Education, and National Guidance, Communist sympathizers appear to be making new inroads throughout the bureaucracy. The Ministry of Economics under Ibrahim Kubba is well embarked on a program to tie Iraq as closely as possible to the Soviet bloc. In addition to agreeing to large-scale Soviet aid for economic development, Kubba's ministry has succeeded in discouraging foreign and domestic private investment, leaving the way open for the growth of state capitalism. Prime Minister Qasim in his press conference of 24 March hinted at a new specific measure in this field by announcing that Iraq would study nationalization of France's share in the Iraqi Petroleum Company.

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