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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
NATIONAL FOREIGN ASSESSMENT CENTER

6 March 1980

MEMORANDUM

Iraq's Pan-Arab Charter

The Pan-Arab charter proposed last month by Iraqi President Saddam Husayn is aimed at heading off increased superpower involvement--especially military--in the Middle East and at strengthening Arab nonalignment. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was the catalyst for Saddam's plan, but the charter is also meant to oppose US attempts to increase its military presence in the region. Although the charter aims at both superpowers, Iraq's ideological leanings raise the suspicion that it will be applied unevenly, focusing more on US attempts to arrange a more substantial military presence in the region than on the USSR's and Cuba's existing strong military role in South Yemen. [Redacted]

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We caution, however, against prematurely reaching that conclusion. Iraq's intensive pursuit of a nonaligned image during the past year, its attempts to replace Egypt as leader of the Arab world, and the credibility of its Pan-Arab charter require Iraq genuinely to oppose Soviet military intervention in the region and to criticize the South Yemeni government for facilitating that presence. [Redacted]

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*This memorandum was prepared by [Redacted] the  
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It would probably be a mistake to dismiss the Arab charter as empty rhetoric devoid of long-term significance. There is a good chance that Iraq will be able to mold a formal Arab consensus on foreign military presence in much the same way it helped shape the Arab consensus on the Egyptian-Israeli treaty. The fears and uncertainties generated by events in Iran and Afghanistan have so far pushed most area governments to seek protection in Arab consensus, rather than to seek external alliances. Iraq intends to parlay that trend into support for its charter.

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The charter, if adopted, would not by itself end current military relationships with outsiders. But it would inhibit such relationships and limit the maneuvering room of states such as Oman. Because the US has determined that it is in US national interest to enhance its military capability and presence in the region, there is little to gain by promoting broad Arab acceptance of the charter. The only apparent US advantage would be a propaganda edge over the USSR to the extent that the US military presence was "over the horizon", while that of the USSR was in country and highly visible. The US could encourage friendly Arab governments to try to ensure that the rhetoric is not totally focused on the US, and to underscore that it was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and its actions in South Yemen and Ethiopia that stimulated the current competition.

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#### The Charter and Arab Reaction

Saddam's plan resembles the Arab League pact in many ways, but also breaks new ground. The key provision would prohibit all foreign military facilities on Arab land and calls for the political and economic isolation of any Arab state that violates this provision. Arab states are also asked to make a total commitment to nonalignment and the stronger Arab states are to aid less well-off Arab countries to help them resist foreign domination. The charter would make more specific existing inter-Arab commitments on mutual defense against foreign aggression and calls for a good neighbor policy toward non-Arab regional states that respect Arab sovereignty. The latter point was probably meant to signal Iran that Baghdad wants to normalize relations. Israel is specifically excluded from this good neighbor policy.

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Baghdad hopes its proposal will counter the increasing threat of Soviet and American interference in the Mideast, especially in the Persian Gulf where Iraq wants to replace Iran as the dominant power. Approval of the charter would also strengthen Iraq's Arab and nonaligned leadership credentials. Iraq has worked hard to pick up Egypt's Arab leadership role in the wake of the Camp David Accords and to strike a more genuine nonaligned posture as Baghdad prepares to succeed Cuba in 1982 as leader of the Nonaligned Movement. [REDACTED]

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Initial Arab reaction to Saddam's proposal has been favorable. The Iraqis have pushed for a summit meeting to discuss the charter and so far thirteen Arab states plus the PLO have agreed to attend. Saudi leaders are not enthusiastic but have agreed to attend a summit. Of the seven Arab governments that have remained silent, five have existing or pending military arrangements with non-Arab states. South Yemen and Syria have strong ties with the USSR, Djibouti permits a large French military presence on its territory, and Oman and Somalia are presently engaged in military access talks with the US. [REDACTED]

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The absence of a Syrian endorsement of the Pan-Arab charter reduces its usefulness for Iraq. Baghdad is apprehensive about the growing Soviet role in Syria and probably sees the charter as a tool to limit Soviet advances. Iraq's concern may lead Baghdad to reopen direct high level communications with Damascus. In 1978 Iraq submerged its differences with Syria in order to achieve an Arab consensus against the Camp David Accords. Now, an Iraqi source of the US Interests Section in Baghdad reports that following recent private signals of Syrian approval of the charter, the Iraqis sent an envoy to Damascus to get further clarification of the Syria position. [REDACTED]

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The Iraqis do not want a summit meeting on the Pan-Arab charter to end in failure. They are probably prepared to accept changes in order to achieve a unified Arab position limiting foreign involvement in Arab affairs. [REDACTED]

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Saudi Arabia, Morocco, and Tunisia will probably press for a less inclusive definition

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of foreign military facilities so as to permit them some leeway in providing for their own defense. The Iraqis would probably insist on including a minimum level of economic and political sanctions against states in violation of the charter.

[REDACTED]

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Even an abridged definition of foreign facilities would have some restraining effect on host countries inclined to grant access to foreign military forces. A charter limit would also give Arab countries a convenient excuse to fend off foreign pressure for military privileges.

[REDACTED]

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Once approved, the charter would obviously be another tool that Arab radicals could use against Oman's Sultan Qabus if Qabus agrees to a more substantial US military presence in his country. Iraq has already begun to criticize Qabus for his receptivity to US overtures. Baghdad has so far remained silent on possible US-Somalia military ties, but President Siad is to visit Iraq, possibly this week, and Iraq might press him hard on this issue.

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Iraqi moves to isolate Oman under the rationale of upholding the charter would probably be accompanied by similar moves against South Yemen. Iraq's concern over Soviet influence in South Yemen is genuine, but more importantly, failure to act against Aden would harm Iraq's status with moderate Arabs whose willingness to accept Baghdad's legitimacy depends largely on Iraq distancing itself from the USSR. It was no accident that the Pan-Arab charter was unveiled at the end of a Saddam Husayn speech in which he bitterly attacked the Iraqi Communists as tools for foreign subversion.

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