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Note on USSR - Iraq relations  
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*Vrdi H.*

NOTE ON USSR-IRAQ RELATIONS

Copy No. 1

## NOTE ON USSR-IRAQ RELATIONS

1. The Economic and Technical Aid Agreement concluded in Moscow on 16 March 1959 between the USSR and Iraqi Governments constituted a major development in the relations between the two countries, and represents an important shift in Iraq's foreign trade policy.

2. Diplomatic relations between the USSR and Iraq were broken in January 1955 on the initiative of the former Iraqi regime; no relations have existed since between the two countries. The Iraqi revolution of 14 July 1958 received the immediate support of the USSR Government, and the first Soviet Ambassador to Iraq arrived in Baghdad on 4 August 1958 to re-establish diplomatic relations with the new Iraqi regime. The intent of this paper is to point out the main features of the USSR-Iraq relations at the present stage, and their effects on Iraq's foreign policy.

3. The support of the Soviet Government for the new Iraqi regime in particular, and the Arab nationalist movement in general, has been expressed officially on several occasions; it was emphasized in the speech of the Soviet Premier, Mr. Khrushchev, delivered at the 21st Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, and his speech also on 16 March 1959 on the occasion of signing the Soviet-Iraqi Economic Agreement. On the first occasion, the Soviet Premier acknowledged Iraqi Premier el-Kassem as the "leader of the Government of the Iraqi Republic" and praised his movement "in overthrowing the reactionary clique set in the service of the imperialists", and on the second occasion, he expressed the belief "that a more progressive system has been introduced in Iraq than in the neighbouring countries of the Arab world".<sup>1/</sup> Iraq's

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<sup>1/</sup> Extract from the speech given by Mr. Khrushchev on 16 March 1959 at the reception held in the Kremlin in honour of the Iraqi Government's Economic Delegation.

withdrawal from the Baghdad Pact was also received with favourable comment by the Soviet Government and press.

4. From the Iraqi point of view, the strengthening of diplomatic and economic relations with the Soviet Government is in line with the repeatedly avowed policy of the new Iraqi regime advocating the principles of "positive neutrality" and cooperation with the communist countries which have supported the Iraqi revolution in its early stage. Moreover, the Iraqi Government takes the view that, despite the differences in the social and political systems of Iraq and the Soviet Government, both countries have "fruitfully cooperated in preserving world peace<sup>1/</sup> and that their common enemy is imperialism". The Iraqi Ambassador to the Soviet Union, Mr. Abdel al-Wahab Mahmud, stated in Baghdad on 14 April that the "Soviet Union is a sincere friend of all the Arab countries, and not of Iraq only, and is ready to extend honest aid free of any strings, to the States which seek to develop their economy". He also added "that as proof of this, the Soviet Union is still carrying out its agreements with the UAR, despite the severe offensive and machinations being launched against the Soviet Union". A similar view was expressed by the Iraqi Minister of Economy, Dr. Kubbah, who negotiated the economic agreement with the Soviet Union, when he declared on 18 March that "this agreement would strengthen the Iraqi Republic and its economic development and will free it from economic slavery". The Iraqi press indicated also that the Soviet Government and other communist countries "have furnished a fine example of the unconditional character of the economic aid to Iraq and other Arab countries".<sup>2/</sup>

5. The USSR-Iraq relations seem to be based at present on the economic and cultural aspects. Little is known about the amount or the extent of Soviet military aid to Iraq.

<sup>1/</sup> A statement made by Dr. Ibrahim Kubbah, Economy Minister, in Moscow on 25 February 1959 and broadcast by Baghdad Radio.

<sup>2/</sup> From an editorial in the Iraqi daily, Al-Ahali, 19 March 1959.

6. In the economic field, an agreement was signed in Moscow on 16 March 1959 between the representatives of the Iraqi and USSR Governments (See annex), which provided for the construction in Iraq, with Soviet technical assistance, of a number of industrial and agricultural projects. The text of this agreement stipulated "that the Soviet Government will cooperate with the Government of the Iraqi Republic in the realization of the plan of development, of Iraq's national economy, in the sphere of industry, agriculture and transport. It will also grant the Iraqi Republic a credit of 550,000,000 rubles (\$138,000,000) at 2.5% annual interest for the duration of the agreement. The Government of the Iraqi Republic will repay the parts of the credit used for each of the listed projects in twelve annual instalments, beginning a year after the delivery from the USSR of complete sets of equipment envisaged by the corresponding countries. The Soviet Government will also render Iraq technical assistance in the construction of a number of industrial and agricultural projects".

7. Baghdad Radio reported on 30 April that twenty-one Soviet agrarian reform experts would arrive from the USSR to work in Iraq by the middle of May. Another Soviet mission is to arrive soon in Baghdad to provide the Iraqi authorities with technical advice on the establishment of model farms.

8. The Iraqi-Soviet cultural agreement concluded in Baghdad on 5 May is viewed also as another step towards consolidating USSR-Iraq relations. It contains provisions for the exchange of professors and students between the two countries. It also includes holding a Soviet film fair in Iraq and a number of Soviet exhibitions. According to this agreement, Iraqi scientists will receive training in the USSR Academy of Science, and courses for teaching Russian language will be introduced into Iraqi schools. Arrangements will be

made according to this agreement for the visit to the Soviet Union of an Iraqi Red Crescent delegation. The Iraqi Education Ministry will grant scholarships to Soviet students willing to study Arabic and Islamic history and will also invite a Soviet cultural delegation to visit Iraq in order to acquaint itself with the cultural life in Iraq. Commenting on this agreement, the Iraqi Education Minister, Brigadier-General Muhy ad-Din Abd al-Hamid, said: "The Iraqi-Soviet cultural agreement indicates the desire of both the Soviet and Iraqi peoples to cooperate in the education field, and will be one of the important factors in the progress and prosperity of our republic." The Soviet representative stressed the point that the cultural agreement was "a natural result of the July Revolution and would strengthen the brotherly cooperation between the Soviet and Iraqi peoples". He added also that "the Soviet people look with great sympathy upon the current progressive changes in the Iraqi Republic. The Baghdad daily, Al-Ahali, said on 8 May that the "States of the socialist camp headed by the great USSR are the sincerest friends of the small nations. The proof is that the party that will benefit from the Iraqi-Soviet cultural agreement is Iraq alone."

9. In addition to the economic and cultural agreements concluded between the Soviet and Iraqi Governments, special arrangements have been made by the Soviet Government for the free medical treatment of a number of Iraqi sick persons. The Iraqi Health Ministry has also invited Soviet medical specialists to lecture in Iraqi medical schools. It was reported by Baghdad radio on 7 May that about forty-two Soviet doctors are due to arrive in Baghdad at the end of May for work in Iraq.

10. Other developments in the Soviet-Iraqi relations include the question of the repatriated Iraqi Kurds from the Soviet Union to Iraq, which has been

overplayed by the UAR press and radio. It was viewed by Cairo press as "an indirect Soviet attempt to penetrate Iraq and create an avant-garde of a pro-Soviet militant Kurdish group".<sup>1/</sup> The official Soviet news agency, TASS, has furnished another version on the problem of the repatriated Kurds. It stated on 1 May that "around 459 Kurds who in 1947 had fled from Iraq owing to the persecution from the old regime for their participation in the national liberation movement and had found refuge in the Soviet Union, expressed their wish to return to their native land following the proclamation of the Iraqi Republic, and the Iraqi Government informed them of its readiness to receive them. They have been repatriated to Iraq together with their families, with the assistance of the Soviet Red Cross and the Iraq Red Crescent Society. Among them were some 100 aged and invalids." In a broadcast over Baghdad Radio on 14 April, the Iraqi Ambassador to the Soviet Union asserted that the repatriated Iraqi Kurds from the Barazani tribe had asked the Iraqi Embassy in Moscow to facilitate their repatriation to Iraq, and that the Iraqi Government had opened the door for all citizens who were persecuted in the old regime, including the Barazanis, to return home.

11. It may be concluded that the recent developments in USSR-Iraq relations are the natural results of the July Revolution, which aimed, among other things, at freeing Iraq's trade and diplomatic relations from complete dependence on the West, and at adhering as far as possible to its original principles of complete neutrality. However, the future course of USSR-Iraq relations is bound to be affected by the internal Iraqi situation and the drive of the local political forces, including the Communist Party, to build its relations with the Soviet Union on a stronger and more durable basis.

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<sup>1/</sup> From an editorial in Cairo's Al-Akbar, 2 May.

ANNEX

In a press conference held in Baghdad on 20 March 1959, Dr. Ibrahim Kubbah, Iraqi Minister of Economy, enumerated the projects which the Soviet Union is to implement within seven years, to be financed by a Soviet loan to Iraq. They include:

1. A steel factory with a productive output of 60,000 tons per year, which can be doubled as soon as iron is discovered in Iraq;
2. An agricultural machinery factory with an annual production output of 30,000 units.
3. An international radio system comprising four transmitters of 100 kilowatts each;
4. A nitrate fertilizer factory (a most important factory for Iraqi agricultural development);
5. A sulphur and sulphuric acid factory with an annual production of 110,000 tons of sulphuric acid and 65,000 tons of sulphur;
6. A drug factory which will produce 40 million syringes, 100 tons of pills, 18 tons of penicillin, and 250 tons of ointment (in addition to large quantities of other drugs);
7. A factory for electrical equipment and instruments, which will manufacture electrical generators and transformers;
8. An electric bulb factory with an annual production of 15 million bulbs;
9. A light-industries factory;
10. A consumer goods factory with an annual production of 4 million pieces of underwear, 6 million pairs of stockings, and 1 million articles of clothing;
11. A woolen textile factory with an annual production of 2 million square metres of woolen textile in addition to an independent establishment for ginning;
12. A cotton textile factory with a capacity of 60,000 looms;
13. A geological survey project (the most important project to be implemented under the agreement, because it is the basis for Iraq's industrial development);
14. A model grain, cotton, sugar beet, rice and medical herbs farm project;
15. A glass factory with a daily capacity of 83 tons of molten glass;

16. A project for the construction of four stations to rent tractors in order to assist farmers in introducing mechanical means in cultivation;

17. A canning factory with an annual production of 3 million cans.

In addition to these projects, there are research projects aiming at drawing up the designs and blueprints of various projects which will be implemented under the current trade agreement between the Iraqi and Soviet Governments. These research projects will include the following:

1. Rebuilding the Baghdad-Basra railroad, which includes overhauling the present railroad and building another wider one;

2. A study of the Kirkuk-as-Sulaymaniyah railroad;

3. A project for the exploitation of the waters of the Tigris Basin for irrigation, navigation and generation of electric power;

4. A project for using the Euphrates Basin for the same purposes;

5. A project for the improvement of river navigation, because the Soviet experts' studies indicated that 60% of Iraq's imports and exports can be transported to Basra by river navigation.