

## INTER-ARAB AFFAIRS

### IRAQI-SYRIAN UNITY SEEN IN CONTEXT OF IRANIAN THREAT

Beirut THE ARAB WORLD WEEKLY in English 23 Jun 79 pp 19-20

[Text] The bilateral summit meeting in Baghdad between Syrian President Hafez Al Assad and Iraqi President Ahmed Hassan Al Bakr produced the expected results: a re-affirmation of the will to unify the two countries and the creation of a unified political command, which replaces but does not bolster, the joint higher political committee which was also formed by the two chiefs of state.

What the summit, and the final declaration of June 19, clearly demonstrated, however, was that the unification of the two states would precede the unification of the two Baath parties. Although this conclusion does not give a clear indication of the speed with which the unification process will be carried out, it demonstrated, beyond doubt, that it was Syria who, in the final analysis, had the last say on the question.

Before the summit was held, Iraqi official statements and press-reports underlined the need for unifying the party and even said that the unification of the Baath Party would be the condition sine qua non to the unification of the two states' institutions and structures.

However, the final document, dubbed the "Baghdad declaration" dwelt very little on the question of party re-unification. It only includes three or four lines that say that a Party committee will be formed to lay down the necessary principles, studies and documents required for the unification of the Party that would be carried out simultaneously with the constitutional unification of the two states. The committee is to be headed by Interior Minister Izzat Ibrahim for Iraq, and Mohammed Haidar for Syria, and not by more prominent members of the parties.

Furthermore, in declarations he made to reporters during the summit, Syrian President Assad never mentioned the word "party" while Iraqi Vice President Saddam Hussein often insisted on that point. Mr Saddam Hussein made a very significant declaration to the press just after President Assad's departure, saying that the unification of the two states had "outrun" that of the parties and that it was necessary to make up for the delays.

In other terms, contrary to expectations based on the fact that Iraq was seen as having a strong edge over Syria, it was Syria which, in the final analysis, brought Iraq around to its own way of thinking.

The main reason for this reversal of the situation is seen in the development that occurred prior to the summit, and mainly in Iraq's involvement in the Khuzistan problems in Iran, and in Iran's picking on Iraq.

The race has begun between Iraq and Iran on who will be the side in charge of the region's security after the downfall of the Shah's Iran but Iraq has its own views and conditions on the matter and has already taken action against Communists, in Iraq first and elsewhere in the Arab world and has accused Iran of still being the "beagle" of imperialism in the region. But Iran's new regime has not relinquished the former role that the country played in the region and benefits here from the fact that the U.S. has invested so much in that country that it is not totally unwilling to do away with it, especially in view of the fact that Iraq is posing conditions and does not aim to be a mere instrument.

Iran and the Iraqi-Iranian dispute served as the background to the talks between the Syrian and Iraqi leaders; the latter being aware that Syria does not have the same attitude towards Iran and maintains sound relations with the new Iranian leadership. Shortly before the summit convened, reports spoke of a possible Syrian mediation between Iraq and Iran and there was even talk that President Assad could personally go directly from Baghdad to Tehran for this purpose.

Most observers see it that the Iranian threat to Iraq is becoming more and more acute every day because Shia contestation in Iraq is becoming more and more serious, especially in the South of the country and among the followers of Imam Bakr Sadre who lives under house arrest in the Najaf. Rumours have begun to circulate concerning demonstrations and incidents.

Thus it would appear that it was the Iranian threat which drove Iraq to adopt a more lenient stand concerning Syria's views of unity between the two countries, especially because of the role that Syria could play in the Iraqi-Iranian dispute.

For this reason, the summit meeting did not come out with more than an assertion that the two sides were still engaged although the wedding may take a long time to be held. It constituted an attempt at normalization and coordination, more than unification, and almost equalized the force and influence of the two sides.

Whether unification moves will be driven further now hinges on many factors, the main ones being whether the U.S. launches a new diplomatic initiative aimed at having more Arab sides join the peace process, and whether the Soviet Union will respond to the demands that Syrian President Assad will make when he visits Moscow later on.