

Munich, 10 May 1974 (CAA/X).

As relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt become clearly more strained - Soviet commentators have recently criticised Egyptian "liberalism" and have reported calls to President Sadat to "end attacks on President Nasser" - Iraq has joined in the propaganda campaign on the alleged "de-Nasserisation" of Egypt, an indication of the growing closeness between Baghdad and Moscow. This tends to support the prediction of the Algerian Foreign Minister, Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika, at the time of the Soviet-Iraqi Friendship Treaty in April, 1972, that the Russians had found a more attractive and amenable "second wife" in the Arab world.

Since the conclusion of this Friendship Treaty many high-ranking political, military and economic delegations have been exchanged and new agreements concluded. Recent visitors to Iraq have included the Soviet Defence Minister, Marshal Grechko (March 23 to 26), followed closely by Interior Minister N A Shchelokov, who said that his visit had achieved cooperation between the Interior Ministries of the two countries; a protocol had been signed providing for the exchange of delegations and expertise. Last November, a Soviet economic delegation had concluded an agreement under which the Soviet Government would finance Iraqi projects with a 150 million rouble loan.

One of the most important Soviet visitors to Iraq has been Boris Ponomarev, a candidate member of the Soviet party Politburo and Central Committee Secretary. When he left Baghdad on November 30, 1973, Ponomarev made a statement (*Iraqi News Agency*, December 1) stressing that friendship with Iraq was "one of the most important links in our alliance with the Arab national liberation movement". He said that Soviet-Iraqi relations were firmer and broader than ever before, and added: "We urge that the potentials of the friendship pact be utilised to the fullest in order to strengthen our comprehensive cooperation".

Referring to the Progressive National Front between the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and the Ba'ath Party, Ponomarev, a leading ideologist, hailed it as a triumph for the Iraqi people and hoped that the Democratic Party of Kurdistan would join. The cooperation between the three main political parties had been successful in the struggle to close all ranks of democratic and progressive forces within the framework of the progressive national and domestic front. On December 2, *Baghdad Radio* reported that

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the Ba'ath Party-CPSU discussions had included "the means of promoting and deepening the relations and contacts /between the two parties/ and the plan for party cooperation and relations for 1974 was signed".

These comments are reminiscent of Soviet initiatives in Egypt in the 1960s. Moscow had encouraged the ineffective Egyptian Communist Party to disband so that its members could join Nasser's Arab Socialist Union, forming a "Vanguard Party" to lead the ASU towards Soviet "scientific Socialism". Ponomarev was much concerned in this and the plan was only thwarted by purges of the ASU under Presidents Nasser and Sadat. In Iraq, the pro-Soviet ICP offers a more powerful tool matched against a less resilient organisation. Moscow has done much to aid the establishment of the National Front and has also tried, though unsuccessfully, to heal the rift between the Ba'ath and the Communists on one side and the Kurds on the other. In this, too, Ponomarev played a leading role. Despite the failure with the Kurds, however, Moscow's efforts with the Ba'ath and the ICP had been impressive. Relations between the two had long been characterised by bloodshed and violence, yet following the establishment of the National Front in July, 1973, both parties seem to have made a determined effort to show goodwill. The *Iraqi News Agency* reported on January 14, 1974, that the ICP First Secretary, Aziz Mohammed, had congratulated President Al-Bakr on his election as Secretary-General of the Ba'ath Party and had expressed support for his efforts to strengthen national unity and to pursue progressive policies. The compliment was returned when the Assistant Secretary-General of the Ba'ath Party, Shibli al-Aisami, was reported by *Baghdad Radio* on March 28 to have sent a congratulatory cable to the ICP Central Committee on the party's 40th anniversary. He said he hoped that the common struggle of the progressive national front and of the entire Arab homeland would be consolidated. The *INA* reported that both Aziz Mohammed and Shibli al-Aisami were present at an ICP anniversary celebration in Baghdad on March 29. Mohammed said that the alliance of the two parties was "capable of putting an end to the moves of reaction and defeating the imperialist-reactionary conspiracies". For the Ba'ath Party, Na'im Haddad, a member of the Regional Command, praised the "joint struggle" of the two parties and the establishment of the National Front. On March 30, the Iraqi Revolution Council announced the appointment of three members of the ICP Central Committee to work full time for the National Front.

These developments indicate that Moscow is mindful of the factors which contributed to the frustration of its plans with Egypt and the ASU. In 1968, the then *Pravda* correspondent in Cairo, Y Primakov, wrote: "One of the peculiarities, and perhaps weaknesses, of the Egyptian revolution is that it has not yet subjected the old State machine, inherited from the monarchy, to a cardinal change". No doubt Moscow regards the purges and other measures in Egypt, resulting in the curtailment of its influence there, as the consequence of not having made a "cardinal change" in the State machine, though another interpretation is of course that Egypt had recognised the need for a policy of national independence. In Iraq, Moscow is clearly trying to make sure that its Egyptian experience is not repeated: the cooperation measures between the Interior Ministries, and between the Ba'ath Party and the CPSU, and the carefully fostered rapprochement between the ICP and the Ba'ath, leading to the ICP's increased status and influence, are all aspects of the same policy.

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If Moscow can ensure that the only change in the nature of the regime is to make it ideologically more favourably disposed towards the Soviet Union - via the efforts of the ICP - then other aspects of bilateral relations will fall into place. Pravda's report of the visit of Marshal Grechko said that both sides "noted with satisfaction that the friendly relations existing between the two countries bear a stable character and are determined by the basic interests of the peoples of the Soviet Union and the Iraqi Republic". Marshal Grechko had had "the opportunity to acquaint himself with the progressive socio-economic and political measures being carried out in Iraq for the good of the people and to strengthen the national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country".

Iraqi oil provides the main focus for Soviet economic interest. Although the Soviet Union itself has extensive oil reserves, it faces considerable extraction and production difficulties, while at the same time having extensive commitments towards its East European allies. This has obliged Moscow to import Middle Eastern oil and it has looked to Iraq as a supplier. However, Soviet efforts to pay for oil imports in goods rather than hard currency has caused some disagreements with Iraqi authorities, at least some of whom see their export markets in the West and also fear that Soviet oil and gas exports will eventually become competitive with the Arab products. Particular annoyance has been caused by Moscow's re-selling of Iraqi oil in the West for hard currency. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union has forged close links with the Iraqi oil industry and on March 30, 1974, a contract was signed in Baghdad providing for Soviet construction of a pipeline between Baghdad and Basra. Moscow doubtless recognises that if it were able to build up effective influence among Arab oil producing States - perhaps via Iraqi membership of such bodies as the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) - it could bring pressure to bear on Western Europe's oil supplies.

Despite economic and some political differences between Baghdad and Moscow, and initial misgivings between the Ba'ath Party and the ICP within the National Front, the Soviet Union has reasonable cause for satisfaction over its relations with Iraq. For the future, the major threat is the strain imposed by the breakdown in relations and renewed fighting between the Iraqi regime and the Kurdish minority of Mulla Mustafa Barzani. Moscow was formerly sympathetic to the Kurds, but now favours the regime, as does the ICP (whose First Secretary is himself a Kurd). The resumption of hostilities could involve the Soviet Union's political reputation, since it has tried unsuccessfully to reconcile the Kurds, the ICP and the Ba'ath, and it is also involved militarily as the arms supplier of the Baghdad regime.

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