

## Iraq-Syria unity plans are proceeding

Iraq and Syria remained on course for establishing a united state in the near future following a recent visit to Baghdad, the Iraqi capital, by Syria's Foreign Minister Khaddam and Chief of Staff General Chehab. The alliance between the two countries has become the cornerstone of Arab opposition to President Carter's Camp David war pact.

The Syrian delegation visited Baghdad to clear up a renewal of tension between the two neighbors, long bitter enemies. The tension stemmed from reports that among the people arrested in Baghdad for plotting against the Iraqi regime of President Saddam Hussein was a small clique of Iraqis allegedly backed by Syrian intelligence.

Over the past four weeks, several hundred Iraqis have been arrested, and dozens sentenced to death for treason, in a sweeping purge of political saboteurs, assassins, and agents for British, U.S., and Israeli secret services, including a prominent British businessman accused of spying. Among those purged by President Saddam Hussein were followers of the Shiite Ayatollah Khomeini and the illegal Muslim Brotherhood, radicals and Iraqi Communists under British intelligence control, and circles in Iraq opposed to the union with Syria. The latter included some close relatives of the Iraqi president and associates of Michel Aflaq, the so-called founder-leader of the ruling Baath Party.

The proposed union between Syria and Iraq, which would create a powerful new center of gravity that would soon come to dominate Arab politics, was the subject of unprecedented attempts at sabotage by London, Washington and Tel Aviv. An extremely thick press and propaganda smokescreen—including misinformation planted in a dozen world newspapers—sought to obscure the importance of the purge in Iraq.

### Old skeletons revived

The most damaging report concerning the upheaval in Iraq was the report, circulated by the *Washington Post*, *Le Monde* of Paris, and other daily newspapers, that the Syrian government of President Hafez Assad had a hand in stirring up a potential coup d'etat in Baghdad.

The false reports—which, however, were taken at face value by many Arab officials, diplomats, and citizens of both Syria and Iraq—poisoned the atmosphere between the two Arab countries. In London, Patrick Seale, a British intelligence Syria expert who writes for the Atlantic Richfield-owned *London Observer*, went so far as to report gleefully that the Iraqi-Syrian union was “dead.”

What happened, in fact, as pieced together from reports from reliable Arab diplomatic sources, is as follows: Over the course of the past five years, when Iraq and Syria were often at odds, both Syria and Iraq on a number of occasions sponsored dissident movements in each other's countries. When the Iraq-Syria union was proclaimed last October, both Syria and Iraq called off all such operations.

As progress toward the union became more advanced, elements of Iraqi intelligence who are, in the words of one Arab source, “probably compromised by their collaboration with the CIA or even the Mossad,” chose that moment to “expose” the existence of one of the cells or networks that, as long ago as 1975, had been responsible for Syrian-backed illegal activities in Iraq.

These Iraqi intelligence circles, operating under effective London control, forced Saddam Hussein to act to purge the accused Syrian agents—thus leading to the hullabaloo. Despite reports that the Iraqi Baath party considered Assad to be a “traitor” to the Arab cause—based on misinformed and deliberately distorted reporting—the Syrian delegation that visited Baghdad and a telephone call from Assad to Hussein have reportedly cleared up the initial difficulties, which were primarily based on lingering suspicions between the two Arab leaders.

### Iraq role in Gulf

The strengthening of the Syrian-Iraqi unity will have enormous effects on the entire Persian Gulf and Iran.

According to European and Iranian sources, Iraq and Syria will work together with French intelligence to topple the fascist Khomeini regime in Iran and restore Shahpur Bakhtiar to power. The Iranian prime minister had fled the country when the ayatollah returned to make his coup in February. It is now a matter of time—perhaps three months—until Khomeini is ousted.

In addition, in close cooperation with the French, Iraq and Saudi Arabia are working to shore up weaknesses

is taking a leadership role in calming regional disputes and providing security guarantees to Gulf states threatened with either U.S.-Israeli military intervention or destabilization based on religious and tribal minorities.

—Robert Dreyfuss