

Sha'rawi Jum'a and the Free Officers Movement: His Role and Position Toward the 23 July 1952 Revolution

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a, a prominent military and political figure in modern Egyptian history, active during Gamal Abdel Nasser's era. Despite his involvement, his link to the Free Officers Movement, his relationship with Nasser, and the July 23, 1952, Revolution have received limited attention. Jum'a joined the movement but was not part of its leadership. He regarded Nasser as a leader and observed his interactions with colleagues before Nasser's presidency. His role in the revolution was minor, holding only a single position without a decisive influence. Nonetheless, he openly supported the revolution, praising it as a transformative event that significantly changed Egypt and left a lasting legacy.

Keywords: Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a; Free Officers; 23 July 1952 Revolution.

INTRODUCTION

Sha'rawi Jum'a is regarded as one of the military and political figures who left a discernible imprint on Egypt's history in the aftermath of the Revolution of 23 July 1952. This, however, does not suggest that the developments preceding the revolution were inconsequential to the formation of his personality. On the contrary, his character was shaped and matured through his engagement with the unfolding political and military events of the period, particularly during the initial phase of his association with the Free Officers Movement. This connection was established through his acquaintance with Hamdi 'Ashour. Prior to this relationship, Sha'rawi Jum'a had no direct personal ties with the Free Officers, who at that time remained largely unknown to the public. Moreover, during this period—specifically in 1949—Sha'rawi Jum'a was serving as an instructor at the Military Academy. The outbreak of the revolution on 23 July 1952 exerted a profound and tangible influence on Sha'rawi Jum'a, as it did on many of the individuals who took part in its events, marking a decisive turning point in his personal and professional trajectory.

From this perspective, several questions arise: Did Sha'rawi Jum'a formally and actively join the Free Officers Movement? And did he play a role in the Revolution of 23 July 1952?

entitled "*The Relationship between Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a and the Free Officers Movement*," examines the nature and development of his association with the movement. The second section, entitled "*Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a's Position on the Revolution of 23 July 1952*," analyzes his stance toward the revolution and its implications within the broader political and military context.

In conducting this research, primary reliance was placed on the work of Muhammad Hammad, *A Testimony for History: Egypt's Minister of Interior Sha'rawi Jum'a* (Al-Ahram Center, Cairo, 2015), which provides valuable insights into the early stages of Sha'rawi Jum'a's affiliation with the Free Officers Movement. In addition, the study draws upon Ahmad Hamroush's *The July Revolution and the Mind of Egypt* (Maktabat Madbouli, Cairo, 1985). This work is

based on a series of interviews and questions conducted by the author with Sha'rawi Jum'a and several of his contemporaries, through which Jum'a's perspectives on the Free Officers' Revolution and its significance to him are clearly articulated. Furthermore, a range of contemporary newspapers served as supplementary sources, most notably *Al-Abali* (Cairo), issue no. 836, 24 September 1997, and *Al-Bayan*, issue no. 6392, 18 December 1997. The study also benefited from several unpublished university theses, which contributed to the identification of the relevant figures and to situating them within their appropriate historical and intellectual contexts.

Section One: The Relationship of Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a with the Free Officers Movement:

The early stages of Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a's relationship with the Free Officers Movement were closely connected to the consolidation of his acquaintance with Gamal Abdel Nasser in the late 1940s. Sha'rawi Jum'a stated, in audio recordings dating to 1986, that his initial acquaintance with Gamal Abdel Nasser took place during the period of his service as an instructor at the Military Academy, specifically in 1949. This acquaintance occurred through Hamdi 'Ashour, who was an officer at the Military Academy and whom Sha'rawi Jum'a described as "a friend and a brother." Muhammad Fawzi also worked alongside them at the Military Academy during that period.

At that time, Gamal Abdel Nasser was serving as an instructor at the School of Administrative Affairs with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel (General Staff) and was affiliated with the Infantry Corps. By contrast, Sha'rawi Jum'a held the rank of Captain and was, together with his colleague and close associate Hamdi 'Ashour, preparing to enroll in a master's program at the Staff College. He did, in fact, complete his studies and obtained a master's degree in Military Sciences in 1952 (Jum'a, n.d., p. 1) (Al-Bayan, 1997).

At the time, Gamal Abdel Nasser was contemplating the formation of a specialized unit drawn from the Infantry Corps, which, according to Sha'rawi Jum'a, was regarded as "the weakest branch of the Egyptian Army" during that period. The purpose of this initiative was to prepare officers who aspired to pursue advanced studies at the Staff College. To that end, Nasser assembled approximately seventy officers, among them Hamdi 'Ashour and Sha'rawi Jum'a. These officers met with him two or three times a week to receive instruction in tactics and administrative affairs, which Gamal Abdel Nasser provided voluntarily and without remuneration. Major Abdel Hakim 'Amer assisted him in carrying out this task (Hammad, 2015, pp. 202–203) (Fawshiyya, 1960, p. 1/169).

This period witnessed the formation of the Free Officers Movement within the ranks of the Egyptian Army. The Movement's Supreme Committee consisted of ten members: Gamal Abdel Nasser, Kamal al-Din Hussein, Abdel Moneim Abdel Raouf, Abdel Latif al-Baghdadi, Abdel Hakim 'Amer, Anwar al-Sadat, Hassan Ibrahim, Khaled Mohieddin, Gamal Salem, and Salah Salem (Al-Sayyid Jasim, 1985, pp. 51–52). Gamal Abdel Nasser stood at the forefront of this committee, which exercised strict oversight by thoroughly examining the background and ideological orientation of prospective members prior to admitting them into the organization's cells (Al-Sayyid, 2002, p. 18).

Hamdi 'Ashour had joined one of these organizational cells, whose members sought to expand recruitment among Egyptian officers while maintaining absolute secrecy in their activities. As a member of the organization, Hamdi 'Ashour nominated Sha'rawi Jum'a for membership in the Free Officers Movement (Hammad, 2015, pp. 202–203). In light of Sha'rawi Jum'a's professional competence and positive reputation, his candidacy was approved in late 1949, and he was subsequently admitted to the cell headed by Hamdi 'Ashour (Hammad, 2015, p. 203).

The cell's meetings with Gamal Abdel Nasser were held at the residence of Hamdi 'Ashour on al-Malik Street (also known as Egypt and Sudan Street) (Hammad, 2015, p. 203; *Al-Abali*, 1997). At this location, Gamal Abdel Nasser provided a select group of junior officers affiliated with the Free Officers' cells with additional and specialized instruction in the subjects required for admission to the Staff College, separate from the larger group of approximately seventy officers. The primary objective of these sessions was to ensure that the participants were adequately prepared to succeed in the college's entrance examination. In this context, Sha'rawi Jum'a stated:

"Hamdi 'Ashour lived on the fifth floor, and there was no elevator. Abdel Nasser would come to our home three or four times a week and explain to us the subjects required for admission to the college. After finishing with us, he would go down to meet other groups, preparing them for the revolution and for advancement in knowledge and professional work" (Hammad, 2015, p. 103).

Sha'rawi Jum'a observed that Abdel Nasser was keen on cultivating a select group of highly qualified individuals, distinguished by their advanced knowledge and professional standing, and involving them in the preparatory groundwork for the revolution. He further noted that Abdel Nasser took great pride in those who excelled, openly celebrating their successes and being the first to extend his congratulations. In July 1949, Abdel Nasser transitioned from teaching at the School of Administrative Affairs to a post at the Staff College, where he was appointed to instruct Staff College courses in recognition of his decisive leadership and formidable personal authority. This appointment brought him into closer contact with the officers, particularly since Gamal Abdel Nasser led the group to which Sha'rawi Jum'a himself belonged (Hammad, 2015, p. 108) (Vatikiotis, 1992, p. 42).

It is noteworthy that Suhayr, the daughter of Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a, confirmed in an interview that her father had indeed joined the Free Officers Movement; however, she denied his belonging to its first ranks during the early stages of its formation (Murshid, 2025). Nevertheless, Sha'rawi Jum'a's own statements about himself suggest the contrary. Moreover, his name appeared in the lists of Free Officers compiled after the revolution (Abdel Rahman, 1977, pp. 62, 68, 70). It is possible that her assertion was motivated by fear of surveillance or other potential repercussions, as she appeared apprehensive throughout the interview, declined to provide detailed information, and refused to respond to many of the questions posed to her.

Section Two: Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a's Position on the Revolution of 23 July 1952:

With the outbreak of the July Revolution on 23 July 1952, several underlying factors stood behind its occurrence, including the deterioration of social and economic conditions in Egypt and the widespread prevalence of corruption, in addition to the shock experienced by the Egyptian Army during the 1948 Palestine War as a result of the corruption of the weapons used. As for the outcomes of the revolution, they were manifested in the deposition of the king and the promulgation of the Agrarian Reform Law (Al-Rifa'i, 1987, pp. 3/156–158) (Kazim, 2015, pp. 133–134).

Sha'rawi Muhammad Jum'a joined the forces tasked with securing Cairo to safeguard the progress of the revolution, ensure its success, and confront any potential counter-movements opposing it. His role in the events of the July Revolution was confined solely to this aspect. Indeed, when he was asked about his role on the night of the revolution, he replied: "Nothing. On the following day, I was assigned to work with the forces deployed in Cairo, at al-Azbakiya Garden, to secure the revolution" (Hammad, 2015, pp. 204, 209) (Al-Bayan, 1997).

It is evident that Sha'rawi Jum'a was not among the leading figures of the July Revolution; however, he was one of the trusted personalities and belonged to the advanced ranks of the Free Officers Organization. If we return to the sources, they indicate that on the second day of the revolution, namely 24 July, the Cairo forces withdrew to Alexandria to depose the King. This was the same day on which the King accepted the revolutionaries' demands, and no disturbances occurred on that day (al-Sadat, 1965, pp. 132–133). Despite the absence of a genuine role for Sha'rawi in the execution or success of the revolution, he was among its most prominent supporters. In this regard, Ahmad Hamrush responded, when asked in 1977 to assess the events of 1952, by stating: "The Revolution of 23 July 1952 was far more than a purely national uprising; it transcended its local context to acquire regional and even global significance. It stands among the historic revolutions that brought about profound transformations in the conditions of people. Accordingly, it cannot be reduced to a mere coup aimed at changing political power, nor can it be understood as a movement pursuing only limited or incremental reforms." (Hamrush, *The July Revolution and the Mind of Egypt*, 1985, p. 74).

Given his close association with, and membership in, the Free Officers Organization, as well as his familiarity with its leadership, Sha'rawi Jum'a affirmed that the revolutionary leaders had intended to carry out a genuine revolution. He pointed to their pamphlets, which articulated a clear rejection of Egypt's prevailing political and social conditions and expressed an unequivocal refusal of dependency on, or collaboration with the "colonial powers" (Hamrush, *The July Revolution and the Mind of Egypt*, 1985, p. 75). Moreover, the revolution's objectives—namely, the limitation of agricultural land ownership, the reduction of social disparities, and the curbing of the spread of administrative corruption and bribery—all underscored that "it was a genuine revolution, comparable to the Revolution of 1919, in which all social strata—workers, intellectuals, and peasants—participated" (Fayez, 1998, pp. 11–12). Sha'rawi further stated that he was convinced at the time of the necessity of launching the revolution to change the existing conditions, and that he shared with them an understanding of its nationalist character, which he described as being opposed to "imperialism, colonialism, and Zionism" (Magdi Hammad, 1993, p. 42).

Sha'rawi frequently emphasized the inclusiveness of the revolution across all Egyptian political currents, viewing this as evidence that the Free Officers did not seek to monopolize power or rule unilaterally (Hamrush, *The July Revolution and the Mind of Egypt*, 1985, p. 86). He also regarded the presence of figures from the Muslim Brotherhood—an Islamic movement founded in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, which aimed at political, economic, and social reform from an Islamic perspective (al-Mahdawi, 2006, p. 103)—as well as others from the Egyptian Communist Party, a Marxist political party established in 1921 whose activities began in Alexandria in 1922, where it formed bases among the working class and worked to establish free schools across Egypt to educate workers, as further evidence of this orientation. The party criticized the 1923 Constitution, sending a letter to Sa'd Zaghlul in which it demanded recognition of workers' and peasants' unions, and its program called for independence and liberation from British occupation, the elimination of monopolies, and the establishment of a democracy in which sovereignty would rest with the people (al-Mashhadani, 2008, pp. 41–42). The inclusion of such diverse political actors was thus taken as proof of the absence of any intention to monopolize power (Ahmad Muhammad, 2002, pp. 41, 44–45).

In discussing the achievements of the revolution, Sha'rawi Jum'a stated that it brought about profound changes across the economic, social, and political spheres (Hilal, 1987, pp. 145–146), and that its leadership accomplished

“numerous and significant achievements that secured for it a distinguished place among the great historical revolutions” (Hamrush, *The Story of the July Revolution: Witnesses to the July Revolution*, 1984, p. 169). He regarded the proclamation of the Egyptian Republic in 1953 as the revolution’s most significant achievement. On 18 June 1953, the Revolutionary Command Council formally announced the establishment of the Republic, abolished the monarchy, appointed Major General Muhammad Naguib as the first President of the Republic, and dissolved the political parties (al-‘Abbadī and Suqayri, 2018, pp. 32–33). This was followed by the promulgation of a constitution: the new constitution was announced on 16 January 1956 at a large popular conference, declaring Egypt to be a democratic republic. The constitution stipulated the organization of citizens into a single political organization, the National Union, without explicitly permitting the formation of political parties. It granted the National Union the authority to nominate candidates for the National Assembly, called for the elimination of monopolies and the domination of capital over governance, and affirmed social justice as the basis of taxation, as well as freedom of the press, printing, and publication (al-Waqā’i‘, 1956) (Hussein, 2016, p. 64).

Among these achievements was the issuance of the Agricultural Reform Law on 9 September 1952, enacted in the aftermath of the 23 July Revolution and widely regarded as one of its principal outcomes. The law limited individual ownership of agricultural land to two hundred feddans, permitted the allocation of an additional fifty feddans to one son, provided that the total allocated to all sons did not exceed one hundred feddans, and stipulated that land be distributed by the government to small peasants in plots ranging from two to five feddans, in return for a tax paid by the beneficiary farmer (al-Bishri, 1987, p. 80).

Another major accomplishment was the signing of the Evacuation Agreement, concluded between Egypt and Britain on 19 October 1954. The negotiations provided for the withdrawal of British forces from Egypt immediately upon the conclusion of the agreement, with evacuation to take place by sea and air; the withdrawal of British troops and personnel from Sudan; the transfer of military bases to Egyptian forces; and the abrogation of the 1936 Treaty and the 1899 Agreement. In the event of an armed attack from abroad on any state that was, at the time of signing, a party to the Joint Arab Defense Treaty of the Arab League concluded in Cairo, Egypt would provide such facilities as might be necessary to prepare the military bases for war and to administer them effectively (Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1955, pp. 2–3) (Mustafa, 1994, p. 34). In addition to these, there were many other achievements (Hamrush, *The July Revolution and the Mind of Egypt*, 1985, pp. 161, 169) (al-‘Abbadī and Suqayri, 2018, p. 41).

Concerning the course of the revolution, Sha‘rawī maintained that it remained faithful to its original trajectory and committed to achieving its stated objectives, asserting that “the revolution emerged on behalf of the masses and continued to serve their interests.” (Hamrush, *The July Revolution and the Mind of Egypt*, 1985, pp. 120–121). However, he appeared to contradict this assessment when he pointed to the leadership’s failure to establish a party organization capable of uniting the masses who believed in the revolution, safeguarding its principles, and preparing advanced cadres to ensure its continuity—a shortcoming he regarded as the revolution’s sole negative aspect (Hamrush, *The July Revolution and the Mind of Egypt*, 1985, p. 202).

CONCLUSION

Sha‘rawī Jum‘a may be regarded as one of the figures within the Egyptian army who drew close to Gamal Abdel Nasser, were influenced by him, and subsequently joined the organization known as the Free Officers. Nevertheless, he was not among the first-rank leaders of that organization. He became aware of the organization in 1949 through his friend Hamdī ‘Ashūr, and, in view of his good reputation and professional distinction, he joined the organization in late 1949 within the cell headed by Hamdī ‘Ashūr.

As for his involvement in the Revolution of 23 July 1952, he did not join it on the very day it broke out; rather, he was assigned the task of joining the forces responsible for securing Cairo. However, he did not play an active role, a fact he himself acknowledged. Despite this, he articulated clear views on the revolution when questioned about it, considering it a genuine revolution, comparable to the earlier revolutions that had taken place in Egypt.

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