

A. IRAQ. — Dispute with Syria over River Euphrates. - Progress towards Settlement of Border Dispute with Kuwait. - Frontier Agreement with Saudi Arabia. - Signature of Iraq-Iran Agreement.

A serious deterioration in relations between Syria and Iraq began in April 1975, caused primarily by a dispute over the use of the waters of the River Euphrates. Other factors contributing to the tension included Syrian distrust of Iraqi intentions following the Iraq-Iran agreement of March 1975 and the end of the Kurdish war [see below], and Iraq's strong opposition to a further partial Middle East agreement, which it accused the Syrian Government of being prepared to accept. Underlying these immediate issues, rivalry continued between the two opposing wings of the pan-Arab *Baath* party, as represented in the Syrian and Iraqi Governments respectively, with each regime suspecting the other of plotting its overthrow.

In the same period substantial progress was made towards the settlement of Iraq's long-standing border dispute with Kuwait and towards a delimitation of the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

Syria-Iraq Dispute.

It was announced on April 7 that Iraq had requested an emergency meeting of Arab League Foreign Ministers to discuss its claim that Syria was using its new Soviet-constructed dam at Tabqa to divert excessive quantities of water from the Euphrates, thereby endangering the lives of 3,000,000 Iraqi farmers who were dependent on the river's waters for irrigation. Reporting the request, the Iraqi News Agency said it came "as a result of the lack of response by the Syrian Government to all efforts exerted by the Iraqi Government for years to reach an agreement necessitated by considerations of national responsibility, justice, humanity and the provisions of international law".

The Tabqa dam had been built on the Syrian portion of the Euphrates (which crosses northern Syria after rising in southern Turkey, and then flows into Iraq's "fertile crescent" to join the Tigris at Basra) under an agreement signed by Syria and the Soviet Union in April 1966 [see 21403 A] and it had come into operation at the end of 1974. It was estimated that when completed the overall Tabqa project would irrigate about 1,500,000 acres of land and be capable of generating 300,000 kilowatts of hydroelectric power for industrial and development projects.

The Iraqi complaint about the Euphrates waters was accompanied by charges and counter-charges from each Government concerning the other's character and policies, and by reports of repressive action in each country against alleged supporters of the other's regime.

In a statement issued on April 9 the Iraqi Government said it would take whatever steps it deemed necessary to ensure the free flow of the Euphrates and would "hold Syria responsible for the serious results which harnessing its waters have on Iraqi farmers". On the same day the sixth congress of the Syrian *Baath*, meeting in Damascus, condemned the "rightist Iraqi clique" for its alleged collusion with Iran and its "betrayal of the causes of the Arab nation".

It was reported that the congress had been preceded by the arrest of about 200 military and civilian members of the Syrian *Baath* (including the director of the Sana news agency, M. Marwan Hamawani, and a former director of Syrian television, M. Khadour (Chaa)) on charges of plotting against the Government. Most of those arrested were understood to be supporters of the "historic" leadership of the *Baath*, many of whose Syrian members were currently living in Baghdad, notably the founder of the party, M. Michel Aflaq [see 26356 B].

In an official statement issued on April 19, the Syrian Government claimed that it had been seeking a definitive agreement with Iraq and Turkey on sharing the waters of the Euphrates "for many years" but had met with "rejection and evasion" by Iraq, which had conducted bilateral negotiations with Turkey without informing Syria of what was discussed. In October 1973, the statement continued, Syria had reached a provisional agreement with Iraq on the flow of water for the 1973-74 winter season, stipulating that the Syrians would be rerouted when Turkey began filling its own dam at Keban. However, when it had been established in late January 1974 that the filling of the Keban dam had begun, Iraq had "precrastinated" about revising the agreement.

The statement went on to claim that, although Turkey had during that season severely reduced, and on occasion completely cut off, the water flow, Syria had nevertheless allowed 71 per cent of water received from Turkey to flow through to Iraq on the personal instruction of President Hafez al Assad. The latter had also, in response to an Iraqi request made in mid-1974, authorized the release of an additional 200,000,000 cubic metres from the Tabqa reservoir. "Despite the difficulties that the country was facing as a result of the destruction of electric installations during the October liberation war" (i.e. the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war), moreover, Syria had allowed 75 per cent of water received from Turkey in the 1974-75 winter season to flow into Iraq. The statement also alleged that the

Baghdad Government had failed to take steps to modernize irrigation methods used in Iraq so as to utilize the actual water flow more effectively.

Notwithstanding the percentage flows mentioned in the Syrian statement, the Iraqi Government maintained earlier claims that only about half of the water to which it was entitled had reached Iraq in the 1974-75 season and that the Tabqa reservoir had been filled above the level necessary to generate electricity.

After the Syrian Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdel Halim Khaddam, had on April 10 rejected the Iraqi call for a meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers, the Arab League Council, meeting in Cairo on April 22, unanimously approved the establishment of a "technical committee" to mediate on the dispute, comprising the two interested parties and seven other Arab states. However, after representatives of the nine countries had convened in Cairo on April 26, Syria on May 1 announced its withdrawal from the committee and requested its suspension "because of the continued Iraqi propaganda campaign against Syria".

A parallel mediation attempt by Saudi Arabia ended inconclusively on May 3 after tripartite talks in Riyadh under the chairmanship of the Saudi Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Shaikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani. Although the Saudi Arabian News Agency had on May 2 announced that an agreement in principle had been reached by the two sides the previous day, a further announcement on May 3 said that a settlement of the dispute had been deferred after the Iraqi and Syrian representatives had decided to return home for consultations, in preparation for a further meeting.

Following the breakdown of these mediation efforts, Syria on May 7 accused Iraq of resorting to mass executions and assassinations of "nationalist and progressive forces" opposed to the Iraq-Iran agreement of March 1975, which in a commentary published the same day in the Damascus daily *Al Baath* was described as the "ugliest crime against Arab nationalism", committed by the "treasonous and fascist right" in Baghdad. Western press reports stated, however, that most of those on a "first list" of 50 alleged victims referred to in the Syrian accusations (who included religious leaders, army officers and civil servants) had been killed before the March agreement.

The dispute intensified on May 13 when Syria closed its airspace to all Iraqi aircraft and suspended its own air services to Baghdad, in protest against "the barbarous, inhuman treatment of Syrian and Iraqi air transport workers employed by Syrian Arab Airlines in Baghdad" and "unethical conduct" towards passengers aboard a Syrian aircraft. In further developments, the Syrian Government on May 25 ordered the immediate closure of the Iraqi consulate in Aleppo (in northern Syria), while on June 2 it was reported that Syrian armoured units had been transferred from the southern front with Israel to the Iraq border, where Iraqi forces were said by the Syrians to be grouping (although Iraq later denied this allegation).

Meanwhile, an official of the Syrian military mission in Baghdad was stabbed and wounded on May 28 by an assailant whom the Syrians claimed to be an Iraqi intelligence agent, and the following day (May 29) Syria accused Iraq of executing a further 81 opponents of government policy.

With relations between the two countries rapidly worsening and amid reports that Iraq had threatened to bomb the Tabqa dam, Saudi Arabia renewed its mediation efforts in early June, with the result that on June 3 a limited agreement was reached under which Syria agreed to release more water from the Tabqa reservoir as a "gesture of goodwill" towards Iraq.

A statement released by the Syrian Government in Damascus on June 3 said: "In the light of the good offices made available by the fraternal Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and in view of the fraternal Iraqi people's needs, particularly during this period in which Euphrates river water is scarce, the Syrian Government has decided to supply from its own share the requirements of the fraternal Iraqi region regardless of the Iraqi regime's attitude. The Syrian Government expects this to be helpful in promoting a permanent agreement before long on sharing the waters of the Euphrates." No indication was given of the quantities of water that Syria had agreed to release.

Although it led to a temporary moderation in the tone of each side's verbal attacks on the other, the June 3 agreement did not produce a basic improvement in relations between the two countries.

On June 9 the Iraqi Irrigation Minister, Mr. Makram al Talabani, rejected the Syrian claim that the new water to be released was part of its own share and stated that the Syrian decision had come too late to meet the needs of the current summer crop in the river basin. In response, the Syrian Euphrates Dam Minister, M. Sobhi Kahhal, said on June 15 that the Iraqi Irrigation Minister had based himself on "erroneous figures" and had cited a total for recent Syrian consumption of Euphrates water which was in fact greater than the overall volume received by Syria from Turkey.

A further deterioration in relations occurred on July 7 when Syria ordered the closure of the Iraqi military mission at

Keban - begun to fill late 73, early 74
Tabqa

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Damascus and withdrew its own military attaché from Baghdad. The following day Iraq submitted a note to the Arab League complaining of "continuous Syrian encroachments" along the Iraqi border.

In its note, the Iraqi Government claimed that during June Syrian aircraft had repeatedly violated Iraqi airspace and that Syrian armoured units and intelligence forces had harassed and ambushed Iraqi patrols and civilian workers on the northern Iraq border. The note further claimed that members of the Syrian Camel Corps and intelligence service had laid ambushes along a section of the border to intimidate Iraqi shepherds.

In the following month, the two sides fully resumed their propaganda warfare, with the Iraqis in particular alleging that the Syrian authorities were mounting a ruthless campaign of repression against internal opposition elements.

It was announced in Ankara on July 10 that Iraq and Turkey had agreed in principle that problems arising from the use of the Euphrates waters should be settled in tripartite talks with Syria.

Agreement between Iraq and Kuwait on Border Dispute.

It was reported on June 25 that Iraq and Kuwait had reached an agreement settling their long-standing border dispute. No details were given of the agreement, which, diplomatic sources said, still had to be given "legal form".

With only a short coast-line on the Persian Gulf, Iraq had for many years maintained territorial claims against Kuwait, particularly in respect of the two islands of Bubiyan and Warba, and its recognition of Kuwait in October 1963 [see 19668 A] was subsequently stated not to imply acceptance of existing borders. The dispute had remained unsettled over the next decade, until in March 1973 Iraqi troops had occupied part of the disputed territory, although they were quickly obliged to withdraw in the face of general Arab disapproval. Despite this setback, a satisfactory settlement of the dispute remained a prime objective of Iraqi policy in view of the development of the north Rumaila oilfield and the expansion of the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr on the estuary dominated by the two islands at issue [see map on right].

The Iraqi Information Minister, Mr. Tareq Aziz, had announced on May 1, 1975, that following contacts between Mr. Saddam Hussein Takriti (Vice-President of the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council) and Shaikh Sabah as Salim as Sabah (the ruling Amir of Kuwait), Iraq had made concrete proposals with a view to settling the dispute. These were, he had added, that Kuwait should lease half the island of Bubiyan to Iraq for 99 years and cede sovereignty over Warba, in return for Iraqi recognition of Kuwait's land borders.

Further impetus towards a settlement had been provided by President Sadat of Egypt during his visits to Kuwait and Baghdad on May 12-16 [see page 27235], following which it had been reported that Kuwait was prepared to lease certain territory to Iraq in return for water-bearing Iraqi territory adjacent to its dry interior.

A meeting of the Kuwaiti National Assembly held *in camera* on July 12 to discuss the country's foreign policy unanimously adopted a resolution which expressed support for "the positive steps which the Government has taken at all levels designed to reach full mutual understanding" with Iraq, but which at the same time stressed "Kuwait's sovereignty over all its territory within the borders which have been approved in accordance with international and bilateral agreements between Kuwait and its neighbours".

Agreement on Division of Iraqi-Saudi Neutral Zone.

It was announced in Riyadh on July 2 that an agreement had been reached by Saudi Arabian and Iraqi representatives providing for the division of the neutral zone which separated the two countries for a distance of some 250 miles to the west of Kuwaiti territory. Under the agreement the zone was to be divided equally by a line drawn as straight as possible, which would entail modifications to the existing border. It was stated that the agreement, which had been reached after a series of meetings at the level of government officials, was subject to the ratification of both Governments.

[Note. The Saudi Arabian frontier with Iraq was defined in the Treaty of Mohammara in May 1922. Later a neutral zone of about 2,500 square miles was established adjacent to the western tip of the frontier with Kuwait. No military or permanent buildings were to be erected in the zone and the nomads of both countries were to have unimpeded access to its pastures and wells. A further agreement concerning the administration of the zone was signed between the two countries in May 1938.]

Signature of Iraq-Iran "Reconciliation" Treaty.

Meeting in Baghdad on June 13, the Foreign Ministers of Iraq and Iran, respectively Dr. Sa'adun Hammadi and Mr. Abbas Ali Khalafbari, signed a "reconciliation" treaty settling all outstanding differences between the two countries. Agreement on the contents of the treaty, which was to be submitted to the two Governments for ratification, had been

reached during three months of detailed negotiations on the basis of the Algiers Agreement of March 6 in which the two countries had undertaken to settle their border and other disputes and which had quickly led to the collapse of the Kurdish rebellion in northern Iraq [see 27053 A]. The Algerian Foreign Minister, M. Abdel Aziz Bouteflika, also signed the Baghdad treaty.

The treaty expressed the desire of the two countries "to establish a new era of friendly relations . . . on the basis of full respect for national independence and the equality of the states in their sovereignty", "to consolidate the ties of friendship and good neighbourliness between them", and "to deepen their economic and cultural relations".

Three attached protocols (i) established that the border between the two countries in the disputed Shatt-al-Arab waterways should be drawn according to the Thalweg Line (i.e. on the middle of the main navigable channel at low water, instead of, as hitherto, along the eastern bank); (ii) delineated some 670 positions on the land border between the two countries on the basis of the Protocol of Constantinople of 1913; and (iii) provided for the establishment of border security arrangements to prevent the infiltration of undesirable elements in either direction.

The treaty also stated that Iraq would set up a commission to consider the granting of compensation for the property of about 65,000 Iranians expelled from Iraq in recent years, and that Iran would establish a rehabilitation programme for Kurdish refugees who refused to return to Iraq.



(Economist)

The Iraq-Iran rapprochement was strongly condemned by Syria, which, in the context of its dispute with Iraq over the River Euphrates [see above], saw the agreement as increasing the potential military threat posed to Syria by Iraqi forces, and also condemned Iraq's territorial concessions to Iran as a surrender of Arab lands to a non-Arab state.

Tehran Execution of Hijackers of Iraqi Airliner.

Two supporters of the Kurdish cause who had hijacked an Iraq Airways airliner to Iran on March 1 were executed by firing squad in Tehran on April 7 after conviction by a military court.

A third hijacker and three passengers had been killed in the incident when Iranian police had opened fire on the airliner after it crash-landed in a field near Tehran airport. The Iranian authorities had refused to entertain the hijackers' demand for the release of 85 Kurdish prisoners held in Iraq and for the payment of \$4,500,000 as ransom, and had closed the airport and blocked its runways.

Collapse of Kurdish Rebellion. - The Aftermath.

Following the collapse of the Kurdish rebellion which resulted from the Algiers Agreement of March 1975 [see 27053 A] and the subsequent occupation by Iraqi forces of all former Kurdish strongholds in northern Iraq, it was reported in early April that over 200,000 Kurds—both civilians and Pesh Merga guerrillas—had fled across the border into Iran. In the following weeks, however, at least half of these refugees returned to Iraq in response to a general amnesty offered by the Iraqi Government.

The amnesty originally announced by the Iraqi Revolutionary Command Council on March 8, which had been extended for a month on March 31, was extended for a further 20 days on April 30 and for a third time on May 19, when the expiry date was set at June 30. It was stressed that this would be the final extension, after which