

THE ARAB POLITICS OF IRAQ DURING THE BAATH PARTY RULE: BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Aida R. Baghirova

Baku State University, Azerbaijan

aida_bagirova@yahoo.com

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-4458-6974

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Abstract: The paper analyzes one of the priority aspects of Iraq's foreign policy during the reign of the Ba'ath Party (1968-2003), relations with Arab countries. This policy was elevated to the rank of the most important state strategy and was given a special role in the scale of foreign policy priorities. It was allocated to an exceptional part of state politics, called "Arab politics", "*al-siyasa al-arabiyya*".

The research examines the basic ideological and theoretical principles of Ba'athism, which formed the basis of "Arab politics" and on the basis of which the ruling Baath of Iraq built its relations with Arab countries. In this vein, it considers the fundamental principle of Ba'athism, the idea of "Arab unity", which constituted the first element of the party's slogan "Unity, freedom, socialism" and within the framework of which, at certain stages, Ba'ath sought to closely interact with Arab countries. Analyzing official documents, the author concludes that on the issue of Arab unity, Iraq could only unite with those countries that had political systems identical to it. Based on this logic, it becomes clear that among the Arab countries with which Iraq shared common ideological and political principles, Syria, as well as one of the centers of Arab nationalism, Egypt could be natural partners of Iraq within the framework of integration processes in the Arab world. In addition, these countries were among the countries that Iraq considered as opposing Israel and with which it primarily sought to establish close cooperation, including in the military sphere, to resolve the Palestinian problem. It was noted, however, that the radicalism of official Baghdad on this issue not only placed Iraq in isolation in the Arab world, but also sometimes created obstacles to inter-Arab integration and cooperation. Often in his policies there was a deep gap between the declared principles and their practical implementation.

Within the framework of "Arab politics", the article examines in detail Iraqi-Syrian and Iraqi-Egyptian bilateral relations throughout the entire period of the Baath Party's rule in Iraq, revealing their most characteristic features and peculiarities.

Keywords: *Iraq, Ba'ath Party, Arab politics, Syria, Egypt, bilateral relations, Arab unity*

INTRODUCTION

The 35-year rule of the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party or Baath Party in Iraq (1968-2023) was a concentrated expression of important processes in all spheres of socio-political and economic life of Iraqi society; it also contained most of the contradictions that determined the uneven, sometimes zigzag development of the country. The defining trend in the socio-political development of Iraq during the reign of the Baath Party was

its gradual transformation into the leading force of society through the creation and development of a centralized system of ideological, political and administrative control, a system of one-party dictatorship. This process was accompanied by increased “Baathization” of the Iraqi political system, the main essence of which was the transformation of Iraqi Baathism into a national ideology. One of the inspirers and initiators of this course was Saddam Hussein, under whose direct leadership a one-party system of governing society was formed for the first time in the history of Iraq. Having concentrated absolute power in the country in his hands, S. Hussein gradually transformed it into the personal dictatorship of the “chief leader”.

These trends were most clearly manifested in the foreign policy activities of the Baath Party, the main goal of which was to create a solid base for transforming Iraq into the leader of the Arab world and the “center of power” in the Middle East, based on the ideological and theoretical platform of Baathism, one of the varieties of Arab nationalism.

This research makes an attempt, within the framework of Baath foreign policy, to consider the main directions of the so-called “Arab policy” of Iraq during the entire period of the rule of this party using the example of relations with Syria and Egypt, to identify their most characteristic features and characteristics.

“Arab policy” as a strategic direction of Iraqi foreign policy

From the very first days of establishing its power in Iraq in July 1968, the Baath Party declared that it intended to make fundamental changes in the country's foreign policy and formulate new approaches to solving international, regional and inter-Arab problems. In a statement by the Iraqi government on July 18, 1968, the need to provide conditions for the victory of the “Arab liberation struggle” and, in particular, the liberation of Palestine, was declared as a priority foreign policy goal. The statement indicated that “the revolution (Baath - author) will establish its relations with other states depending on their position in relation to the interests of the Arab nation and, above all, to the Palestinian problem” [Al-Bayan rakam vahida (1970): 3].

Let us note that the priority goals and objectives of Iraq's foreign policy became the subject of special discussion at the VII regional congress of the Ba'ath (November 1968). The congress obliged the party leadership to “work towards improving relations with Arab countries”, strengthening the “unity of Arab states”, pursue an active regional policy, expand ties with the USSR and other socialist countries and differentiate political relations with developed Western countries according to the degree of their “friendliness” and “hostility to the Arab nation” [The Political Statement of the 7th Regional Conference (1969): 10]. The congress also directed the ruling party to focus on solving regional problems, primarily the Palestinian problem.

In Iraq's foreign policy, one of the leading directions was its relations with Arab countries, which were allocated to an independent area of policy called “al-siyasa al-arabiyya”, “Arab politics”. In all official documents, decisions of the congresses of the ruling Baath, statements of the highest body of state power, the Council of the Revolutionary Command and Government, speeches of party and government officials, relations with Arab countries were considered as a priority task facing Iraq and stemming

from the Baathist ideology and strategy developed by regional and pan-Arab congresses. The starting point of Iraq's "Arab policy" was the principle of the country's ethnic, linguistic, historical, cultural and psychological affiliation with the Arab world. This provision was recorded in the provisional constitutions of Iraq (1968 and 1970), where it was noted that: "Iraq is an integral part of a single Arab homeland, and the Iraqi people are part of a single Arab nation" [Vizarat as-sakafa va-l-ilan. Ad-dustur al-muvaqqat (1969): 36].

Initially, the main components of the "Arab policy" of Iraq were of a general nature and boiled down to the implementation of the unity of the Arab countries; the liberation of all occupied Arab territories, primarily Palestine; supporting liberation movements in Arab countries. At that time, Iraq advocated strengthening ties primarily between "Arab progressive and revolutionary forces," and considered itself "a reliable base for their activities" [Masir at-Thawra (1969): 48]. The same position was confirmed at the Tenth Pan-Arab Congress of the Baath Party (March 1970), the Report of which spoke of the need to "transform the territory of Iraq into a refuge for revolutionary Arab forces and put the country's potential at the service of a pan-Arab strategy" [Arab Ba'th Socialist Party. The Political Manifesto (1970): 14]. As we see, from the very beginning of its activities, Baath outlined its claims to a leading role and leadership in the Arab world; it was the party, in the opinion of its leaders, "that was called upon to coordinate and direct the actions of individual Arab revolutionary groups" [Masir at-Thawra (1969): 49].

As the regional situation changed and new challenges emerged, the content of Iraq's "Arab policy" underwent a certain evolution and was enriched with specific goals and objectives. Accordingly, these goals and objectives found their detailed expression in theoretical documents - the "Charter of National Action" of Iraq (November 1971) [The National Action Charter (1973): 9], decisions of the VIII Regional Congress of the Baath Party (January 1974) [The Political Report adapted from the 8th Regional Congress (1970): 132].

This particularly concerned one of the fundamental principles of the Ba'ath, which formed the basis of the party's slogan "Unity, freedom, socialism", the idea of "Arab unity". Even in the first party program adopted in 1947, its most important goal was proclaimed "the unification on a nationalist basis of all Arab countries into a single state organism." The common language, territory, culture and "sacred mission of the Arabs" were named as objective prerequisites for its implementation [Nidal al-ba'th fi sabil al-vahda va-l-huriyya va-l-ishtirakiyya (1970): 27]. The important place given by Ba'athist ideologists in their theoretical principles to the problem of Arab unity was not accidental, given the exceptional popularity of the idea of unification in Arab countries. Unity was considered the main slogan and the highest demand of all political forces in the Arab world, elevated to the rank of state policy. However, the Ba'ath leaders invariably emphasized that only they were "the only consistent exponents of the idea of Arab unity" [ibidem: 31], claiming the role of leaders of the united Arab state, which was planned to be created under the auspices of this party and relying on its slogans. In the triad, "unity, freedom, socialism", the order of words is not accidental, as it may seem at first glance: since the Baath set national goals, concentrated in the concept of "unity", as the basis of its domestic and foreign policy, then only through achieving "unity" "a path to "freedom" was possible, under which it was possible to build "socialism" in society. The difference

between the Baathist concept of “Arab unity” and others, according to Baathist theorists, was due to the fact that it brought this problem out of “the captivity of general ideas and vague phrases, gave it flesh and blood, opened up the path of implementation for it, connecting it with the common struggle Arab peoples for liberation” [Farah (1973): 56]. The party leaders considered the implementation of Arab unity to be one of the effective forms of the Arab struggle for national independence.

One of the important documents that confirmed Iraq’s desire to implement the principle of Arab unity was the country’s Interim Constitution (October 1968), which proclaimed the main goal of the “sovereign people’s democratic republic (Iraq)” to be the creation of a unified Arab state on the principles of socialism, based on the fact that “the Iraqi people are part of the Arab nation” [Vizarat as-sakafa va-l-ilan (1969): 10]. The desire to implement the principle of Arab unity was confirmed by the Iraqi leadership in the Charter of National Action (November 1971) and the decisions of the VII (November 1968) and VIII (January 1974) regional congresses of the ruling Baath. An analysis of these official government and party documents allows us to assert that Iraq’s position on the issue of Arab unity followed logically from the impossibility of agreeing to state unification with countries that had opposing political systems. If we exclude from this list, in Baathist terminology, “Arab feudal-bourgeois regimes,” then the circle of countries with which Iraq, in principle, could lay the foundations of a united Arab state, narrows significantly. He considered Egypt and Syria as Iraq’s main allies. However, at that time, the country’s leadership was not ready for political unification with these states, in return for which they proposed strengthening ties between them and intensifying their struggle against “international and regional reaction.” Although the reasons for refusing immediate unification with Egypt and Syria were not given, nevertheless, the unsuccessful experience of the first unification project of the Arab countries, the creation of the United Arab Republic within Egypt and Syria (1958-1961) and the Federation of Arab Republics (1958, 1972- 1977), Ba’athist leaders began to exercise caution in their previously radical calls for Arab unity. A certain role here was played by a critical understanding of unsuccessful lessons, “experiments of past associations,” which was confirmed in the documents of the IX, X and XI pan-Arab (national) party congresses and the decisions of some regional congresses of the Iraqi Baath. An analysis of these documents confirms the course towards a more balanced and pragmatic approach to the idea of Arab unity, which was expressed in “the need to work towards the political, economic and military unity of the Arab homeland” [Arab Ba’th Socialist Party. The Political Manifesto (1970): 21].

After carefully studying the mistakes and miscalculations of “previous experiences and experiments,” the pan-Arab and regional Baath leadership concluded that it was advisable, in “the given historical conditions, to create the necessary atmosphere conducive to the implementation of unity” [ibidem: 15]. At one time, the founder and ideologist of the Ba’ath M. Aflyak noted: “Reality differs from theoretically compiled projects. Our goal is to make the best possible use of any situation” [Aflaq (1947): 63]. Despite the obvious failures in the practical implementation of unification projects, “the Baath continued to consider its concept of Arab unity as a flexible, not frozen form,” therefore, “the correct use of objective and subjective factors associated with changing

historical conditions” could make adjustments to the forms, terms, necessary for its implementation [ibidem: 65].

Another reason that determined the cautious approach of Iraqi leaders to the issue of state unification with Arab countries was related to their position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, which fundamentally rejected all political means as a means of solving the problem. Iraq's position was quite clearly stated by President A.H. al-Bakr (1968-1979), stating that “with regard to the unification formulas proposed by some Arab countries, it must be taken into account that any unity serves the interests of Arab confrontation with the enemy, the complete liberation of Arab territories ”[Al-Bakr (1977): 96]. The National Action Charter also confirmed the official point of view of the Iraqi leadership, which considered the unification of Arab countries on a different basis - “a fiction that creates a basis not for the implementation of Arab unity, but only for the implementation of various reactionary plans” [The National Action Charter (1973): 9]. It is absolutely clear that with this approach to the problem, Iraqi leaders could not agree to state unification with countries whose positions were officially regarded as “capitulatory”.

At the VIII regional congress of the Baath (1974), a final decision was made on practical methods and ways to unite the Arabs into a single state, the main provisions of which were as follows: firstly, the Baath proceeded from the real fact of the existence of independent Arab states and that the split of the “Arab nation is of a political, economic and psychological nature.” In this regard, a situation arose in which it was necessary to act within the existing state borders, but at the same time try to promote the integration of the Arab world. Secondly, based on the presence of the mentioned factors, the ruling party congress indicated a path that could lead to the creation of a unified Arab state. Its essence was to establish political control first in one country, and then in other countries - until the principle of Arab unity was realized and a single Arab state was created [The Political Report adapted by the 8th Regional Congress (1974): 177]. It was assumed that this process would be led by the Baath Party, whose ideological principles and organizational forms would form the core of the future united Arab state and which would play a leading role in this unification. “The development of the regional state will be put at the service of building a national state, through the organizational and ideological unity of the Baath Party and on the basis of its political program” [ibidem: 177], noted at the congress. At the same time, in determining future tasks, the congress encountered certain difficulties not only of a terminological nature, but also related to the need to revise some of the ideological and theoretical principles of the political platform of Baathism itself. The question of unifying the “Arab fatherland” could not but lead to a lack of clear differentiation, and sometimes even a contradiction between programs - minimum and maximum, a confusion of the strategic line of a foreign policy nature with the party’s tactics in the field of internal political development. This contradiction was not difficult to notice in the Political Report to the Congress, which, while defining the building of socialism among the main tasks of the party as “a necessary condition for achieving freedom, the unity of the Arab nation and its modern rise,” at the same time asserted that “only in a single Arab state is it possible building an Arab socialist system” [ibidem: 85].

It should be noted that the socio-political development of Arab countries after they achieved political independence and global challenges made significant adjustments to

the ideological platform of Baathism, and the content of its main ideological doctrines, including the idea of Arab unity, underwent changes. During this period, the prevailing tendency within the Arab world was not towards unity, but towards deepening division, which was confirmed by the history of the Baath itself, which had been in a state of ideological and organizational split since the mid-60s [Baghirova (2023): 1879]. Later, in one of his interviews, the leader of the Iraqi Baathists, Saddam Hussein (1979-2003), described the changes that had occurred in the position of the ruling party on the issue of Arab unity: “Twenty years ago, we thought that unity could be achieved through constitutional, political and policy measures. And now we see that unity or approximation to it cannot be achieved only by political and constitutional acts. And we began to look for opportunities to act towards unity in other areas as well” [Hussein (1981): 82].

In addition to attempts to implement the idea of “Arab unity” for the ruling Baath, one of the important areas of its activity was focusing on solving the Palestinian problem. Although Iraq did not border Israel and belonged to those Arab countries that conventionally constituted the “second line” of the Arab-Israeli confrontation, nevertheless, the existence of the unresolved Palestinian problem, which negatively affected the general political situation in the region, could not be ignored. However, unlike the “front-line” Arab countries, Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon, Baghdad had a certain freedom of action and much more room for maneuver in implementing its “Arab policy” and making practical decisions. In addition, in the system of political priorities in Iraq, the factor of Palestinian refugees did not occupy a priority place. The insignificant presence of Palestinians in Iraq and the strict regulation of their activities by the authorities made it possible not to fear the destabilizing influence of this factor on the internal political situation. Party congresses oriented the leadership of the ruling Ba'ath to conduct energetic work in “the direction of solving the problems of the Arab nation” [The Political Statement of the 7th Regional Conference (1969): 43] Thus, in the final document of the 7th regional party congress (November 1968) there was a “special” approach of the Iraqi Baathists to solving the Palestinian problem was defined, which rejected all political methods of settlement as “capitulatory” and “treasonous”. The only way to solve this problem was recognized as a war with the “Zionist entity” (Israel - author) and the “imperialist states” that supported it until the “enemies of the Arab nation” were completely defeated [ibidem: 18]. The use of the oil factor was proposed as a “political weapon”. In general, the radical and uncompromising policy on the Arab-Israeli settlement proclaimed and pursued by official Baghdad should have created the image of the only until the end consistent promoter of the “goals of the Arab nation for the liberation of Palestine” [Muhammad (1980): 88].

Along with declarative statements, Baghdad in practice sought to normalize its relations with Arab countries that were directly opposed to Israel, to achieve unification of efforts and coordination of their actions. At the end of 1968, he put forward the idea of creating a unified military command with the participation of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. At the same time, the Iraqi leadership proceeded from the fact that “Israeli aggression is directed not only against any specific Arab country, but against the entire Arab world” and stated that “Palestine, Syria, Jordan and we constitute a single Arab people, the Iraqi army is an army the entire Arab people, and if any country is attacked,

we will consider it as an aggression against the entire Arab people" [The Political Analysis of Present Arab Condition (1975): 31].

Based on its position on the impossibility of resolving the Palestinian problem by peaceful means, Iraq sharply criticized King Hussein's plan put forward in the spring of 1969, which provided for an end to the state of war, recognition of Israel's borders, its right to existence, security and peace, and a guarantee of free navigation in international waters of the countries of the region, with the simultaneous Israeli withdrawal to the line on June 4, 1967. On April 22, 1969, Baghdad radio broadcast the text of a statement by the regional leadership of the ruling Baath, which stated that it considered these proposals as "a prelude to the expected measures aimed at imposing Arab peoples of someone else's will." It emphasized that the Baath rejects all peaceful means of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and believes that such solutions are based on "capitulation, which suppresses the Arab will to resist" [Al-mutammar as-suhufi (1969): 21].

However, by the beginning of the 80s, under the influence of a number of international and regional factors, as well as a more pragmatic approach to the problems of the Arab world, Iraq's position on the Palestinian settlement had undergone a certain transformation. Iraqi leaders recognized the possibility of a comprehensive settlement of the conflict through peaceful means. They confirmed the "fundamental fidelity" of their position, "rejection of defeatist decisions in any form, condemnation of the Arab regimes responsible for the defeat...", but were forced to admit that "a very large distance separated in reality these slogans, programs from their practical needs." According to them, the party's "own capacity to play a leading, decisive role ... to put these slogans and programs into practice" was insufficient due to its "limited position in the Arab world" [The Political Analysis of Present Arab Condition (1975): 131]. Drawing conclusions from "mistakes in the implementation of its national tasks in relation to the Palestinian problem," the party leadership was able to generally soberly assess its own failures in this matter as "the natural result of a complex of mistakes and misconceptions." It was also forced to admit, "the Baath became involved in national activities on the problems of Palestine in a form that significantly exceeded its subjective capabilities at that stage" [Ibidem: 139].

One cannot but agree with this generally correct and critical assessment of the Ba'ath activities on this issue, since even a superficial analysis of its policy in this direction revealed an inflexible, rather monotonous and straightforward, and most importantly, a position far from reality that could not satisfy Iraq's ambitions and ensure him the status of a state - the leader of the Arab world and the entire Middle East.

Based on the analysis of the theoretical principles of Baathism, which form the basis of the "Arab policy," its practical implementation will be examined using the example of Iraq's bilateral relations with the leading Arab countries, Syria and Egypt.

Iraqi-Syrian Relations Within the Framework of the "Arab Policy"

It should be noted that in the overall system of Arab relations in Iraq, relations with Syria were the most difficult area. Their main feature can be characterized as permanent tension and conflict, with some periods of normalization.

Even with a superficial analysis of the reasons that gave rise to the Iraqi-Syrian contradictions, one can quite easily discover many common interests and points of

contact both in bilateral relations and on the fundamental problems of the Arab world and the entire region. A factor capable of bringing two neighboring states closer could be their party and ideological identity. But it is precisely the disagreements in this area were the root cause of tension between the two countries, according to a number of researchers of the modern history of Iraq and Syria [Akhundova, Baghirova (2000): 122; Kienle (1990): 192]. A split in the pan-Arab leadership in February 1966, when its founder and leader Michel Aflaq was removed from leadership as a result of an internal party struggle, and power passed into the hands of representatives of the pro-Syrian wing of the Baath, led to the refusal of the Iraqi regional branch of the party to implement the decisions of the new pan-Arab leadership, as “ illegal, anti-national and divisive.” The position of the Iraqi Baath was recorded in the Political Report of the Eighth Regional Party Congress, which stated: “From this period, the party in Syria was led by forces armed with false ideological, organizational and political principles, trying to separate the Iraqi Baath, which had a new, more progressive ideological, political and organizational platform, from the Syrian” [The Political Report adapted by the 8th Regional Congress (1974): 25].

The transfer to Baghdad of the headquarters of the old pan-Arab leadership, headed by the founder of the party and its General Secretary M. Aflyak, gave additional advantages to the Iraqi Baathists in their struggle with the Syrian Baath for leadership at the party-ideological level [Baram (1986): 128]. In fact, from that time on, two independent parties acted in the political arena with their own pan-Arab and regional leadership, new program guidelines and goals, strategy and tactics. Ideological rivalry and the struggle for influence, refracted through a complex system of international, regional and national-state interests, have become a factor of instability and tension in bilateral relations for many years. Over time, the party-ideological confrontation began to be burdened with the political ambitions and mistrust at the personal level. The struggle for leadership in the Arab world objectively turned these countries into irreconcilable rivals, which, against the background of complex regional problems in general, did not meet either their interests or the interests of the Arab world as a whole.

Another negative aspect of Iraqi-Syrian relations, according to a number of researchers, was the unequal approach to ways and methods of solving regional problems, primarily the Palestinian problem [Muftiler (1996): 123]. Iraqi leaders considered their position on certain problems of the Arab world to be the only correct one and criticized those states whose positions and principles did not coincide with their approaches, and the struggle was carried out in the most uncompromising way. At times it happened that because of its extreme radicalism and unwillingness to make reasonable compromises, Iraq found itself isolated in the Arab world. However, in fairness, it is important to note that at critical moments for the Arab world, Iraq and Syria, despite the tensions, provided assistance to each other, and criticism and harsh attacks gave way to cooperation and mutual assistance. This political line was dictated not only by Arab solidarity, but by the fact that, due to personal interests and ambitions, they could not ignore the implementation of the fundamental ideological and political principles and program goals of the party.

It is also noteworthy that in the initial period of its rule, the Baath attached great importance to the normalization of relations with those Arab countries that directly

opposed Israel, and the mandatory participation of the Iraqi army in the war for the “liberation of Palestine.” It was these considerations that prompted the Iraqi leaders to put forward at the end of 1968 the idea of creating a unified military command from the front-line Arab states, such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Since Egypt refused to participate in this project, a joint “Eastern Command” was created in March 1969, consisting of Syria, Jordan and Iraq. Based on the agreement reached, up to 20 thousand Iraqi military personnel were stationed on the territory of Syria and Jordan, and their annual maintenance in the amount of 60 million dinars was fully assumed by the Iraqi side [Al-Saka (1980): 66]. However, as a result of contradictions, cooperation within the Eastern Command soon fell apart, and Iraqi troops were withdrawn from the eastern front.

Syria also bore some responsibility for the collapse of this military alliance. Hafez Assad, who came to power as a result of the so-called Corrective Movement in November 1970, advocated the need to revise a number of principles of the country’s foreign policy. The main goal was to achieve a speedy and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. For this purpose, it was planned to establish close contacts not only with the so-called progressive and patriotic Arab regimes, but also with all Arab countries, regardless of the nature of their socio-political system. Syria sought to distance itself from Iraq’s radical course in the Middle East settlement and began to strengthen the military-political alliance with Egypt within the framework of the Federation of Arab Republics (FAR), which, according to the famous researcher N. Gulliam, made it possible to characterize this period as a “pro-Egyptian stage” [Gulliam (1999): 120].

Although in the package of political reforms announced in early March 1971, H. Assad pointed out the need to establish closer cooperation with Iraq in various fields, in practice this period was characterized by a further cooling of bilateral relations. Taking into account Iraq’s strained relations with Egypt and Jordan, it becomes clear that at this stage its attempts to establish close contacts and military cooperation with the front-line Arab states not only failed, but it found itself in virtual isolation in the Arab world. This situation could not satisfy the Iraqi leaders, so on March 20, 1972, President A.H. al-Bakr approached Syria and Egypt with a proposal to establish unity between these countries [Al-mutamar as-suhufi (1972): 19]. To specify the details and mechanism for its implementation, Iraq sent a special delegation to Damascus headed by the Deputy Chairman of the RRC, Saddam Hussein. However, during the negotiations it became clear that the unity project proposed by Iraq was fundamentally different from the Syrian plan to unite the Arab countries into a federation. The Syrian side invited Iraq to join the FAR, subject to agreement with all its principles, which actually meant accepting the leadership of Syria [Akhundova, Baghirova (2000): 192]. In response, Iraq stated that it was not seeking full state unification or joining the FAR; its plans included unifying the military efforts of the front-line Arab states. The failure of the Iraqi-Syrian negotiations at this stage was largely due to the intense rivalry for leadership in the Arab world, which, after the death of the pan-Arab leader, Egyptian President G.A. Nasser, in 1970, became open.

However, in addition to political rivalry between the two countries, there were other problems that negatively affected the nature of their relationship. Among them we can highlight the oil problem and the issue of distribution of water resources of the river. The

Euphrates, which became chronic and repeatedly led to crises between them. When in June 1972 Baghdad began to nationalize the property of the Iraq Petroleum Company, the issue of transporting Iraqi oil became an issue. At that time, the only communication that ensured its delivery to foreign markets was the Kirkuk-Baniyas oil pipeline with access to the Mediterranean Sea through Syria. Initially, H. Assad declared full moral and political support for this strategic step by Baghdad and, as a sign of solidarity, announced the nationalization of the company's property on its territory. However, Syria soon notified the Iraqi side of a revision of payments, tariffs, customs duties and fees for the transportation of its oil [Eppel (1996): 211]. It became clear that by exerting economic pressure on Baghdad, it was seeking to obtain certain political concessions. Negotiations between them on this issue were unsuccessful, and in January 1973, the Syrian parliament adopted a bill to double the tariffs for transporting Iraqi oil through its territory [ibidem: 218]. To block its negative consequences, a special commission was created, which was supposed to resolve the issue of building an alternative oil pipeline as soon as possible. To this end, in January 1973, the Iraqi Minister of Energy visited Ankara, where he discussed the issue of transporting oil through Turkey to the Mediterranean Sea, and in May a protocol was signed on the construction of an oil pipeline along the Kirkuk-Yumurtalyk route, which opened in January 1977. At the same time, the issue of building a strategic oil pipeline that connected the southern Iraqi fields with the Gulf was resolved. Thus, the construction of two new oil pipelines contributed to a significant weakening of the dependence of Iraqi oil exports on Syrian political decisions. Since April 1976, Iraq suspended the transportation of its oil to the port of Baniyas, after which Syria closed its common border and froze trade and economic ties.

As for the issue of using the water resources of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which pass through the territory of three Middle Eastern states, Turkey, Syria and Iraq, it arose since 1920 and was associated with many reasons, such as the state of the water level in the river, its quantity, spring floods, drought and etc. To avoid friction between them, firm quotas were established according to which the water resources of the Tigris and Euphrates were distributed [Orhan (2000): 192]. Since the beginning of the 1970s, in connection with the construction of the Keban hydraulic structure in Turkey and the Euphrates Dam in Syria, the distribution of water within the framework of previous quotas has undergone some changes. In the spring of 1975, the Iraqi side accused Syria of deliberately reducing water flow, as well as of excessive use. In response, Iraq's water supply was cut off without prior notice, causing the Habbaniyya Reservoir to fail to fill, causing severe damage to agriculture, and leaving some 3.5 million farmers in the Euphrates Basin in dire straits [Shen (2001): 91]. Syria explained the decrease in water flow by the fact that Turkey did not fulfill its quota obligations, as a result of which it was not possible to fill the Euphrates reservoir to the required level. In July 1975, mutual accusations and threats led to a severance of diplomatic relations. However, in October 1975, the parties managed to overcome their differences by reaching an agreement on a new division of the waters of the Euphrates and the establishment of annual quotas for each country [Orhan (2000): 193].

By 1977, Iraqi-Syrian interstate relations were at their lowest point in decades. The inability of the two leading Arab states to unite their efforts to solve the fundamental problems of the region, to rise above their own ambitions, and to sacrifice personal likes

and dislikes in the name of Arab unity and solidarity contributed to the deepening of negative trends in the region. However, the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty became an incentive for their rapprochement and consolidation of the Arab world in new conditions, and the political discredit of Egypt and its isolation in the region opened up opportunities for these countries to implement their ambitious plans.

Therefore, the Iraqi leadership turned to the heads of Syria, Algeria, Libya, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (South Yemen) and the PLO Executive Committee with a proposal to create Arab Struggle Front to counter the political course of Anwar Sadat. It also declared its readiness to resolve all issues in dispute with Syria within the framework of a bilateral meeting in Baghdad at the end of 1977 [Al-mutamar as-suhufi (1977): 19]. However, this initiative did not find support among the leaders of these countries, since there was already an official agreement to hold the next Arab Summit in Algeria in February 1978 to develop a plan of joint action and apply political and economic sanctions against the Camp David participants and those who supported it states Iraq boycotted the Algiers Summit and also refused to participate in the meeting of the leaders of Syria, Algeria, Libya, PDRY and PLO, convened on the initiative of Hamid Assad. Official Baghdad perceived the creation of the Front of Fortitude and Resistance as a result of it as an attempt by Syria to “throw a shadow on Iraqi political initiatives and push them away from the leading role in Middle Eastern affairs” [Hussein (1981): 56]. But soon sober calculation and pragmatism, and most importantly, fears of being isolated in the Arab world prompted Iraqi leaders to come up with a proposal to convene the next Arab Summit in Baghdad and create a special fund to finance the fight against Israel [Al-Yasri (2010): 86]. At the same time, to normalize relations with Syria, negotiations were held in Baghdad at the end of September 1978, which ended with the signing of a Charter of Joint Action to create a political body to regulate and coordinate military-political, economic and other relations between the two countries. During the negotiations, an agreement was reached on the unification of Iraq and Syria into a single state, and in June 1979 the parties signed the Political Declaration on Unification [Akhundova, Baghirova (2000): 77].

However, the Iraqi-Syrian rapprochement was short-lived: the internal party struggle for power that escalated in Iraq in the late 1970s had a negative impact on the state of bilateral relations, and the issue of party-state unification was removed from the agenda. After S. Hussein's group came to power and executed the so-called “conspirators,” whom the new authorities exposed as “agents of the Syrian regime who sought to place their henchmen in the most important state-party posts” [Hussein (1981): 191], confrontation between the two countries took on an open character. The breakdown of their relationship had extremely important consequences for the evolution of Iraq's "Arab politics", when the futility of attempts to lead the "struggle for the liberation of Palestine" led to its alienation from the countries considered by Baghdad as rivals for leadership in the Arab world.

During the Iran-Iraq War, Iraq's relations with Syria can be described as hostile. Syria was one of the few Arab countries to openly support Iran during the war. The reason for this was not only the long-term conflict between the two “centers of Baathism”, their rivalry for leadership in the Arab world, but also “Shiite sympathies” in Syrian politics (H. Assad and most members of the party-state elite belonged to the Alawite sect of

Shiism). All this, of course, could not but lead to serious negative consequences for bilateral relations, the “war of words” between them ended with the fact that on April 8, 1982, the Syrian government announced the closure of the border with Iraq, and on April 10, the suspension of gas transportation through the pipeline Kirkuk-Baniyas, and on April 18, diplomatic relations were interrupted [Ari (2006): 197].

The serious international crisis that erupted as a result of the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi troops in early August 1990 could not but affect the interests of Arab countries. Syria demonstrated the most consistent position against Iraqi aggression. It joined the multinational coalition, sending a 17,000-strong military contingent to the Gulf zone [Ahmedov (2009): 38]. Syria also adhered to a hard line when adopting anti-Iraqi resolutions both at the pan-Arab level and within the UN, which contributed to the political isolation of Iraq in the region and in the international arena.

The change in Damascus’s foreign policy guidelines during the period under study occurred under the influence of a new balance of power at the global level, when the exploitation of the bipolar confrontation lost its effectiveness and narrowed the scope for maneuver. The Syrian leadership sought to extract the maximum political and economic dividends from the new course, which would allow them to count on leading positions in the post-crisis regional balance of power. The change in his political priorities was significantly influenced by the country’s numerous internal and economic problems, which were aggravated by large external debt (the amount of debt of the former USSR alone was estimated at 16-17 billion dollars, of which 11 billion dollars accounted for military supplies) [Isayev (2001): 78]. The country's leadership, having realistically assessed internal resources, proclaimed a course towards a “multi-structured economy,” which included attracting large foreign and national investments into the economy, creating free economic zones, etc. Economic reform projects in Syria, due to a lack of its own resources, required significant investment from outside, including from the oil-producing monarchies of the Gulf. For military assistance during the Kuwait crisis alone, Syria received up to \$2 billion from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in the form of “financial compensation” [Eppel (1996): 211]. The level of relations with Iraq played a special role in shaping the Syrian position in the Kuwait crisis. The excessive strengthening of the Iraqi military machine has changed the regional balance of power in favor of Baghdad, so it was vital for Syria to curb it by any means necessary.

The defeat of the Iraqi army by the forces of the multinational coalition during Operation Desert Storm (1991) and international sanctions led to a significant weakening of Iraq's economic and military potential, and the regime found itself in virtual isolation. The country's regional status has undergone significant deformation, which has led, in turn, to Baghdad's forced adjustment of its foreign policy in general and relations with individual states in the region in particular. Although over time he managed, although not fully, to restore his political and economic ties, the pre-war status in one of the regional “centers of power” was lost. It was during this period that the previous rhetoric of the Iraqi authorities, far from reality, was replaced by a new foreign policy course, which stemmed from a more objective assessment of the country’s regional situation.

In the post-crisis period in the system of “Arab” relations in Iraq, the Syrian direction continued to remain one of the most complex and contradictory. Military defeat and international sanctions, which led to the weakening of Iraq's economic and military

potential, tipped the balance of power in bilateral relations in favor of Syria for the first time in many years. Despite the fact that preserving the weakened state of Iraq was in its interests, the regional situation dictated the need to preserve its territorial integrity and sovereignty. Therefore, plans to dismember or federalize Iraq were decisively rejected by Damascus [Orhan (2000): 192].

At the turn of 1996-1997, the process of gradual normalization of Iraqi-Syrian bilateral relations began. The conclusion of the Turkish-Israeli military alliance in 1996, economic difficulties in both countries and other factors made their rapprochement urgent at this stage. Iraqi media, most of which were under the control of Saddam Hussein's eldest son, Uday, began publishing articles about the need to intensify bilateral relations, which could benefit not only these countries themselves, but also the entire Arab world [Al-Yasri (2010): 126]. At the beginning of 1997, a joint trade committee was established, whose activities gave impetus to the establishment of economic ties. Delegations at various levels began to practice regular meetings to discuss a wide range of issues of mutual interest. In June 1997, a significant event occurred - the common border, closed for 17 years, was opened. In August 1997, representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Economy, as well as a large group of Syrian businessmen, visited Baghdad, during which agreements were signed on the opening of shopping centers, several contracts for the supply of essential goods from Syria in exchange for the export of Iraqi oil for a total of 13 million dollars [Ahmedov (2009): 36].

During this period, one of the important areas of bilateral cooperation was the oil sector, in particular the resumption of work on the Kirkuk-Baniyas oil pipeline, which was closed back in 1982. Negotiations on this issue at the expert level began in 1997, and on July 12, 1998, at a meeting of the oil ministers of the two countries, A.M. Rashid and M.M. Jemal, contracts were signed for the renewal of the old line, as well as the construction of a new one oil pipeline and oil refinery in Baniyas [Ahmedov, Kulaqina (2006): 135]. In August 1997, during the 44th international fair in Damascus, the Iraqi delegation led by Minister of Trade M.M. Saleh signed several agreements in the economic sphere.

An indicator of the parties' interest in deepening cooperation was the visit to Damascus in December 1997 of Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister T. Aziz and his negotiations with Syrian leaders. In the same month, on behalf of Hamid Assad, Syrian Foreign Minister F. al-Sharaa, during a meeting with King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, for the first time voiced the idea of the need to speed up the process of "returning Iraq to the Arab ranks" [Ari (2006): 301]. The words of the Syrian minister were treated with "understanding" in Riyadh, especially since political processes in the region and in the international arena were leading Arab leaders to understand that Iraq's participation as a full member of the Arab community in these processes meets their strategic interests.

Iraqi-Syrian bilateral relations received a new impetus after the rise to power of Assad's son, Bashar, who maintained personal contacts with the younger generation of the Iraqi ruling elite. In 2000, an Iraqi advocacy section was opened in Damascus, and in May 2001, a similar Syrian advocacy section was opened in Baghdad. In November 2000, a decision was made to open the Kirkuk-Baniyas oil pipeline, which was of great importance for the troubled Syrian economy. Syria bought Iraqi oil at a price of 10-15 dollars a barrel, which was significantly lower than world prices, then refined it, and sold

refined products along with its oil at current OPEC prices. Iraq also did not remain a loser: it received about \$2 million a day from oil supplies [Iraq exports oil to Syria (200): 11]. For him, the political benefit of oil cooperation lay in the fact that, in a broad sense, the development of economic ties had a beneficial effect on the general political climate between the two countries and that the sanctions regime was gradually weakened. In January 2001, Syrian Prime Minister M. Miro and Iraqi Vice President T.Y. Ramadan signed an agreement on customs tariffs, which provided for the gradual reduction and removal of most trade restrictions, and an agreement on a joint free trade zone. For Damascus, the development of trade relations with Iraq served to develop a number of sectors of the national economy; pending the lifting of sanctions, it was important to establish itself in the Iraqi market, which had great potential.

Nonetheless official Baghdad has repeatedly stated that, along with the development of economic ties, it also expects the restoration of diplomatic relations in full. However, Syria gave preference to the development of economic cooperation, since close political contacts with Iraq could lead to regional and international isolation of the country. Syria did not want to jeopardize political and economic ties with the Gulf monarchies, primarily with Saudi Arabia, for the sake of an unpredictable alliance with Saddam Hussein. It was in this spirit that the first official visit Syrian Prime Minister Mohammed Mustafa Miro to Iraq took place in the summer of 2001. The result of negotiations with the Iraqi leadership was the full restoration of the activities of the joint commission on economic cooperation, as well as the signing of a package of agreements in the sphere of economics, transport, trade, etc. Syria was the first Arab country with which Iraq entered into a free trade agreement. An important outcome of the joint commission was the signing in August 2002 of an agreement to create an investment holding company to implement four infrastructure projects in Iraq. In addition, since 1997, Syria has actively participated in the UN Oil for Food program [Ibidem: 10].

Relations with Egypt as one of the directions of Iraq's Arab policy

Analyzing in general terms the state of Iraqi-Egyptian bilateral relations in the first decade of Baath rule, it can be stated that they were uneven in nature with elements of rapprochement and cooperation to tension in certain periods.

To implement one of the priority goals of the Arab policy of establishing close ties with Arab countries that directly opposed Israel, Iraq placed special hopes on cooperation with Egypt and considered it as a potential ally in the region. Therefore, Iraqi President A.H. al-Bakr issued a statement declaring the government's intention to “develop and strengthen cooperation with Egypt in various fields” [Al-mutamar as-suhufi (1968): 31]. As for Egypt, the Ba'athists' rise to power was greeted coolly in Cairo. President G.A. Nasser was distrustful of their practical activities. He perfectly remembered the events of the recent past, when the popular slogans and verbal radicalism of the Iraqi Baathists turned out to be nothing more than an attempt to manipulate national ideas in the name of achieving their narrow party interests. [Seymour (1963): 402]. However, Nasser, being a pragmatic leader, could not ignore the extremely difficult situation that had developed in the Arab world after the defeat in the 1967 war. At this turning point in history, pan-Arab interests required coordination of the efforts of all Arab countries without exception, their

unity and cooperation in various fields. Therefore, when Baghdad at the end of 1968 put forward the idea of creating a unified military command with the participation of the front-line Arab states and Iraq, it advised Syrian President N. al-Atasi and King Hussein of Jordan to accept their proposal, although he himself refrained from participating in this military alliance [Al-radd al-Misri (1970: 80)]. But Iraq's military cooperation within the framework of the "Eastern Command" did not last long, after Egypt and Jordan agreed to a temporary ceasefire and accepted the "Rogers Plan" for a political settlement of the conflict, the Iraqi leadership began publicly criticizing their position. At the same time, Baghdad was in no hurry to withdraw its military contingents from the Eastern Front, intending to demonstrate to the nationalist population inside the country and "anywhere in the Arab world" its commitment to Arab unity and solidarity. The radical position of the Iraqi leaders on this issue was supposed to create for them the image of the only and completely consistent exponents of "the goals of the Arab nation aimed at the liberation of Palestine" [The Political Analysis of Present Arab Condition (1975): 43].

After the adoption by Egypt and Jordan in June 1970 of the American "Rogers Plan" for a political settlement of the conflict based on UN Security Council Resolution No 242, Iraq's relations with these countries deteriorated sharply. Tensions reached a particularly high level between Iraq and Egypt, the war of words between them drew even high-ranking government officials, including presidents, into its orbit [Khadduri (1978): 181]. In August 1970, G.A. Nasser addressed a special message to Iraqi President A.H. al-Bakr, where he outlined his country's position, simultaneously accusing Iraq of passivity on the eastern front, which "is carried out only by slogans, without providing military assistance to the pan-Arab cause" [Haula risala ar-ra'is (1970): 183]. However, the escalation of tension between them did not lead to a severance of diplomatic relations.

Although the policy of A. Sadat, who came to power in September 1970, for a partial and phased settlement of the Middle East conflict, caused sharp condemnation of Iraq, nevertheless, they did not greatly affect bilateral relations. Both sides were interested in maintaining them at the same level; Egypt due to the condemnation of A. Sadat's political course by the majority of Arab countries [Chechen, A. (2000): 194], Iraq due to its virtual isolation in the region. It is no coincidence that during the visits of the Egyptian Minister of Industry I.S. Muhammaddin in August 1974 and Presidential Advisor A. Marwan in September of the same year to Baghdad, agreements on economic cooperation and the creation of mixed commissions in the oil and metallurgical industries were signed. The parties also agreed that Iraq would invest up to \$1 billion in the Egyptian economy to implement joint projects, and would also recruit and employ an agreed number of skilled workers and specialists in various fields from Egypt and provide them with the same rights as local workers. [Al-Yasri (2010): 16]

It should be emphasized that, while cooperating with Egypt in various fields, Iraq did not intend to deviate from its principles in solving the Palestinian problem. It is no coincidence that after A. Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and the signing of the Camp David Agreement, the main direction of Iraq's regional policy was to counter this process, isolate Egypt and provide large financial assistance to radical forces opposing Israel - Syria and the PLO. In December 1977, Iraq broke off diplomatic relations with Egypt [Shmelyova (2003): 59]. He took an active part in the preparation and convening of a meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs, economics and finance of

Arab countries in Baghdad, at which it was decided to impose political and economic sanctions against Egypt. The discredit of Egypt as the traditional leader of the Arab world after Camp David and its political isolation in the region created favorable prospects for the Baathist regime to turn Iraq into a new “center of power” in the Middle East. Official Baghdad firmly adhered to the political and economic sanctions imposed against Egypt and continued to pursue a policy of keeping it on the periphery of the Arab world.

During the Iran-Iraq War, Egypt was among those Arab countries that sided with Iraq. In conditions when Syria took a pro-Iranian position, Baghdad needed an alternative and equivalent ally in the region. According to the Iraqi leadership, only Egypt could play this role, so the process of normalizing bilateral relations was initiated. During the war, Iraq also had to solve the problem of military supplies, and therefore establishing cooperation with Egypt in the military sphere became an urgent necessity. Given Egypt's interest in expanding the Arab market for its military industry, Iraq's proposal to resume military supplies was received positively. During the first four years of the war, Iraq purchased weapons, military equipment, equipment and spare parts from Egypt worth more than \$1 billion [ibidem: 59]. In addition to military assistance, more than 15 thousand volunteers and advisers from this country participated in the Iraqi army at the front, and up to 1.5 million Egyptians living in Iraq worked at its military and civilian facilities.

In response, in 1982, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein called on Arab countries to return Egypt to the Arab family. The 9th regional congress of the Baath Party (June 1982) noted that with the coming to power of President Hosni Mubarak, the situation in Egypt began to change for the better, and put forward the slogan “Isolation is not of Egypt, but of the Camp David Course” [The Political Report of the 9 -th Congress (1982): 43]. Saddam Hussein said that “Arab solidarity will never be complete without Egypt. He is too important for us not to let him into the Arab camp. Besides, Mubarak is not Sadat. He is a worthy person and his contribution to the pan-Arab cause is much more significant than other Arabs who constantly talk about Arabism” [Hussein (1997): 53]. Egypt also attached great importance to improving ties with Iraq, as it hoped with its help to normalize its relations with other Arab countries, and then gradually regain lost positions in the Arab world. Like S. Hussein, H. Mubarak was concerned about Ayatollah Khomeini's policy of “exporting the Islamic revolution,” under the influence of which various extremist Islamic groups in the country became significantly more active.

Despite clear signs of improvement in bilateral relations, before 1983, political, trade and economic ties between them had not yet reached the expected level. In January 1983, in Paris, after a long break, the first meeting took place between the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs of Egypt B.B. Ghali and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iraq T. Aziz, during which issues of cooperation in various fields were discussed. In August of the same year, the parties agreed to regulate the economic and financial aspects of bilateral relations, including the transfer of funds, clearing operations, the establishment of bank representative offices, etc. [Mamadzadeh (2004): 305]. In response to Egyptian assistance, Iraq actively promoted Egypt's return to the Arab ranks and the restoration of its membership in the Arab League and other regional organizations. Although diplomatic relations between the two countries had not yet been restored, in 1985, H. Mubarak paid an official visit to Baghdad. Iraqi-Egyptian diplomatic relations were fully restored on November 13, 1987 [Yurchenko (2003): 208]. The Iraqi-Egyptian

rapprochement reached its apogee after the war, when in February 1989 they united in the Arab Cooperation Council (ACC).

It should be noted that during the Kuwait crisis, Egypt's position took into account a number of internal and external factors. Numerous problems (balance of payments deficit, 50 billion foreign debt, etc.), aggravated by the weak economic structure of the country, have become a collapse since the late 80s. The growing confrontation between the authorities and radical Islamist groups, on the one hand, and a wide spectrum of secular opposition with the authorities, on the other, which ended in a boycott of the 1989 parliamentary elections, had an extremely negative impact on the internal political situation in the country. Against this background, the Egyptian leadership saw a way out of this situation in intensifying its foreign policy. The desire of President H. Mubarak to revive the role and significance of Egypt as the traditional leader of the Arab world, undermined by the Camp David process and the subsequent isolation of the country, by the end of the 80s - early 90s. began to take on distinct and far from hopeless outlines. Egypt's increased activity during the Kuwait crisis was accompanied, as expected, by a strengthening of its position in the Arab world [Bilan (2010): 37]. It was in Cairo, on the initiative of Hosni Mubarak, that an emergency Summit of Arab leaders was convened, in which the Egyptian delegation was active in making decisions condemning Iraqi aggression; he was also the initiator and participant of numerous bilateral meetings and negotiations with many leaders of the Arab world. Even full cooperation with Iraq within the framework of the NAC did not prevent Egypt from openly condemning the aggression against Kuwait and breaking off diplomatic relations with it. Egypt's position was expressed as follows: "We do not object to the transformation of Iraq into a strong state, but we cannot agree for it to become stronger through aggression against our Arab brothers" [Yurchenko (2003): 189]. Egypt sent a 30,000-strong military contingent to Saudi Arabia, which participated in the liberation of Kuwait as part of a multinational coalition. Despite the significant financial losses from the Gulf War, it brought significant political and economic dividends to Egypt. Firstly, it was decided to return the Arab League headquarters to Cairo from October 1, 1990, which stemmed from recognition of its contribution to the pan-Arab cause under extreme conditions. Secondly, Egypt's participation in the anti-Iraq coalition did not go unnoticed by the United States, which announced the write-off of its debt in the amount of \$7.1 billion. Thirdly, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait undertook to pay most of Egypt's losses [Baghirova (2003): 446].

The "peace dividends" received annually from the United States in the amount of \$2.1 billion and "material assistance" from the Gulf monarchies imposed certain obligations on Egypt. It is no coincidence that President Hosni Mubarak responded weakly to Baghdad's repeated calls to restore diplomatic relations and trade and economic ties between the two countries, which, in principle, met the interests of Egypt. The Egyptian leader did not want to risk the country's position; he invariably called on Iraq to strictly implement all UN Security Council resolutions, and considered this a necessary condition for the speedy lifting of international sanctions. At the same time, Egypt resolutely opposed the use of force against Iraq in situations of its confrontation with the UN Special Commission.

In general, until the mid-1990s, relations between the two countries were practically frozen. Egypt began to show diplomatic activity on the Iraqi problem in 1996–1997,

when it became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. At the same time, the first contacts between the two countries in the trade and economic sphere began in November 1997, for the first time after the Gulf War, the Egyptian delegation took part in the International Baghdad Fair, and already in 1998 the number of Egyptian firms and companies at the fair reached 60 [Mamadzadeh (2004): 309].

Since the end of the 20th century, against the backdrop of changes in the positions of a number of leading states regarding Iraq, Egypt's policy began to trace a line aimed at normalizing bilateral ties in various fields. At the same time, the Egyptian authorities stated that the resumption of full cooperation would be possible only after the lifting of international sanctions. Since 2000, Egypt has been involved in a campaign to abolish them, both through official government policy and through numerous non-governmental organizations. In November 2000, a significant event occurred, as diplomatic relations, interrupted in 1991, were restored. In January 2001, a representative Iraqi delegation led by Vice President Taha Yasin Ramadan visited Cairo and held numerous meetings with the Egyptian leadership. As a result of the visit, a free trade agreement was signed, which came into force in the summer of 2001. According to Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Ebeid, the signing of this agreement was the first step towards the creation of the Arab Common Market, which provided for ensuring freedom of movement and transit of human resources and capital, goods, labor hiring and property acquisition. For Iraq, it symbolized a breakthrough from the international blockade towards the resumption of active cooperation with the countries of the region.

In continuation of the development of trade and economic relations between the two countries, in February 2001, an Egyptian delegation led by Minister of Foreign Trade Youssef B. Ghali visited Baghdad. During the visit, agreements were signed in the field of railway, sea and air transport, and negotiations continued to accelerate the process of creating the Arab Common Market [Shmelyova (2003): 59]. In April 2001, an Egyptian trade fair was held in Baghdad, in which over 180 companies took part. In the summer of 2001, a quadripartite agreement (Egypt-Iraq-Syria-Libya) on the creation of a free trade zone was signed in the Iraqi capital. Thus, Iraq became one of the key links in the future inter-Arab integration union. Despite the sanctions, at the end of 2002, Egypt occupied second place after Russia in trade with Iraq within the framework of the UN Oil for Food program, displacing France and a number of other countries in the list, and also became one of its main trading partners in the Arab world, exporting goods worth \$2.8 billion annually [Rozov (2004): 163].

Thus, Egypt became the first Arab country that, by the beginning of the 21st century, actually broke through the regional blockade of Iraq and brought ties with it to the level of close partnership. Helping Baghdad restore its international image and establish economic ties, official Cairo proceeded from the fact that the isolation of such a potentially strong regional player as Iraq did not contribute to the unification plans of the Arabs, especially when the system of inter-Arab relations was experiencing one of the deepest crises in its history [Skibinskaya (2004): 110].

Although the Egyptian authorities did not hide their generally negative attitude towards the regime of Saddam Hussein, Iraq, with its high economic potential, continued to be viewed as an important participant in the integration processes in the Arab world.

CONCLUSION

An important component of Iraq's foreign policy were relations with Arab countries, which were considered as a special area of its international relations. A characteristic feature of inter-Arab political relations was the constant confrontation between centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. Among the factors that contributed to maintaining their mutual attraction are the similarity of problems associated with the need to gain economic independence, strengthen national sovereignty and resolve the Middle East problem. The growth of socio-political differentiation of Arab countries, the struggle for leadership in the Arab world, the clash of ideologies, and the intervention of extra-regional forces had a destabilizing effect on inter-Arab relations. Although the main principles of the Arab policy of Iraq were based on a serious ideological and theoretical basis, they were often declarative in nature, and a gap arose between the put forward slogans, the theoretical formulation of issues and their practical implementation. Since Iraq has clearly outlined its claims to a leading role and leadership in the Arab world, this course has repeatedly led to a clash of its interests and goals with the interests of other Arab countries, not only within the framework of bilateral relations, but also on the fundamental problems of the Arab world, and in each specific case contradictions and rivalry between them, the struggle for influence, refracted through a complex system of international, regional and national interests, took on various forms and configurations. At the same time, excessive radicalism has repeatedly led Iraq to isolation in the Arab world.

Iraq's relations with the leading Arab states fully reflected the symbiosis of centrifugal and centripetal trends in the Arab world. On the one hand, the similarities and common characteristics of the problems faced by almost all Arab countries, the presence of a number of unresolved problems, made them potential allies. On the other hand, competition for influence and leadership in the region, differences in socio-economic and political orientations, ideological confrontation, as well as contradictions of a subjective nature created serious obstacles to their integration and cooperation, both on a bilateral and multilateral basis.

The priority goal in the field of Arab policy of the ruling Baath was the course of transforming Iraq into the leading state of the Arab world and the "center of power" in the Middle East by strengthening its ideological and political influence in the region. It was in this context that it was necessary to consider the chronic confrontation at the interstate level with a number of countries in the region, which in one form or another prevented him from implementing his ambitious plans, as well as between the Iraqi and Syrian branches of Baathism for ideological influence.

However, the Iraqi crisis, which worsened at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, reached its peak of tension by 2003. In March 2003, a multinational coalition carried out the military operation "Iraqi Freedom", as a result of which the Baath Party regime in Iraq fell. A painful process of transformation of Iraqi society began, which took place in the context of global and regional challenges, competing aspirations of various political forces in the country to ensure their influence through participation in power structures. Iraq's relations with Arab countries also underwent fundamental changes during this period; they began to be built on a new basis, taking into account the changed

status of the country.

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