

SUBJECT: OREGON GOVERNOR ATIYEH'S MARCH 28 CONVERSATION
- WITH SYRIAN BA'TH PARTY OFFICIAL

SUMMARY: ON MARCH 28, OREGON GOVERNOR VICTOR ATIYEH MET WITH SYRIAN PARTY OFFICIAL MUHAMMAD HAYDAR. IN RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS, HAYDAR SAID HE THOUGHT THE THREE NEW VICE PRESIDENTS IN SYRIA WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR, RESPECTIVELY, "POLITICAL AFFAIRS" (KHADDAM), "SECURITY" AND TO A CERTAIN EXTENT MILITARY AFFAIRS (RIF'AT) AND PARTY/CULTURAL/INTELLECTUAL AFFAIRS (MISHARIQA), ALTHOUGH THESE DUTIES HAD NOT YET BEEN SPELLED OUT. IN DESCRIBING THE BA'TH PARTY, HAYDAR WAS CAREFUL TO DISTINGUISH IT FROM MARXIST PARTIES, AND IN DISCUSSING SYRIAN-SOVIET RELATIONS HE SAID THESE WERE NOT BASED ON IDEOLOGY BUT ON POLITICAL SELF-INTEREST. HAYDAR ASSERTED THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE NO BASES IN SYRIA, AND THAT SYRIA IS NOT PART OF MOSCOW'S INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY. END SUMMARY.

ON MARCH 28, OREGON GOVERNOR VICTOR ATIYEH CALLED ON MUHAMMAD HAYDAR, DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN RELATIONS FOR THE BA'TH PARTY REGIONAL COMMAND. GOVERNOR WAS ACCOMPANIED BY CHARGE, AN ASSISTANT FROM HIS OFFICE, AN OREGON BUSINESSMAN OF DAMASCENE ORIGIN WHO ACTED AS INTERPRETER, AND TWO MEMBERS OF THE OREGON PRESS.

HAYDAR OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY SAYING SYRIA WAS PROUD THAT A MAN OF SYRIAN ORIGIN HAD REACHED THE HIGH POSITION OF GOVERNOR OF AN AMERICAN STATE, AND HE ADDED THAT SYRIANS WERE CONFIDENT THAT GOVERNOR ATIYEH WOULD ACT AS A 100 PERCENT AMERICAN AND NOT HAVE DOUBLE LOYALTIES WITH ALLIGENCE TO A FOREIGN STATE AS MANY AMERICAN JEWS DO. THE GOVERNOR RESPONDED THAT HE HAD LEARNED FROM HIS FATHER, A FIRST-GENERATION AMERICAN, TO BE LOYAL TO THE UNITED STATES, ADDING THAT A MAJOR REASON HE (THE GOVERNOR) IS UNABLE TO SPEAK ARABIC IS BECAUSE HIS FATHER INSISTED THAT HE AND HIS BROTHERS LEARN THE LANGUAGE OF THE UNITED STATES. THE GOVERNOR ADDED THAT NEVERTHELESS MOST AMERICANS WHO HAVE ROOTS IN OTHER COUNTRIES DO HAVE AFFECTION FOR THE COUNTRY OF THEIR ANCESTORS AND THAT THE MIX OF PEOPLE FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS IN THE UNITED STATES IS PART OF THE STRENGTH OF AMERICA. HAYDAR COMMENTED THAT SYRIA IS AWARE OF THE STRENGTH OF THE UNITED STATES AND ESPECIALLY APPRECIATES ATIYEH'S EFFORTS IN TRYING TO REACH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ON ISSUES OF CONCERN IN THE MIDDLE EAST BECAUSE OF THE IMPORTANCE OF OPINION IN THE FORMULATION OF U.S. PUBLIC POLICY.

GOVERNOR ATIYEH SAID HE WANTED TO ASK ABOUT THE RECENT APPOINTMENT OF THREE NEW VICE PRESIDENTS IN SYRIA. WHAT DID THAT MEAN? HAYDAR RESPONDED BY REFERRING TO THE SYRIAN CONSTITUTION OF 1973 WHICH ALLOWED FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF ONE OR MORE VICE PRESIDENTS TO HELP THE PRESIDENT IN HANDLING AFFAIRS OF STATE. NOW THAT THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRESIDENCY HAVE GROWN SO MUCH, HE HAS TAKEN ADVANTAGE OF THIS CONSTITUTIONAL POSSIBILITY.

GOVERNOR ATIYEH ASKED WHAT THE SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE INDIVIDUAL VICE PRESIDENTS WOULD BE. HAYDAR RESPONDED THAT THIS HAD NOT BEEN SPELLED OUT IN DETAIL AS YET, BUT HE EXPECTED THAT THE THREE NEW VICE PRESIDENTS WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR AREAS RELATED TO THEIR PARTICULAR BACKGROUNDS AND INTERESTS. SINCE KHADDAM HAD BEEN FOREIGN MINISTER HE WOULD NOW PROBABLY BE RESPONSIBLE FOR "POLITICAL AFFAIRS". (COMMENT: THIS TERM "SHU'UN SIYASIA" IS THE SAME ONE USED BY OTHER WELL-INFORMED INSIDERS, SEE DAMASCUS 1946.) HAYDAR SAID THAT VICE PRESIDENT RIF'AT, WHO HAD BEEN INVOLVED IN MILITARY AFFAIRS AND LED AN ARMY UNIT, WOULD PROBABLY NOW BE RESPONSIBLE FOR SECURITY AND "TO A CERTAIN EXTENT" OTHER MILITARY MATTERS. THE THIRD VICE PRESIDENT, MASHARIQA, WHO HAYDAR DESCRIBED AS AN OLD HAND IN PARTY AFFAIRS, WOULD BE GIVEN RESPONSIBILITY FOR PARTY AFFAIRS AS WELL AS FOR CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL MATTERS. HAYDAR SAID THAT FROM WHAT HE UNDERSTOOD OF DISCUSSIONS THIS IS PROBABLY THE WAY IT WOULD COME OUT ALTHOUGH SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES HAD NOT YET BEEN ANNOUNCED. IN ANY CASE, THE PRECISE DUTIES AND ACTIVITIES OF THE VICE PRESIDENTS REMAINS IN THE HANDS OF THE PRESIDENT AND THE WHOLE IDEA OF THIS NEW DEVELOPMENT IS TO LIGHTEN THE PRESIDENT'S WORKLOAD.

GOVERNOR ATIYEH THEN ASKED HAYDAR ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE PARTY IN FORMULATION OF FOREIGN POLICY. HAYDAR EXPLAINED THE STRUCTURE OF THE BA'TH PARTY NATIONAL AND REGIONAL COMMANDS AND SAID THE NATIONAL COMMAND WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR SETTING PARTY GOALS AND OBJECTIVES AND THAT EACH NATIONAL COUNCIL MEMBER HAD A SPECIFIC FUNCTIONAL AREA OF RESPONSIBILITY. HIS HAPPENED TO BE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THESE INVOLVED RELATIONS BETWEEN THE PARTY AND OTHER PARTIES IN THE ARAB WORLD AND ELSEWHERE ABROAD. GOVERNOR ATIYEH INTERJECTED "INCLUDING THE REPUBLICAN PARTY IN THE UNITED STATES?" HAYDAR LAUGHED AND SAID NORMALLY THE RELATIONS OF THE BA'TH PARTY ARE WITH THE OPPOSITION PARTIES ELSEWHERE BUT SAID THE BA'TH DID HAVE SOME RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES WITH INDIVIDUALS, WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY, WITH BLACK AMERICAN POLITICAL MOVEMENTS, AS WELL AS WITH ORGANIZATIONS OF IMMIGRANTS. HAYDAR NOTED THAT HE WAS ALSO HEAD OF THE ORGANIZATION OF ARAB IMMIGRANTS ABROAD WHOSE PURPOSE WAS TO KEEP SYRIAN IMMIGRANTS INFORMED ON DEVELOPMENTS IN SYRIA, CREATE TIES WITH THEM AND ENCOURAGE THEM TO BUILD TIES WITH SYRIA AND VISIT IT. HAYDAR SAID THAT HE HAD PERSONALLY BEEN INVOLVED IN EXTENDING THE INVITATION TO GOVERNOR ATIYEH, FOR EXAMPLE, TO VISIT SYRIA.

GOVERNOR ATIYEH PICKED UP HAYDAR'S REFERENCE TO THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND SAID HE UNDERSTOOD THAT SYRIA IS INDEPENDENT OF BOTH THE U.S. AND THE USSR. HAYDAR SAID THAT AS A POLITICAL PARTY, THE BA'TH IS NATIONALISTIC AND DIFFERS FROM MARXISTS AND THEREFORE FROM COMMUNIST PARTIES AROUND THE WORLD. HE SAID THE BA'TH PARTY BELIEVES THAT EVERY COUNTRY HAS ITS OWN EXPERIENCE AND SYRIA SHOULD TAKE IDEAS FROM OTHER SOURCES BUT MAKE ITS OWN CHOICES AND FOLLOW AN INDEPENDENT SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LINE, NEVER COPYING A FOREIGN IDEOLOGY WHOLESALE, TAKING ONLY WHAT IS GOOD FOR SYRIA. THEREFORE, THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BA'TH PARTY ON THE ONE HAND AND COMMUNIST PARTIES AND THE USSR ON THE OTHER ARE THE RESULT OF POLITICAL POSITIONS BASED ON IMMEDIATE PROBLEMS FACING SYRIA, NOT ON IDEOLOGY. HAYDAR SAID THAT FOR 30 YEARS THE BA'TH PARTY HAS FOUND THAT THE POSITION OF THE USSR AND COMMUNIST PARTIES HAVE ALWAYS COINCIDED WITH ITS OWN AND SYRIA RECOGNIZES THAT ITS ARMED FORCES ARE ARMED WITH SOVIET EQUIPMENT. NEVERTHELESS, SYRIA IS NON-ALIGNED DESPITE THE SOVIET ARMS AND SUPPORT. THE PARTY WANTS SYRIA TO LIVE PEACEFULLY IN THE MIDST OF THE CONFLICTS OF THE SUPER POWERS AND SEEKS FOR THE AREA TO BE FREE OF SUPER POWER RIVALRY. CONTINUING, HAYDAR SAID THAT WHEN THERE IS A MAJOR CONFLICT IN THE AREA, THE U.S. SIGNS A STRATEGIC AGREEMENT WITH ISRAEL AND SYRIA IS LEFT WITH NO OTHER CHOICE BUT TO SEEK ASSISTANCE FROM THE USSR. THEREFORE, HAYDAR SAID, IT APPEARS THAT THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE UNITED STATES IS THE BEST PROMOTOR OF SOVIET INTERESTS IN THE AREA BECAUSE OF U.S. BIAS' IN FAVOR OF ISRAEL WHICH HAS LED TO THE SYRIAN-SOVIET ALLIANCE. HE STRESSED THAT SYRIA AND THE USSR ARE NOT IDEOLOGICALLY LINKED BUT THAT THE TWO WERE PUSHED TOGETHER BY U.S. FOREIGN POLICY. HE SAID THAT FOR EXAMPLE BEFORE 1948, NOBODY IN THE MIDDLE EAST DARED TO SAY "GOOD MORNING" TO THE SOVIET UNION AND PRE-1948 THE ARABS WERE THE MAIN DEFENSE AGAINST COMMUNISM. BUT WHEN THE CREATION OF ISRAEL AND ITS EXPANSION THREATENED THE ARAB COUNTRIES, THE ARABS FELT BETRAYED BY THE WEST AND THEY HAD TO TURN TO THE USSR.

CONTINUING, IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT SOVIET INFLUENCE IN SYRIA, HAYDAR SAID THAT SYRIA DID NOT HAVE A SINGLE SOVIET BASE HERE, AND SYRIA IS NOT PART OF THE SOVIET INTERNATIONAL STRATEGY, BUT RATHER SYRIA DEALS WITH THE SOVIET UNION AS AN EQUAL AND ON AN HONORABLE BASIS AS FRIENDS.

THE REMAINDER OF THE CONVERSATION WAS DEVOTED TO SYRIAN INTERNAL POLITICAL STRUCTURE. HAYDAR DESCRIBED THE DUAL FUNCTIONS OF PRESIDENT ASSAD AS PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC AND ALSO SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE PARTY, AND HE OUTLINED THE HIERARCHY OF THE PARTY THROUGH THE COUNTRY, IN SCHOOLS, MILITARY UNITS, FACTORIES, AND ELSEWHERE. HE DESCRIBED THE OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES IN SYRIA AND CONTRASTED THE COMMUNIST PARTY, WHICH HE CALLED MARXIST, WITH THE OTHER THREE WHICH HE CALLED NATIONALIST WHO CALLED FOR ARAB UNITY AND A SOCIALIST SOCIETY AS CONTRASTED WITH THE COMMUNIST PARTY WHICH IS LESS SOCIALIST AND MORE INTERNATIONALIST.