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"The Story of The Libyan Revolution As Told by Col. Muammar Gaddafi, Chairman of The R.C.C."

Col. Muammar Gaddafi, Chairman of the R.C.C. and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces spoke to the Libyan News Agency about how the Libyan Revolution began.

He said: "It is impossible to determine when the Revolution began. Nobody can really say when any revolution began. Because a revolution is different by nature from a coup which comes as a sudden decision from a Senior Officer, who often holds a senior capacity in the establishment and can order troops to move without justifying his actions or bothering about persuading them to support him. Therefore, a revolution is different from military coups although there might be similarities between the two at the stage of execution. Revolution is a necessary and natural phenomenon which is an answer to certain demands of society. Sometimes a complete and fundamental change of social order is absolutely necessary for the rebirth of a nation."

"I have said that I cannot determine the time when the Revolution began but I can tell you what practical steps were taken to bring it to its culmination. We have started preparations for the Revolution in the fifties, and we have formed a leadership committee while we were students in the secondary school at Sabha. Our numbers increased gradually. Later some of us went to the Military Academy and formed the first cell inside the Army. In 1964 the movement was re-organised and the committee was reconstituted for members of the Armed Forces only. The committee held its first meeting on the seaside at Tlemitha near Benghazi in the same year. A popular committee was formed at the same time to operate independently but along with the newly formed Central Committee of the Free Officers Movement. And although the activities of this popular movement were rather slow because of the oppressive measures of the previous corrupt regime, the movement has achieved great success in reviving the hopes of the youth and preventing divisions and saved the nation from splitting up into different factions and parties. Because of this, thanks to God Almighty, any person who was suspected of being a partisan was chased away from the ranks of our popular movement.

The small groups which had party-status were defeated, and our popular movement which was flexible and free from useless arguments and narrow party prejudices saved the movement from exposure and liquidation through unity and flexibility as the establishment failed to realise the real depths of the movement.

As I have said previously, the Movement was re-organised in 1964. Since then the Central Committee of the Free Officers Movement (which is now the Revolutionary Command Council) held regular meetings. The attendance of these meetings was rather difficult. They were held on 9th August, 7th October, 24th December and on the two holy feasts. In other words, we held our meetings during public holidays. These meetings were held out of town and we had to travel hundreds of miles to attend them in all sorts of very hot and cold weather. Most of us had to buy private cars to enable us to serve the cause although cars were rather expensive and our salaries

were inadequate to support our poor families as well as indulge in owning motor cars. But by the Grace of God we managed somehow. However, travelling from one part of the country was rather risky in those days, because of the numerous checkpoints along the highways and byways which we hated especially at the Marble Arch. But we managed to cross these checkpoints without registering our names, as we had made use of our personal acquaintance with the generals to our advantage or some ruse or other. We usually slept in the open air and held our meetings under the trees or in caves or bedouin tents.

Another difficulty we faced in attending these meetings was our social obligation to our families and friends during these public holidays. We had to see our relations before or after the meetings so that we could spend our holidays in attending the meetings. We had therefore to justify our absence.

The Central Committee imposed on itself a rather stern code of ethics which others perhaps could not endure. The members were forbidden alcohol, gambling and night clubs. They practised their daily prayers and studied diligently. This rigorous code was also imposed on all the members of the Free Officers' Movement. But in order to avert attention to ourselves we were not strict with everybody who played cards.

We decided that every member should enrol with the university to specialize in a specific subject. And so there was an unprecedented number of military personnel in the university although a number of our officers could not enrol as they were sent to study abroad, and some of them were transferred to other posts.

All members of the Central Committee were expected to attend the periodic meetings. In view of the difficulties involved in holding these meetings, we decided that no meeting obtained quorum unless all members of the Committee were present. A heavy penalty was dealt therefore in 1967 to a member who failed to attend a meeting and the marks of the punishment are still visible.

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I have previously spoken about the difficulty we faced in obtaining cars for our transport. And it gives me pleasure in recalling the generosity of Free Officers who were not members of the Central Committee in collecting contributions for this purpose and for the activities of the Movement. The idea of creating a fund for the Movement was proposed at a major meeting in Sidi Khalifa. The decision was postponed to a subsequent meeting. After this meeting some members of the Central Committee approached individual members and found they were willing to contribute to the utmost of their ability; especially the cadres of lieutenants who were then the pride of the Libyan Army and could well be the pride of any army. When this enthusiasm became evident we took a resolution at another meeting at Sidi Khalifa not to collect contributions but to place all our salaries of all the Free Officers as well as the salaries of the Central Committee at the disposal of the Movement so that the Movement could draw on these salaries without limit. Since then the Movement drew repeatedly on our salaries to pay the air fares of the officers who were to travel on urgent business and to assist each other on various occasions, and family welfare. We often travelled by air from Tripoli and Benghazi to our meeting place and returned the same day in spite of the strict military life and the shortage of leave. The expenses were willingly paid by the Free Officers and all were happy to contribute to the one and only way.

I remember that while some of our colleagues who graduated were going to some other destination, we gathered in front of the former residence of King Idris in Benghazi where he resided before becoming King of Libya, to discuss how and where we should hold our next meeting. The discussion drew some attention to us and probably made others realize that there was a leadership unit, so we withdrew to the pavement in front of the De Lassale Institute and surrounded ourselves with Free Officers, and we were able to continue our discussions and decide the time and place of the next meeting, which was to be held a week later.

Members of the Central Committee of Unionist Free Officers' Movement arrived for this meeting at the Nahda Hotel in Benghazi late in the evening. As they had made no reservations I found them in the morning sleeping on couches in the lounge. But, nevertheless, we held our meeting.

We passed a resolution in this meeting instructing each member of the Central Committee to report on officers who were not members of the Free Officers' Movement, especially high ranking officers, so that we would not commit injustice to anybody at the hour of reckoning. Consequently we received piles of confidential reports on various commanders, and the picture became clearer to us by comparing these reports with our personal impressions.

Those reported revealed that some of these high ranking officers were hopeful. So we discussed the plight of the country with them. Some of them did not believe that the state of affairs was so bad; and others admitted the truth of our analysis of the situation but were rather pessimistic about the possibility of effecting a change. They pointed out that there were foreign bases and security forces and tribal loyalties.

But in fact this was nonsense. We were the people. Our movement embodies representatives of the whole country. We were the sons of the tribes with which they tried to terrify us. Among us there were also the sons of the cities, villages and the entire nation; and what's more, we were the genuine representatives of the people.

As for the foreign bases, we have never feared a collision with them. For we have decided that it was time our people asserted their sovereignty, and resolved that should these bases intervene, then the fight against them would be a noble and legitimate duty.

Our attitude to the security forces was different. Some members of these forces were also members of our movement. We looked at these forces as an element of the people who were overpowered and led into activities which are loathsome to them.

Our discussions with some of the high ranking officers came almost to nought. There were some sympathetic officers nevertheless. But we decided to spare a lot of them the consequences of involvement in our risky undertaking either because of their family affairs or state of health, etc.

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of.

Lt. Col. Adam Hawaz who later became our Minister of Defence was one of those. He was an excellent and popular officer. But he had kidney trouble and in sympathy with his plight we decided to relieve him from immediate action. But we kept in touch with him in hospital and when we succeeded in our risky enterprise we called him to join us as our Minister of Defence.

Initially the date of the revolution was set for 12th March 1969. But it was postponed to the 27th. This was preceded in January, 1969 by weighing up the strength of our Free Officers' Movement against the opposing forces. But no one in Libya or anywhere else in the Arab world, nor any of those who were tried by a special military tribunal, except the members of the Free Officers' Movement and less than half a dozen who were prominent leaders of the popular organisation attached to our movement, knew about our intention to carry out our revolution on March 12th or about the postponement of our action to the ~~27~~th and then to five months later.

The Central Committee of the Free Officers' Movement met during the examinations for officer promotions at the Tripoli Command Camp. After reviewing the general situation, they decided to carry out the revolution within a few months.

But we found that a large number of the officers whom we wanted to arrest were attending a concert of Um Kalthum. As they would be sitting among crowds of innocent civilians at zero hour we decided that it would be unethical to disturb the civilians and therefore we had to choose another time.

So I returned to Benghazi in my volkswagen accompanied by Lieut. Abdel Hamid Shahas and Lieut. Abdel Hamed Zayed. En route I went to visit my family in the Badia of Sirt as I had not seen them for a long time.

AN OFFICIAL HISTORY OF THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION

An "official history" of the background, planning, and execution of the Libyan revolution appeared in:

1. al-Qadhafi's five-part account of the Revolution:
 - (a) Part I - Libyan newspapers of September 13, 1969
 - (b) Part II - Libyan newspapers of September 16, 1969
 - (c) Part III - Libyan newspapers of September 30 and October 1, 1969
 - (d) Part IV - Libyan newspapers of October 7, 1969
 - (e) Part V - Libyan newspapers of November 11, 1969
2. an article by the "political editor" of Tripoli's al-Yawn of September 5, 1969.
3. al-Qadhafi's interview with MENA - Libyan newspapers of September 10, 1969.
4. al-Qadhafi's denial of statements made in an account of the revolution published by the Sudanese al-Khbar al-Yawn and reprinted in Tripoli's al-Ra'id of September 22, 1969 - Libyan newspapers of September 26, 1969.
5. al-Qadhafi's interview with Egyptian television - Libyan newspapers of October 15, 1969.
6. al-Qadhafi's interview with the Sudanese al-Ayyan - Tripoli's al-Ra'id of December 6, 1969.

The following narrative is a complete word-for-word translation of these sources. The sources of specific passages of the narrative are indicated by the footnotes which appear at intervals to mark transitions from one source to another. Statements that confirm rather than add to the narrative are placed in parentheses.

It is impossible to give a specific date for the beginning of the Libyan revolution Al-Thawrah--no one can determine the beginning of any revolution.

This differs from a coup Al-Inqilaḥ, which is a casual event occurring at the pleasure of senior officers. These sometimes issue orders from positions of legal authority for the movement of the troops and officers who bring about everything but their masters' orders. These may not be discussed and are followed without certainty or conviction.

A revolution is the opposite, even if the practical application of the idea partakes of the same appearance as a military coup. A revolution is a vital necessity which grows naturally in the consciousness of a society as a whole. Thus, it materializes naturally or the members of a society give it form automatically as an inevitable response to the laws of nature. The necessity for complete and radical change and alteration touches the essence and values of life and produces an excellent pattern in the life of the new man--a man of revolution, a man of comprehensive and complete change, a man who is as if born again in a new age.^{1(a)}

As for the practical organization of the revolution--the collection of men and the provision of weapons--a specific time for them can be determined. The practical steps of the revolution, including the beginning of secret meetings, began in 1959, when my colleagues and I Al-Qadhdhāḥ were students in secondary school.⁵ The first command committee was formed while we were students in secondary schools in the town of Sabhā to be exact. Our number began to increase and to branch out within the ranks of youth. (We began our meetings in preparation for drawing up an organizational plan to bring together the elements and tools of the revolution in the nineteen-fifties.^{1(b)} One can fix a date for planning and preparation for the revolution. We go back tens of years to 1959. At that time, we were students in secondary schools.⁶)

Our souls were in revolt against the backwardness enveloping our country and its land, whose best gifts and riches were being lost through plunder, and against the isolation imposed on our people in a vain attempt to hold it back from the path of the Arab people and from its greatest cause. Indeed, this attempt planted enemy bases on our territory and stabbed the Arab people in the back.

We met as a group of friends to plan a long, hard path for ourselves. It would, however, lead to a goal we had promised ourselves to achieve. We decided first not to join any of the political parties and to strive to enter the military academy in the belief that it was the ideal way to the revolution--to taking power and defeating the reactionary forces. The opposition parties and groups were weak. They did not have the strength for confrontation and did not have definite ideas. Such were the attributes of the official opposition. As for

the people, it proceeded in its opposition without organization. As to the ideological parties, there was a small group belonging to the Arab Ba'ath Party whose movement the authorities suppressed and recently a small group of Arab Nationalists appeared. Socialist revolutionary thought existed among a few individuals without organization.

We continued our struggle while we were students in secondary schools. Our group organized demonstrations. We organized a huge demonstration the day Syria seceded from the United Arab Republic. As a result, I was expelled from secondary school and deprived of education in any of the government schools of the Fazzān territory. I moved from the whole province to Tripolitania and entered the Misrātah School to receive the college preparatory certificate, as my colleagues--the other members of our group--received it. We presented ourselves to the Military Academy. Some were accepted and some were not.⁶ (Some of the group proceeded to the Military Academy, and some of the members of the first cell were fated to enter the Army.^{1(b)} Some joined the army and some headed for universities and civilian activities.⁵)

Inside the Military Academy we continued to work.⁶ In 1964, the movement was reorganized in such a way that the central committee was composed only of military men.^{1(b)} (The central committee of the Free Officers was formed inside the military academy.⁵) We formed the central committee of our organization, which we gave the name of the "Free Unionist Officers."⁵ (The operational name of the organization was "The Free Unionist Socialist Officers."²)

Its first meeting was on the shore at Tulmaythah in that year.^{1(b)} We began to expand our membership base by enlisting more young officers.⁶ The organization included officers from the land, air and naval forces in its ranks.² These officers used to leave a nucleus of themselves in each new group of Academy students. Upon their graduation, the junior and senior Free Officers would amalgamate. The enrollment of officers was carried out before graduation,...not by means of visiting army camps after graduation.⁴

At the same time, our colleagues who had not been accepted into the Military Academy formed a civilian command to heighten popular consciousness.⁶ (At the same time, a popular committee was formed to work totally independently of the central committee of the Unionist Officers from the organizational point of view.^{1(b)}) But their work went slowly and was not marked by the same speed which marked our work inside the armed forces, where military discipline helped us to continue working.⁶ In spite of the fact that activity on the popular level stumbled because of the repression prevailing under the past corrupt and defunct regime, it bore its fruit to a great extent. Popular activity was able to create an environment immune to party activities, division, and mini-blocs. Thus, it was able to prevent dissolution of the groups of free progressive youth. As a result of this and thanks to God's protection of this good people, anyone suspected of being a party member was exposed to expulsion. Several small groups colored by party activities were in fact struck, as is known. Our popular activity, marked by flexibility, expansion, avoidance of narrow factionalism and sterile debate, escaped detection and discovery of its vast extent.^{1(b)}

We were the only organization working within the army. There were other groups with oppositionist ideas, but they were groups brought together by friendship and without organization. Our group was the only organization inside the armed forces. It relied only on young men and junior officers and was able over a short time to gain control of all the young men in the army.⁶ It is said that the number of Free Officers is 70, although this number is comprised by only one of the numerous groups of Free Officers.⁴

I have said...that there was flexible popular activity far removed from party activities and sterile debate. It came into existence and grew in the course of a few years of preparation for the revolution. I have said that the movement was reorganized in 1964. Thereafter, meetings of the central committee of the Free Unionist Officers, which is now the Revolutionary Command Council, followed one after the other.

We tired ourselves most of all over the question of meetings. Their appointed dates were 9 August, 24 December, 'Id al-Fitr, 'Id al-Adha, and 7 October--i.e., the agreed dates of meetings were holidays and feasts. The reasons for our exhaustion were that they were held outside cities on the one hand and on holidays on the other.

The first reason always caused the imposition of the hardships of travelling hundreds of miles accompanied by sleeplessness and heat or cold according to the season. For this reason, most of the members were forced to buy a private car to be at the service of the movement. Cars were expensive, while our salaries were small and our families poor. However, by praising God and with His help, we were successful. Often, we passed the many check points without registering, sometimes with a trick and sometimes through a personal acquaintance. We used to sleep out of doors and, meet under trees, in the shelter of boulders, or in desert tents. We used to dislike the many barriers, especially the one at Marble Arch.

The second reason for our exhaustion over meetings was that we had set their dates according to feasts and holidays, something which prevented us from spending these feasts with our families and relatives. We were also prevented from enjoying our holidays, for we would see our families before or after the feasts, or sometimes on the same day and then spend the rest of the time in meetings. We made an appearance intentionally so that those concerned would not know that we disappeared on these occasions.

Restrictions others did not have to bear were imposed on members of the central committee. Thus, members of the committee would not play cards, drink alcoholic beverages, frequent night clubs, or neglect prayer. They studied everything. I say in all honesty that these restrictions were imposed on all the many formations of the Free Unionist Officers, but, out of fear of attracting attention, we were not very strict about card playing with everyone.

Our plan was for those of us who could to enter the university to specialize in a given branch of learning. In recent years the faculties of the university witnessed an unusual interest in enrollment by military men, even though missions overseas and transfers often came between the university and our officers.

I say with regard to meetings that some of the orders were that every member of the central committee should attend. It was not permitted for anyone to be absent. If anyone was, the meeting was considered invalid. This kind of meeting was periodic. Keenness for attendance and its necessity used to impose many hardships and problems on us, being, as we were, under military restrictions. In 1967, a severe punishment whose effects continue to the present was imposed on one of the members of the committee because he was absent from one of these meetings. 1(c)

I have spoken...about the meetings and their difficulties and about the private cars in the service of the movement and their high prices, their necessity, and the difficulty of obtaining them.

In this respect, I remember with all pride and honor how the Free Unionist Officers, even those outside the central committee, cooperated in collecting the purchase price of cars and in contributing the cash they had for the good of the movement. At a crucial meeting in the Sidi Khalifah area, a number of members of the central committee put forth the proposal that the movement have capital resources and a savings fund. Agreement was reached to postpone a decision on this matter to a second meeting. Following the meeting, the members of the committee scouted out most of the formations, and we found a readiness to sacrifice without limit, especially among the formations of lieutenants, who were the pride of the Libyan army--in fact, the pride of the entire Arab military. After such good results, we decided at another meeting in the same place in Sidi Khalifah not to collect subscriptions, the salaries of all the Free Unionist Officers, those of the central committee in the forefront, being instead the funds of the movement, to be taken at any time and without limit as to amount. In fact, our salaries were liable to be unsystematically spent on plane tickets for officers on urgent missions and on mutual assistance in family matters, misfortune, and social occasions. We travelled a great deal by air singly and as a group between Tripoli and Benghazi and would return the same day because of the strict requirements of military life and the limitations on us with regard to leaves and permissions. The Free Officers spent a great deal of what they owned without limit. We were very pleased with the action we were undertaking, because it was an action for which there was no alternative and a road for which there was no other.

I remember that on one occasion, while seeing off the officers graduating from among us, we took advantage of the great crowd in front of the former Amir Diwan in Benghazi before getting into our buses and tried to define the last points of discussion for the next agreed

meeting. It is worth mentioning that, when a certain point was raised in a risky manner, we were forced to move aside to the sidewalk of the De LaSalle Institute. We were afraid that we had attracted someone's attention. Perhaps this indeed happened. But it appears that the majority of those around us or near us were from among our Free Officers. If they knew anything, they knew that a command unit was among the group or something like that. Later, the meeting took place. (d)

I have said...that it was agreed to meet.... A week after that, the members of the central committee of the Free Unionist Officers flocked to the al-Nahdah Hotel in Baghdad at different late times of the night. In the morning I found them sleeping in various positions and on chairs because places had not been available and because the hour had been late. In the morning, the meeting took place. It was there decided that each member of the central committee of the Free Unionist Officers would submit a report every month on the officers who had not joined the movement, especially those with high ranks, so that we would wrong no one when judging him. Thereafter, secret reports on the commanders of units and brigades and their assistants followed one after the other. We began to get a clear picture of each one of them and we began to compare these reports with the information we recollected about them all and with our experience with and observation of them.

We expected some good from some of them despite their high rank. We disclosed the matter to them, but often found deep in them a profound despair and disbelief of what they were hearing. The reluctant among them sought to frighten us with mention of bases, tribes, and security forces, but we trusted in God's help. We did not fear the tribes because we all represent them from top to bottom--we are the sons of those tribes with which they seek to frighten us. We are the sons of the villages, cities, and countryside and represent the Libyan people with its tribes, cities, villages, nobility, and true heritage. As for the foreign bases, we did not fear conflict with them. If our people has proclaimed its will in its country and they try to interfere, then, in our belief, the noblest and most lawful kind of fighting will occur. As for the security forces, there were formations from it inside the movement, and we viewed them as a part of the people, albeit helpless.

I say with respect to contacts with and disclosures to the high ranks that the result was almost nil. We put some of the sincere ones aside until after the battle, sometimes because of family situations and sometimes because of their health. For example, Lt. Col. Adnan al-Hawari, the present Defense Minister, was among the excellent officers devoted to his military duty. All loved him, and we would have admitted him into the movement had it not been for the kidney illness with which he was afflicted and which required his treatment abroad for a period of time. After his return, he was given medical rest to keep him from reading and the pressure of work for a year. In spite of this, he held

to his work in the Signal Corps. We used to visit him in the hospital and find him translating electronics books and relying on a special worktable of the kind that is attached to the bed because he was unable to sit naturally. He was the object of our esteem and sympathy. Thus, we decided not to admit him into the organization for the reasons mentioned and put him aside with the others we had put aside until such time as we had risked all and succeeded. Indeed, he was summoned the morning of the revolution and the Defense Ministry was entrusted to him despite the state of his health. 1(e)

We were not discovered until very recently. The reason for this is that the defunct regime was occupied in its internal struggles. The senior officers revolved in the orbit of these struggles and competed for positions. There was the group of the King. There were the groups of the Crown Prince and the group of the general staff and Colonel al-Shalhi. Eyes were focused on these groups as they gyrated in frantic maneuvers in search of positions. None of them paid attention to the junior officers. Thus we stayed concealed. We on our part worked under conditions of absolute secrecy.

We had fixed the early hours of last March 24 as the date of our move. As the date approached, our activity and movements increased and the elements of secrecy collapsed. The authorities felt that something was going on in the ranks of the junior officers and learned of our movement, but they did not know the extent of its depth or seriousness. They immediately took rapid and urgent measures--they withdrew vehicles so as to limit the officers' and soldiers' ability to move. They withdrew live ammunition from the units. Armored cars were sent to Benghazi. The King travelled from Tripoli to his palace in Tubruq so as to remain under the protection of the British base there. The army was not in control in Tubruq. Thus, revolution became impossible.

They found out I was the organizer of the movement. An order for my arrest was issued, but they feared that the situation would explode. We found all the documents indicating this after the revolution. They knew my arrest would lead to an explosion, so they deferred and resorted to another method. They decided to send the junior officers abroad in training missions and to the foreign language school in preparation for the coming missions. They began by sending a group to study aerial defense and followed it up with another group from the artillery. They decided to send me to Britain in a mission lasting seven months. We felt that this plan, were it to succeed, would make us lose all our Free Officers. Finally, they decided to send a large group abroad suddenly and fixed the first of September as the date of departure. We could wait no longer, so we fixed the same date as the date of our revolution. 6

The Revolutionary Command Council decided that September 1 should be the date of execution of the revolutionary plan.² (The reason for that is attributable to the fact that it had been decided that about thirty or forty Free Officers whom it had been determined to send on a mission to Britain were to depart the country immediately the next day. By this means, it was intended to get rid of them in groups under cover of study. The previous government used the same procedure last March and April by sending away about twenty junior officers when, at that time, it felt the existence of a movement in the army. Had it been decided to postpone the date for carrying out the revolution to after the first of September, this would have meant that about seventy or eighty Free Officers would have been out of Libya. Thus, we decided that the revolution would be on this day. This was a big surprise, because the officials were then preparing to send away those officers. They believed their plan had succeeded.⁵)

The execution of the plan drawn up began after midnight.² We did not resort to colleagues outside the organization on the night of the revolution because we had no need to.⁴ The password of the various units on the night of September 1 was "Palestine is ours" and the reply was "Jerusalem."³ The Libyan armed forces which participated in executing the plan arrived at the positions assigned to them one whole hour before the appointed time. These forces were able to gain complete control of the situation in only two hours. At 5 a.m., on September 1, the forces participating in the execution of the plan were able to strip the Security Forces in Tripoli, Benghazi and al-Bayda⁷ of all their weapons--especially the Mobile Forces. Thus, the forces controlled these three cities before dawn....² The broadcasting station fell at 6 a.m.⁴ I al-Qadhafi was among the Free Officers entrusted with specific tasks. My task was to occupy the Benghazi broadcasting station and to cooperate with Lt. Col. MUSA Ahmad, the present Interior Minister, in seizing the armored cars of the Security Forces in the Eastern provinces. Each Free Officer carried out the duty assigned to him most completely.³ The Security Force had several times the fire power that the army had at that time. It had rockets and artillery. But on the night of the revolution, these weapons did not move, some as a result of surprise and some because the security men themselves longed for revolution and awaited the day in which the army would move in order to join it. Indeed, many security officers joined the forces of the army in the first hours of the revolution.⁵