



Director of  
Central  
Intelligence

(b) (1)  
(b) (3)

~~Top Secret~~

APPROVED FOR RELEASE  
DATE: OCT 2005

# National Intelligence Daily (Cable)

25 January 1979

~~Top Secret~~

CG NIDC 79-0021C

25 January 1979

Copy

000

~~Top Secret~~

## SPECIAL ANALYSIS

## SYRIA-IRAQ: A Temporary Alliance

*The three-month-old rapprochement between Syria and Iraq is the product of mutual concern over the Israeli-Egyptian peace process and the upheaval in Iran as well as the narrow tactical considerations of each side. Although a "unity" scheme between these two traditional rivals may come soon, it will be fragile and superficial. Both governments are deeply suspicious of each other and have rival pretensions for leadership in the eastern Arab world.*

Limited political, economic, and military cooperation between the two is nonetheless likely as long as their short-term objectives outweigh their permanent national ambitions. Syrian President Assad and Iraqi President Bakr may announce agreement in principle to "unite" their two countries at a summit meeting in Damascus later this month.

There is little chance of a real integration of the two countries. Arab groups in Syria and Iraq have been rivals since the seventh century. Their long-standing inability to agree on sharing waters of the Euphrates River, for example, reflects their geopolitical difficulties. (U)

Religious sectarianism also works against unity; a Sunni Muslim minority rules in Baghdad and an Alawite minority regime governs in Damascus. Many Syrians oppose a real rapprochement because they fear Iraqi political subversion.

Since Syria achieved independence in 1946, its foremost foreign policy concern has been to preserve national independence against threats from its neighbors. Syria

--continued

~~Top Secret~~

~~Top Secret~~

has supported the idea of Arab unity but largely as a matter of its Baath Party's pan-Arab ideology. Iraq and Egypt have tried to exploit this tendency in order to dominate the Syrians. Syria joined the United Arab Republic with Egypt in 1958, signed a never-implemented federation agreement with Egypt and Iraq in 1963, and joined the Confederation of Arab Republics initiated by Egypt and Libya in 1971. None stood the test of time.

The Camp David accords and developments in Iran are the most important, but not the only, current sources of affinity between Syria and Iraq. The Syrians are also attracted by Iraq's oil wealth and view Iraq's armed forces as a possible reserve that could enhance Syria's military credibility and its ability to obtain concessions from Israel in future negotiations. Iraq sees ties with Syria as the first step toward playing a stronger role in Arab affairs and toward minimizing Soviet and domestic Communist influence in the region. Iraq also is concerned about unrest spilling over from Iran.

The various joint committees created in the past two months to pave the way for unity apparently have made little progress in the key areas of party, military, intelligence, and security matters. Both sides want Israel to feel increased military pressure, and thus are likely to hammer out some arrangement for closer military coordination. The possibilities include:

- The formation, at least on paper, of a joint military command.
- A token Iraqi military presence in Syria, possibly on the Golan Heights.
- Contingency planning for deployment of an Iraqi force to Syria.

The economic results of the rapprochement to date have been mixed. Transportation services have been resumed, restrictions on border crossing lifted, and new commercial and trade contracts signed. Disagreement over distributing waters controlled by Syria through the Tabaqah Dam on the Euphrates River, however, may

--continued

~~Top Secret~~

~~Top Secret~~  
[redacted]

continue to block the reopening of the Iraq Petroleum Company pipeline that runs through Syria to the Mediterranean. [redacted]

Despite their congruent views toward Camp David, the two countries have made little apparent progress in the area of political cooperation. The two international wings of the Baath Party could be reunited in a scheme to stress Arab solidarity at the coming summit meeting, but the depth of the personal antagonisms and ideological differences between the two sides would make such a move only cosmetic. The national leaders of Iraq and Syria will, in any event, retain ultimate control of all political activity in their respective countries.

[redacted]

~~Top Secret~~  
[redacted]