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Hungarian Foreign Ministry memorandum of conversation with the Iraqi Ambassador in Budapest (March 2, 1983)

9th Territorial Department

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Private copy

Subject: The visit of the Iraqi Ambassador

Today I have received Ismail Hammoudi Hussein, the Ambassador of the Iraqi Republic in Budapest, with whom - according to our agreement last week - I have had a conversation about the problems in the region.

The Ambassador emphasised that our points of view were identical concerning the war. The prolongation of the conflict would cause serious damage to both nations and would endanger the peace and security of the whole region. They agree that the present situation is favourable only for the United States and her allies.

Concerning the latest mediation efforts, he said that, from the beginning, Iraq had supported those efforts which were directed at the solution of the conflict by political means, but Iran rejected all constructive suggestions and wanted to force a military solution. It seemed that, as a result of the talks with the Algerian Foreign Minister, the positions had

come closer. However, the Iraqi side is concerned that, for political reasons, Iran had only made an oral gesture toward Algeria. Therefore, there is little hope for reconciliation.

Hussein expounded his private opinion, according to which the Soviet Union and the socialist countries should make steps more actively to finish the war, this way consolidating their positions in the region, that had weakened after the Lebanese crisis. He stressed that Hungary, for example, could play an important role, considering that she had good relations with both parties, her policies were recognised at the international level [sic!] and considered skilful.

I interjected that we saw little opportunity for mediation as Iran rejected even the initiatives coming from Islamic countries.

The Ambassador agreed and declared that Iran would surely reject the mediation of the Soviet Union or Hungary, just like the similar actions of Islamic countries or of the organisation of non-aligned countries. However, in his opinion, there are other opportunities as well. He mentioned as an example that Hungary had good relations with those Arab countries - Libya and Syria - which provide substantial support to Iran, and whose opinion is considered by the Iranian leadership.

Hussein said that sometimes such indirect steps could have decisive importance. For instance, when relations between the Soviet Union and Iran improved through Syrian mediation, it became possible for ten divisions of the Iranian army to be directed from the Soviet border to the front and this decided the battle of Khoramshari, which meant a turning-point in the war. He underlined that he did not consider a direct interference necessary from the side of the Soviet Union but rather a similar demonstration to the demonstration of force made recently by the USA on the side of Sudan.

According to the Ambassador's opinion, the Lebanese events also confirmed that there was a need for resolute Soviet steps, more active policy and diplomacy. The consolidation of imperialist positions had already influenced the Palestinian liberation movement as well. The latest Algerian conference suggested that there was a shift to the right going on within the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation and they were in favour of the American plan of settlement. He stressed that he did not want to censure the Soviet Union or diminish the responsibility of the Arab countries for the evolved situation.

In my reply, I pointed out that I did not agree with the Ambassador's opinion concerning several issues. I emphasised that the Soviet Union could not fight the war against Israel instead of the Arab countries. The Soviet Union most resolutely stands up against the American-Israeli aggressive endeavours and her policy is directed at the creation of the unity of action of the Arab countries, without which they cannot count on success. It is a pity that the Arab countries observed Israel's aggression against Lebanon impotently and they look on the Palestinian question moving their own interests into the foreground. It was not in the Arab countries but in Israel that the bloodshed of Beirut caused the biggest demonstration and protest. The internal Arab conflict and division undermine the effectiveness of the policies of both the Soviet Union and the socialist countries.

The Ambassador analysed Syria's policy in more detail. He stated that one of the main obstructers of the creation of the Arab unity was Syria, who had regional superpower endeavours and she approached the Near-Eastern crisis, the Palestinian question and the Iraqi-Iranian war proceeding from this. The Syrian leadership wants to mislead the Soviet Union by proclaiming leftist slogans and an anti-imperialist policy. At the same time, they co-operate with Saudi-Arabia and, through her, with the USA, and in their internal politics, they set limits for the Syrian Communist Party. Their real goal is to get the most modern weapons, which they did not deploy in Lebanon peculiarly. Syria's main aim is to abduct Saddam Hussein and to raise such a Baathist system to power that will subject itself to Assad and will open up the country's economic resources for the Syrian ambitions for power.

Hussein denied that Saddam Hussein had met Assad in Fez or Khaddam in Riyadh. He stated that the Iraqi side was prepared any time for an exchange of ideas at high level, but Syria rejected this, although the situation after Camp David had proved that the minimal Arab unity might only be created with the co-operation of Iraq and Syria.

At the meeting lasting about one and a half hours participated Béla László, desk officer for Iraq, as well as an interpreter of the Iraqi Embassy.

Budapest, 2 March, 1983