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YEVGENY M.

PRIMAKOV:

NOTES

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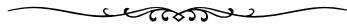
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Editorial



The archive of Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov is kept by me; it represents an extensive collection of his notebooks, which he maintained throughout his entire professional life, beginning with his period of work as a journalist in the Middle East and continuing up to his very last years. These notes contain unique information about events of which he was both a witness and a participant. Yevgeny Maksimovich was born in 1929 in Kyiv, graduated from Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies, and then completed graduate studies at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, becoming a professional orientalist and specialist on the Middle East.

In the 1950s–1960s he worked within the Soviet radio broadcasting system and later at the newspaper *Pravda*, where he advanced from an observer on Asian and African countries to chief correspondent in the Middle East. Later he headed the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences and Institute of World Economy and International Relations, served as Chairman of the Soviet of the Union of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Director of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, and Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation.

Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov began his career as a genuine field journalist, which immediately tied him to the practical, real side of events and was reflected in his analytical style, which always proceeded from concrete events and processes. He possessed a rare ability to gain access to the most closed environments and to establish trusting contacts both among representatives of government institutions and among unofficial political actors, including leaders of Palestinian resistance organizations. Thanks to this, his notebooks constitute sources of exceptional value; they are living testimonies of an era and an insider's view of key international events. The materials of the archive have never



before been published in full; however, many of them formed the basis of Yevgeny Maksimovich's autobiographical and scholarly works published in recent years.

Their transcription required extensive research and archival work: the notes were often made under difficult conditions, hastily—immediately after meetings or during conversations in the Middle East, in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, and other countries of the region. At the same time, a significant portion of the notes made later in Moscow, during the period of his academic work and government service, is preserved in the personal archive. I express my deep gratitude to the staff of the journal *Istorichesky Vestnik* (Historical Reporter) for their invaluable assistance in deciphering and attributing these materials. This work has already produced outstanding results; nevertheless, much still lies ahead: a substantial part of the archival notebooks is still kept by me and awaits its time. I hope that the further transcription and publication of these notes will make it possible to introduce new, unique sources into scholarly circulation and to open up unknown pages of national and world history to researchers.

Yevgeny A. Primakov Jr.



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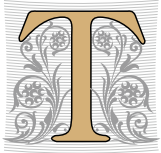
Original paper



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The Middle East in the 1960s–1970s in the Working Notes of Y.M. Primakov



The source presented to the readers consists of the working notes of the Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov (1929–2015), in those sections devoted to the situation in South Yemen in 1968, the Arab–Israeli War of 1973, and the initial period of the Lebanese Civil War (1976). This source should be regarded as unique for a number of reasons. First and foremost, it was written by an outstanding Russian scholar and specialist in Oriental studies who worked for many years in several Arab countries of the Middle East — Egypt, South Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria — and represents the result of daily, thoughtful observations and conversations with many Arab state and political figures, as well as with fellow journalists. At the same time, the text of the notes does not resemble a conventional diary: they are working notes in the true sense of the word, recording both what was seen and heard during trips and business meetings and deep personal reflections on ongoing events in the context of the current political situation in the region. It is also important to note that Primakov’s notes had never been published before and, apparently, were not intended for publication; rather, they served as valuable working material. Thanks to the heirs of Yevgeny Maksimovich, they have now been brought to light and constitute a valuable primary source on the contemporary history of the countries of the Arab East.



Having graduated in 1953 from the Arabic Department of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies with a specialization “country specialist on Arab states”, and in 1956 from the graduate program of the Faculty of Economics of Lomonosov Moscow State University (MSU), Y. M. Primakov defended in 1959, at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, a PhD dissertation entitled “The Export of Capital to Certain Arab Countries as a Means of Ensuring Monopoly Superprofits”. Combining academic research with practical work, Yevgeny Maksimovich worked in the Arabic editorial office of the State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, rising from correspondent to editor-in-chief of the Main Directorate for Broadcasting to Arab Countries. From December 1962 he became an observer on Asian and African countries for Pravda, the newspaper of the CPSU Central Committee. From 1965 to 1969 he worked as Pravda’s own correspondent in the Middle East.

The correspondent office was based in Cairo, the capital of Egypt, but the events that attracted Primakov’s attention were not limited to this key Arab country; rather, they encompassed the region as a whole. This is evidenced, in particular, by the first part of the published working notes of Yevgeny Maksimovich, which reflect the complex and highly dynamic situation in South Yemen in 1968. Beginning in 1962, the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula experienced revolutionary upheavals. At that time, North Yemen (the Mutawakkilite Kingdom of Yemen) was a monarchical state headed by a king-imam from the Zaydi Shiite community, while South Yemen was still under British colonial rule. Following the example of the Egyptian “Free Officers” revolution and under the influence of the anti-imperialist course of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, in September 1962 a group of officers of the North Yemen army seized power in the capital, Sana’a, and proclaimed the creation of the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR). Colonel Abdullah al-Sallal, who enjoyed Egyptian support, became the head of the revolutionary leadership. During the ensuing civil war between republicans and monarchists in the YAR, Egyptian troops were sent to assist the republicans, while their monarchist opponents began to receive aid from Saudi Arabia. Thus, events in North Yemen turned into a large-scale regional conflict which, given Soviet assistance to Egypt and the YAR on the

one hand, and Saudi Arabia's close cooperation with the United States on the other, fit squarely into the logic and context of the Cold War.

Meanwhile, in South Yemen, the British colonial authorities attempted to play a "preemptive" game in order to disguise their colonial protectorate regime over the numerous local sultanates and sheikhdoms that formed a kind of security belt around the key strategic point – the British Crown Colony of Aden. To this end, in 1959 Great Britain formed from the monarchies of South Yemen under its control the Federation of the Arab Emirates of the South, later renamed the Federation of South Arabia (FSA). In 1963 Aden also became part of this structure, which, while possessing certain attributes of sovereignty, in fact remained under British protection. The revolution and overthrow of the monarchy in North Yemen in 1962 led to the activation of the anti-colonial movement in the British-controlled territories of South Yemen as well. The key role in this struggle was played by the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (the National Front, NF), which launched guerrilla warfare, including in Aden itself. The second most significant organization was the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY), based in the territory of the YAR (North Yemen) and oriented toward Egypt. Both groupings of Yemeni patriots waged armed struggle against the British and the FSA armed forces under their control, but subsequently turned their weapons against each other. On 30 November 1967, having lost control of the situation in South Yemen, Great Britain was forced to transfer power to the National Front and withdraw its troops from Aden. The NF leadership proclaimed the People's Republic of South Yemen (PRSY), with Qahtan Muhammad al-Shaabi, a representative of the NF, becoming the first president of the young state. On 3 December 1967 diplomatic relations were established between the USSR and the PRSY.

At the same time, independence confronted South Yemen with serious political and economic problems. Socialist transformations began in the country, including the nationalization of lands belonging to the overthrown pro-British monarchies and of foreign capital, but the new government lacked sufficient economic resources. After the closure of shipping through the Suez Canal as a result of the 1967 Six-Day Arab–Israeli War, the port of Aden temporarily lost its significance, while the evacuation of British troops and wealthy local entrepreneurs associated with the colonizers deprived many residents of their livelihoods. In this difficult situation, the leadership of the PRSY looked to the USSR for support and assistance, seeing it as a fortress of justice and progress, a friend and defender of na-

tional liberation movements and of the young states of Asia and Africa that had embarked on a path of non-capitalist development. It was in this highly complex environment (further exacerbated by a struggle for power between moderate and ultra-left groups within the NF leadership, against the backdrop of sharp contrasts between the capital Aden and the country's tribal agrarian periphery) that Primakov undertook his working trip to South Yemen in 1968. As subsequent events showed, his deeply analytical and farsighted assessments of the situation in the PRSY, reflected in his working notes, proved accurate: the revolutionary leadership of South Yemen sincerely sought socialist transformations, but at the same time relied on Soviet assistance and found itself in very difficult relations with the republican authorities of the YAR. It is important to note that Primakov's trip to South Yemen in 1968 and his conversations with the PRSY leadership took place even before the opening of the Soviet embassy in Aden, which makes his view of events in the country an invaluable primary source written "hot on the trail" of the fateful revolutionary events in southern Arabia.

The second part of Primakov's working notes published in the *Historical Reporter* is devoted to assessments of the situation in the Middle East during the Arab–Israeli War of 1973 (the October War, the Yom Kippur War). By that time, Yevgeny Maksimovich had already defended his D.Sc. dissertation entitled "Social and Economic Development of Egypt", had been awarded the academic title of professor, and held the position of Vice Director of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR. His academic career continued to be combined with practical work during trips to Arab countries and numerous meetings with Arab state and political figures, scholars, and journalists. As is evident from the text of the notes, in October 1973 (when the Egyptian and Syrian armies managed to achieve limited successes in offensive operations against Israeli forces on the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt) and the Golan Heights (Syria), occupied by Israel in 1967), Yevgeny Maksimovich traveled to Beirut and Damascus, thoughtfully analyzing, on the basis of various sources, the sentiments prevailing in Arab ruling and political circles. The focus of his attention included the actions of the leaderships of Egypt and Syria, as well as of the leading Palestinian military-political organizations within the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). Among Primakov's interlocutors during those anxious days were Syrian Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Halim Khaddam; Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee and leader of the Fatah movement Yasser Arafat; Secretary-General of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine George Habash; Secretary-General of the

Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine Nayef Hawatmeh; as well as Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian journalists.

The next section of Primakov's notes, dated April 1976, constitutes a highly valuable and informative primary source on the early stage of the Lebanese Civil War of 1975–1990. The main opposing sides in this conflict were, on the one hand, the militias of the right-wing nationalist Kataeb Party and its allied parties, composed mainly of Maronite Christians, and, on the other hand, the armed detachments of the PLO and the coalition of the National Patriotic Forces (NPF) led by the leader of the Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party, Kamal Jumblatt. The fratricidal war assumed a particularly brutal character in January 1976, when the Kataeb militias and their allies began a blockade of Palestinian refugee camps in the suburbs of Beirut. In response, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad undertook a mediation mission to settle the conflict and sent to Lebanon the Damascus-controlled Yarmouk Brigade of the Palestine Liberation Army. Against the backdrop of escalating tragic events, young Muslim officers of the Lebanese Army staged a mutiny, and in March 1976 the armed forces of the Lebanese Republic effectively disintegrated. The Syrian leadership, while attempting to force the warring sides to cease fire by military means, simultaneously sought to strengthen its direct influence in Lebanon and to use the PLO in the interests of its Middle Eastern policy — actions that increasingly met with dissatisfaction and growing resistance from a number of Palestinian organizations as well as from the Progressive Socialist Party. At the beginning of June 1976, against the backdrop of mediation efforts by various Arab countries, a large-scale deployment of Syrian troops into Lebanon began.

The dramatic, tense pace of the Lebanese civil war and the atmosphere of anxious uncertainty in April 1976 are clearly felt in the pages of the notes of Y. M. Primakov, who by that time had been elected a Corresponding Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences — a recognition of his high scholarly achievements and his deep understanding of the mechanisms of Middle Eastern politics. His view of the situation reflects the official position of the USSR, which was interested in restoring stability in Lebanon primarily through the efforts of the Lebanese themselves.

At the same time, the Soviet leadership sought to prevent a confrontation between the PLO and Syria, which could only weaken them in the context of their confrontation with Israel, which enjoyed extensive support from the United States. As is evident from the text of the notes, Yevgeny Maksimovich, while analyzing a vast flow of information during personal meetings and conversations with a number of key participants in the con-

flict (including Yasser Arafat and Pierre Gemayel), diplomatically sought to maintain amicable contacts and opportunities for continued dialogue with each of them. This working style was consistently facilitated by his high personal authority, tact, and long-standing relations of trust with Arab politicians, diplomats, and influential journalists.

It is also noteworthy that Primakov, already at an early stage of the Lebanese civil war, correctly assessed the intentions and potential risks of one or another scenario of developments for the parties involved. For example, the unofficial consent of the United States to the entry of Syrian troops into Lebanon is interpreted not as a concession to Damascus, but as a long-term trap aimed at discrediting the leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic in the eyes of other Arab leaders and provoking a conflict between Syria and the PLO, which, in turn, clearly worked to Israel's advantage. As subsequent events showed, this assessment of the situation proved to be entirely accurate.

The publication of fragments of the working notes of Yevgeny Primakov constitutes a kind of invitation to further the study of this most valuable primary source and to its introduction into scholarly circulation. Objective technical difficulties associated with deciphering the manuscript and interpreting the numerous names and abbreviations cited in the text leave room for further source-critical research.



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Original paper



South Yemen, 1968

Aden. January 22, 1968.

External observations.

The airfield is very heavily guarded. Everywhere everything is wrapped with coils of barbed wire. At the entrance to the building there is a policeman who (we were told: as under the British) searches everyone – his hands slide over the body from top to bottom. They checked the ticket – a general rule. It’s also probably “punctuality” inherited from the British. Although the reception was very warm.

Next to the airfield is a former British military base. Barbed wire there as well. On the right, Aden officers now live there. On the left side of the road – empty houses. Everywhere on the houses there are inscriptions: FLM – FLM only. And in another place, clearly crossed out: FLOSY only¹.

They are working actively. In the ministries, for example. Young guys, enterprising, energetic. Not like in Damanhur² – the leaders are *all*³ officials. Was it like this in Egypt after the revolution? Or did the officer corps there support a certain respectability?

The essence of the nat[ional] lib[eration] movement in the Arab world is nevertheless changing. The general tendency is toward democratism.

Conversation with Abdallah Badheeb⁴ on the evening of 22 January 1968, on the balcony of the department.

¹ The “Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen” (FLOSY) was a militant political organization active in the British-controlled Federation of South Arabia (South Yemen) in the 1960s. It adhered to anti-colonial and anti-imperialist left-nationalist positions and was influenced by the ideas of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser

² Damanhur is a city in Lower Egypt.

³ *Sic.* (in English)

⁴ *Abdallah Badheeb* (1931–1976) was a Yemeni socialist writer, Marxist theoretician, journalist, and politician, and one of the leaders of the Marxist faction of the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (known

1. The tribal problem. Not as acute as in the North⁵, although it is necessary, with the PDRY⁶, to take into account the lessons of the North. During British rule, the tribal structure turned out to be blurred to a much greater degree than in the North.

The sultans are the largest feudal landlords, but they became such after the British presence. A law on private ownership of land was introduced. The sultans are an exception only in Lahej⁷, where there really was sultanic power — elsewhere they were ordinary tribal chiefs. It was the British who endowed them with enormous power and helped redistribute communal tribal lands in their favor.

After the proclamation of the PDRY — expropriation of property, including that of the sultans. But what next is the question! For now, it is in the hands of the state, and with the exception of Hadhramaut, where rental payments for buildings were reduced by 40 percent, everything remained at the same level. Dissatisfaction.

since 1967 as the National Front, NF), which fought for the liberation of South Yemen from British colonial rule. He played an important role in dialogue among various nationalist groupings, which led to their unification within the framework of the National Front.

⁵ This refers to North Yemen, i.e., the Yemen Arab Republic, which was established as a result of the anti-monarchical revolution of 26 September 1962 and existed until the unification of the two Yemeni states on 22 May 1990.

⁶ PRSY — the People's Republic of South Yemen, established on 30 November 1967 in southern Yemen as a result of armed national liberation struggle against British colonial rule and following the withdrawal of British troops from Aden. In 1970 the state was renamed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY). The ruling political force in South Yemen was the National Front (NF). The main political rival of the NF was FLOSY, which operated from the territory of North Yemen with Egyptian support.

⁷ The Sultanate of Lahej (also known as the Abdali Sultanate) was an Arab state that existed from 1728 to 1967 on the territory of what is now Lahej Governorate in South Yemen. From 1839 to 1967 the Sultanate of Lahej, ruled by the Abdali dynasty, was under British protection (from 1962 to 1967 as part of the Federation of South Arabia). In 1967 the Sultanate of Lahej was abolished by Yemeni revolutionaries during the creation of the PRSY.

They believe that the NLF⁸ Congress on the 15 of February, 1968, will determine the path. N. cooperated with the sultans. He even said that Fadhl⁹ – the Sultan of Lahej – was stronger than Great Britain. Now he is in S[audi] A[rabia].

2. The working class is a fairly large force. It began to develop especially after 1956, when an oil refinery was built in Aden. It employs 7,000 people. Now the British want to exert pressure on the Aden government and, putting forward the closure of the Suez Canal as an argument, have left 20,000 people without work. Such a number of unemployed is very large for Aden.

Of course, during its regime England placed its main emphasis on freedom of activity for reactionary forces, but in a certain sense the 20th century was introduced into Aden. Therefore, progressive figures here also received fairly good opportunities at various stages. Newspapers, radio – this did not exist in the North, either. Growth of national self-awareness.

3. Britain's positions.

The first step was FLOSY, since they feared Egyptian influence. At a certain stage Q. Sh.¹⁰ evolved, ceasing to be a lackey of N¹¹. The army – that was the support. Of course, the army is peculiar. The British more than once managed to throw it against the people. And yet. Before leaving, they tripled the salaries of officers and soldiers. Now officers receive more than 200 pounds, soldiers 60–80 pounds, being fully provided for. Try now, under the new regime, to reduce anything. And not to reduce it means to have created a caste.

The British deliberately established this caste system.

In Hadhramaut they managed to unite the army and the national guard into security forces. In Aden, where the main mass refuses outright, the army wants to remain an independent force.

At first the British helped ensure that the army together with the NLF acted against FLOSY. This was also facilitated by the sentiments within

⁸ From the English “National Liberation Front”, referring to the National Front (NF).

⁹ This refers to the last Sultan of Lahej, Fadhl VI ibn Ali al-Abdali, who ruled from 1958 to 1967. After the abolition of the sultanate, he fled to Saudi Arabia.

¹⁰ This refers to Qahtan Muhammad al-Shaabi (c. 1920–1981), a Yemeni political and statesman figure, leader of the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (known since 1967 as the National Front), and the first president of the PRSY (1967–1969). In 1969 he was deposed and arrested.

¹¹ This likely refers to Gamal Abdel Nasser.

the army itself. With Egyptian help, FLOSY created its own posts on Yemeni territory — 800–900 people. The Aden army feared (just like in Algeria) the return of these organized forces into the country.

There was a danger that the army would now turn against the NLF. However, they believe that the tactics are being modified. (Apparently this also happened as a result of a certain purge and the growth of patriotic sentiments among junior officers.) They think that this is now the line of division within the NLF: right and left. Not against the NLF with a bet on others, but internally — toward a split while keeping part of it in power. And to ensure the victory of the right, right-wing elements in the army are being used.

Again the question to the Congress, 15th of February, 1968.

4. Within the NLF there are three major forces — now everywhere in Arab countries in all fronts, apparently, it is the same: Arab nationalists, Nasserists, and communists. The NLF is not a party but a front. One of the questions at the congress is whether it will become a vanguard party or remain a front.

At present, the influence of the nationalists has increased. After the break between the NLF and FLOSY, the creation of a Supreme Command of the NLF consisting of 7 people was announced. Now another 14 have been “illegally” co-opted. A total of 21. Almost all are nationalists. Friends have close ties with Nasserists and left nationalists (who themselves are also not homogeneous).

5. S[audi] A[rabia] is operating at full speed. One of the channels is religious penetration. Every Friday, radio broadcasts speeches by a major religious figure, Muhammad bin Salim al-Bayhani (from Bayhan¹²). He speaks against social transformations that could promote atheism (the government apparently allows all this, thus shielding itself from criticism), and for alliances primarily with Muslim countries: with Pakistan, Somalia, and the UAR (in that order).

They are also active in Hadhramaut.

But there progressive elements are stronger than in other parts. However, there are also leftist tendencies. Trotskyists and the Chinese also exert influence.

Nevertheless, according to him, the Chinese do not exert deep influence and do not hold strong positions. But they are active.

¹² Bayhan/Beihan is a city in western Yemen, the administrative center of Bayhan District in Shabwah Governorate.

10 (according to other information, 5) people were sent by the NLF to study in China — to a party school.

Additional: the army numbers 10,000 men.

Observation: Abdallah Salafi. Father — Abdelmejid Salafi. Three children of the murdered man. They think it was FLOSY. (...) his name. The [rifle] butt — a table lamp. He invited. Immediately showed magazines — says: they're yours. Most of them are Korean. He carefully changed clothes before being photographed.

In Hadhramaut there are strong pro-Chinese sentiments, since many people came there from Zanzibar (therefore, these are not purely pro-Chinese).

And NB! — differentiation in attitudes toward FLOSY.

Asnag¹³ — in his opinion, already a political corpse. But Me(...)awi — far from it. Very many want an agreement to be reached with him. Possibly corresponding talks are already underway.

We saw his house — it has merged into a row of others, the walls riddled with bullets — his sister and three children were killed there — by whom? — unknown.

January 23rd, 1968.

Abdel Fattah Ismail¹⁴ — Minister of Culture and N[ational] Orientation. The problems are difficult, inherited from British imperialism.

We must clearly realize that the country is backward and semi-feudal. The country was bound by many ties to imperialism and colonialism.

¹³ Abdallah al-Asnag (1937–2014) was a Yemeni trade-union and political figure, leader of the Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC), and from 1965 head of the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen (FLOSY), which he organized following a split within the anti-colonial movement in South Yemen. He was a supporter of the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser.

¹⁴ Abdul Fattah Ismail (1939–1986) was a political and statesman figure of South Yemen and leader of the left wing of the National Front. In 1967–1968 he served as Minister of Culture, National Guidance, and Yemeni Unity Affairs. In March 1968 he was arrested by the right-wing faction of the National Front and went into exile. In 1969, together with Salim Rubai Ali, he led a bloodless coup against President Qahtan al-Shaabi and became General Secretary of the Central Committee of the National Front. In 1978–1980 he was the de facto leader of South Yemen, serving as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Yemeni Socialist Party and Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Council. He was regarded as the main pro-Soviet figure in the leadership of the Yemeni Socialist Party and the PDRY. He was killed in January 1986 during armed clashes between supporters and opponents of the General Secretary of the Yemeni Socialist Party and Prime Minister Ali Nasir Muhammad.

The British wanted to preserve the country as a military base and a market for their goods. Imperialism also bound our country to the “culture” of the West, the culture of the colonizers. A mass of complex problems has remained. We see no other way out than the path of scientific socialism (he now emphasizes the word “scientific!”).

Of course, we must carry out scientific elaboration in order to create a program.

At present we are engaged in studying the program of national action. At present the task is to study. That is the stage. When it is completed, we will announce it in order to mobilize the people.

I will speak frankly about the most important problem.

1. The current situation forces us to choose a definite orientation in our development: to seek solutions to the unresolved problems and the tasks facing us. Since we have chosen the path of scientific socialism, the socialist countries are our revolutionary ally. I believe that no one except the socialist camp can adequately understand our problems.

When we say that our friends are from the socialist camp, we mean first and foremost the Soviet Union, which stands at the head of the socialist camp. We hope that the USSR will quickly understand the difficulties we are experiencing and will take prompt measures so that cooperation may be established both with the state and with the people. Previously we had no opportunity to make direct contact; now the situation has changed. There are very broad possibilities. All the more so because both the old colonizers and the local reactionary force do not abandon their attempts to undo our progress.

Our people have already proved that they are capable of resisting attacks; now they want to withstand internal difficulties.

Frankly speaking, we believe that providing assistance to liberated countries is the duty of the Soviet Union. By doing so, it also helps itself. Of course, this is not a demand. We see with regret the fact that disagreements and contradictions exist within the socialist camp. We believe that imperialism benefits from (these) contradictions.

Despite the contradictions, the entire socialist camp is our natural ally. The USSR is the mother of all socialist countries. We are proud of the achievements attained by the Soviet Union. There are sufficient possibilities to support the struggle for peace and progress. Throughout the entire socialist camp, the USSR assumes the main burden of responsibilities—we see this.

We believe that relations between our countries should not be classical diplomatic relations, but revolutionary ones. We believe that there

[should be] not only state, but also party [ties] between the CPSU and the NLF¹⁵.

2. The situation itself makes it necessary to consider the creation of an avant-garde of the people — a party. The requirement of social transformations to defend the revolution compels us to create a party.

Over the course of the nat[ional]-lib[eration] struggle, the Front turned into a broad base for consolidating all the forces of the people. But under no circumstances do we yet consider it a party. During the nat[ional]-lib[eration] struggle there were few opportunities to create a party. The main goal was to organize the struggle. In addition, the political preparation of the members of the NLF was not yet sufficiently high. Of course, all this is a consequence of objective conditions.

I think that we were not the only ones to go through all this. The need to achieve unity among the fighters forced us at the previous stage not to put forward such demands¹⁶. At that time, we set the goal of maximally expanding the ranks of the Front, increasing the number of its members — a path to expanding the nat[ional]-lib[eration] struggle. This could not but have a negative effect on the actions of the Front. There were mistakes, misconceptions, and disagreements. Naturally, today there are sufficient possibilities to move to a qualitatively new stage. Having a broad popular base within the Front, we can create a political organization.

The forthcoming congress will be engaged in studying and developing this fundamental question. After this congress there will be a clearer understanding.

We hope to derive great benefit from the experience of the CPSU's struggle.

3. The problem of the unity of Yemeni land. Imperialists and reactionaries did everything to prevent the creation of progressive regimes. American imperialism has enormous interests here and strives to preserve the "status quo".

Therefore, [there are] close relations between Saudi Arabia and imperialism. S[audi] A[rabia] is trying to appropriate these lands.

We can consider that the imp[erialists] and the Arab reactionary forces are actively trying to overthrow the rep[ublican] regime in the North. And this is preparation for an action against the People's Republic

¹⁵ That is, the National Front for Liberation (NFL).

¹⁶ That is, demands for the creation of a single ruling party.

of South Yemen. We believe that this is not simply an attack on Sana'a¹⁷. It is an attempt to put an end to the entire progressive regime on the Arabian Peninsula.

The North and the South share a unity of interests. Our strategic goal is unification. The tactical goal is also clear. We must with all our strength support the republican regime in the North – thus defending ourselves as well! Our duty is the most active participation in the defense of the republican regime in the North (they constantly speak simply of “the North”). We believe that the experience of development in the North is erroneous. Reliance solely on military force cannot decide the fate of the people. Only the people’s awareness of their goals and tasks, only the people themselves, can defend revolutionary transformations. The republican regime in the North mistakenly prohibited the young forces of the people from creating an organization to defend the republic. Also erroneous are the relations between the republican regime and the nor[thern] tribes, the mistake is the carrying out of arrests among republicans and the penetration of opportunist elements. The problem is not a military one. It is not a matter of the quantity of weapons or soldiers. I believe that it would have been more correct to provide greater opportunities to the people to put republican revolutionary slogans into practice.

We cannot accept for ourselves the methods and means used in the North. Only reliance on the broad masses of the people is capable not only of defending the revolutionary regime but also of developing it.

Our experience is vivid proof of this. We fought against the colonial regime and the regime of the sultans by all means. We opposed FLOSY as a counterrevolutionary force. We achieved these victories not because of a certain quantity of weapons, but as a result of the decisive support of the masses of the people.

The conscious will of the entire people cannot be defeated by any forces. An example is Cuba. The only way out in the North is reliance on the people, on the organization of popular resistance. An example is the defenders of Sana'a. The creation and strengthening of an organization

¹⁷ This refers to the siege of Sana'a, the capital of North Yemen (the Yemen Arab Republic), by royalist forces during the North Yemeni Civil War. The royalists (supporters of the imam and king Muhammad al-Badr, overthrown in the 1962 revolution) acted with active support from Saudi Arabia against republican forces, which were assisted by Egypt and the USSR. The siege of Sana'a was lifted by February 1968, which effectively marked the victory of the republicans.

of popular resistance — that is the way out. This is what we are discussing with our brothers in the North. Of course, popular resistance in the North is close to us. It is necessary that the struggle in the North and in the South be coordinated, insofar as there are common problems.

Relations and cooperation between the CPSU and the NLF in various directions.

1. Exchange of delegations. A delegation of our Front could go to the Sov[iet] Union to familiarize itself with the experience of party building. After that — concrete decisions. One could also come here to become acquainted with the activity of the NLF. To give some advice on party building: experience of party registration, party structure, party work.

2. Sending trainees for party education.

3. If there is readiness to act quickly, then quickly make proposals.

1) The opening of the embassy is delayed. Constant contact of ideas would demonstrate promptness. Delay with delegations. 2) Will provide support.

Many questions were raised when the comrades were here.

Cultural problems. The propaganda apparatus is old. a) Films (cow-boy films) are being shown. We need Soviet ones. Libraries — serious books. The embassy — first of all. It is necessary to prepare a cultural center, and so on. Films, like ours.

24 January 1968. Aden.

General Secretary of the Congress of Trade Unions, Muhammad Ahmad Saleh Aulaqi¹⁸.

Trade unions. Previously the work of the movement was limited only to Aden, unfortunately. The former leadership acted according to Western methods. Abdullah Asnag, a creature of the Labour Party. But even the English system was not allowed to manifest itself as it should have.

Such behavior led to the leadership becoming isolated from the rank-and-file members. The leadership spent most of its time in Aden, trying to use the movement for its own pol[itical] purposes. They declared that the Congress of Trade Unions was open to all Yemenis, but in reality it was only for Adenis. The former leadership did everything possible to prevent the penetration of dissenters — communists, progressives. But

¹⁸ More precisely: *Muhammad Ahmad Saleh al-Aulaki* (1940–1973), a trade-union, political, and state figure of South Yemen and a member of the National Front leadership. From 1969 to 1971 he served as acting Minister of Defense, and from 1971 to 1973 as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PDRY. He was killed in a plane crash.

over time this policy was exposed. The armed uprising contributed especially to this.

I will say frankly that the NLF did a great deal to bring this about. Asnag's group did everything to discredit the NLF, asserting that the arm[ed] uprising was meant to improve the position of the tribes, and doing everything possible to promote peaceful forms of development.

Subsequently it became clear that Asnag, by his methods, was tied to Britain. Over time he moved farther and farther away. This is a long story. It ended with him remaining isolated and beginning to make statements in support of the revolution.

Egyptian assistance was provided on the condition that everyone must obey their orders. I believe that the clash between FLOSY and the NLF was because of the Egyptians. As a result of such a policy by the pr[evious] leadership, the trade-union movement was isolated both externally and internally. Unfortunately, despite complete isolation within Aden, Asnag enjoyed recognition from some externally. In the socialist countries Asnag was being promoted (?), because they did not know the real situation on the ground. Of course, everyone perceived Asnag not as an individual, but as a representative.

In 1965, during the elections, he did not get through anymore. It began with the airline workers' union, which did not support him. Prolonged disputes and struggle took place within the leadership between the group for trade-union democracy and those opposed to it. Those who, to one degree or another, adhered to socialist views (including spontaneously) prevailed.

They insisted on withdrawing from the confederation of th[eir own] (?) trade unions, something Asnag obstructed.

Our aspiration to become members of the WFTU¹⁹ — we want to become closer to the real trade-union movement.

Other regions are even more backward than Aden. We are now striving to bring the trade-union movement out of isolation.

There are no more than 25,000 [union members] now in Aden itself. Of these, 5,000 are in the five prov[inces] — in Hadhramaut. The strongest union is that of the oil refinery (not in terms of numbers, but in

¹⁹ WFTU — the World Federation of Trade Unions, an international trade-union organization associated with communist parties. It was founded in October 1945 at the First Constituent Conference in Paris. The WFTU was influenced by the USSR and today unites more than 100 million workers in many countries around the world.

effectiveness); in terms of membership, the largest are the dockworkers' union and the transport workers' [union].

Difficulties:

1. Sending trade-union spec[ialists] and do exchanges: sending two people to each location.

2. Abdul Malik Ismail — Minister of Labor and Soc[ial] Security. He was chairman of the oil workers' union.

3. Mahmoud A. (...) — Minister of Finance — a trade-union activist, also formerly president.

4. Abdel Qader Amin²⁰ (?) — chairman of the trade union, member of the High Command.

Our interlocutor himself. Son of a peasant from the eastern part of Aulaqi²¹. Studied in Aden at a college, graduated. Worked at British Petroleum for one year in 1965. One week after his marriage, in October 1965, was imprisoned. The Front's leadership was in Taiz²², while he was in the field. Twenty-six years old. Came to Aden [at the age of] nine, knowing only the Quran. Married a fourteen-year-old.

Photo.

Saleh Muhammad. Member of the executive committee of the dockworkers' union.

24 January 1968.

Minister of For[eign] Affairs Saif Ahmed Dali²³. Meeting at the ministry — city of Shaab²⁴. In the building of the Council of Ministers of the former federation.

Also a young man. He himself wanted to meet — was looking for us near (...?). Said he had deliberately scheduled it for 2 p.m. so that everyone would leave and no one would interfere.

²⁰ This likely refers to Abd al-Qadir Amin.

²¹ This refers to the territory of the Upper Aulaki Sheikhdome (northeast of Aden). The sheikhdome was part of the Aden Protectorate and its successors — the Federation of Arab Emirates of the South (1959–1963) and the Federation of South Arabia (1963–1967). It was abolished in 1967 during the formation of the PRSY.

²² A city in the southwestern part of North Yemen (Yemen Arab Republic).

²³ Saif Ahmad Salih al-Dali (1931–1973) served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the PRSY in 1967–1969 and as Ambassador of the PDRY to Iraq in 1972–1973. He was killed in an airplane crash.

²⁴ Madinat Asha'ab (literally "City of the People") was originally called Madinat al-Ittihad; it is one of the new districts of Aden where, prior to the establishment of the PRSY, government institutions of the Federation of South Arabia were located.

1. History of relations with FLOSY. On 16 January 1966 FLOSY was created. After that N.²⁵ stopped providing the National Liberation Front with both money and weapons. A system of twisting arms.

He was in Moscow — September 1965 to January 1966, en route to Cuba. The political climate did not allow him the opportunity to meet with the necessary people.

On 16 January 1966 FLOSY was created. Assistance stopped. In September there was a secret meeting of the NLF in Yemen, in Kib/Qib(...?). They considered withdrawing if the Alexandrian summit continued — a demand for capitulation, to surrender weapons.

Ahmad Saleh Sha'ir²⁶.

Minister of Agriculture (secretary in the ministry).

The country is agricultural. Small landholdings.

This is mine: Sultans and sheikhs were connected with Britain. In Yemen — against Ahmad²⁷. Different attitudes toward the tribes. There was no agrarian law regulating relations between ...

Compared these ministers with those ministers — in Yemen.

12,000 guineas (?) for the purchase of potatoes (?), 18,000 for onions (?). Over half a year, from April to December, 25,000 for oranges.

About 1 million feddans²⁸ are suitable for cultivation. But only 200,000 are cultivated, that is, one-fifth. The problem of water. Agrarian reform. To those who cultivate it?

Law on agrarian relations: taking into account Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Iraq²⁹.

Mine. Ministers are using Marxist terminology — a new development! At the congress they will present their proposals well.

²⁵ This refers to President of the United Arab Republic, Gamal Abdel Nasser.

²⁶ Ahmad Salih al-Sha'ir (1943–1973) was a member of the National Front leadership; at the time in question he served as Minister of Agriculture and from 1969 to 1973 as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the USSR. He was killed in 1973 in an airplane crash together with Saif Ahmad al-Dali and Ahmad Salih Aulaki.

²⁷ This likely refers to Imam and King of North Yemen Ahmad ibn Yahya Hamidaddin, who ruled from 1948 to 1962.

²⁸ A feddan is a unit of land area used in Arab countries. In Yemen, one feddan equals 4,600 square meters.

²⁹ In the aforementioned Arab countries, agrarian reforms were carried out by establishing a maximum limit on landownership per individual and per family. Surplus land was compulsorily purchased by the state at prices below market value.

One can only assume that 20% of the 200,000 feddans were in the hands of sultans. Those lands that can be cultivated, the state has taken them into its own hands.

They will approach maximums and minimums differentially by regions. Two forms. They will try both, proceeding from local conditions.

With regard to the tribes — it creates difficulties. Half a month ago, four families argued over half a feddan. Tribal attachment to land will hinder collectivization.

Land is owned on an individual basis. Stratification has already occurred. Sharecropping at one-quarter exists. Half-share tenancy also existed. Seventy percent on a tribal basis.

NB! The expulsion of the sultans had a strong impact. Some left, others stayed. They largely lost power. They fear that after the sultans [they will be next]. Four years have had a strong effect.

The tribes themselves deprived many of privileges. In practice, the Front often did not intervene.

Tribal relations in the North are much stronger. NB!

Incr[ease] of export crops. Increase tariffs — protectionism.

Again regarding our assistance.

2. The problem of the tribes. NB! Well known. Religious foundations, s[ocio]-econ[omic] and political. The four-year struggle greatly contributed to their erosion. The Lib[eration] Army consisted of representatives of different tribes. Connection with the city. They began to read and listen more.

People from the city went into the tribes. The petty bourgeoisie — workshops. The Front sent people into the tribes.

British imperialism tried to exacerbate tribal relations. Officers from one [tribe] were placed above soldiers from another. The Front, on the contrary, worked on an inter-tribal basis. Explanatory work continues even now by the NLF, in order to weaken internal tribal ties as much as possible. They convince people that they are all participants in the revolution. Over the last four months they have faced very difficult trials.

Starting on 20 June, the Egyptians began withdrawing their troops to Aden. Also with a purpose. The NLF was seizing positions. Previously they gave to Asnag (support?). Now they said: take this! But the Front.

But the self-awareness of the tribes turned out to be higher. People's militia — no troops. They guard everything themselves.

This was the first post-revolutionary test!!! But (this is mine) nothing is yet known.

There is no religious criticism. Everyone is Shafi i³⁰! In the North there are Zaydis³¹ and Shafi is.

25 January 1968. Lahej³². Ali Abd al-Alim³³.

Centralization in the governorate. Previously incorporated districts — autonomous.

Lahej, Dali, part of Haushabi, Subeihi, Maflahi, Sha(?)³⁴.

Houta³⁵ — before the revolution, the name of the capital of Lahej.

Centralization.

The governor is the s[enior] representative of the NLF. In the building of Fadhl ibn Ali³⁶ (the Sultan of Lahej).

Previously there was a British adviser. There were no British troops, but they were constantly passing through to the south. In the future, when there is a party, the representative of the Front will have supervisory and educational functions.

About 30 years old. He was a teacher in a pr[ivate] school in Lahej. Born here. He helped create the Front's organization. There was no question of a par(...) — he himself created the organization. He spent two years imprisoned in Mansura³⁷.

³⁰ Shafi is are followers of the Shafi i madhhab, one of the four Sunni schools of Islamic law.

³¹ Zaydis are followers of Zaydism, one of the Shi i branches of Islam.

³² Lahej is one of the provinces (governorates) of South Yemen; prior to 1967 it was the Sultanate of Lahej.

³³ *Ali Abd al-Alim* (1935–1970) was a South Yemeni revolutionary and one of the activists of the National Liberation Front. In 1968 he was a member of the General Leadership and the Organizational Committee of the National Front. He made a major contribution to the establishment of the National Front as the ruling political party in South Yemen and to the formation of its ideological course. Following the coup within the party and state leadership of the People's Republic of South Yemen in 1969, he was arrested together with supporters of the deposed leader Qahtan al-Shaabi. In 1970 he was sentenced to death on charges of attempting a coup d'état and was executed.

³⁴ The names of former sheikhdoms whose territories became part of Lahej Governorate in the People's Republic of South Yemen are listed.

³⁵ Al-Houta is the historical name of the administrative center of Lahej Governorate; it is synonymous with the city of Lahej.

³⁶ This likely refers to the building of the former palace of Sultan Fadhl VI ibn Ali, who ruled from 1958 to 1967.

³⁷ Al-Mansura is an urban district in Aden Governorate, effectively one of Aden's suburbs. The prison in al-Mansura, built by the colonial government of

He was dismissed from the school as soon as he was arrested. He was imprisoned by the British in 1965. At that time he was working in Aden. British intelligence exposed him as an underground activist. He was arrested in Aden in October 1965. He was interrogated “with particular severity”. In 1965 the British began discovering secret caches. Several people were caught, but not from the leadership.

In October they gave him salt water to drink, then did not allow him to drink at all. They beat him with sticks, dragged him by the hair. They stubbed out cigarettes [on him]. In Mansura — preliminary “processing”. A pit. They kept him in a pit for several days in a contorted position. They beat him with boots. They turned on powerful conditioning³⁸. Hands bent into a (figure) “seven”, legs into an “eight”. Torture by cold.

Criminal commission. Not a court, but a repeated interrogation: “Are you a terrorist — yes or no?” A judge, a prosecutor, an intelligence [officer], and a defense attorney.

Abdullah Asnag’s uncle acted as translator.

Previously Yemen was a single state. The Imam sent his governors. Remote [provinces] became independent. He imposed taxes. The Bedouins were outraged by tax increases, broke away and isolated themselves. At the same time, each tribe had its own sheikh. But he was not a dictator, because he was elected. Before the arrival of the British, [sheikhs] did not possess power. There was no hereditary [rule], even though he was called a sultan.

Previously Aden and Lahej were together. Later the [sultan] moved to Lahej.

The British supported [sheikhs] who broke away from the tribe and rose above it — this was British assistance. Previously the tribal sheikh had no property at all. Strengthening the real power of the sultans, the British supplied them with weapons and money and, using their position, they began to seize land. The sultan himself di[srup]ted (...) NB! — he did not allow tribal sheikhs. He was a shadow of the High Commissioner.

This is an agricultural region, and therefore tribal ties are weaker here.

The sultan deprived tribal sheikhs of any influence. He began to transfer power by inheritance — this was a most serious blow to the sheikhs.

Aden in the first half of the 1960s, was used as a political prison for Yemeni fighters against British colonialism.

³⁸ Air conditioner.

Sultan Abdel Kerim Fadhl³⁹ personally directed the cultivation of the land. He used hired labor (there was no serfdom — there was freedom, one could leave).

Our interlocutor knows the history of Russia! He says — this is not like serfdom.

In 1910 the sultan⁴⁰ wanted to become, following the example of Russia, a tsar. But when he became sultan he changed his mind, and died > [owning more] than 7,000 feddans. His son was less interested in land and began leasing it out. The last sultan⁴¹ in Cairo — leased out [his own land].

!Selector!

There were three main systems of tenancy: a) the harvest split in half; b) hiring as workers with fixed pay; c) any harvest, but fixed payment for leasing the land.

But the peasants still do not feel better! — this is mine!

At first we thought it was necessary to lay our hand on it, [to take the land] under our control. Now the situation is being studied. They believe that the land problem is harmful. Now they will divide it up. If land is given [to peasants] and then they are later cooperativized — it will be worse. As for agricultural workers, they come from the North⁴². Now the peasant is guaranteed that he will remain on the land. Already the arbitrariness in the distribution of income has been eliminated. In the event of a crop failure, peasants are exempt from paying rent.

The feeling of “one’s own land” is not very strong here.

The militia is a people’s militia. Locally it is led by the governor and the [National] Front’s branch. All militiamen are members of the Front. The overwhelming majority are illiterate. When the Front was being created, the basis [was] only the liberation struggle. From January 1966 there was propaganda against the NLF.

In the photo — Abdel Rahman Anwar Hasan (secretary of the NLF Representative Office) and NLF representative Ali Abd al-Alim. Abdel Qader Ali Nasr — chief. Ahmed Salem Obeid⁴³ — head of the mili-

³⁹ This likely refers to Sultan of Lahej Abd al-Karim II ibn al-Fadhl, who ruled from 1915 to 1947.

⁴⁰ In 1910 the Sultan of Lahej was Ahmad III ibn Fadl, who ruled from 1898 to 1914.

⁴¹ This likely refers to Fadhl VI ibn Ali, the last Sultan of Lahej, who ruled from 1958 to 1967.

⁴² That is, from the territory of North Yemen—the Yemen Arab Republic.

⁴³ Ahmad Salim Obayd (born 1942) is a South Yemeni military and state figure who, at the time in question, served as commander of the People’s Guard in

tia⁴⁴, a friend. “Pravda” — this is truth (he says in Arabic). “Like the Red Guard” — the people’s militia. No pay. Only symbols.

Three tasks:

1. Control over the officer corps of the old army⁴⁵.
2. Control over arrivals from the North.
3. Search for hidden weapons.

He studied in Romania at the Lenin School, at the Faculty of E[conomics].

To this day there is weak contact with the army. In practice, the militia is led by the Front. They help peasants, build roads. There is no mutual understanding between the militia and the “police”. The police are stronger.

25 January 1968.

1. H[ead] of the Lib[eration] Front — (pseudonym Faris Ahmed) ®Sultan Ahmed Umar⁴⁶— h[ead] of the organizational department. Was in Cairo and Beirut, worked in the Ministry of Education in Yemen.

2. Abdallah Sharar — member of the ideological commission, works in the newspapers *14 October* and *Suwar*⁴⁷.

3. Said al-Ibbi — head of security in the Front.

Meeting at the Front’s premises in Crater⁴⁸. Sultan speaks in a low voice. Security. He wanted to go out to stop the noise. Sultan said: p[erhaps] it is better that they are making noise...

1. Creation of an organization — as if there are contradictions within the Front.

Lahej Governorate. He later held the posts of Deputy Minister of Defense and Minister of Information. Since 1994 he has lived in political exile in Egypt.

⁴⁴ This refers to the People’s Guard (al-Haras al-Sha bi).

⁴⁵ This refers to the officer corps of the former army of the Federation of South Arabia, trained by the British and later, for the most part, incorporated into the armed forces of the People’s Republic of South Yemen.

⁴⁶ Sultan Ahmad Umar (Faris) (d. 1993) was a Yemeni revolutionary, activist of the Arab Nationalist Movement, one of the leaders of the left wing of the National Front, one of the founders of the Yemeni Socialist Party, and a member of its Central Committee. He was a supporter of the unification of the two Yemeni states.

⁴⁷ *14 October (14 Uktubir)* is a daily government newspaper published in Aden since 1967, named after the date of the revolution in South Yemen. *Al-Thawra* (“Revolution”) is the government newspaper of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen), published since the anti-monarchical revolution of 1962.

⁴⁸ Crater is a historic district of Aden, located inside the crater of an ancient extinct volcano. In 1967 it became the scene of fighting between British troops and units of the National Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen.

2. Sixty thousand of the adm[inistrative] apparatus were inherited [from the Federation of South Arabia]. He is hostile towards them.

3. Provinces.

4. Army. There is a danger. Naval officers are Somalis, pro-British. The army is 15,000 strong.

Really cultivated land – 150,000 feddans. Another 150,000 are cultivated very primitively. One million feddans can be cultivated. Out of 39 million → 16 million go to the army, the rest goes to the state apparatus.

Tribes. They were incited against one another. Saudi Arabia attempted to attack three times. We understand that the capture of Sana'a would be an attack against us. And this creates enormous difficulties for us.

We are convinced that we must have direct ties with the socialist camp, especially with the Sov[iet] Union. Nationalist China betrayed us; a consulate of the Federal Republic of Germany will be opened – do not let this mislead you. We will remain with you regardless; we will create a Marxist–Leninist party.

We believe that the communists of Abdallah Badheeb and we are moving in the same direction. There is no closeness between us at present, but we are going along the same path.

1. Asnag's party⁴⁹ – the middle and petty bourgeoisie, perhaps even more the bureaucracy.

2. The group in the army supporting Asnag killed workers and the fedayeen⁵⁰.

There are different views regarding their friends. They do not want either to allow them [to act] independently or to include them [in the National Front]. He said that this is how the majority of the leadership thinks. The reasons: extremists, fault-finders, intellectuals, did not fight. He says that a M[arxist]–L[eninist] group exists within the Front as well. He let slip, in effect, that against including the friends of Q. Sh.⁵¹ is the Minister of the Economy, Faisal al-Shaabi (a cousin) also.

The alternative is to let them create a separate party, but in the North. In any case, our country is one.

⁴⁹ That is, FLOSYP—the Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen.

⁵⁰ Fedayeen (fida i, fida iyin), from the Arabic “those who sacrifice themselves,” is a general term for members of insurgent detachments of national liberation movements in various Arab countries.

⁵¹ Qahtan al-Shaabi.

NB! Salaries. The British introduced extremely high pay for the army. Soldiers — 30 pounds. Officers — over 100. Com[mand] — 200.

Civil servants. Previously a minister received (under the British) 350 pounds. Permanent secretaries — 250. Highly paid bureaucracy. Now ministers receive little, but everything is provided by the state — house, car, electricity. They buy Gr[reek] vases and ask the merchant to send the bill to the government.

In the army under the British, the Aulaqi⁵² dominated — a tribe that, with British help, entered the army. Tied to the British. The NLF used sentiments against the Aulaqi, who were all the senior officers and altogether made up 20% of the army. Nepotism, promoting their own people.

Connections during the clash with FLOSY. H[alf] of the security service — one out of three who was dismissed — was tied to the British and to FLOSY in the most decisive way.

Now the NLF [leads] through its people in the army. One of them is Muhammad Salih (?) Sab a — head of military counterintelligence.

27 January 1968

Minister of Defense⁵³. Attitude toward the situation in the North.

The main problem, which became acute after the military coup five years ago: there was no money and no program of action. This led to the fact that, having carried out the revolution, the leadership did not meet the demands placed upon it. The revolution did not have a serious social base. Unfortunately, again after five years the question is on the agenda — will there be a republic.

Under these conditions, the development of the revolution in Yemen proceeded along the correct path. But of course the initiative is now not in the hands of the republicans. The meeting in Beirut showed this.

After victory here, the attacks [of the monarchists] in the North intensified. This is against us; we understand this. We always believed that

⁵² That is, people originating from the large Aulaki Arab tribe in southern Yemen, whose leaders during the colonial period were ruling sultans in two sultanates—Upper Aulaki and Lower Aulaki—as well as ruling sheikhs in a small state known as the Upper Aulaki Sheikhdom. These political entities were part of the Aden Protectorate and the Federation of South Arabia under British protection until 1967.

⁵³ The minister's name is not specified in the text, but it most likely refers to Ali Salim al-Beidh (born 1939), a South Yemeni political and state figure who served as Minister of Defense of the People's Republic of South Yemen in 1967–1969 and as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Yemeni Socialist Party from February 1986 to May 1990.

our front line of defense runs through the North. If it is breached, they will be here. My personal opinion is that the creation of front line defense forces in the North inspires great hopes. Even if we lose Sana'a and Taiz, these forces will still be found in the future.

This is the position of everyone — the government, the masses, etc. — to help the North. Despite our modest capabilities, we will exert every effort to help and to take direct part.

2. The situation on the peninsula in general is determined by the struggle of two camps. If the soc[ialist] camp made incorrect tactical moves, it handed trump cards to the enemy.

Given the difficult conditions, we cannot take up defensive positions. We must continue the revolution. We have no means for defense. Internally — a strong pol[itical] organization. Externally — the support of friendly countries. From the moral point of view there are great forces. Especially after 20 June⁵⁴ this was confirmed — the people support the revolution.

We ask that the USSR help us for the development of the world revolution.

Military and civilian delegations.

Do they fully control the situation in the army? The army question — army circles — has not been resolved in many Third World countries. At the head of the army are capable young members of the Front, cells. He did not expect immediate danger.

27 January 1968

President Qahtan al-Shaabi. The palace of the former High Commissioner.

We receive you not simply as journalists who will tell public opinion about this meeting. I receive you as friends, as representatives of a socialist country with which we want to develop relations in all aspects. With our revolution we want to make a modest contribution to the struggle of peoples against imperialism and reactionism. We hope and believe that relations between us will develop at the most varied levels. We are conducting the struggle together with you against a common enemy. We hope that Sov[iet] public opinion will be imbued with a deep understanding of our hopes and needs.

⁵⁴ On 20 June 1967 an anti-British uprising began within the armed forces of the Federation of South Yemen, leading to an intensification of the national liberation struggle under the leadership of the National Liberation Front. The actions of the rebels forced Great Britain to withdraw its troops from Yemen by the end of November 1967.

There is no doubt about the exchange of telegrams. I must highly appreciate the initiative of the Sov[iet] Union, which was expressed in send[ing] us greetings. It was well received throughout the country, by all our people. A decision has been made to exchange embassies, and we hope that embassies will be opened in the near future. We, as a young country pursuing a progressive liberation policy both domestically and abroad, are guided in our activities, both during the liberation struggle and now, by the Charter of the NLF adopted earlier.

We are filled with determination to implement the goals set out in the Charter. At the forthcoming congress we intend to consider a concrete program of actions aimed at developing a progressive, socialist society.

Our main task is the creation of an independent national economy. After 129 years of Br[itish] imp[erialist] rule, Britain left us a very heavy legacy, especially in the economic sphere. Hence it is natural that primary attention must be given to the most backward areas and regions, particularly the countryside. In this program we must give foremost and primary attention to solving the land problem. We will proclaim agrarian reform as one of the cornerstones of our policy. We are currently drafting legislation.

The first step is the expropriation of land from sultans and sheikhs and its transfer to the state. We are resolutely determined to eliminate semi-f[eudal] relations in the countryside. The next step after expropriation is the transfer of land own[ership]. A maximum size of landholding will be established by law. We intend to take up virgin lands. We intend to transfer the expropriated land into the hands of those who cultivate it. The subsequent stages: part will be distributed among landless peasants. On the other part we intend to create agricultural cooperatives. We will try to conduct an experiment with the creation of st[ate] farms. Naturally, at the first stage the state will take control over the entire conduct of the experiment.

We will proclaim the slogan “land to those who cultivate it” and are determined to put it into practice.

The main condition for the development of agriculture is water — a fairly difficult problem, since we have poor sources. There are no rivers, or almost none. Agriculture is mainly rain-fed; we use precipitation and flows after snowmelt in the mountains. Wells are also envisaged — both artesian and ordinary. A small number of artesian wells already shows that there are underground waters, and in large quantities.

For better use of floodwaters it is necessary to build dams and weirs. Perhaps the most radical solution to the problem is drilling a large number of artesian wells.

Most of the suitable land is still uncultivated. Of course, we need specialists and external assistance. Naturally, the state must take care of the marketing of agricultural products so that profits do not go beyond the borders of the state (NB!), but remain with the peasants and the state.

In developing agriculture, we will, naturally, rely on the achievements of technology. It is necessary to mechanize, to carry out the necessary research to select the best, most productive crops. Of course, we will devote great attention to increasing fish production (fish is already the second export i[tem] after cotton).

We must create ind[ustry] — of course not heavy industry, but industry that would find sources of raw materials for itself. The question is being studied about building a textile factory, a plant (or ...?) for processing fish for export, a soap-making factory, and a tobacco factory (there is local raw material).

Naturally, this is only the first stage. Further on — the creation of medium-scale industry. In the future we intend to become an industrial power.

As a result of prolonged colonial domination, our country is very backward, but it is not poor.

We want, with the help of specialists, to carry out extensive geological exploration. We hope that there is oil. In five governorates—Hadhramaut and four other governorates. Two for[eign] companies have already searched, but did not find any—we do not trust them very much and think that exploration was stopped for political reasons.

We want to grant concessions to for[eign] companies, including those from friendly countries, but not on unequal terms, as was the case in the past.

The USSR is engaged in oil exploration in various countries. If we find oil, this will help us solve our problems.

As stated in our Charter, the main role in the development of the socialist economy will be played by the state sector. You may have noticed that there is no great order in the countryside. In the future the state wants to direct both foreign and dom[estic] trade. We want to create our own nat[ional] bank, which will be state-owned.

It is necessary to put financial policy in order. We attach great importance to protectionism. We must pay enormous attention to the social development of the countryside.

The British did not even dig wells for drinking water. I was recently in northern Hadhramaut. I was told that there are not even wells for drinking water. This is reality. British imperialism exploited our country in every way—as a base, a port, a market for goods—but did nothing essential for the country itself.

In effect, when leaving, the British left our country bankrupt and did everything so that we would fail.

An en[ormous] adm[inistrative] apparatus, artificial inflation of salaries, the distribution of handouts without any justification.

Naturally, to solve our problems we need the most varied forms of your assistance.

As a main principle, this assistance must in no way infringe upon our freedom and sovereignty. Therefore I must say frankly that above all we expect assistance from our friends in the soc[ialist] camp, from the Sov[iet] Union.

We are accustomed in the Arab countries to the fact that Soviet leaders correctly understand our problems.

In the present difficult conditions our people highly value any assistance, and we will never forget it.

Our situation is quite clear. It is understood first by enemies, and only later by friends.

Independence was not granted; it was won in a hard struggle that cost many sacrifices. Therefore, we intend to defend it. The goal of the struggle is not to simply stop at the seizure of power. That is only a means.

The main goal is the complete liberation of the country from for[eign] influence and its development in the interests of the people.

We know what imperialism and colonialism are; as a people and as a revolutionary authority we closely follow their intentions. To the extent of our strength and capabilities, we will take part in the common struggle against colonialism and reaction, for the elimination of the exploitation of man by man. That is what the revolution was carried out for. We do not consider our independence complete as long as external influence and the exploitation of man by man persist in the Arab world. We are part of the Arab world; we particularly perceive this now, when the imp[erialists] — Israel — aim not only to occupy our lands but to overthrow progressive regimes.

The aim of concentrating the offensive pushes aggression toward stopping the development of the rev[olutionary] social process before it reaches its goals.

We consider the complete lib[eration] of the Arab world and its unification on socialist foundations to be our main duty.

Not only us, but other Arab peoples as well, highly value the position taken by the USSR against imp[erialism], Zionism, and reaction.

Here in our country we believe that the forces of counterrevolution will not sit idly by — world imperialism and Arab reaction.

We fully realize what dangers threaten us. With all the forces at our disposal we will defend ourselves and will not allow external counter-revolutionary forces to divert us from our path. Our friends, and above all the USSR, will not leave us alone in our struggle against our enemies.

The events unfolding in the North, in my opinion, are not due to internal disagreements, but to the intervention of external reactionary forces, in order not to let this most important strategic resource slip out of their hands.

You yourselves could see that inhumane attempts are being made to return the people to the darkness in which they lived for centuries.

The main goal of the imp[erialists] in the North, perhaps, is not so much the YAR⁵⁵, but, as is now becoming clear, the PRSY⁵⁶, where the development of events poses the greatest threat to their interests.

We feel our responsibility and in no case absolve ourselves of it for the development of events in the North.

We will take direct part in repelling the attacks of the counterrevolution in the North.

Already after the proclamation of independence, near Habarut⁵⁷ (the east[ern] border), there was a concentration of troops⁵⁸ with the participation of British officers. Of course, not the Sultan of Muscat, but Great Britain itself. In other border areas as well there have been attempts to penetrate our territory for hostile purposes.

The Khuriya Muriya Islands⁵⁹ are part of our territory and are still under British rule. They want to transfer them to Muscat. We will never renounce them.

⁵⁵ Yemen Arab Republic.

⁵⁶ People's Republic of South Yemen.

⁵⁷ Habarut is a city in western Oman, near the border with Yemen.

⁵⁸ This refers to the armed forces of the Sultanate of Oman.

⁵⁹ The Khuriya Muriya Islands are a group of islands in the Arabian Sea. In 1937 they were annexed by Great Britain to its colony of Aden. In November 1967 the islands were transferred by the British to the control of Oman, which itself was under British protection. After the proclamation of the People's Republic of South Yemen in 1967, the South Yemeni authorities declared claims to the islands.

Of course, we will declare that we do not want to interfere, but as events show, our intentions are not met with reciprocity. It is necessary that everyone understand that despite the fact that we have no aviation, no navy, and only a small army, our people are ready for the fiercest struggle.

We will fight against any attempts to divert us from the progressive path of development.

Britain, which for many years ruthlessly exploited us, must at least partially compensate for this. We will insist on this.

Of course, it is an injustice when, after such long exploitation, we are literally abandoned to our fate. At the negotiations in Geneva we were disappointed by Britain's position. But I believe that Britain must show a sober approach. We hope that the forthcoming economic negotiations with Britain will be more successful and that Britain will be more accommodating.

The British in Geneva stated that they had not so much derived benefits as incurred expenses. We said that we are ready to total all expenditures over 129 years and deduct from the profits only those of the [last] 50 years.

In Yemen⁶⁰.

Objective conditions are conducive.

1. Cl[ass] relations are underdeveloped; hostility and venality of the tribes.

2. There was no genuine revolution—there was merely a coup. There were only leaders who did not rely on the masses and did nothing to assist them.

In the leadership there were, and still are (there are indeed such people here), dishonest individuals.

The leadership is incompetent and is not going to deal with concrete matters. It is absolutely uninformed. It does not know the situation or what is really happening.

There is no program of practical actions whatsoever.

As a result of exchanging four messages (to the last of which I received no reply), the People's Republic of South Yemen demands a concrete discussion of who has what and who needs what. Otherwise it may turn out that our fighters arrive and there is nothing to eat, or no ammunition, and shots are fired into their backs. The leadership in the North does not even know how many weapons it has on hand.

⁶⁰ This probably refers to North Yemen, i.e., the Yemen Arab Republic.

The situation in the North is catastrophic. And the climate is very favorable for successful intervention by external counter[revolutionary] forces.

A people's militia is now being created. But it must be done faster, and above all honest people must be appointed — at least 60 per cent must be honest. We will, of course, help. Two delegations were here about which nothing was reported. There are other delegations as well, including from Eritrea. But the delegations are absolutely incompetent.

They only say: help us — but what exactly they want, they do not know.

I sent my last message to al-Eryani⁶¹ 14 days ago — no reply.

Regarding the possibility of assistance, I said: we have no weapons and no ammunition. But we will not stay on the sidelines anyway.

Despite the fact that the population resisted the creation of an army, they did not create a militia⁶² either. I frankly wrote about everything to Nasser.

S[audi] A[rabia] is assembling units on our borders. There are training camps where forces for an invasion of the South are being prepared. I emphasized the importance of Harib⁶³ as a key position and gave orders to the troops to suppress any incursions.

We are sending people there.

Seventy-five thousand Egyptians could do nothing with these tribes⁶⁴, for whom war is life — especially with such support.

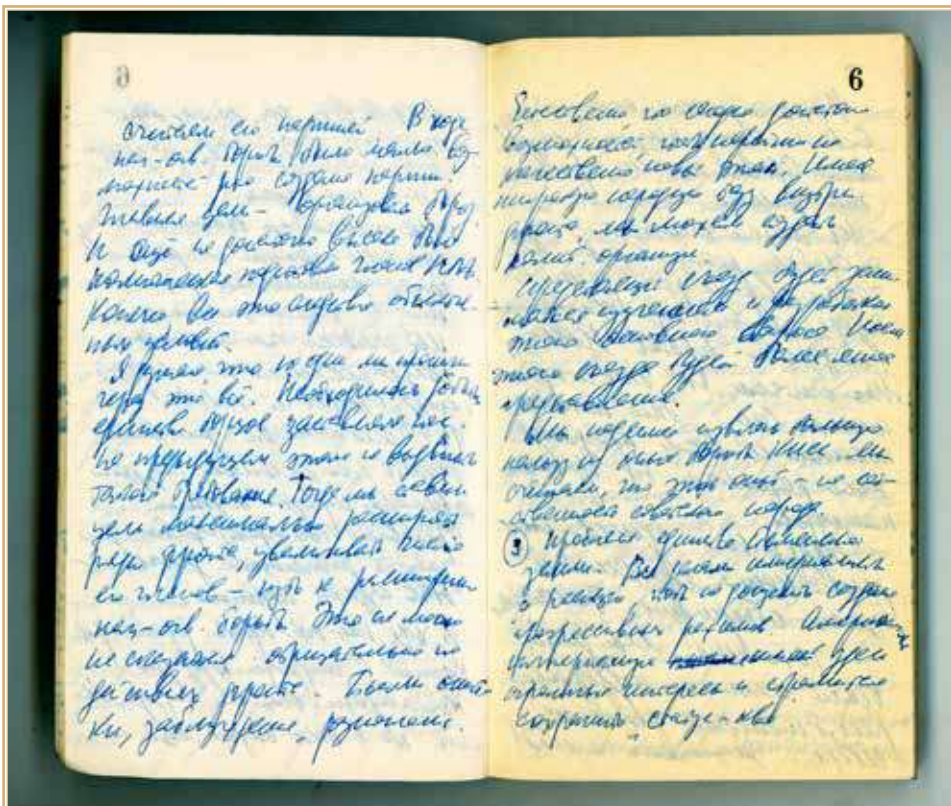
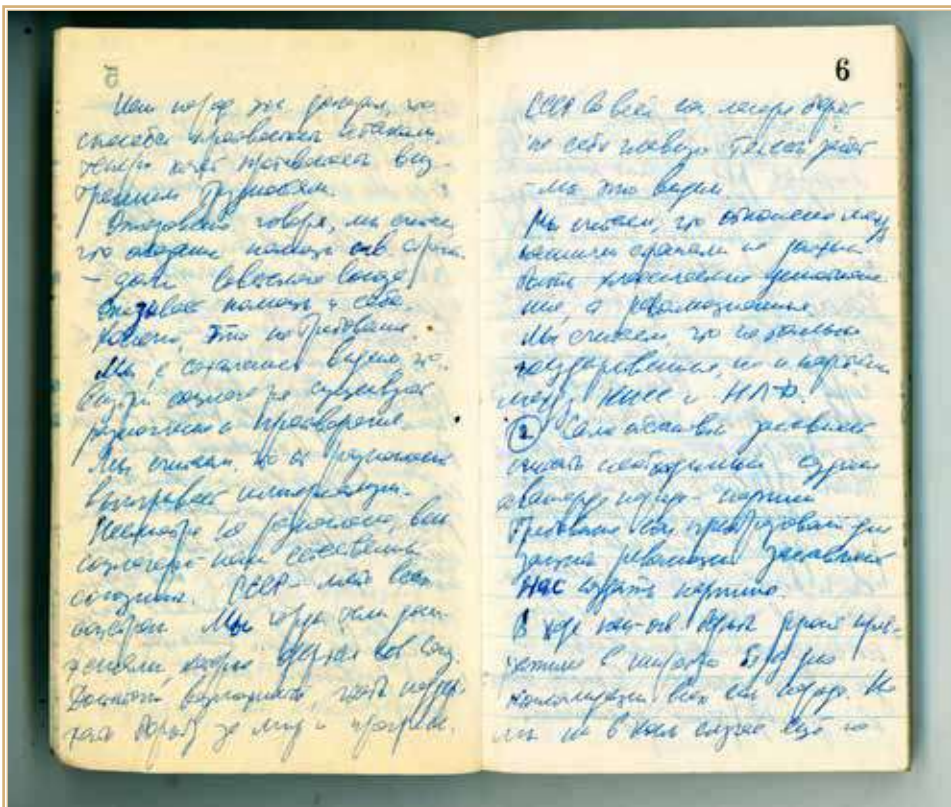
Minister of Defense.

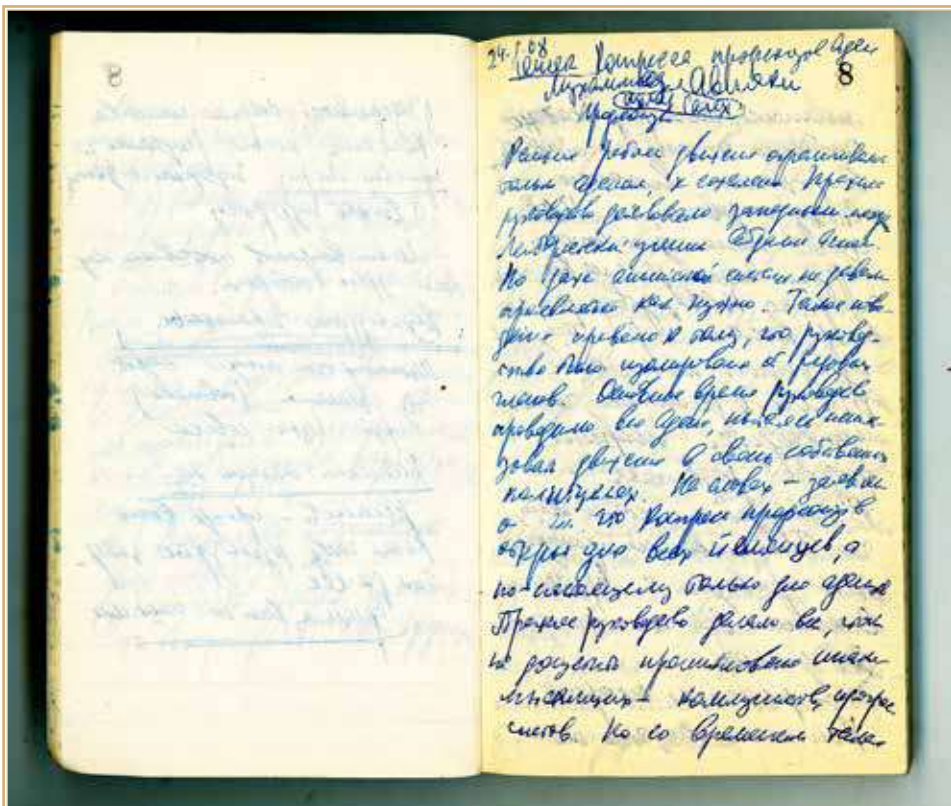
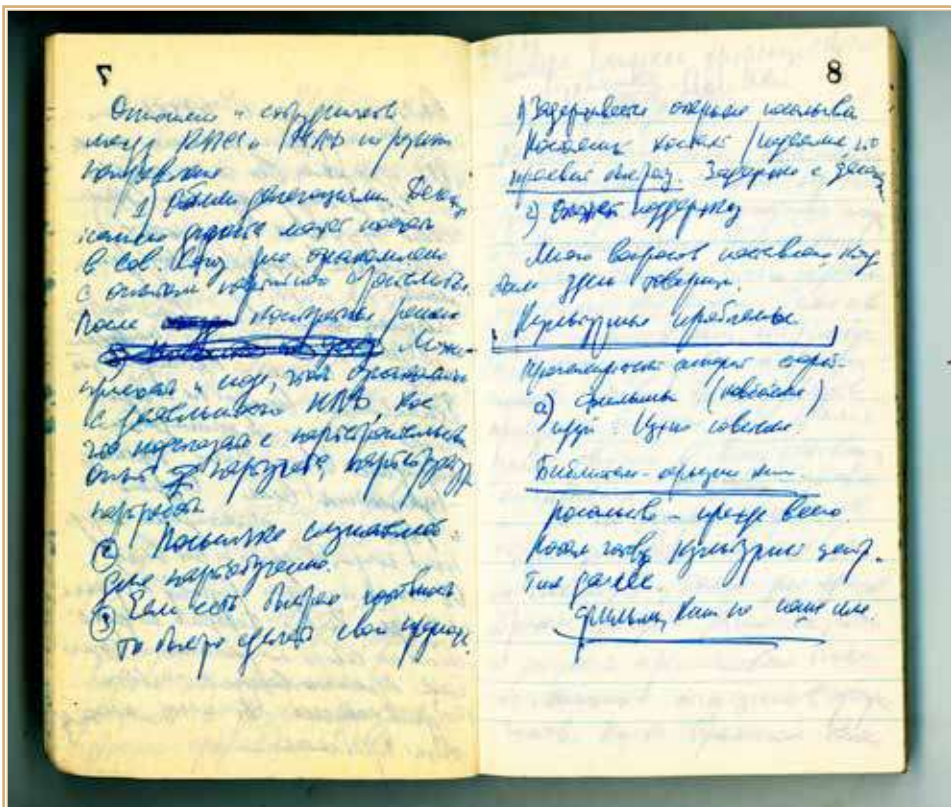
⁶¹ Abdul Rahman al-Eryani (1910–1998) was a Yemeni political and state figure, the second President of the Yemen Arab Republic (from 5 November 1967 to 13 June 1974).

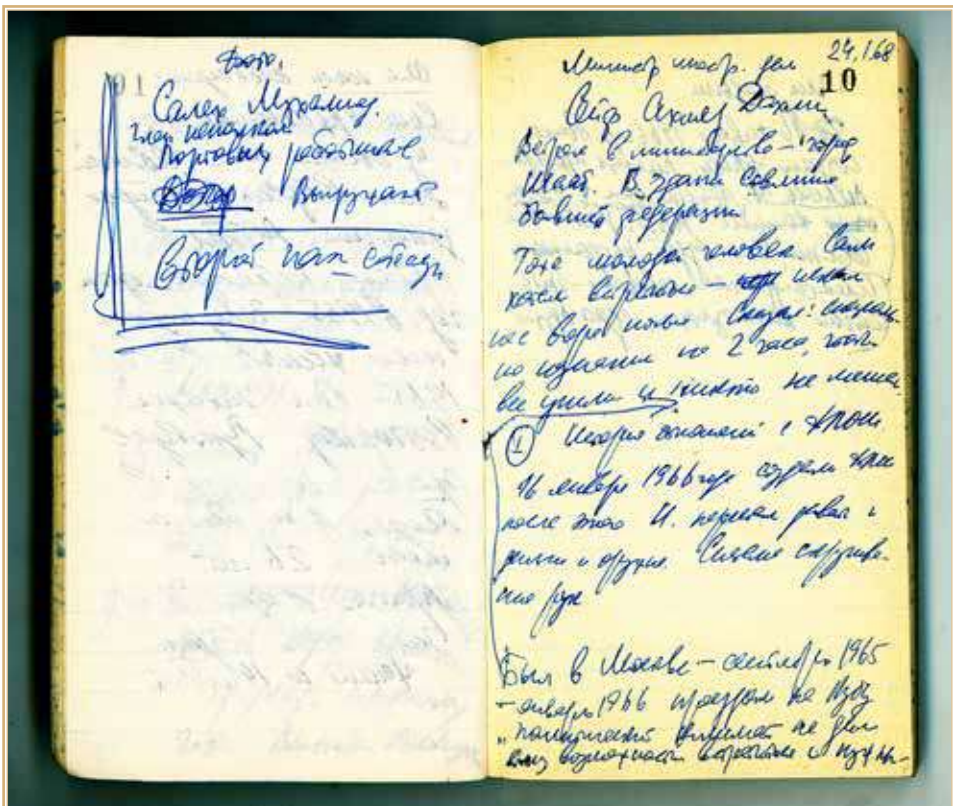
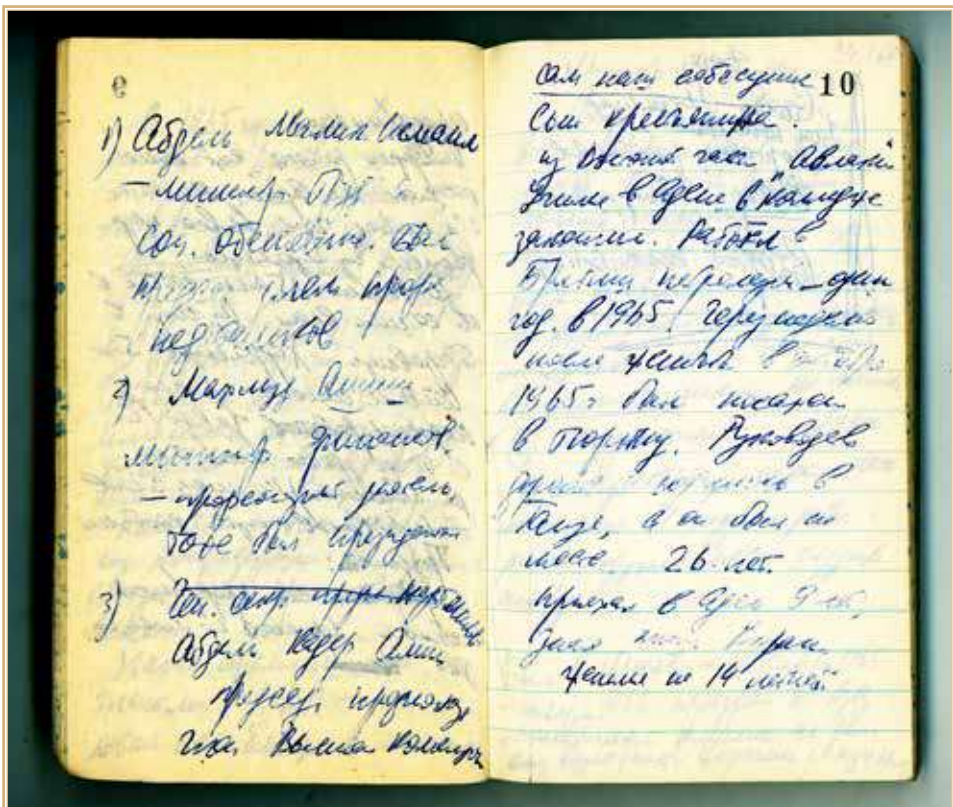
⁶² That is, the people's militia.

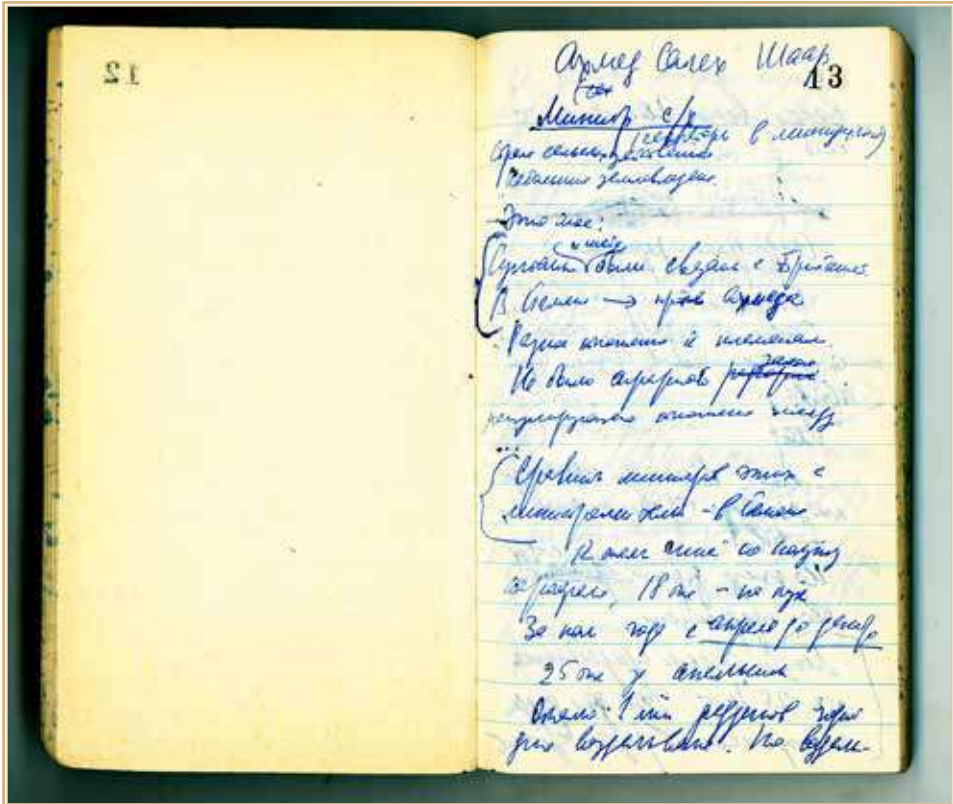
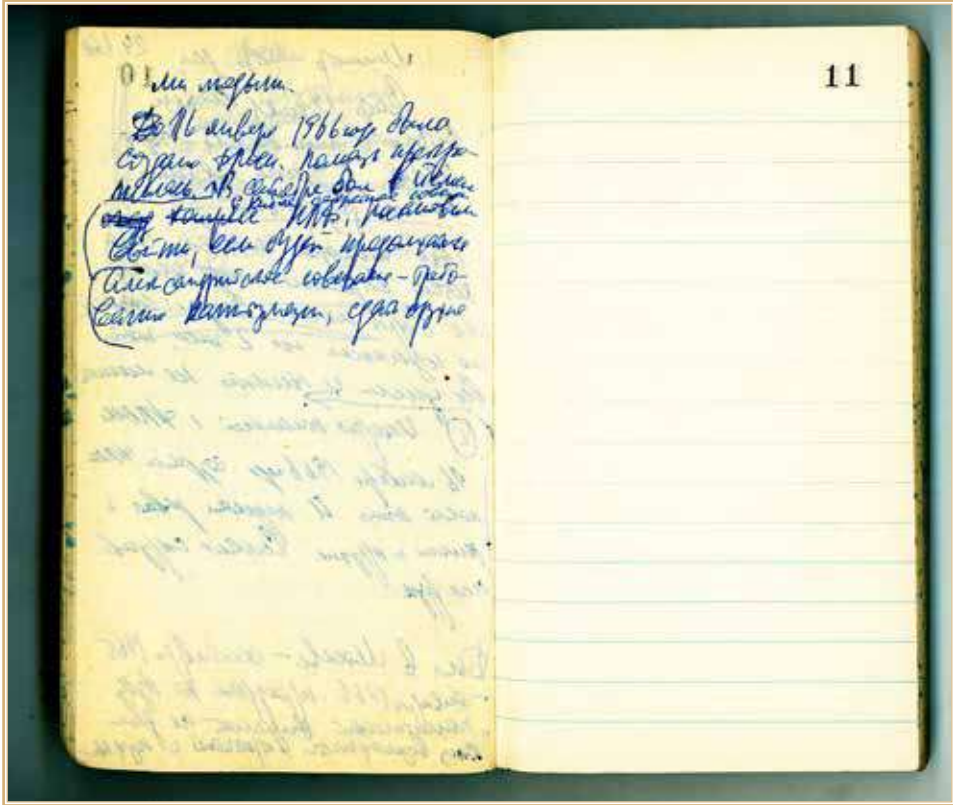
⁶³ Harib is a district of Marib Governorate in North Yemen.

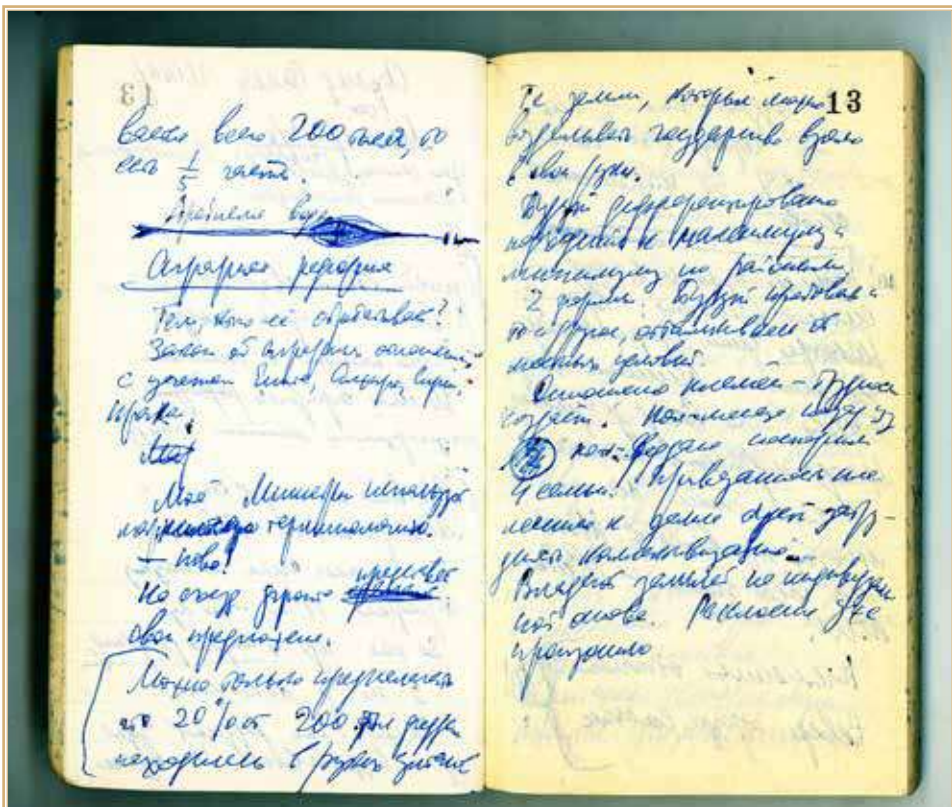
⁶⁴ This refers to the participation of an Egyptian military contingent on the side of the republicans during the civil war in North Yemen.











8) $6000 \times \frac{1}{5} = 1200$

Арифметическая прогрессия

Тема, как ее определять?
Зачем это арифметическая прогрессия?
с какими данными, формулы, примеры.

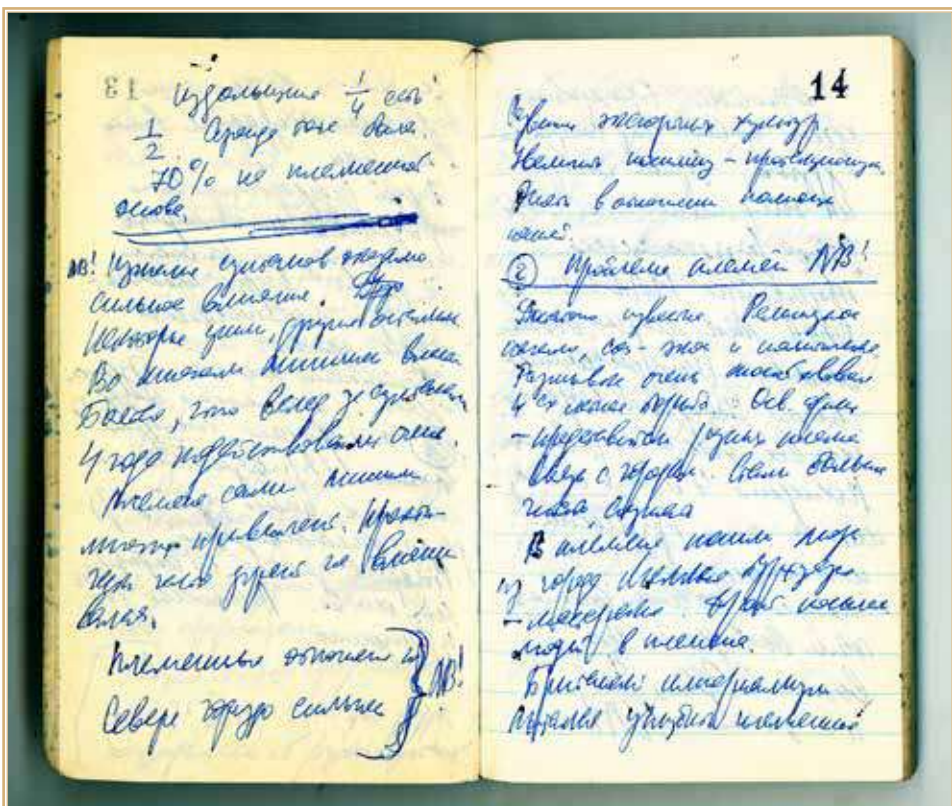
Но! $a_n = a_1 + (n-1)d$
 $S_n = \frac{n}{2}(a_1 + a_n)$
— но!
Но если $d = 0$ — это не прогрессия.

Но если $d = 0$ — это не прогрессия
то 20% от 200 руб. — это не прогрессия

7) $10000 \times \frac{1}{5} = 2000$

Два вида прогрессии — арифметическая и геометрическая.
2) $a_n = a_1 \cdot q^{n-1}$
— но! $a_1 = 1, q = 1$ — это не прогрессия.

Арифметическая прогрессия — $a_n = a_1 + (n-1)d$
Геометрическая прогрессия — $a_n = a_1 \cdot q^{n-1}$
— но! $a_1 = 0, q = 0$ — это не прогрессия.



8) $10000 \times \frac{1}{5} = 2000$
 $\frac{1}{2}$ — это не прогрессия.
70% — это не прогрессия.

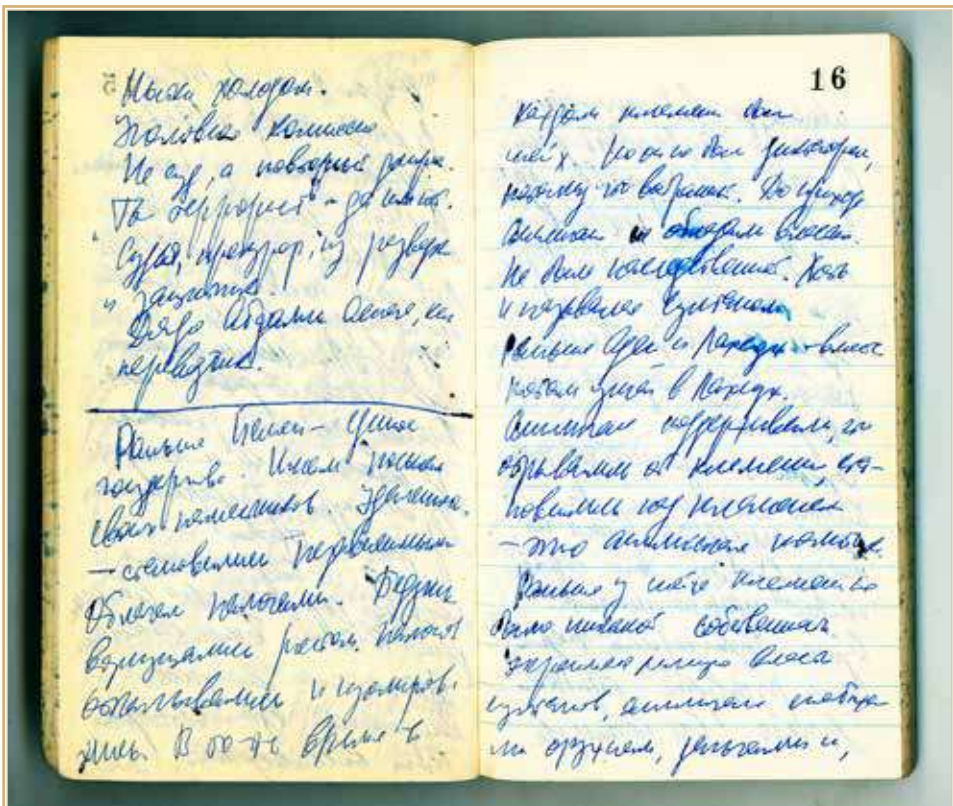
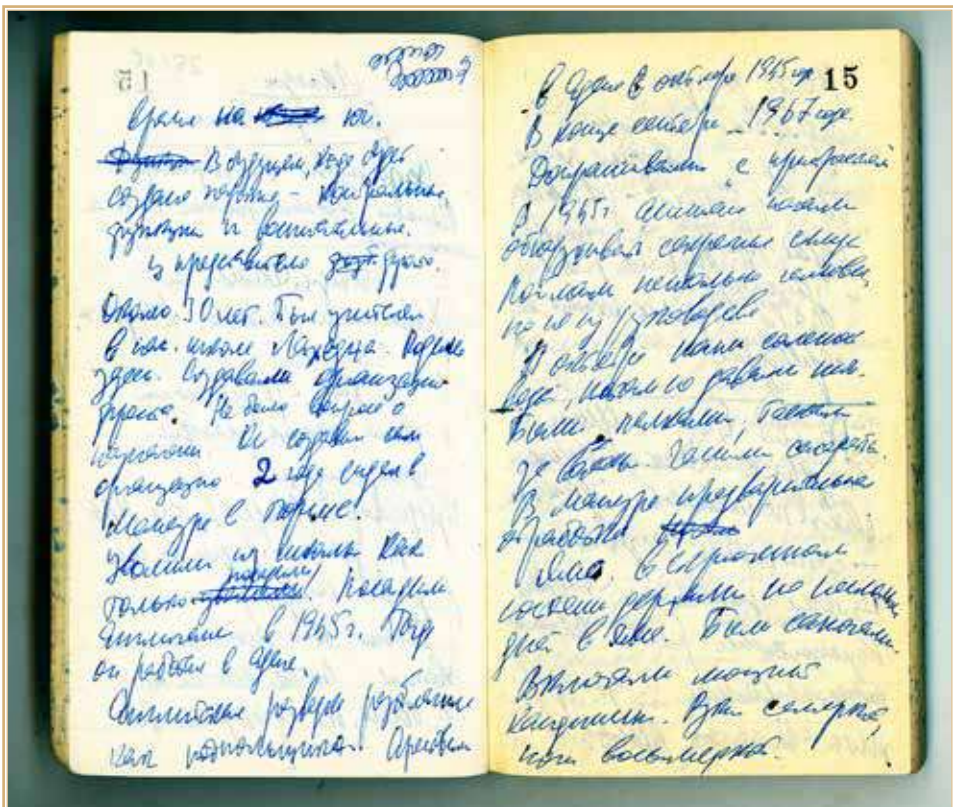
Но! $a_n = a_1 \cdot q^{n-1}$
Арифметическая прогрессия — $a_n = a_1 + (n-1)d$
Геометрическая прогрессия — $a_n = a_1 \cdot q^{n-1}$
— но! $a_1 = 0, q = 0$ — это не прогрессия.

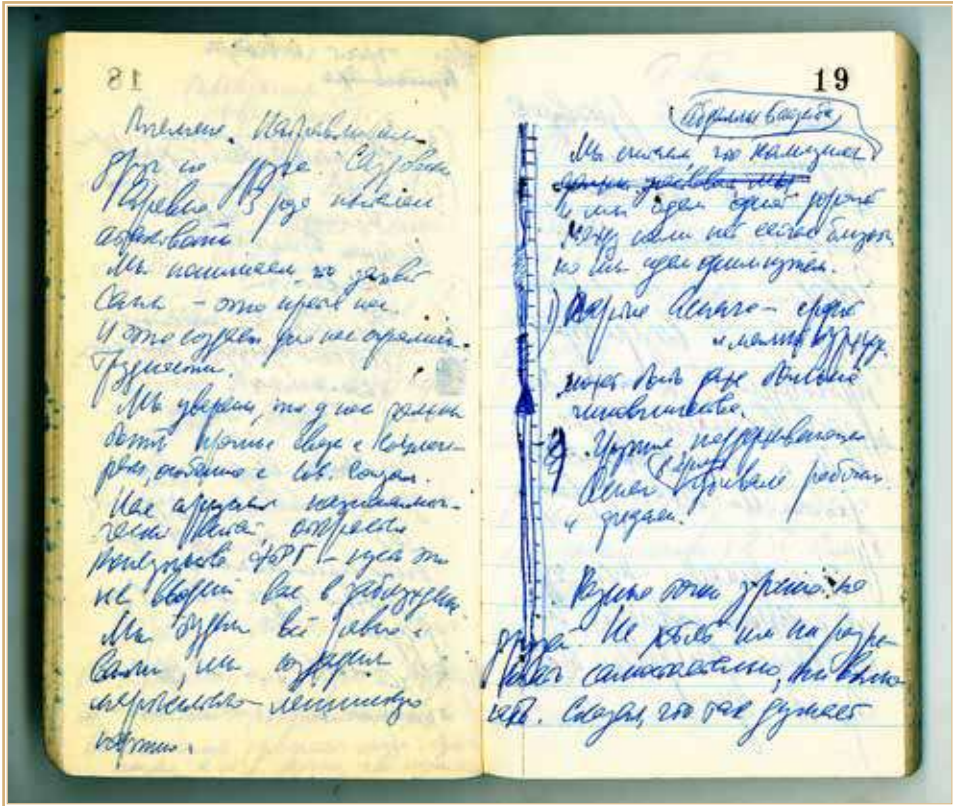
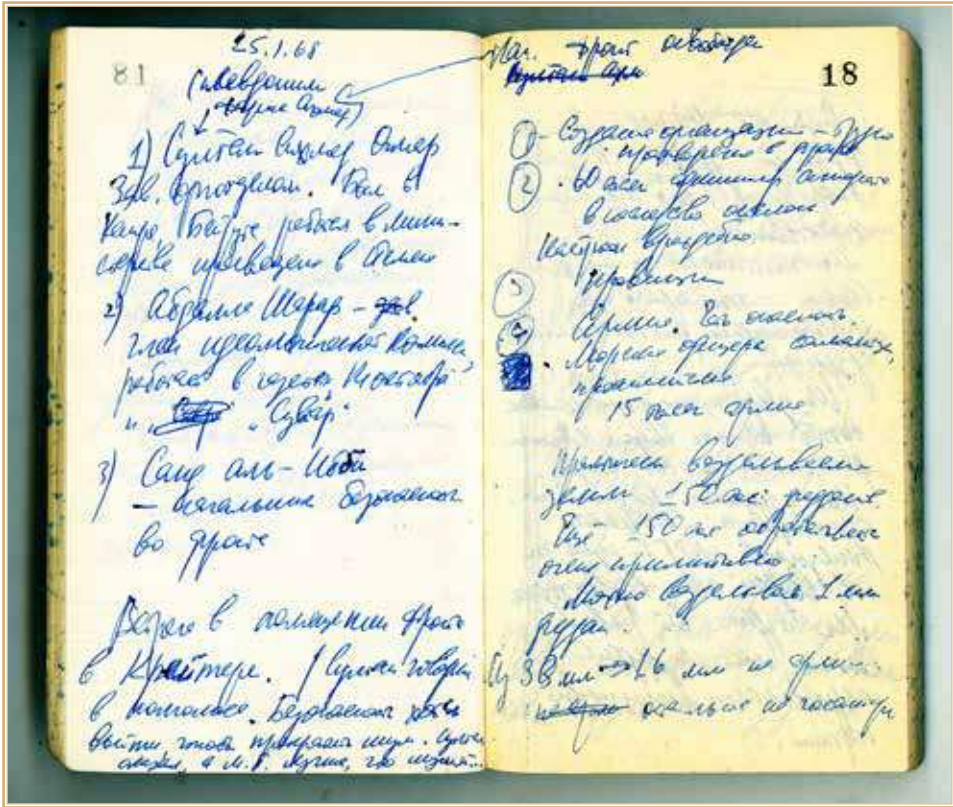
Арифметическая прогрессия — $a_n = a_1 + (n-1)d$
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— но! $a_1 = 0, q = 0$ — это не прогрессия.

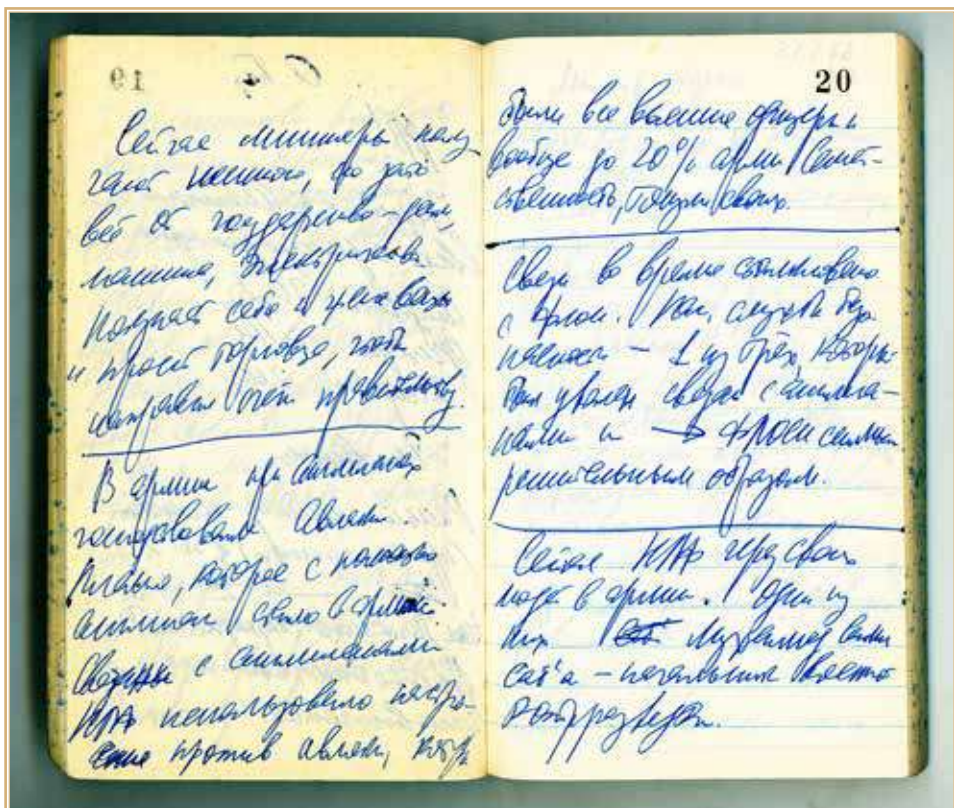
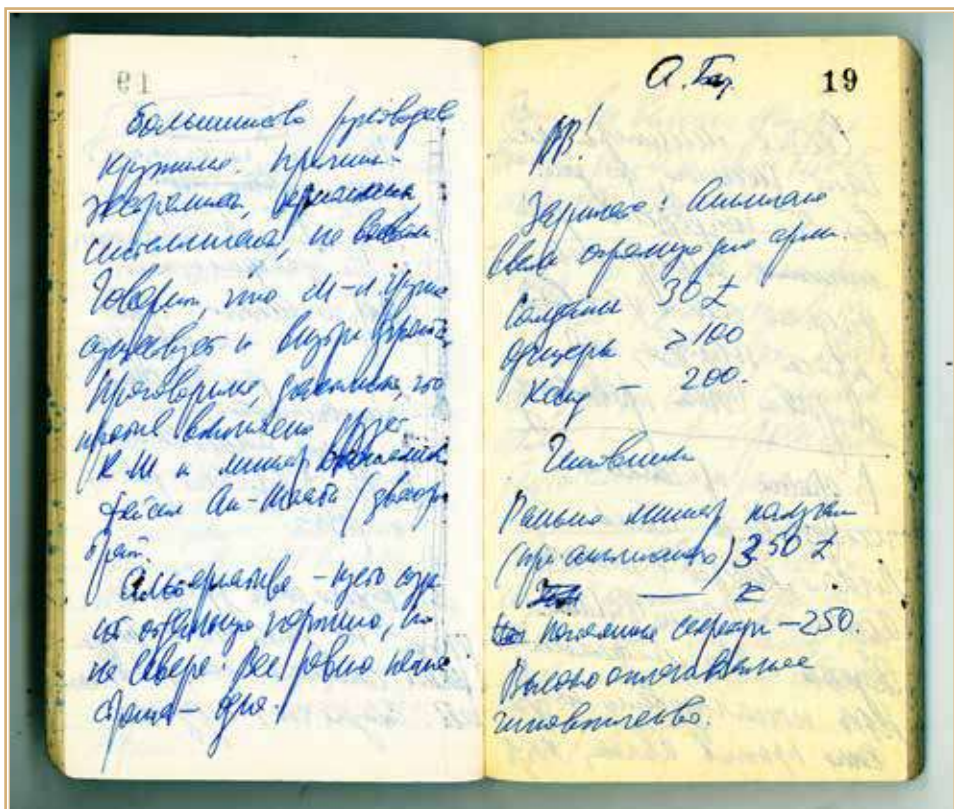
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Два вида прогрессии — арифметическая и геометрическая.
2) $a_n = a_1 \cdot q^{n-1}$
— но! $a_1 = 1, q = 1$ — это не прогрессия.

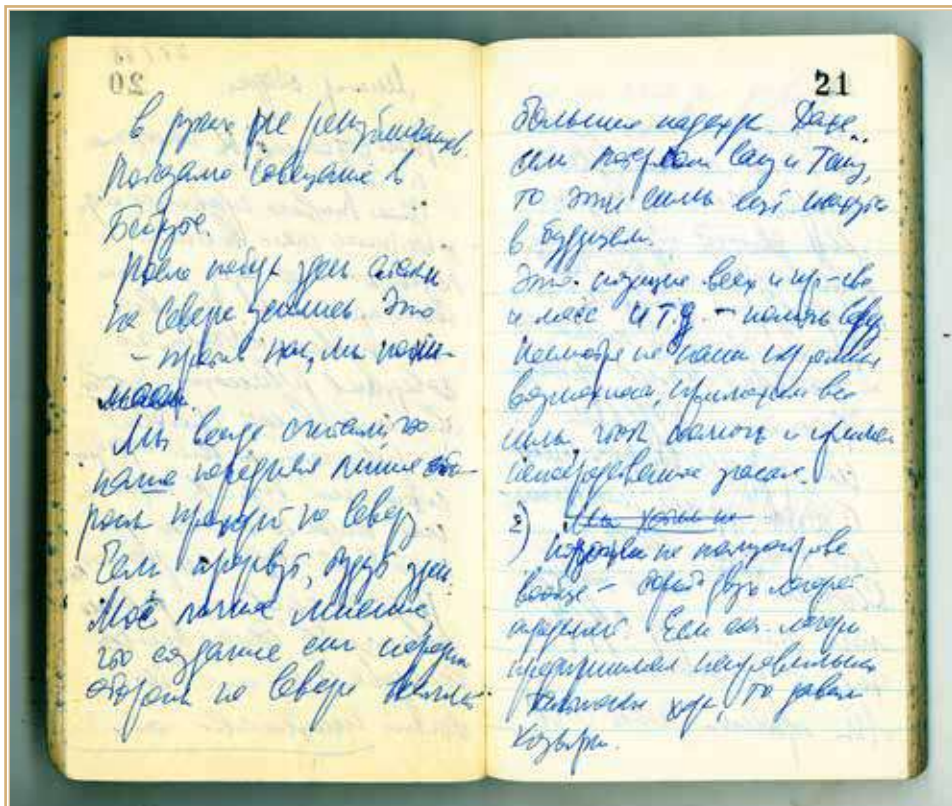
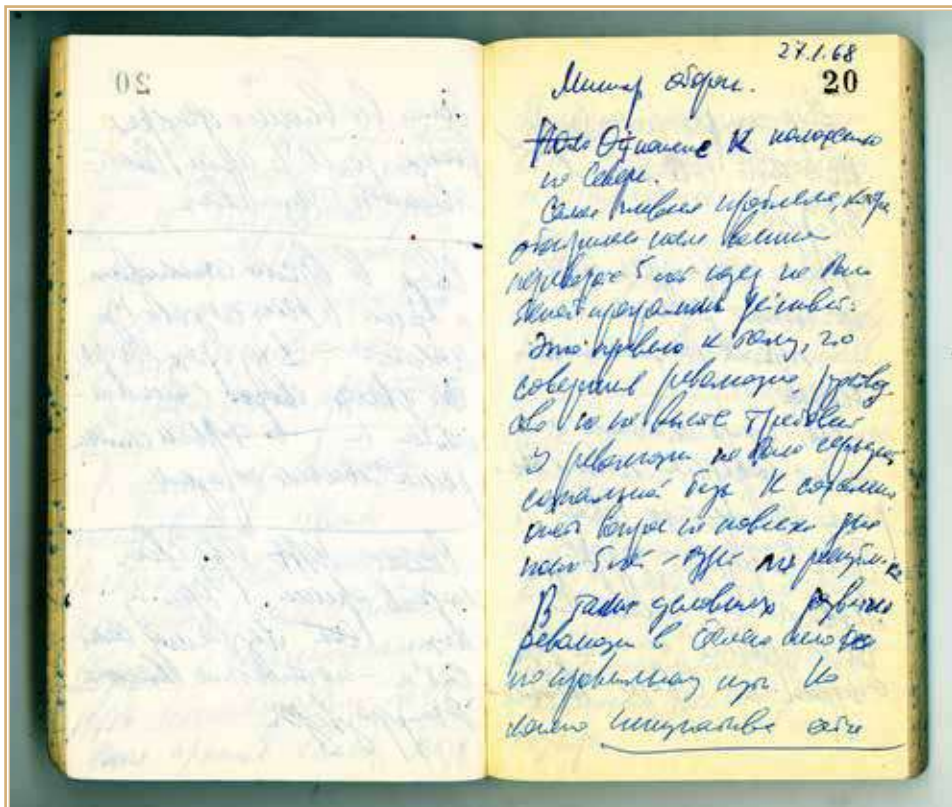
Арифметическая прогрессия — $a_n = a_1 + (n-1)d$
Геометрическая прогрессия — $a_n = a_1 \cdot q^{n-1}$
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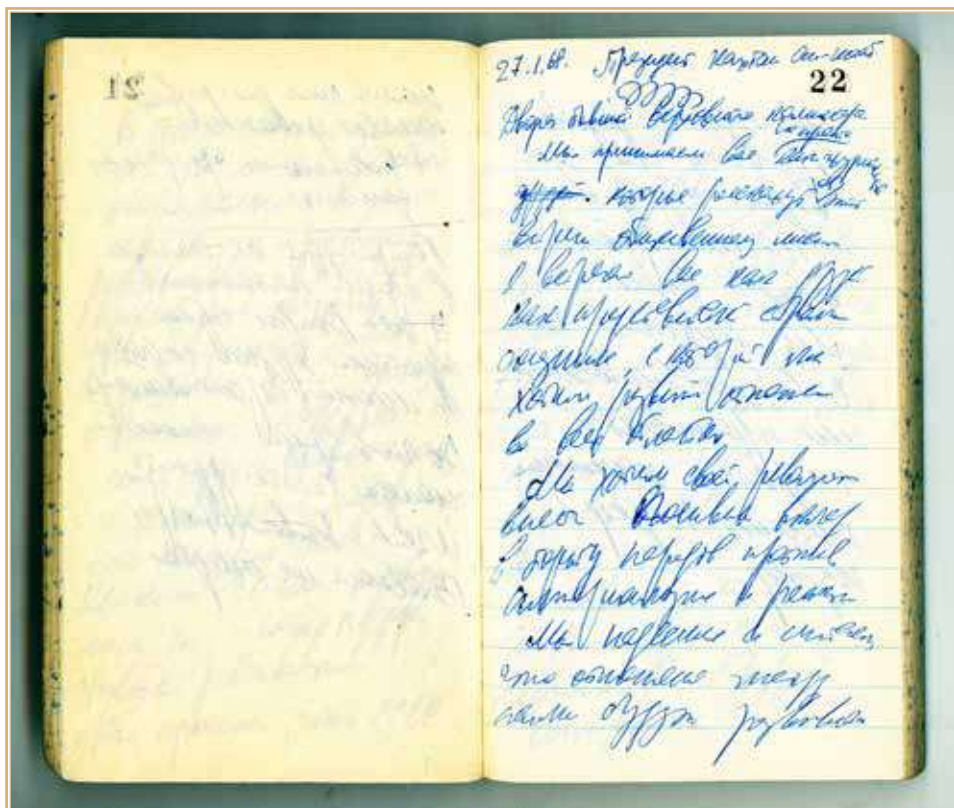
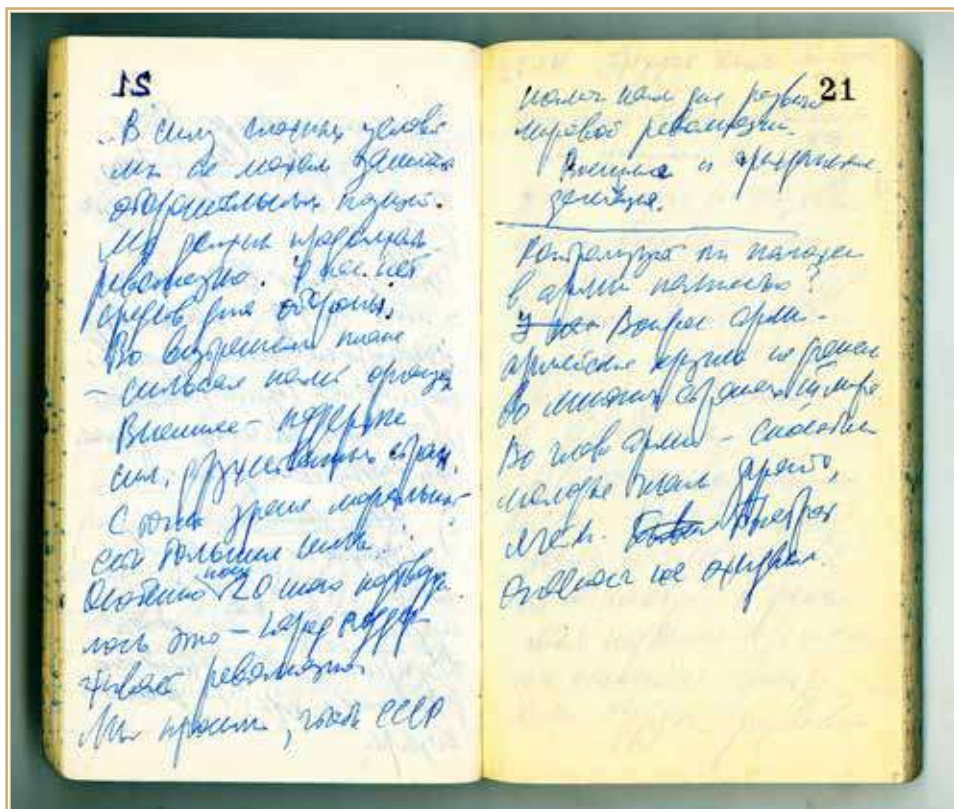
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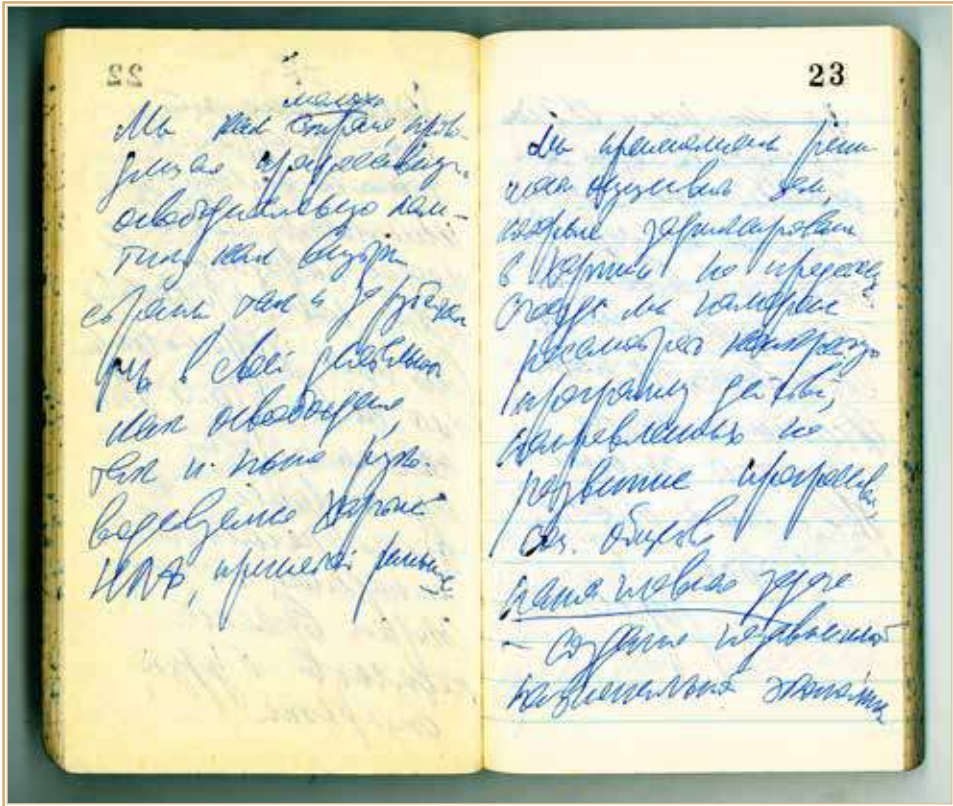
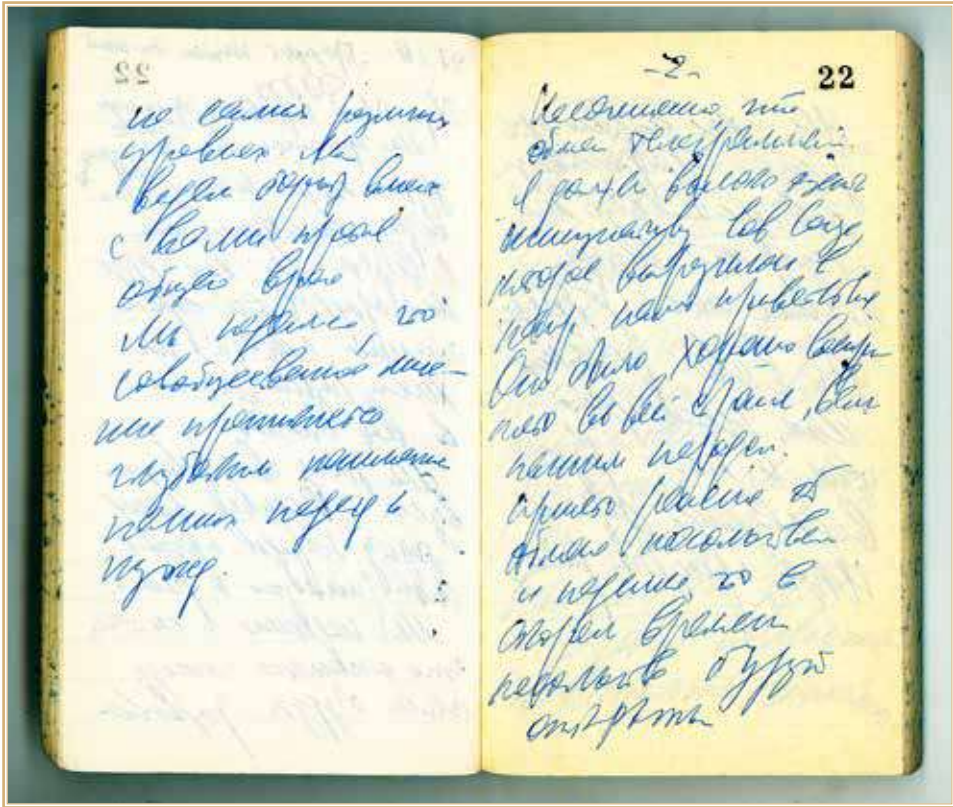


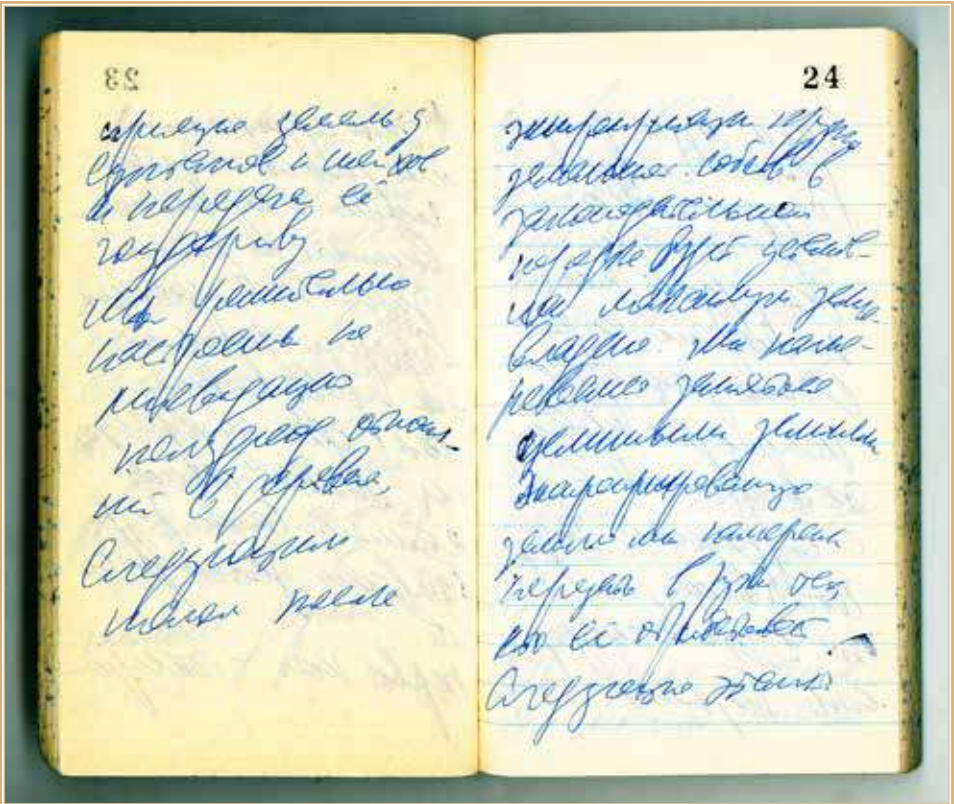
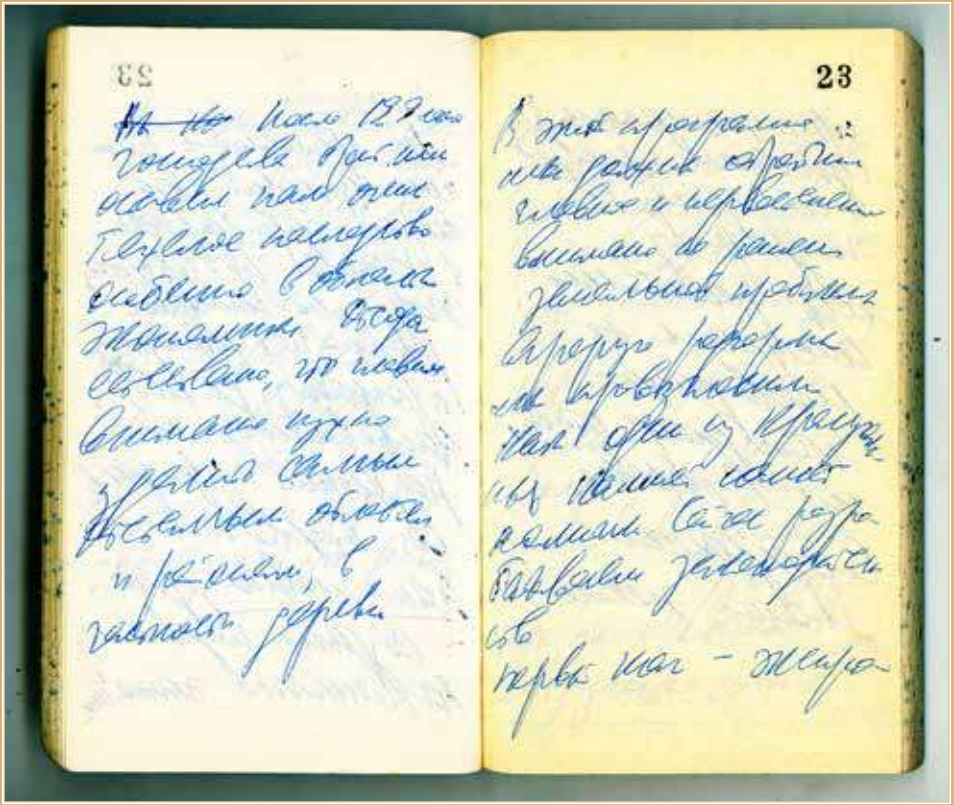


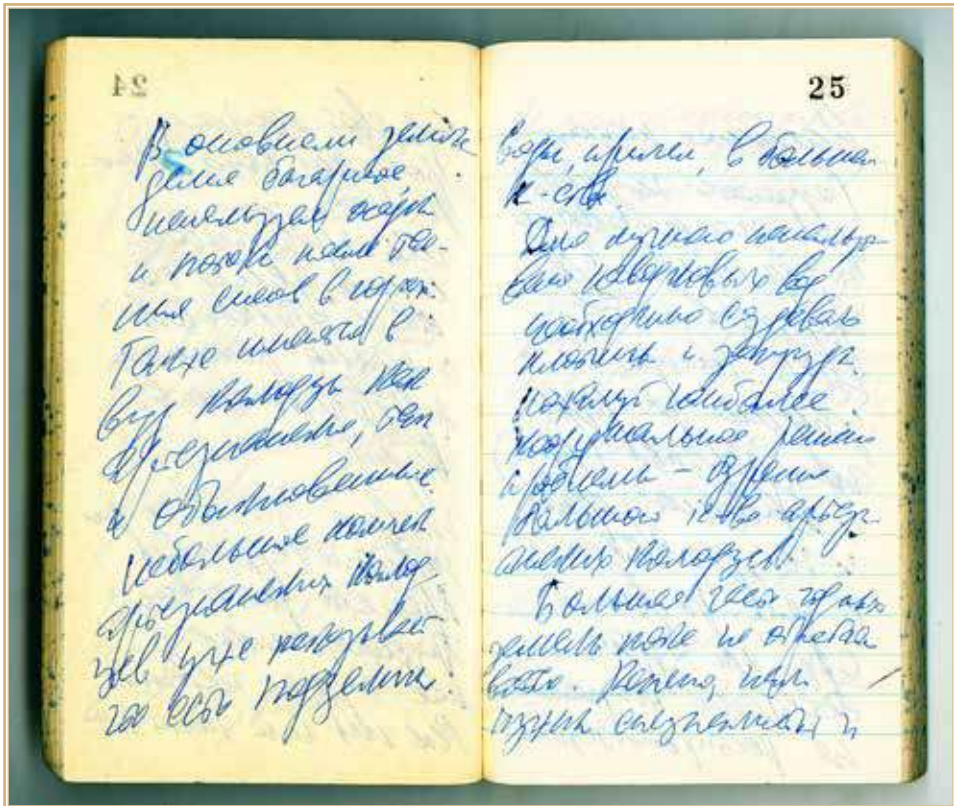
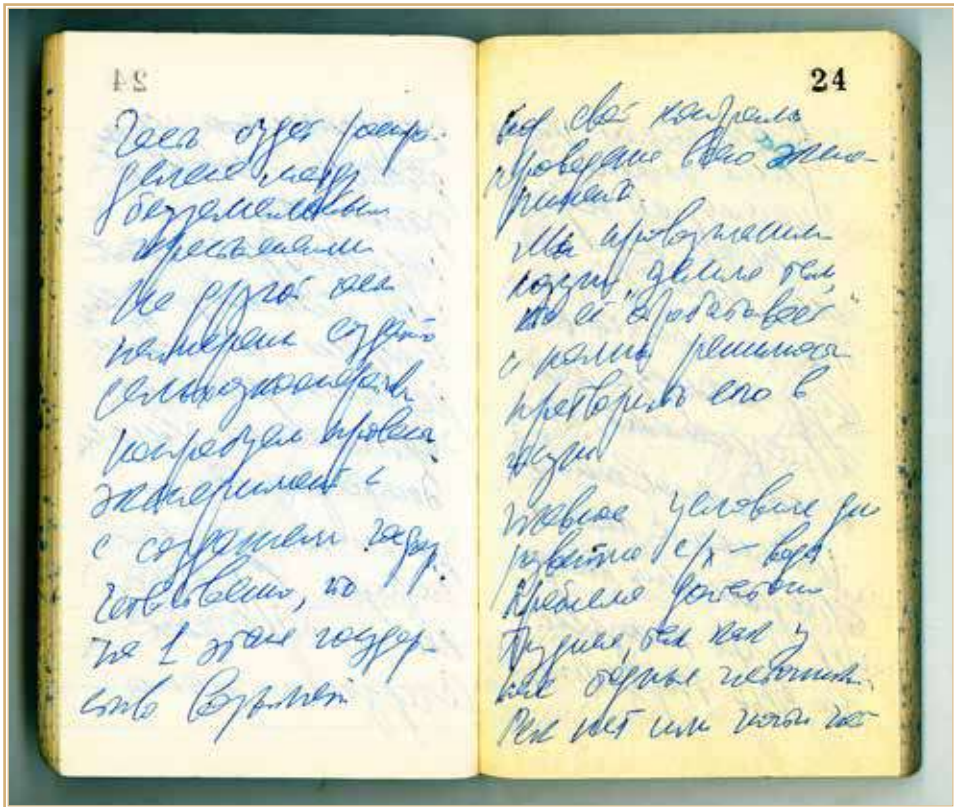


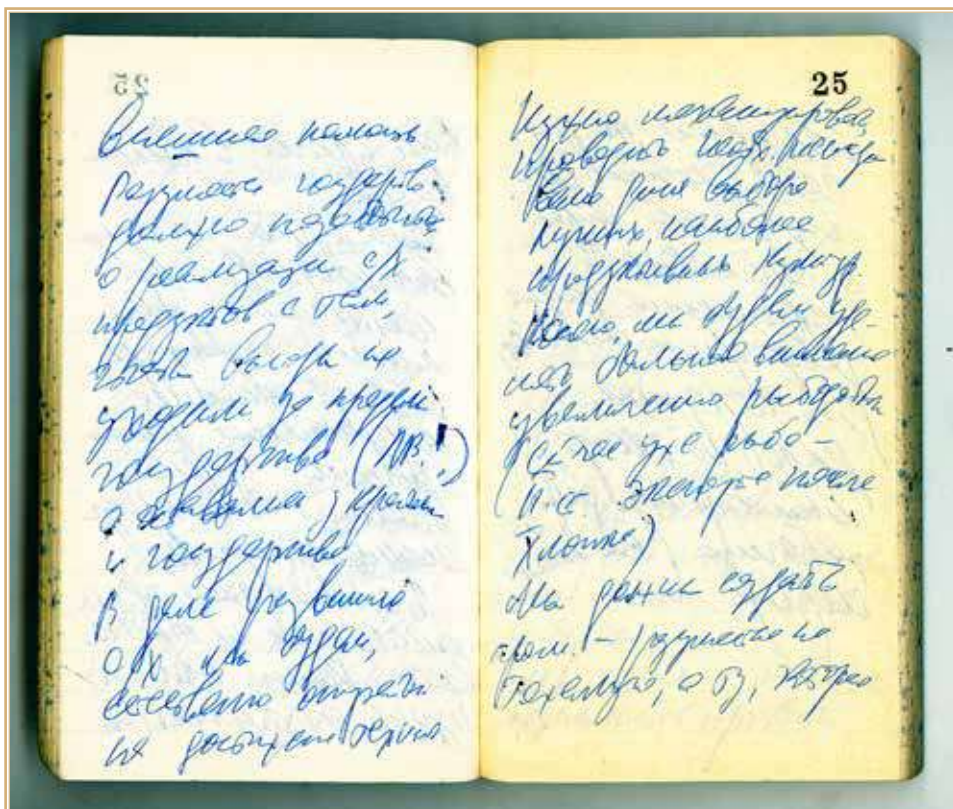












24

Судя по всему
 разумеется, что
 процесс изобретения
 и реализации с
 использованием
 этих средств и
 средств по этому
 виду работы (№1)
 и другим, которые
 и рассматриваются
 в плане работы
 от нас и других,
 особенно в плане
 их финансирования

25

Кстати, в отношении
 использования средств
 для финансирования
 научных исследований
 и разработки новых
 средств, мы должны
 учитывать также
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 от нас и других,
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 их финансирования

26

Кстати, в отношении
 использования средств
 для финансирования
 научных исследований
 и разработки новых
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 и рассматриваются
 в плане работы
 от нас и других,
 особенно в плане
 их финансирования

25

Ученые разрабатывали
 проекты. Вплоть до
 5-го года работы б.
 5-го года работы б.
 2-го года работы б.
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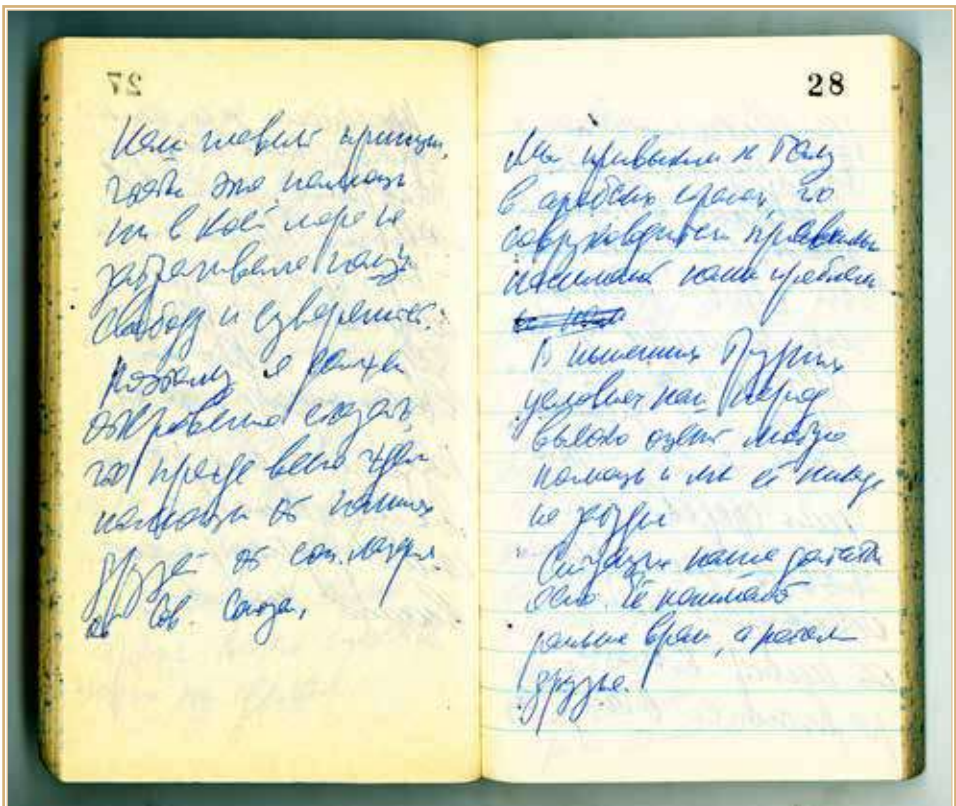
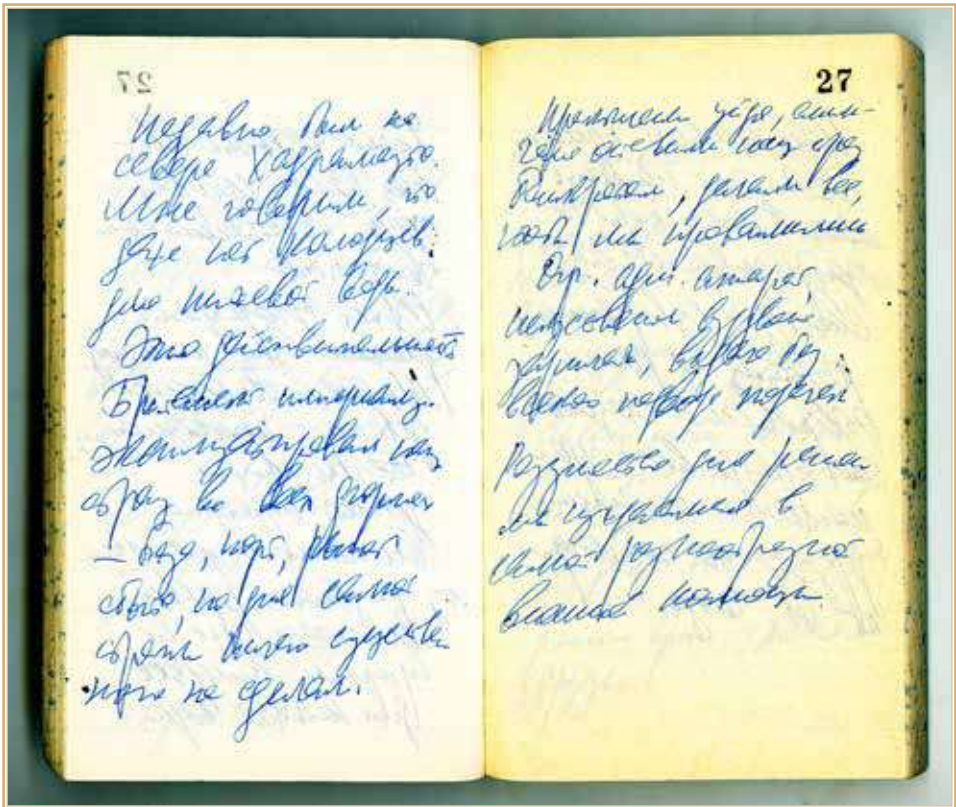
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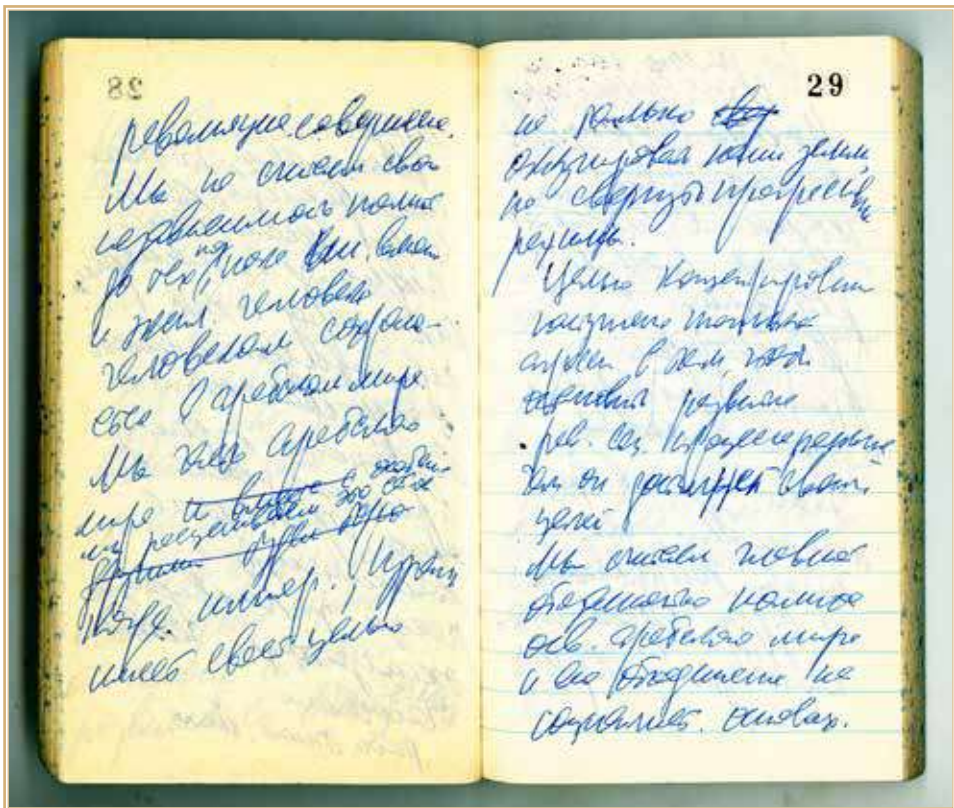
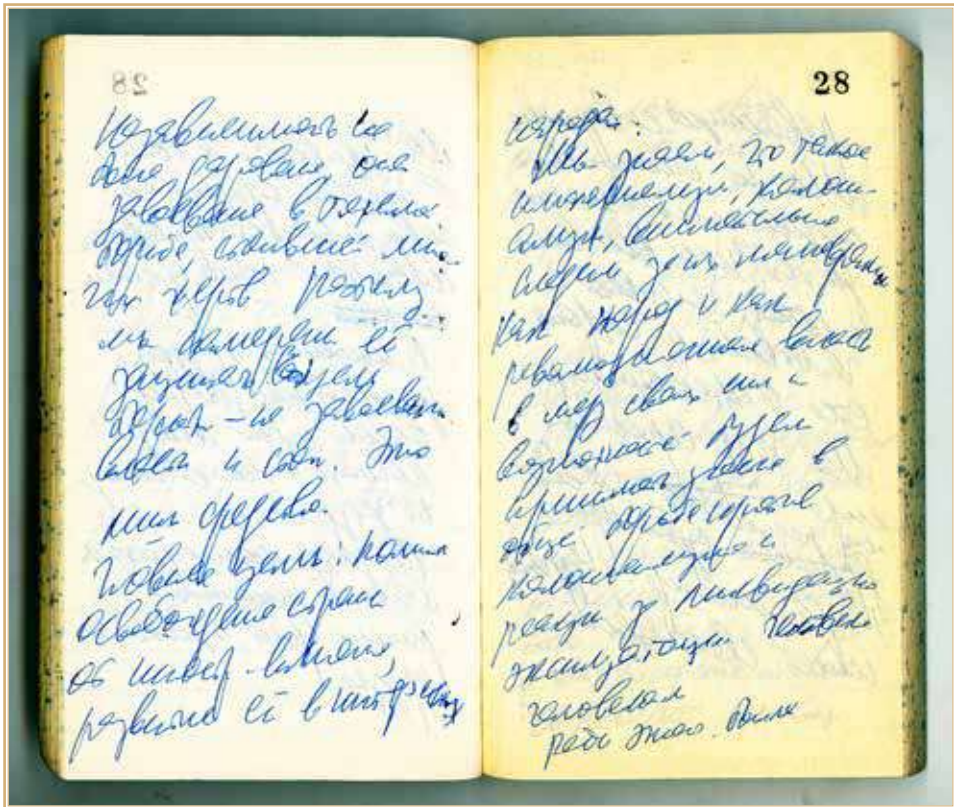
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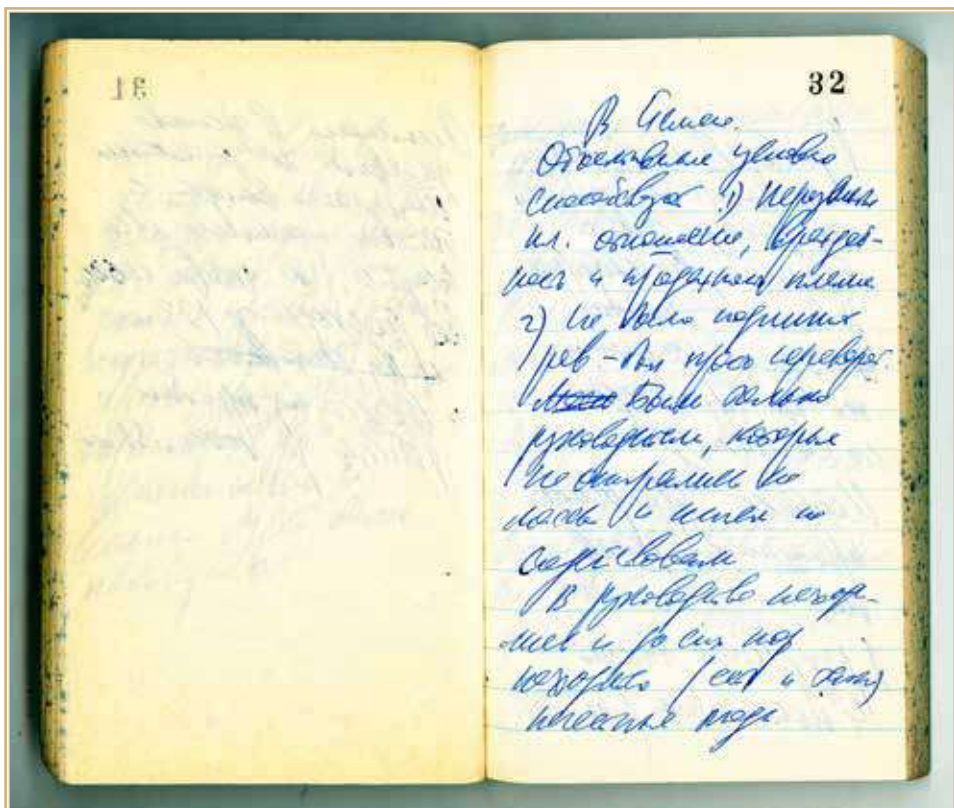
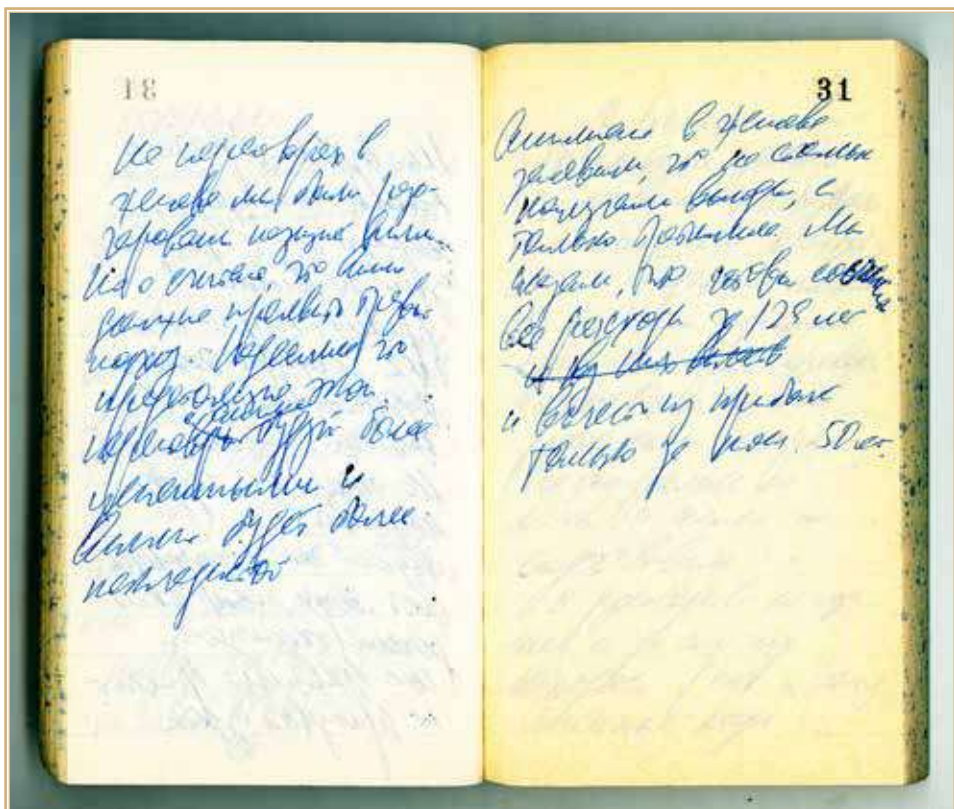
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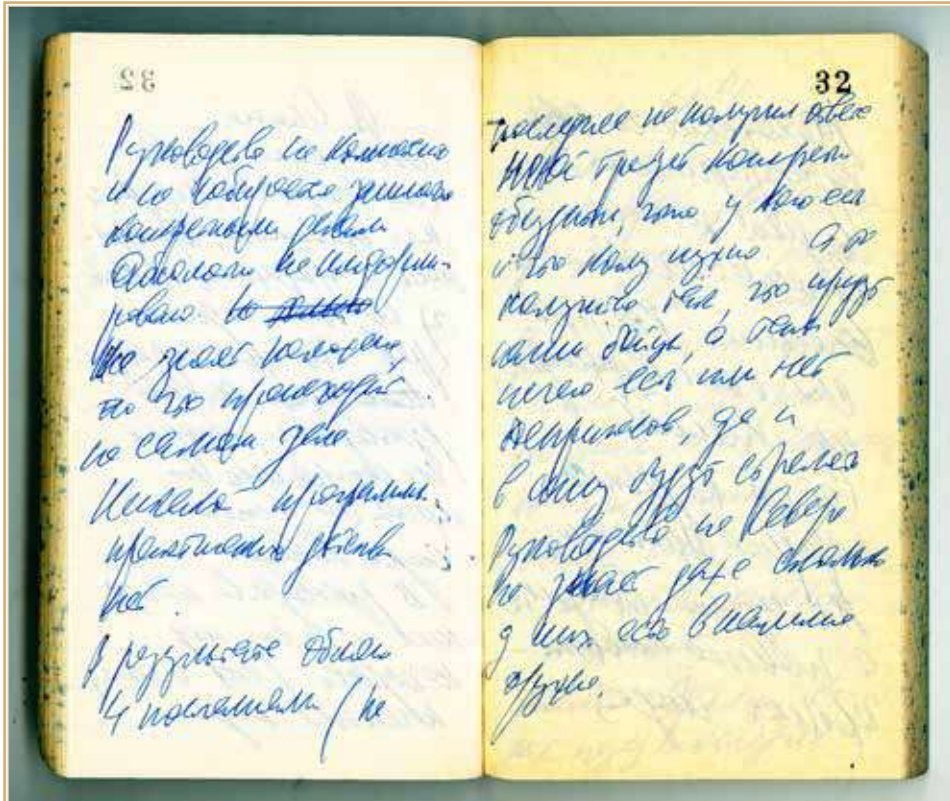
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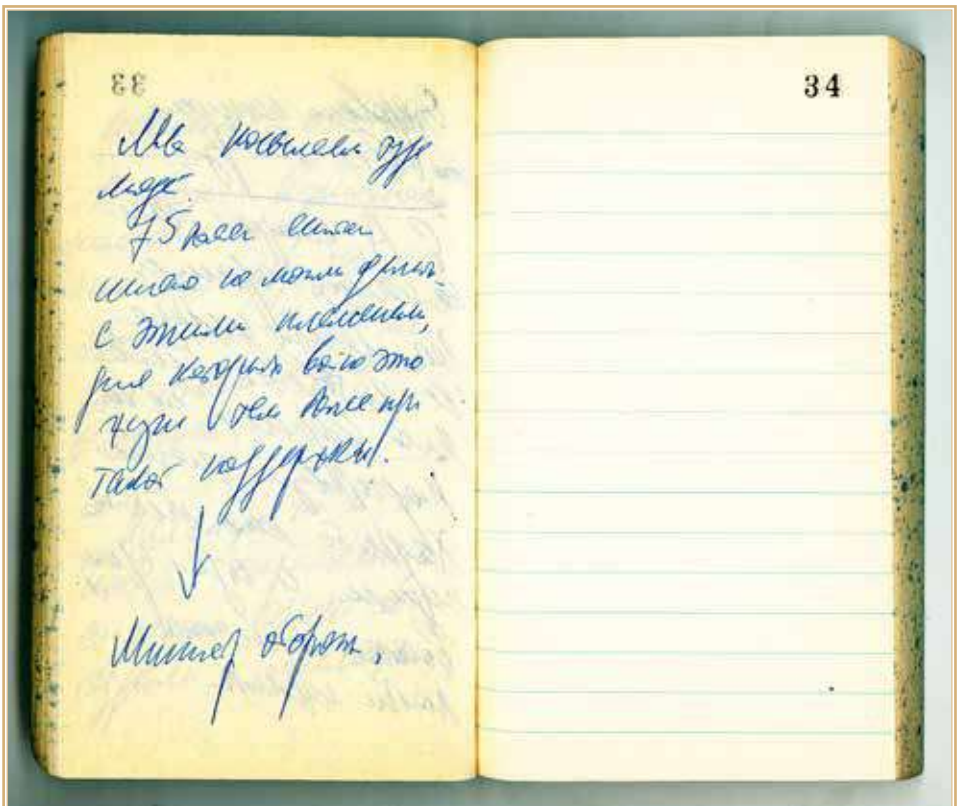
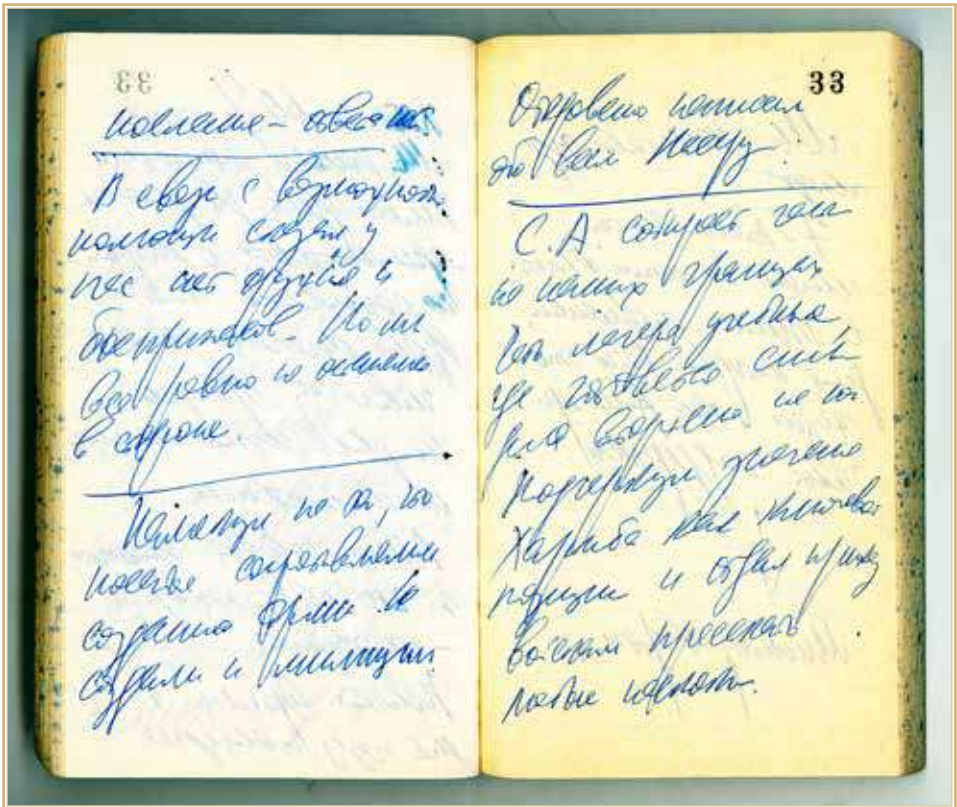


Psychologie in der Natur
 u. in der Geschichte
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 Die Seele ist unsterblich
 u. wird nach dem Tode
 in eine andere Welt
 übergeführt.
 Die Seele ist die Ursache
 aller Handlungen.
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Original paper



Lebanon, Syria, 1973

12 Oct 1973 – 14 Oct 1973 – Lebanon.

14 Oct 1973 – 20 Oct 1973 – Syria¹.

20 Oct 1973 – 24 Oct 1973 – Lebanon.

Nadim, Karim: 12 Oct 1973.

1. Never before have there been such pro-Soviet sentiments; it recalls the year 1956². “If they could, they would (...) at S(?) -6 and S(?) -7” – that is how they affectionately refer to (...). A complete collapse of all talk about: a) the source of weapons; b) alleged collusion of the superpowers during the period of détente.

2. The Iraqis, in their (Ba’athist)³ struggle with the Syrians, are watching to ensure that the more decisive word was theirs. Therefore, they are now insisting that under no circumstances and in no situation should military operations be halted.

3. The logic of events is leading to contradictions between the Egyptians and the Syrians. The Egyptians began, with the understanding of their obligation (?)

¹ These notes were made during the October War of 1973, the last major Arab–Israeli war, which took place from 6 October to 25 October 1973. During the hostilities, Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and liberated part of the Sinai Peninsula, which had been occupied by Israel since 1967, while Syrian forces simultaneously launched an offensive against the Golan Heights, which Israel had also seized from Syria in 1967 during the Six-Day War. Egyptian and Syrian forces were armed mainly with Soviet weapons, and a significant portion of the command staff of both countries had been trained by Soviet instructors.

² This refers to the events of the Suez Crisis of 1956, during which Egypt was subjected to a tripartite military aggression by Great Britain, France, and Israel. A stern warning from the USSR about its readiness to intervene directly in the conflict on Egypt’s side disrupted the aggressors’ plans and forced them to withdraw. This led to a sharp rise in pro-Soviet sentiment in Arab countries, especially in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq.

³ At that time, two factions of the same Ba’ath Party (the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party) were in power in Syria and Iraq. Syrian and Iraqi Ba’athists competed and conflicted with one another, but in 1973 they temporarily united during the military confrontation with Israel. An Iraqi military contingent was sent to Syria and, together with Syrian forces, took part in the offensive on the Golan Heights in October 1973.

on the east bank of the S[uez] C[anal], to use it as leverage for negotiation⁴. The Syrians want to liberate the Golan Heights. The Egyptians are not in a great hurry to pull the Syrians out of their difficult situation.

4. The Palestinians are thinking about a state on the West Bank and in Gaza⁵. They want (possibly) to bring down Hussein now⁶. Previously they feared an Israeli strike; now less so. Internally, G. Habash⁷ is losing [influence] — he is passive. Hawatmeh⁸ is gaining strength. His rapprochement with Arafat⁹.

12 Oct 1973. Newspaper “An-Nahar”¹⁰. Abdel Karim Abu Nasr¹¹.

1. Confirms that our stock has risen extraordinarily — this is “your victory” (which is true, since it is a pro-Amer(ican) newspaper).

2. NB! “The Americans have realized that without you they will not now be able to do anything to resolve the conflict”. He sees a sign of this in Kissinger’s¹²

⁴ This likely refers to the fact that the Egyptian leadership (President Anwar Sadat and his inner circle), having launched an offensive operation against Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula on 6 October 1973, did not intend to develop the offensive after the successful crossing of the Suez Canal. Instead, they planned only to seize a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Canal and to use this position in subsequent negotiations with Israel mediated by the United States.

⁵ That is, the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip, which were occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War of 1967.

⁶ This likely refers to King *Hussein bin Talal* of Jordan, on whose orders Jordanian forces in 1970, during the events known as “Black September”, carried out a large-scale military operation against the bases and units of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Jordan, with the aim of destroying them and expelling them from the kingdom.

⁷ *George Habash* (nom de guerre al-Hakim; 1926–2008) was a prominent Palestinian political figure and leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a left-wing militant political organization.

⁸ This refers to *Nayef Hawatmeh* (born 1935), a prominent Palestinian political figure and leader of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), a left-wing Palestinian military-political organization that is part of the PLO.

⁹ *Yasser Arafat* (1929–2004) was an outstanding Palestinian political and statesman figure, leader of the Fatah movement, chairman of the Executive Committee of the PLO (since 1969), and President of the State of Palestine (from 1989 to 2004).

¹⁰ An-Nahar is one of Lebanon’s leading newspapers.

¹¹ *Abd al-Karim Abu al-Nasr* (died 2022) was a well-known Lebanese journalist.

¹² *Henry Kissinger* (1923–2023) was an American statesman and diplomat who served as U.S. Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977 and as National Security Advisor to the U.S. President from 1969 to 1975.

latest statement, in which he emphasized that “the USSR is acting within the bounds of responsibility”.

3. The Egyptians and the Syrians have found, by agreement (?), that the military action must transition into the political. They will continue to control the situation in terms of how events develop. But certain differences are already present.

4. NB! The new round of military operations has struck directly and progressively at the future prestige and positions of the PLO¹³. It is bound to be the most active and most effective factor. Moreover, the Egyptians and the Syrians have shown that only they, and only by the force of regular armies, can achieve anything.

12 Oct 1973. “L’Orient-Le Jour”¹⁴. Marwan Hamadeh¹⁵.

1. The danger of the moment may come not from your friends, who now understand the necessity of coordination with you, but from S[audi] A([abia], Libya, and others, who will be putting pressure.

2. This is “your victory above all” — he repeated what Abu Nasr said. Apparently this point of view is fairly widespread.

Muhammad Odeh, 13 Oct 1973.

3. Their propaganda toward the Arab countries now resembles the onslaught of 1967. “They have become more Arab, and we have become more Jewish”.

1. (It) completely changes the situation in Egypt. He emphasized that he knows everything, since he arrived in Lebanon only on 19 September. Sadat¹⁶ used all anti-Nasserist alternatives and failed. Events have shown who was right. This is a victory for the conservative trend. A new era is awaiting Egypt. Of course, there will be no copying or repetition of Nasserism — there will be a post-Nasser period; but it will differ from Nasserism by even greater radicalism.

Bourgeois elements have lost everywhere. In the army there were two groups: Sadek¹⁷ wanted to make the army a pol[itical] instrument, march on Cairo, establish his power, and reach an agreement with the Americans. But there was another group as well. They were pushed aside even after Sadek’s removal.

¹³ The PLO (Palestinian Liberation Movement) is a collective term for all Palestinian organizations that participated in armed struggle against Israel from the 1960s through the first half of the 1980s with the aim of creating a Palestinian state.

¹⁴ L’Orient-Le Jour is a French-language Lebanese newspaper.

¹⁵ *Marwan Hamadeh* (born 1939) is a Lebanese journalist and politician who, at the time in question, worked for L’Orient-Le Jour and An-Nahar.

¹⁶ *Anwar Sadat* (1918–1981) was an Egyptian statesman and military figure, President of Egypt from 1970 to 1981.

¹⁷ *Muhammad Ahmad Sadek* (1917–1991) was an Egyptian military and political figure who served as Egypt’s Defense Minister in 1971–1972. In October 1972, following a conflict with President Anwar Sadat, he was dismissed from office.

S(...), for example, was sent as military attaché to Istanbul. These (...) and the officers believed that Egypt was capable of fighting! Now they are on top. I do not think that Sadat rules everything without restraint, that he now has unchecked power in his hands. Internally, he will look over his shoulder more and more. He believes that a group headed by Ali Sabri¹⁸ will be released from prison. He believes that, due to objective reasons, Sadat's maneuvering with the Americans has become more difficult:

a) Without us it will now be harder than before.

b) S(audi) A(rabia) has exposed itself.

The situation in relation to the Soviet Union is changing completely. Piles of lies have melted away. No one will be able to revive them anymore.

2. It should be more advantageous for Israel than for the Arabs now to accept Resolution 242¹⁹. Only in this way can they guarantee their security.

3. Libya — Qaddafi²⁰ has lost enormously, immeasurably. The future of Egypt's progressive forces is separating itself from Qaddafi, who objectively, in recent times, under conditions of Egypt's rapprochement with S[audi] A[rabia], played a progressive role. Financial ties m(ay) remain, but it will be easier to separate.

"Jeune Afrique"²¹. Barrada Hamid, 13 Oct 1973.

He has just arrived from Libya, where he met with Qaddafi. Qaddafi is in a depressed state, because he feels that events are passing him by. His statement that he is ready to support not only with money and oil, but with everything at all, is an attempt to regain lost positions. This is the best time to work with him.

¹⁸ *Ali Sabri* (1920–1991) was an Egyptian political and military figure of the era of President Gamal Abdel Nasser, an advocate of socialist orientation and closer ties with the USSR. He headed Egypt's General Intelligence Service in 1956–1957, served as Prime Minister of Egypt (officially, of the United Arab Republic) in 1962–1965, and as Vice President of Egypt in 1965–1968 and 1970–1971. After Nasser's death, Ali Sabri and his supporters criticized President Anwar Sadat; in May 1971 they were removed from all posts, arrested, and sentenced to lengthy prison terms.

¹⁹ This refers to UN Security Council Resolution No. 242, adopted on 22 November 1967 following the Six-Day War. The resolution called for the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied during the conflict (i.e., East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights). Resolution 242 remains one of the principal international documents defining the principles of Middle East peace settlement.

²⁰ *Muammar Gaddafi* (1942–2011) was a prominent Libyan revolutionary, statesman, and political theorist, leader of the 1969 Libyan Revolution, and at the time Chairman of the Libyan Revolutionary Command Council (de facto head of state).

²¹ *Jeune Afrique* is a French-language pan-African weekly magazine founded in Tunisia in 1960 and later published in Paris. Hamid Barrada is a well-known Moroccan journalist and political commentator.

“Al-Jumhur al-Jadid”. Farid Abu Shahla²².

1. The Saudis, due to circumstances, will now have to act more decisively (the logic of events) than before, if the United States openly begins supplying Israel with weapons.

“Al-Muharrir”, Editor-in-Chief Shafiq al-Hout²³. 13 Oct 1973.

1. At a certain stage the Palestinians could agree to the creation of a state under conditions of Israel’s existence. How else would we liberate part of our homeland? At this stage we could create a state as a base for further struggle.

Egypt and Syria began military actions after reaching an agreement with Faisal²⁴. He believes that the agreement included the oil question, but the king is not in a hurry – perhaps he is waiting for events to develop. The Egyptians are nervous. He thinks that today’s (Saturday’s) article by Hatem (?) is an indication of this – it states directly that something must be done about oil. If the king doesn’t take action, he will not be able to (...) two months’ oil reserves.

Ahmad Shukeiri²⁵, 13 Oct 1973.

Met him at [“]Al-Muharrir[”]. As I learned from Z. Mohsen²⁶, he urgently arrived from Cairo in order to “turn (?) the Palestinians toward oil”. A. Shukeiri said to me: “Obviously, now is precisely the moment – not the time, but the moment – to use such a weapon as oil”. I think, added A. Shukeiri, that circumstances will force the king to begin acting in 2–3 days.

Nayef Hawatmeh, 13 Oct 1973.

A member of the leadership of the PFLP, Saleh Raafat²⁷ (released from prison) was sent to Amman four days ago, where he met with King Hussein. Two issues: the beginning of the war and permission to return. Hussein: “The Americans told

²² Al-Jumhur al-Jadid is one of Lebanon’s leading socio-political magazines. Farid Abu Shahla is a prominent Lebanese journalist and editor-in-chief of Al-Jumhur al-Jadid, a position he inherited from his father, Michel Abu Shahla.

²³ Al-Muharrir is a Lebanese daily newspaper expressing the views of Arab nationalists. Shafiq al-Hout (1932–2009) was a Palestinian political figure, writer, and publicist, one of the founders of the PLO and its representative in Lebanon.

²⁴ *Faisal ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud* (1906–1975) was the third King of Saudi Arabia, reigning from 1964 to 1975.

²⁵ *Ahmad Shukeiri* (1908–1980) was a Palestinian political figure and the first Chairman of the PLO (1964–1967), who resigned after the Six-Day War of 1967.

²⁶ This may refer to *Zuheir Mohsen* (1936–1979), a Palestinian political figure and leader of the militant Palestinian organization al-Sa’iqa (“Lightning”), which was closely linked to the Syrian party and military-political leadership.

²⁷ Until 1974, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) was known as the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP). Saleh Ra’afat (born 1945) is a prominent Palestinian political figure, a member of the PLO Executive Committee and of the leadership of the PDFLP.

me that in a few days the Arab and Egyptian groupings will be destroyed. Under these conditions I will not [act]. I will begin only in the event of the liberation of the Golan Heights and consolidation on the eastern bank of the canal. Without my beginning military actions, there can be no talk of permission for the Palestinians to return". (He met with Z. Mohsen and agreed on a meeting at 18:00.)

Z. Mohsen, 13 Oct 1973.

With a submachine gun, a pile of debris of a ["Phantom"] and a ["MiG"].

He is dissatisfied with the Egyptians. They are acting slowly, without taking into account what is happening on the Arab front. With regard to Hussein — Sadat and H. Assad²⁸ told him nothing. The matter was discussed only in a tentative way. Therefore, there was no firm coordination; they feared leaks.

13 Oct 1973.

Second meeting with N. Hawatmeh — basement, doors barricaded. A political settlement after the fighting. At present, the response is under way with the aim of liberating the occupied territories, possibly creating a state — he and Abu Ammar²⁹ are in favor. It will play (?) a relative role in connection with the events; therefore it is very important to have a constructive program.

14 Oct 1973. Met with D[eputy] Prime Minister Khaddam³⁰. Basement of the MFA — tired, somewhat depressed.

1. The best prospects are with us.

2. Jordan has weakened itself. Sending a brigade was a move. It did not even take up positions.

3. Attitudes toward Egypt changed after the start of the offensive in Sinai that began on the morning of the 14th.

4. Libya has given (turned) to us) + all oil and food for the army and 20 million dollars.

15 Oct 1973. Meeting with Khaled Fahoum³¹.

1. A ceasefire and political settlement are needed.

2. The Palestinians are divided into two parts. He himself is for the "Hussein Plan". Syria is too. Assad told him many times that after liberation of the territo-

²⁸ *Hafez al-Assad* (1930–2000) was a Syrian statesman, politician, and military figure, President of Syria from 1971 to 2000.

²⁹ One of Yasser Arafat's pseudonyms.

³⁰ *Abdul Halim Khaddam* (1932–2020) was a Syrian statesman and politician, Vice President of Syria from 1984 to 2005, and a member of President Hafez al-Assad's inner circle. From 1970 to 1984, he served as Foreign Minister of the Syrian Arab Republic and also held the post of Deputy Prime Minister.

³¹ *Khaled al-Fahoum* (1923–2006) was a Palestinian political figure, a member of the PLO Executive Committee, and Chairman of the Palestinian National Council.

ries, autonomy within Jordan should be eliminated. In his assessment, the majority of the Palestinian people think so. Arafat and Riyadh (?) are for a separate state.

15 Oct 1973. Meeting with Hussein Uweidat.

Came out of the Council of Ministers bunker, tired, drinking vitamin “C” in large doses.

1. The plan — to take K.

2. With Iraq — a new alignment of forces. The Right here are afraid — hence the exaggeration of assistance from reactionary regimes and forces and the downplaying of Iraqi assistance.

The problem of the presence of Iraqi troops — the position of Iraq — political settlement.

16 Oct 1973. Khaled Bakdash³².

He listens, asks; he needs it himself. Himself.

a) Anti-extremism is necessary.

b) They did not even use this period for a joint statement. Two groups issued/will issue statements (?) The Turki (?) group issued its own.

23 Oct 1973. Meeting with Arafat.

In Sidon. The driver is checked. A group of fighters. One has a very familiar face, gray eyes, speaks English well. Everyone treats him with respect. “Arab countries always sell us out”. At that time a broadcast of “Radio Peace” off the coast of Cyprus. A pilot (...) who flew to Cairo during the “Six-Day War”. The broadcast is against militaristic elements on both sides.

“I never believe the Zionists. It is they who are trying to demobilize the Arabs”. Arafat arrived. As always, a warm meeting (Kolotusha V.M.³³ was with me).

1. Only for (the creation of) a state. No one and nothing will force us again to go under the authority of those Bedouins tied to American and British imperialism (West Bank, Gaza, Ha(?)). The issue of a corridor³⁴.

2. They can participate in negotiations. It would be good if we were the ones inviting them. But justification for the invitation is needed: either UN resolutions, or at least wording from the joint statement of L. I. Brezhnev and Nixon.

3. Coordination of positions.

³² This likely refers to *Khaled Bagdash* (1912–1995), a Syrian political figure and leader of the Syrian Communist Party from 1937 to 1995.

³³ *Vasily Ivanovich Kolotusha* (1941–2020) was a Soviet and Russian diplomat, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USSR to Lebanon (1986–1990) and to Morocco (1992–1999). At the time in question, he was an employee of the Soviet Embassy in Lebanon.

³⁴ This likely refers to the issue of the possible creation of a land corridor between the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip.

4. He will never allow anti-Sovietism.

5. He referred me to our previous conversation (November 1972), when I asked him to retrospectively speak about mistakes or missteps. Then Arafat acknowledged insufficient flexibility during the “Rogers Plan”³⁵. As a result — during Black September³⁶ the Palestinians had no Egyptian support (literally “rear” — *Editor*).

“We will not repeat the mistakes”.

Assessment of the situation — “military incompetence of the Egyptians and Syrians”.

23 Oct 1973. Meeting with Habash³⁷ in Beirut.

Again he speaks about “the masses”. I interrupt. Revolutionary romanticism and revolutionary realism. Me: “I greatly respect, revere, and consider Che Guevara a hero, but he did not make a revolution in Bolivia”. He defines his position:

a) against the resolution;

b) against anti-Sovietism;

c) on political settlement there is still no decision. They are interested either in handing the West Bank over to the bourgeoisie (this after I proposed a bet that the Palestinians would participate and he would remain on the sidelines), or in taking into account the PLO, or in disrupting it.

He promised that the leadership would consider my arguments and proposals. He said: “You together — you, the USSR — have a broader outlook”.

23 Oct 1973. Met again with Hawatmeh.

An even better impression. Papers pressed down by a pistol. Cultured faces all around.

a) The leaders of Egypt and Syria are already lying about us. On the eve, Sadat invited Abu Ayad³⁸ and said: “The Soviet Union imposed the ceasefire”. The Syrians. A delegation (?) — Assad is preparing to present criticism.

³⁵ The “Rogers Plan” refers to the framework proposed by U.S. Secretary of State William P. Rogers in 1969–1971 to end hostilities in the Arab–Israeli conflict following the Six-Day War of 1967. The plan envisaged the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula occupied in 1967 and mutual commitments by Israel and Egypt to maintain a ceasefire and peaceful relations. The plan was effectively rejected by Israel.

³⁶ This refers to the events of “Black September” in Jordan in 1970.

³⁷ That is, with George Habash, leader of the PFLP.

³⁸ More precisely, *Abu Iyad*. His real name was Salah Khalaf (1933–1991), known as Abu Iyad, a Palestinian political and military figure, one of the founders of Fatah, and a close associate of Yasser Arafat.

1. Tlass³⁹ spoke before the National Council the day before, where he showed on a map what would happen — said (...) asked whether there was confidence that the issue (...) would be supported. They agreed with (?) on timing.

2. (...) — if we do not finish it, our children will. Any regime that — even if reactionary — does this will be better than us (the liberation of the occupied territories).

Complex 1. 12(th?), 13(th?) (...) a message — the same by all chiefs (?) (buzaat — ?) to exert pressure on (the) 1(st). He himself agrees to also (...) the message. They began on the morning of the 14th.

Complex 2 — “crisis”. He called, saying he was ready (...) weapons, issues (...) — better himself — to you (...).

Somewhat depressed — we will go out into the streets ourselves.

11. (...) Iraqi (...).

Complex 3. When a brigade⁴⁰ arrived near Daraa⁴¹ — the commander said: I have no orders. Assad: let them clear out. The king received a representative and assured that they were fully subordinate to Syrian command. Arafat told me: in the [Jordanian] brigade 3 people were killed, yet they speak of losses and heroic actions — Assad is completely silent about the Palestinians. Budeiri (general)⁴²: Arafat did not even call us in Syria.

12. How Israeli propaganda is changing.

The first days — total bravado (M. Odeh: This (...) us into the Six-Day War). Then: a knot/junction at Damascus — 20 km.

Tlass then (...) on the 14th said 40 km — and this after so many declared offensives.

On the 14th a radio broadcast for internal use: radio program “with a microphone across the country”: “We have become more restrained. This is reflected both in communiqués and in reports from the field. A psychological restructuring is taking place. We were programmed for a lightning war and a quick victory. This is not like what happened before. When we ourselves began and assessed the enemy. We underestimated the fact that they could operate complex types

³⁹ *Mustafa Tlass* (1932–2017) was a Syrian statesman and military figure who served as Minister of Defense of the Syrian Arab Republic from 22 March 1972 to 12 May 2004.

⁴⁰ This likely refers to Jordan’s 40th Armored Brigade. In 1973, after the outbreak of the October War, the brigade was sent to the Syrian front and played an important role in the fighting.

⁴¹ This likely refers to the city of Daraa in southern Syria.

⁴² This may refer to General *Musbeh al-Budeiri*, who commanded a Syrian-controlled brigade of the Palestine Liberation Army.

of weapons”. Press conference by Meir⁴³ — completely unlike what it was before (on the 14th). Then on the 14th: we, (she) said, have fulfilled [our tasks]. Here on the northern front:

1. We pushed them off the Golan Heights (and crushed them, and smashed them, even threw them back. — E.).

2. We weakened the enemy, his military power, and

3. advanced in the direction of Damascus.

The main goal of the war is to inflict as much damage as possible on the enemy’s military force. This is easier to declare than, say, the seizure of territory — if it does not work out, then in the second case no one will be misled.

Israel, for the first time during the war, announced the numbers of killed and wounded; the figures are small, in my view. Obviously, this was done in order to relieve internal pressure — understated figures. At the same time Dayan⁴⁴ said that there are 440 Arab prisoners and that there will be exchanged — also to calm things down. Neither G.⁴⁵, nor Dayan in fact said anything about American assistance.

Attacks against the S[oviet] Union from G. Meir.

On the 16th, a session of the Knesset.

Opening it, the speaker speaks of a “treacherous aggressor who invaded the territory of our country”. G. Meir: “This war was imposed on us”, we did not want it (one could imagine that [they] cut off smth(?) from the history of Palest[in]e(?), but the matter concerns only events beginning on 6 October 1973). Again and again, it was the Arabs who acted first (Abba Eban⁴⁶, leaving on the 13th for a rally in New York, said that in general this affair was needed by the Arabs — after all, negotiations were supposed to take place in November). An interesting move — about borders.

Obviously, in order to deflect criticism of previous policy, Meir demagogically declared: “Can you imagine what it would have been like if we had had to repel the blow under the conditions of the old June 1967 borders”.

Arafat, 23 Oct 1973.

There must be either a UN resolution or the B[rezhnev]–Nixon wording. A pretext is needed.

Iraq is a special case.

⁴³ *Golda Meir* (born Golda Mabovitch; 1898–1978) was an Israeli political and stateswoman, the fourth Prime Minister of Israel (1969–1974).

⁴⁴ *Moshe Dayan* (1915–1981) was an Israeli military and political figure who served as Israel’s Minister of Defense from 1967 to 1974.

⁴⁵ This likely refers to *Golda Meir*.

⁴⁶ *Abba Eban* (1915–2002) was an Israeli statesman and political figure who served as Israel’s Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1966 to 1974.

Egypt, N[orth] Africa, S[audi] Arabia must make efforts.

He promised not to take rash steps or make rash stat[ements]. He struck out two-thirds of the draft in order to put the PLO in a dif[ficult] pos[ition] – the beginning of its movement in 1965 – and then included the rights of the Pales[stinian] people.

We will not accept a variant when we return to Hussein⁴⁷. Even if for this reason we all become [in his eyes] terrorists. No one will force us to return under the authority of Bedouins connected with (...).

For a state. The very least we can accept is the West Bank, Gaza, and Galilee. And even that would require conducting a poll within the PLO. If, however, [...] all the wavering ones receive support – the people want to obtain something.

We have no decision on the question of participation in negotiations. Our formula is – either they invite us or they will wait– for what? Or so as to invite us again. They are taking us into account.

Agreed positions before [a meeting] with us.

A big mistake.

There is no d[oubt] that they will try to place responsibility. This comes from the top leadership of Egypt and Syria.

A firm position against.

But the popular masses – HIMSELF will decide – we will not change (...). How quickly withdrawals will take place. In Egypt and Syria the regimes are under threat of collapse.

Junior officers.

From the very beginning of the military actions there was a plot aimed at strangling the PLO.

The Jordanian brigade lost three men – “such courage”! We understand what price [...] and the establishment of peace entails. We are expecting trouble in Lebanon.

1. Do you intend to participate in negotiations?

2. Your mood – what exactly will you support: a) Palestinian state; b) autonomy in Jordan; c) ?

3. Who will participate?

4. Who will support you within the PLO?

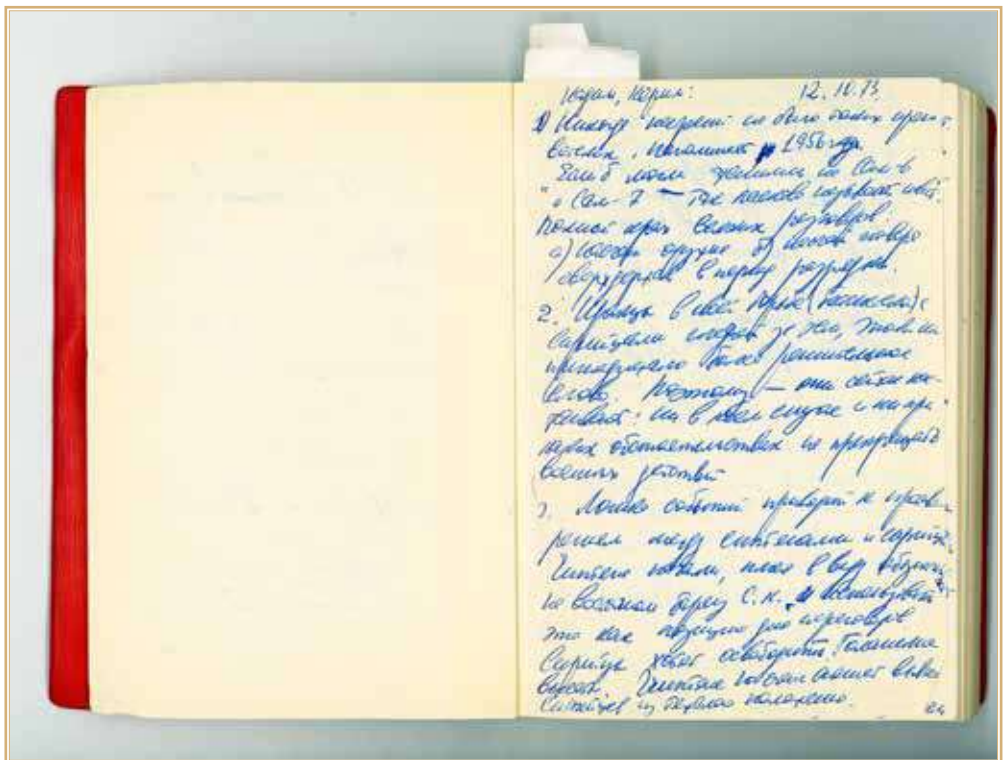
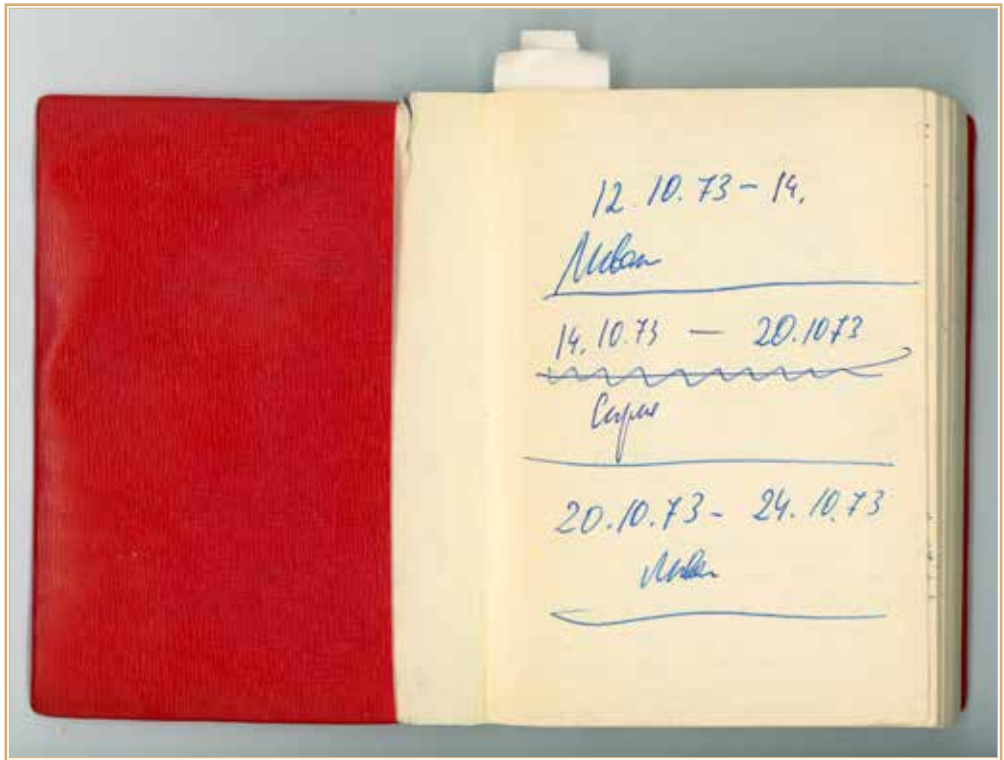
5. Which Arab countries do you intend to rely on?

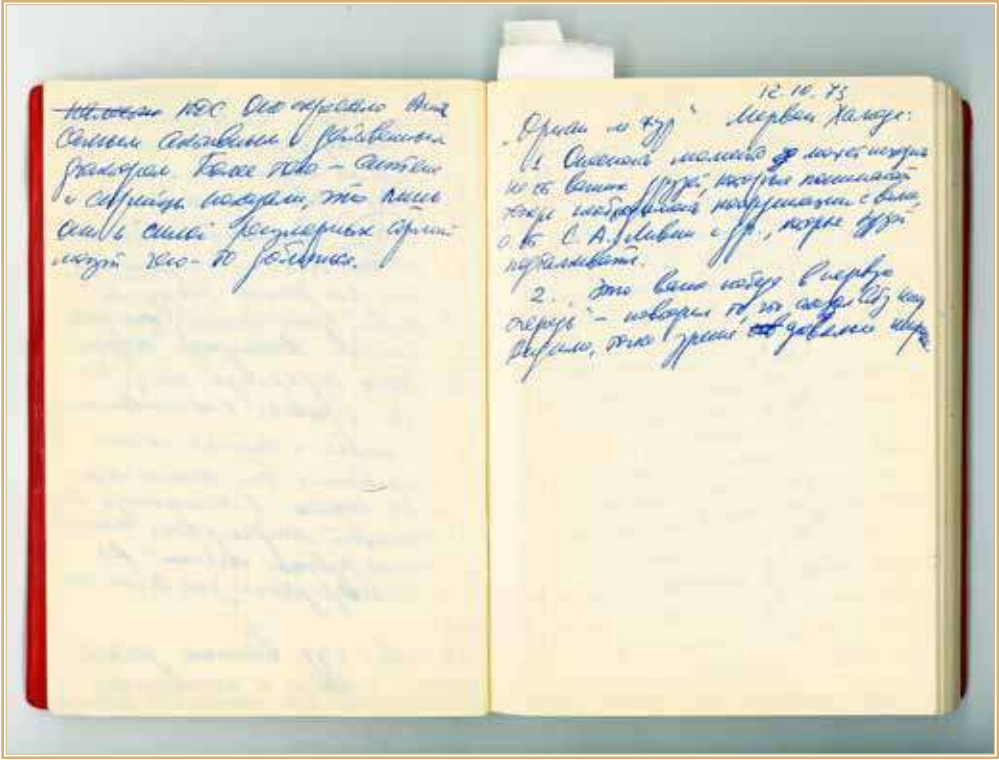
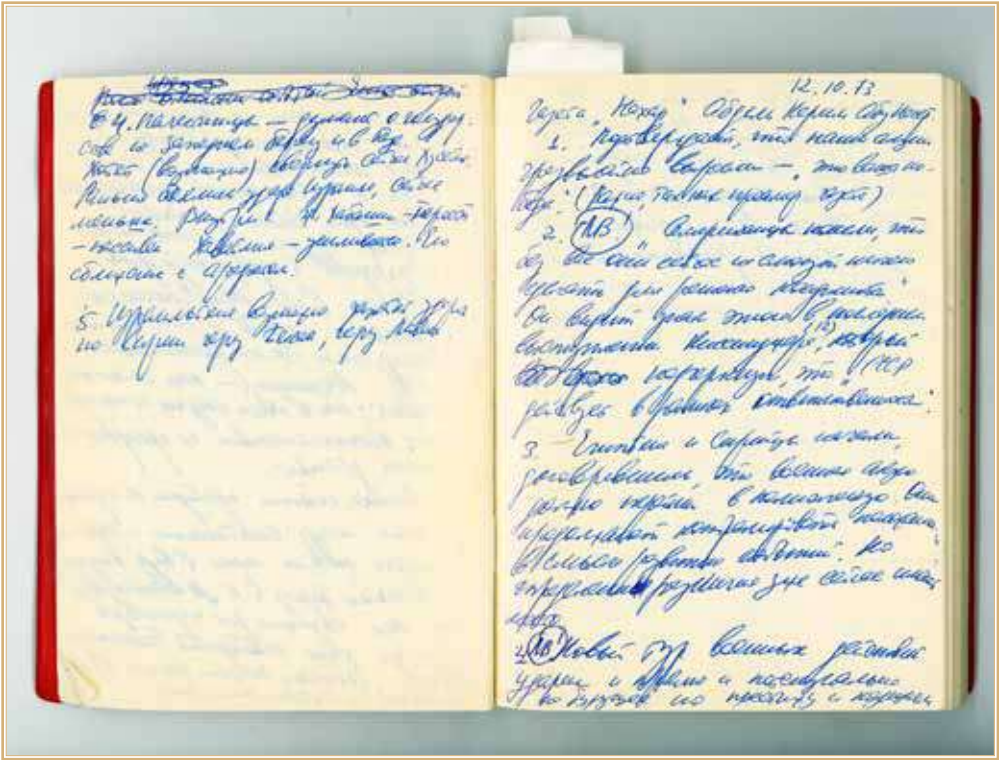
6. What forms of communication and armament?

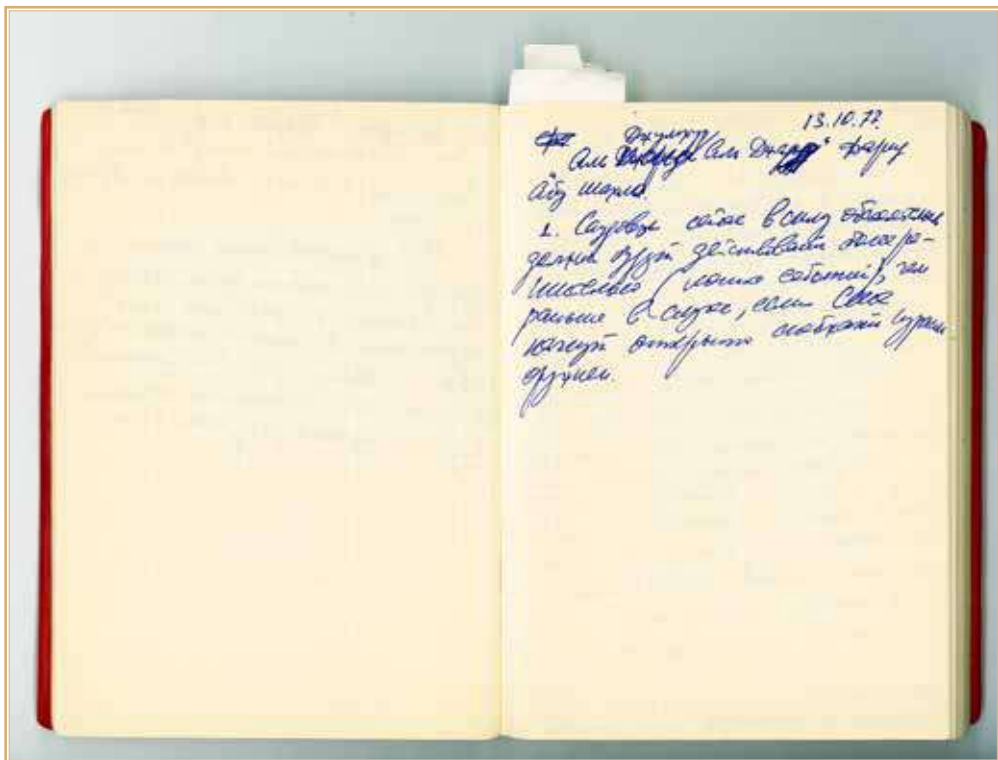
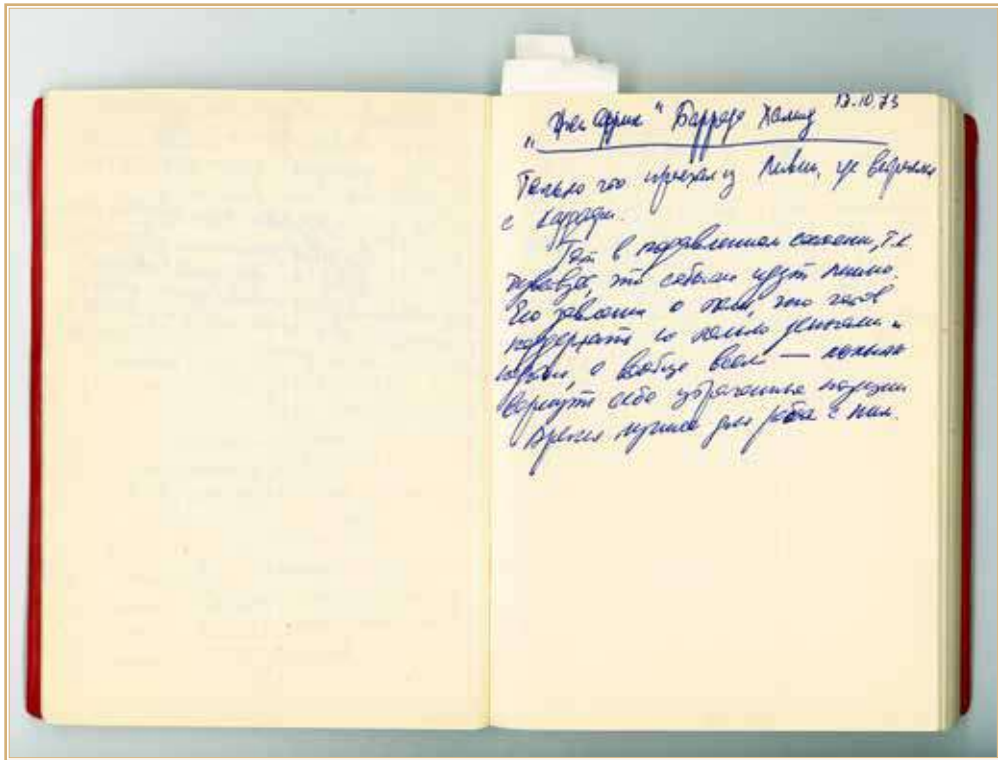
How do you intend to oppose anti-Soviet tendencies?

Have you informed Cairo of (...) and what was Sadat’s reaction?

⁴⁷ This refers to King *Hussein bin Talal* of Jordan.





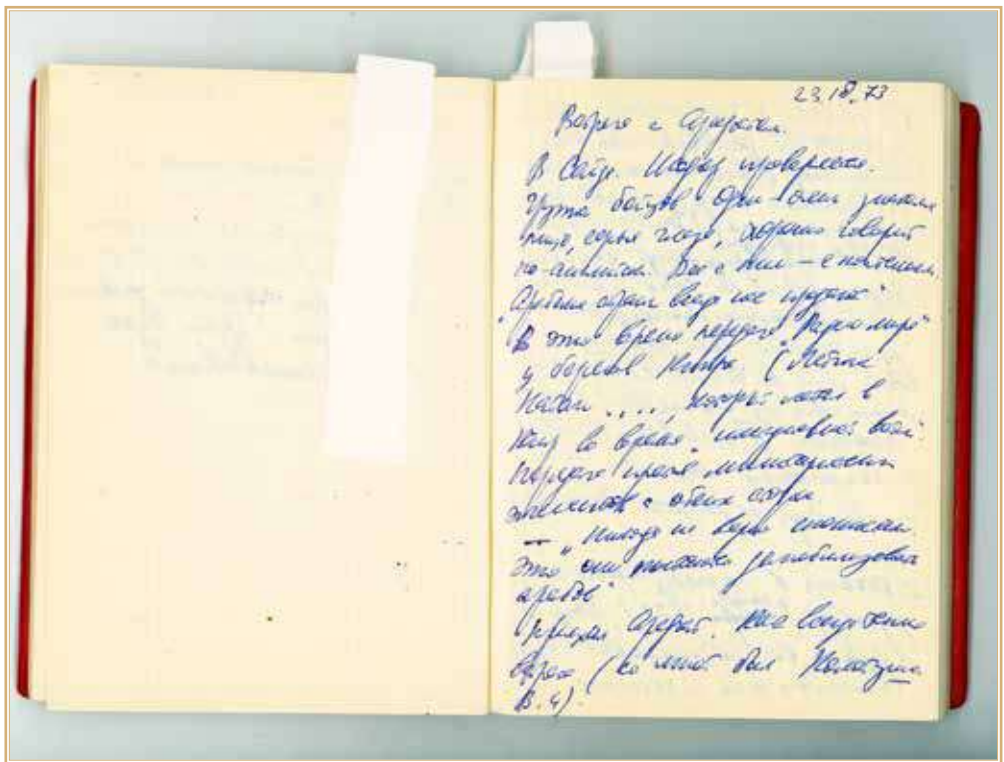
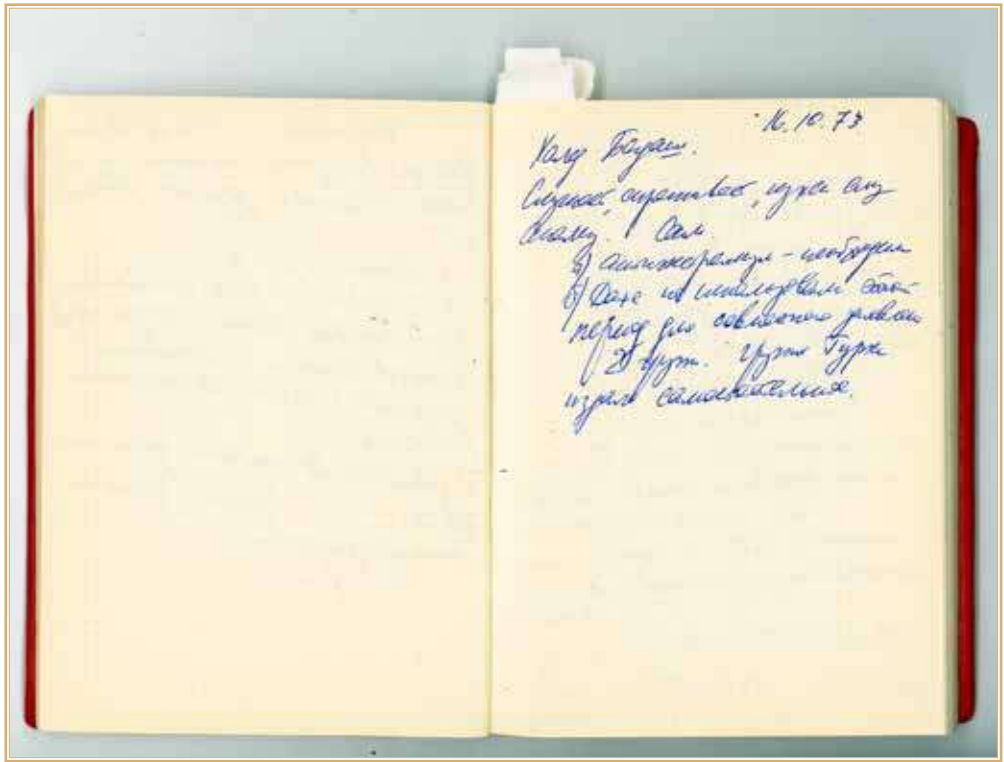


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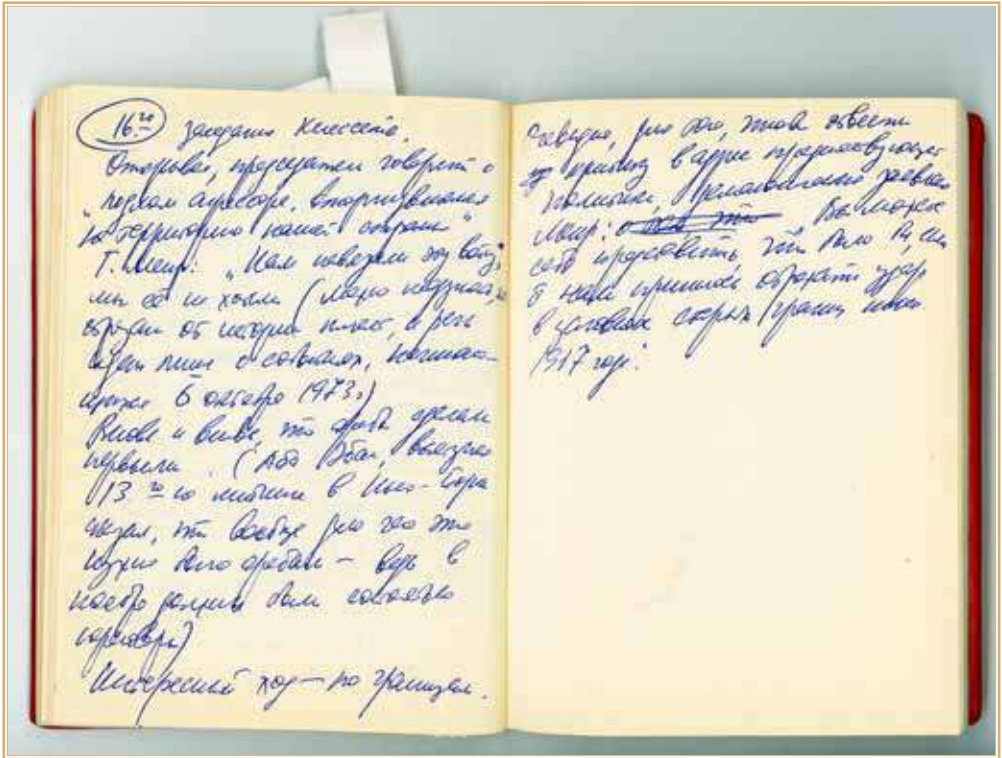
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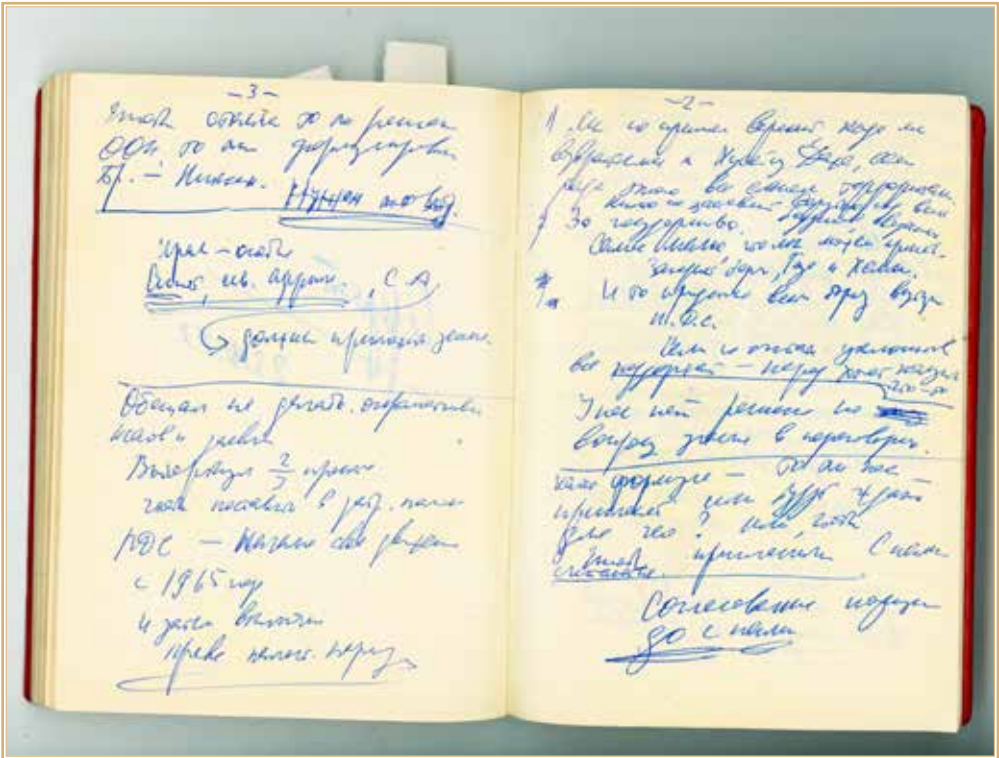
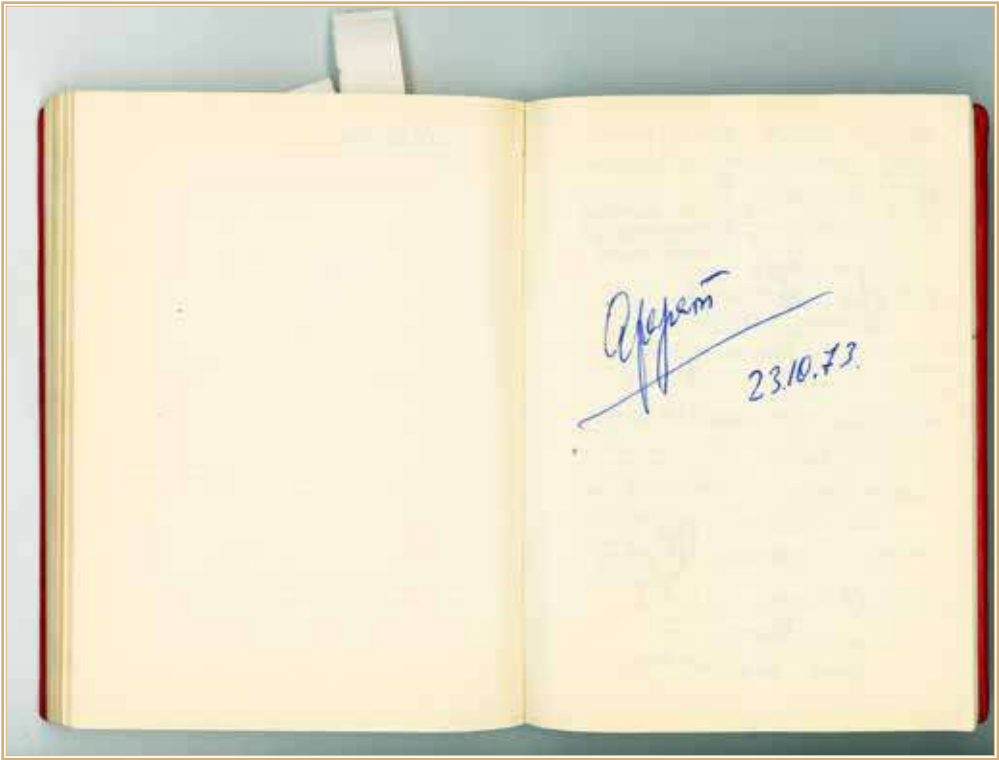
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Original paper



Lebanon, Syria, 1976

Damascus (*underlined by the author*).

6 April 1976.

H. Fahoum¹.

1. The situation in Lebanon. Arafat and Abu Ayad² arrived and reached an agreement with Assad³. On Friday (in two weeks) to convene parliament. The next day – Frangieh's⁴ abdication. Everything seemed to be working. Frangieh agreed.

But suddenly Aziz Ahdab⁵ [spoke out]. Fatah is behind him – I am sure. The h[ead] of the security service, Abu Hasan⁶ (Hammali(?), was in Moscow in 1972), personally escorted him to the radio station. Later Z. Mohsen (Sa'iq)⁷ circulated among the cadres of his organization a statement accusing Fatah of conspiring with Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Fatah found out. A fight broke out.

¹ *Khaled al-Fahoum* was Chairman of the Palestinian National Council.

² More precisely, *Abu Iyad*.

³ That is, with the President of the Syrian Arab Republic, *Hafez al-Assad*.

⁴ *Suleiman Frangieh* (1910–1992) was a Lebanese statesman who served as President of Lebanon from 1970 to 1976. He was the head of the influential Maronite Frangieh political family.

⁵ On 11 March 1976, against the backdrop of the escalating Lebanese Civil War, Brigadier General Aziz al-Ahdab of the Lebanese Army attempted an unsuccessful coup d'état. In a radio address, he demanded the resignation of President Suleiman Frangieh and the government, calling for early presidential elections. However, his appeal was not supported by the Lebanese Army command, and the coup failed.

⁶ *Abu Hasan* most likely refers to *Ali Hassan Salameh* (1941–1979), known by the nom de guerre Abu Hassan, a prominent figure in Fatah and the PLO and considered one of the leaders of the “Black September” organization. He was assassinated in Beirut in 1979 in an operation carried out by Israeli intelligence services.

⁷ *Zubair Mohsen* (1936–1979) was a Palestinian political figure and leader of the militant Palestinian organization al-Sa'iq (“Lightning”), which was created in 1966 with the support of the ruling Ba'ath Party in Syria.

There is other evidence as well that Fatah favors the continuation of bloodshed in Lebanon.

“Yarmouk”⁸ is subordinate to Arafat. The Egyptian brigade that arrived in Lebanon (subordinate to Egypt). They take the main part in the fighting on Jumblatt’s⁹ side, not his militia. Meanwhile, the fire does not cease.

2. Why Arafat? Syria — its prestige has fallen. It does not want to bind itself. There is no unity in Fatah — not everything is under control. It does not want to associate itself with a “capitulationist narrative”.

3. What is everyone seeking in Lebanon? All Arab countries are against the former situation (before the events in Lebanon) for various reasons. [For] the USA the main thing is [to work] toward a split between Syria and the PRM¹⁰, and within the PRM itself. The questions of Am[erican] journalists are identical: why the PLO leadership is not re-elected, why the PLO Nat[ional] Council is not convened. Another direction — a moderated¹¹ leadership on the West Bank¹². The PLO is weakly connected to the events taking place there. The Sov[iet] Union needs to tell the op[posing] forces to stop escalating the situation in Lebanon. Then + the Palestinians [could come out] against Sadat, having freed themselves.

4. He acknowledged that Syria, in coordination with the USA, introduced troops into Lebanon. He also referred to the Fr[ench] ambassador

⁸ The Yarmouk Brigade was a combat unit within the Palestine Liberation Army, established in 1970 with Syrian involvement. During the Lebanese Civil War, it was effectively subordinate to Syrian command.

⁹ *Kamal Jumblatt* (1917–1977) was a Lebanese politician and thinker, founder of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), and leader of Lebanon’s Druze community. He held leftist views and, in the early period of the Lebanese Civil War, aligned with other left-wing forces in Lebanon and with the PLO against the militias of the right-wing nationalist Kataeb Party and its allies, who in 1976 formed the Lebanese Front coalition.

¹⁰ PRM (Palestinian Resistance Movement) is a collective term for Palestinian organizations — both within and outside the PLO — that participated in armed struggle against Israel with the aim of realizing the Palestinians’ right to national self-determination and the creation of a Palestinian state in Pales.

¹¹ “moderate”.

¹² That is, in the West Bank of the Jordan River, which was occupied by Israel in 1967.

Fernand Rouyon (?) (former h[ead] of the Middle East Department of the French Foreign Ministry).

5. Egypt. A 20-year-old officer arrived. An argument with Ga(...) at the base. Heikal¹³ — a conversation with Sadat at the beginning of the year. “No, I am not claiming your place, Mr. President”. [President of Egypt] can only be an officer.

Beirut.

4 April 1976.

Naif Hawatmeh, Abed Rabbo, Abu-Leila¹⁴.

After 22 January a radical shift in the balance of forces. On 16 October 1975 there was a meeting between H. Assad and the Amer[i-can] ambassador in Damascus, where for the first time the USA [declared] support for [Syria’s actions in Lebanon] (this was said by H. Assad to the Pales-tinian leaders). They asked for the time being not to introduce reg[ular] units. After 22 January — a ceasefire, the final collapse and decomposition of the Lebanese army.

The influence of events on the army turned out to be somewhat de-layed. The greater part of the army is on the side of the progressive forces. The progressive forces¹⁵ > and this led to the fact that they strength-ened their demands compared to the Syrian mission. They were right. But parallel to this, Egypt, S[audi] A[rabia], and the right wing of the Pales-tinians [are striving] to pit the left forces against Syria.

11 March — a coup for this purpose.

The left managed to block such a development of events (together with Jumblatt).

At this moment two forces manifested themselves: the progressive forc-es, to go beyond the limits of changes in the Syrian mission, and Syria, in coordination with the Americans, to freeze [the conflict].

¹³ *Mubammad Hassanein Heikal* (1923–2016) was a leading Egyptian journalist, best known as editor-in-chief of *Al-Ahram* (1957–1974). He was regarded as a close as-sociate and friend of President Gamal Abdel Nasser. In 1974, during the presiden-cy of Anwar Sadat, whose policies he opposed, he left his position at *Al-Ahram*.

¹⁴ *Yasser Abd Rabbo* (born 1944) is a senior Palestinian political figure and a mem-ber of the PLO Executive Committee. At the time in question, he was a member of the Political Bureau of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) and the second most influential figure in the organization after Nayef Hawatmeh. Abu Layla refers to Qais Abd al-Karim (party pseudonym Abu Layla), a Palestinian political figure and Deputy Secretary-General of the DFLP.

¹⁵ “Progressive forces” refers to the bloc of “National-Patriotic Forces” (NPF) led by Kamal Jumblatt’s Progressive Socialist Party, acting in alliance with the PLO against the Kataeb Party and its allies.

The progressive forces are [conducting] operations in mountainous Lebanon. Syria's reaction — political and military, (...) (the ports of Tripoli, Sidon, (...)). Syria agreed with the Americans on intervention to return to what existed before 22 January, but the internal balance of forces has already changed! The Americans — Ford¹⁶, Ki (...) ¹⁷ and others — constantly emphasized the agreement with Syria on a “constructive role and limits”.

Brown¹⁸ proposed that Jumblatt act as a mediator between the left and the Syrians, stressing that the general line between the USA and the Syrians was agreed.

1. One cannot take the balance of forces in the country outside the framework of the Middle East crisis, the situation in the Arab world and in the world in general.

2. Where is the main enemy?

3. Who are the allies?

4. What do the Americans want?

5. The PRM — with all its forces — supports the progressive parties?

Two days ago there was a meeting of Khaddam¹⁹ with members of the Political Bureau of the DFLP²⁰ — the Syrian troops will not go further. Assad as well. How events develop further — this will determine how the Syrian troops will be used.

At present: the essence of the struggle between the progressive forces headed by Jumblatt and the Syrians is who will establish military control. Because whoever establishes it will lead the settlement and ensure the restoration of state institutions, including the army.

The Syrians want the election of such a [Lebanese] president who would immediately turn to Damascus with a proposal to provide troops to ensure the construction of new state institutions.

Brown: Jumblatt rejected the American proposal for cooperation. Then the USA began to feed Jumblatt the idea of using Syrian-Arab troops, since Syria had compromised itself.

¹⁶ *Gerald Ford* was President of the United States from 1974 to 1977.

¹⁷ This may refer to *Henry Kissinger* (1923–2023), U.S. Secretary of State from 1973 to 1977.

¹⁸ *Lewis Dean Brown* (1920–2001) was an American diplomat who in 1976 served as President Gerald Ford's special envoy for the settlement of the Lebanese crisis.

¹⁹ *Abdul Halim Khaddam* (1932–2020) was a Syrian statesman and politician who served as Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic from 1970 to 1984.

²⁰ The Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) changed its name in 1974 to the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

Jumblatt insists on using mixed Lebanese [forces] and the PRM.

Positions:

Egypt, S[audi] A[rabia], Iraq — striving to weaken Syria's influence in Lebanon. Ready to support American proposals if Arab troops are also sent to Lebanon. Sadat declared readiness.

In the initial contacts Brown let Jumblatt understand that the USA was ready to support > [more] than the Syrian mission. They wanted all sides to get bogged down and then to play!

In recent days Jumblatt has begun to understand that the Americans are using him. This manifested itself in conversations with him over the last two days. Until recently J[umblatt] believed that the actions of the Syrians, coordinated with the Americans, were supported by the USSR. Now he has begun to move away [from this point of view].

After the meeting with Soldatov²¹, Jumblatt is in a state that disposes him to accept the advice of the USSR. An increasing interest in the USSR's position, in its ability to normalize his relations with Syria.

The French have become convinced that the American game leaves no room for a French game. Gorse²² proposed to Jumblatt a round table in Paris for all Lebanese forces. He said he would discuss this with Damascus and the right-wing Christian leadership.

But we do not think that [this plan] will be accepted by the right-wing Christian parties, which, feeling their relative weakness, cling to the Syrians, the Americans, etc.

Proceeding from this, we consider it necessary to have an effective Soviet presence from positions of support for the Lebanese progressive forces. Abd Rabbo.

The Syrians believe that if they manage to establish control over Lebanon and the PLO, they will use this as a trump card.

They have been behaving in Lebanon this way for six months as if there is no internal struggle here.

1. Externally Syria is involved, and 2) the conclusion — everything is bad for Syria — it is in an American mousetrap.

Hence the compromise.

²¹ *Aleksander Alekseevich Soldatov* (1915–1999) was a Soviet statesman and diplomat who served as Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the USSR to Lebanon from 1974 to 1986.

²² *Georges Gorse* (1915–2002) was a French politician and diplomat; in 1976 he served as a special envoy to Lebanon for the settlement of the Lebanese crisis.

The Syrians tasked Hussein²³ in the USA to convince the Americans to allow Syria to introduce troops.

How to save Syria? How to prevent a direct clash between Syria and the progressive forces and the PRM?

Saeb Salam²⁴ met with Dean Brown and said to him: you managed to kill two birds with one stone. Answer: he laughed for two minutes without stopping. The Syrians will not be able to exit without adopting compromise decisions. How to achieve this?

The DFLP did not follow in the footsteps of Jumblatt and Arafat. We show flexibility.

Arafat began to act together with Syria when S[audi] A[rabia] drew closer to Syria.

a) Sett[lement] in Lebanon in accord[ance] with minimal (...) demands – not the whole program, but only

b) agreement on a common candidate.

c) After achieving [a settlement] – restoration of the Lebanese [state] apparatus through agreement among internal forces.

The PRM and Syria could provide assistance, but not replace this apparatus with their presence.

Whatever Jumblatt says, he can give consent to this plan. But the Syrians do not want to accept it.

It is possible that in the PRM there are circles that are interested in Syria falling into American nets, in order to justify themselves in the future when they act in the same direction.

Abu-Leila.

For Syria not to go down Sadat's path is the main condition for preserving the independence of the PRM.

Hawatmeh.

We sharply opposed Arafat's attempts to use Egypt and S[audi] A[rabia] against Syria. We also openly opposed Jumblatt, who in his struggle against Syria is trying to use the same thing.

²³ This refers to the visit of King Hussein of Jordan to the United States, which took place from 29 March to 1 April 1976.

²⁴ *Saeb Salam* (1905–2000) was an influential Lebanese politician and one of the informal leaders of Lebanon's Sunni community. He served as Prime Minister of Lebanon in 1952, 1953, 1960–1961, and 1970–1973. During the civil war, he carried out mediation missions.

It is necessary to meet with Gemayel, Frangieh²⁵, etc.

14 April 1976.

Halim Dibbs.

Three main sections — within them one can concentrate everything that is being discussed.

1. The program on the basis of which the crisis should be resolved. Three variants (the Syrian compromise).

2. The president.

3. Security.

Four positions: a) accept the Syrian solution; b) an Arab–Syrian solution; c) an international solution; d) a Lebanese solution.

The Lebanese Communist Party²⁶ has no illusions that the fourth will win, but they put it forward in order to hinder the other solutions. Undoubtedly, it is impossible to resolve the security problem without cooperation with the Syrians.

The Soviet Union must play its role — more actively than ever before.

Jumblatt:

There are two forces that can force the Syrians to leave Lebanon. Jumblatt said (...) that it would be very useful if the USSR were to send its representative to Lebanon.

Fatah.

17 April 1976.

Helicopter.

Pierre Gemayel:

1. We do not want to be enemies of the USSR; we strive for friendship with you.

We believe that Lebanon should have friendly relations with both the USA and the USSR.

2. We are not against the Palestinian guerrilla struggle. But we cannot give up part of our sovereignty to them.

We have signed agreements with Arafat many times, but not for a single day were they ever observed. Arafat is the closest to us and we could understand each other. But the PRM is not united.

There was a situation in which Lebanon had a Lebanese government and five Palestinian-Lebanese armies²⁷, and five other armies. Zones were

²⁵ This likely refers to the Kataeb Party leader Pierre Gemayel and Lebanese President Suleiman Frangieh.

²⁶ The Lebanese Communist Party was founded in 1924. During the civil war, it acted as an ally of the PSP and the PLO.

²⁷ This likely refers to the militias of various political forces during the civil war.

created that were no longer subordinate either to the Lebanese or to the Palestinian authorities.

Such criminals as Carlos²⁸ and those who killed King Faisal²⁹ were with us.

3. What needs to be done. The building is on fire. First the fire must be extinguished, and only then can there be a settlement. The greatest service you can render to this unfortunate country is to help put out the fire. And then we will be open to any discussions.

4. How to finish. 1 there must be one authority, one government. Influence the Palestinians, tell them that nothing can be achieved by chaos and aggression. This is not needed by them or by us.

We have the Cairo Agreement³⁰; it must be implemented. At one time we were against the Cairo Agreement, which gave Israel a pretext to strike us. Now we agree — let Arafat respect this agreement.

5. We have fully accepted the Damascus Agreement³¹.

6. We are ready to dissolve our militia if there is a force capable of protecting us.

7. We first wanted the Arab League to take up our affairs. After the League refused, Syria extended its hand to us. At first we were afraid. After a four-hour conversation with Assad, I understood that he is an honest man. Everyone advised us, but the only force that intervened was Syria.

He praises Sadat, who does not meddle in Lebanon and is dealing with Egyptian affairs.

17.

Member of the P[olitical] B[ureau] of the Kataeb, K. Pakradouni³².

²⁸ This refers to Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, known as Carlos the Jackal (born 1949), a notorious left-wing international terrorist of Venezuelan origin. At the time described, he cooperated with the PFLP.

²⁹ This refers to King *Faisal II* of Iraq, who was killed in Baghdad in 1958 by revolutionary officers during the coup d'état.

³⁰ The Cairo Agreement was concluded in November 1969 between the PLO leadership and the command of the Lebanese Army, with mediation by Gamal Abdel Nasser. The agreement effectively placed Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon under the military-political control of the PLO and allowed PLO fighters to conduct armed struggle against Israel from Lebanese territory in exchange for the Palestinians' commitment not to interfere in Lebanon's internal affairs.

³¹ This refers to the ceasefire agreement between the opposing sides in Lebanon, concluded in January 1976 with mediation by Syrian President Hafez al-Assad.

³² *Karim Pakradouni* (born 1944) is a Lebanese politician of Armenian origin. At the time described, he was a member of the senior leadership of the Kataeb Party and advocated overcoming Lebanon's political crisis through cooperation with Arab states.

1. Full contact with Syria.
2. Arafat wanted to org[anise] a meeting.
3. An agreement with Syria.

17 April 1976.

Jumblatt.

Arafat informed him that they had secretly adopted two principles: withdrawal³³ and the free choice of the [Lebanese] president. We have no trust whatsoever in the Syrians.

The people are dissatisfied with them.

P[erhaps] they are even giving weapons to the other side.

The problem will be discussed in the Arab League at the initiative of Iraq and S[audi] A[rabia], which are also very angered by the actions of the Syrians in Lebanon.

The Americans have changed their position. At first — to help Syria. Now Brown has taken an independent position. The USA exerted pressure on Syria, Sa'iq³⁴, and Frangieh. We managed to present our position to them in a good light. France has also taken a strong position against the Syrian attack (...).

Toubou.

Abu Ammar³⁵ is pleased.

USA Sarkis.

Syria³⁶

He is for R. Eddé³⁷.

If Syria were at least neutral, we could wage a people's liberation war in this country and within three months be in power.

The French representative proposed a "round table" in Paris — p[erhaps] a good idea!

³³ This may refer to the withdrawal from Lebanon of units of the Palestine Liberation Army that were effectively under Syrian control.

³⁴ That is, the Syrian-controlled Palestinian organization al-Sa'iq.

³⁵ *Abu Ammar* is the party pseudonym of *Yasser Arafat*.

³⁶ This scheme may be interpreted as support by both the United States and Syria for the candidacy of the moderate Maronite politician Elias Sarkis in the forthcoming presidential elections of the Lebanese Republic. Elias Sarkis (1924–1985) was elected President of Lebanon in September 1976 and served until 22 September 1982.

³⁷ *Raymond Eddé* (1913–2000) was an influential Lebanese Maronite politician and leader of the National Bloc Party. A committed Lebanese nationalist, he opposed both Palestinian and Syrian interference in Lebanon's affairs. During the civil war, he was the only major Lebanese politician who consistently maintained neutrality and preserved good relations with political figures from both opposing camps.

“The Soviet Union was absent. It would be important to send a Sov[iet] representative to Damascus. You must not abandon us”.

He denied that he had spoken with Brown about pol[itical] matters — he is lying.

We prefer Arab forces to Syrian ones.

P[erhaps] Mahmoud Riad³⁸ [will organize] a meeting between him and the Gemayels³⁹.

Sadat speaks ind[irect]ly.

Assad is against the LCP [and] Jumblatt and will work against them. Assad argued with Hawatmeh about the role of S[audi] A[rabia].

1. The Syrians are not ready to go beyond the Frangieh document. Therefore, discussion must be continued after the election of a new president.

2. They are not ready to reach agreement with Jumblatt et al. regarding the person of the new president.

Assad noted that the Kataeb supports [this], while Chamoun⁴⁰ does not yet. Since the Syrians are not ready, Syria will continue its line, and the progressive forces and the PRM let them go their own way. But Assad said that Edde will not pass.

Sarkis — the most likely president?

3. Syrian troops.

It is clear that the Syrians are not insisting on retaining or advancing the troops.

H. Assad is not pressing very hard. At the same time Hikmat Shihabi⁴¹ [believes] that they should remain.

The decision: they remain on the same line as now. On the other hand, the three-[party] committee is being revived. It will have everything at its disposal (after Syrian troops).

³⁸ *Mahmoud Riad* (1917–1992) was an Egyptian diplomat who served as Secretary-General of the League of Arab States from 1972 to 1979. In 1976, during the Lebanese Civil War, he undertook mediation efforts in support of deploying an Arab peacekeeping force in Lebanon.

³⁹ That is, with the leaders of the Kataeb Party, Pierre Gemayel and his son Bashir Gemayel.

⁴⁰ *Camille Chamoun* (1900–1987) was a Lebanese politician and statesman who served as President of Lebanon from 1952 to 1958. During the Lebanese Civil War, he was one of the leading Maronite figures of the right-wing nationalist camp and founder and leader of the right-centrist National Liberal Party.

⁴¹ *Hikmat al-Shihabi* (1931–2013) was a Syrian general who served as Chief of the General Staff of the Syrian Armed Forces from 1974 to 1998.

The committee's mandate — until the [election] of a new president. It will also decide whether Syrian troops will be used (this ...).

4. Assad agreed to the creation of an ind[ependent] consortium for reviving the Lebanese economy. But he is against the arrival of U.S. experts or foreign troops (also an undeclared point). On the declared points — all are against a resumption of hostilities and are ready to use force against those who start them (perhaps this is a step forward in defusing relations between Assad and the Leb[anese] left).

5. Discussion of the point on American intervention. Shihabi and Naji Jamil⁴² — favor a general formulation. Hawatmeh and Abu Saleh very clearly [against]. Assad asked: do you want to draw Syria into a clash with the Americans? H[awatmeh]: we want the road into the Am[erican] trap to be closed before each of us. After Assad agreed, Arafat was against it.

A discussion between Hawatmeh and Abu Ammar: they argued for 45 min[utes].

This is also a certain step forward toward a unified platform.

6. Against Arab or intern[ational] troops. The Syrians welcomed this. Abu Ammar was against it (on the question of rejecting Arabization). This is connected with his contacts with Egypt, Iran, and S[audi] A[rabia] on Lebanese affairs. He immediately sent his representatives to various Arab countries to explain.

Assessment: DFLP.

1. A step forward in freezing the struggle between Syria, the PRM, and the nat[ional] forces.

2. A step forward in unifying the actions of Syria and the PRM.

3. A step forward in weakening Syrian–American contacts.

4. On the path toward military détente.

But it did not solve the problems.

After the election of the [Lebanese] president, the struggle will take on sharp forms.

The camp[aign] of attacks has been halted until the election of the new president.

⁴² *Naji Jamil* (1932–2014) was a Syrian military and political figure, a close associate of President Hafez al-Assad, and Commander of the Syrian Air Force from 1971 to 1976. In addition, from 1970 to 1978 he headed the National Security Bureau, coordinating the activities of Syrian intelligence services. At the time described, he was one of the key figures in Syria's military-security apparatus and a member of the Regional Command of the Ba'ath Party.

Why was it possible to achieve this? At the first stage the USA dangled promises before the Syrians.

In Assad's latest speech and in the gov[ernment] statement – not a word about the USA.

The Syrians need to be encouraged and the disagreements intensified. Assad quoted Kiss[inger], who said that the USA plays the main role – “now”, Assad added, “they are playing the full role”.

A situation has taken shape. It is necessary to speak with Assad in concrete, clear language.

The tactic is that now, before the elections, to draw the conclusion that a single candidate has been [agreed upon] Jumblatt is against it. The new president: to legalize the presence of the troops – advise this and act accordingly.

8 April 1976.

Br(...)⁴³.

1. We are ready to fight in the streets of Beirut for Damascus.

2. Against Jumblatt – even by arm[ed] force. Behind them – Sadat. We intercepted weapons. And if the PRM [supports Jumblatt]? [In that case] we will not consider them Palestinians.

3. The war in Lebanon is “dirty”. We gave weapons both to Jumblatt and to the LCP. Those who oriented us incorrectly will be tried in Damascus. To the clarifying question: whom – people from your leadership, or Ba’athists in Lebanon? – both.

4. With the USA – a fragile glass vessel – policy must be flexible, but strategically opposed. The main thing is trust in us. Brown has already been in Damascus.

5. And Israel? – let it be. And [if] it occupies [part of Lebanese territory] – let it. It is worse if there are anti-Syrian establishments throughout Lebanon.

6. With the SCP. They did not send Bagdash⁴⁴, because there are two communist parties.

1. The Syrians intervened when the PRM and the left could come under attack; a power vacuum, the army disintegrated. Pal[estinian] brigades were introduced – support for a sector of the Syrian army.

⁴³ Judging by the context, this may refer to a representative of Syrian state structures.

⁴⁴ *Khaled Bagdash* (1912–1995) was a Syrian politician of Kurdish origin and leader of the Syrian Communist Party from 1936 to 1995.

2. Frangieh⁴⁵ was summoned to Damascus. 17 points. A secret agreement on dismissing from the army all > [officers above the rank of] brigadier to preserve its unity and restructure it, and on amnesty for those who deserted from it.

3. The army leadership learned of this and decided to act > [faster] than Frangieh. Boustany⁴⁶ and others — known for pro-American sentiments.

4. In parallel, another process — Arafat feared the strengthening of army control. He contacted Cairo — asked to send a brigade of Pal[estinians] in order somehow to “balance” the situation⁴⁷. And with S[audi] [Arabia], and with Iraq. Here a convergence of approaches between Fatah and the PFLP began to occur.

5. At the same time Frangieh was sinking, which caused concern and made Damascus nervous. Another issue that caused nervousness was the fear that the situation would get out of control. Khatib⁴⁸ was strengthening — Fatah was behind him. They proposed in an ultimatum form that Khatib surrender either to Frangieh or to the Syrian command.

6. At this time Ahdab⁴⁹ appeared on the scene. He tried beforehand to contact the Syrians — they rejected him. Behind him — Fatah, S[audi] A[rabia], Egypt. Abu Hasan (Hammaki) — h[ead] of Fatah intelligence — brought him to the radio station.

7. The Syrian mission [in Lebanon] came under attack. The Syrians.



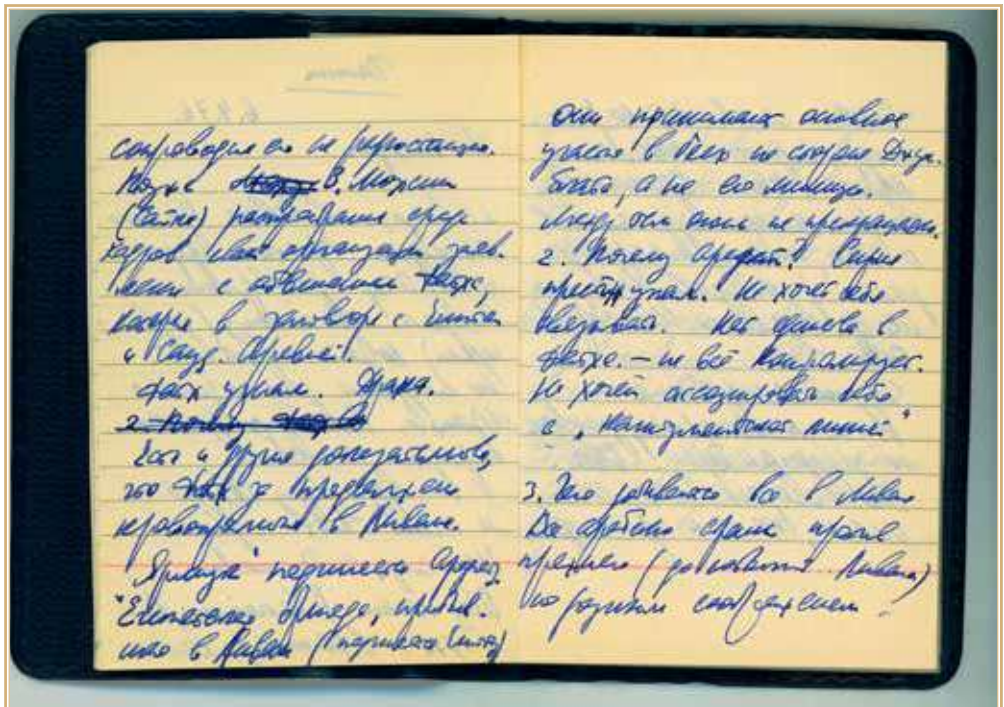
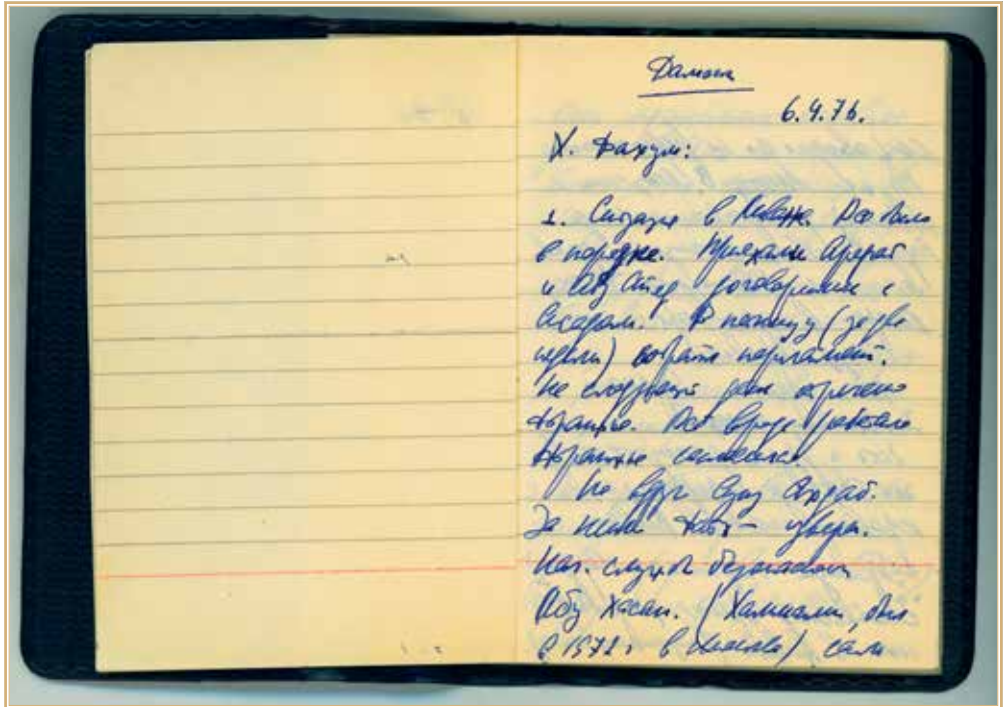
⁴⁵ That is, *Suleiman Frangieh*, President of Lebanon.

⁴⁶ This likely refers to *Emile Boustany* (1909–2002), a Lebanese general who served as Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces from 1965 to 1970. In 1973, amid suspicions of involvement in a corruption scandal, he fled to Syria, where he was granted political asylum.

⁴⁷ That is, Syrian influence.

⁴⁸ At the end of January 1976, Lieutenant *Abmad al-Khatib* of the Lebanese Army launched a mutiny within units of the 1st Armored Brigade, refusing — together with fellow Muslim servicemen — to obey orders from the command. The mutineers, led by al-Khatib, formed the so-called Lebanese Arab Army and entered into an alliance with the PLO and the National-Patriotic Forces in the struggle against the Kataeb Party and its allies in the Lebanese Front.

⁴⁹ That is, General *Aziz al-Ahdab*.



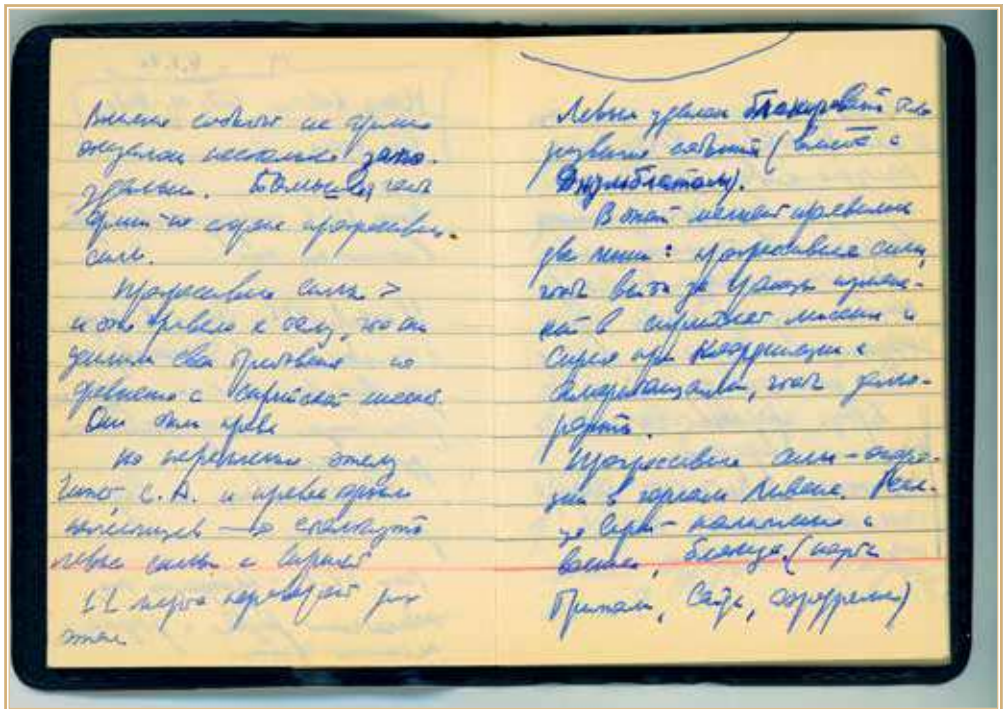
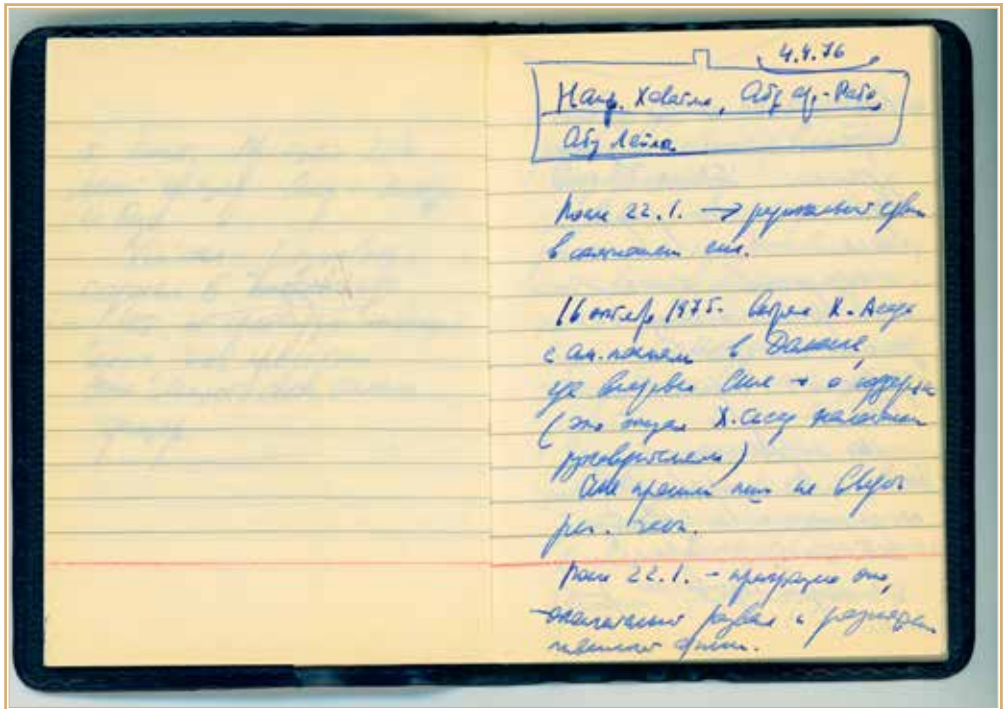
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 capis NDC. Spumosa
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4. Nigra, vna Capis in
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 vasa nuda. Vasa nuda
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5. Lino. Mucosa 20ⁱⁿ
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 in piceis.

Xivra - piceis.
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piceis



Спустя год и более после
 отъезда, когда бы не при-
 влекло к себе, с помощью
 меня, апартаментов была бы
 отменена апартаментов и
 самозанят.

(Бригада) Бригада - адеп-
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 подпольщиков. Они это
 делают с помощью своих
 людей и с помощью своих
 связей - делают так, что
 апартаменты отменяются
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апартаментов адеп-тивная
 и т.д.

Бригада: С.А. Уфа - адеп-
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 адеп-тивная организация
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 тивная организация.

В конце декабря Бригада
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 адеп-тивная организация, с тем, что
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Депутат Енисейской
 области, с тем, что
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В конце декабря Бригада
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Ад, Уг-Рад

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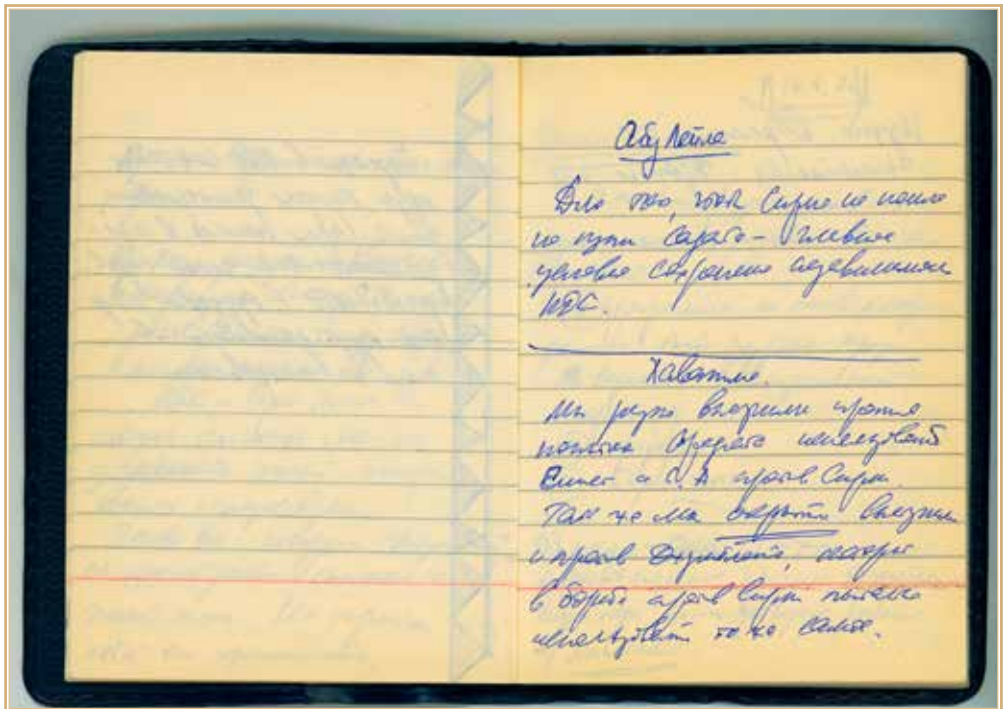
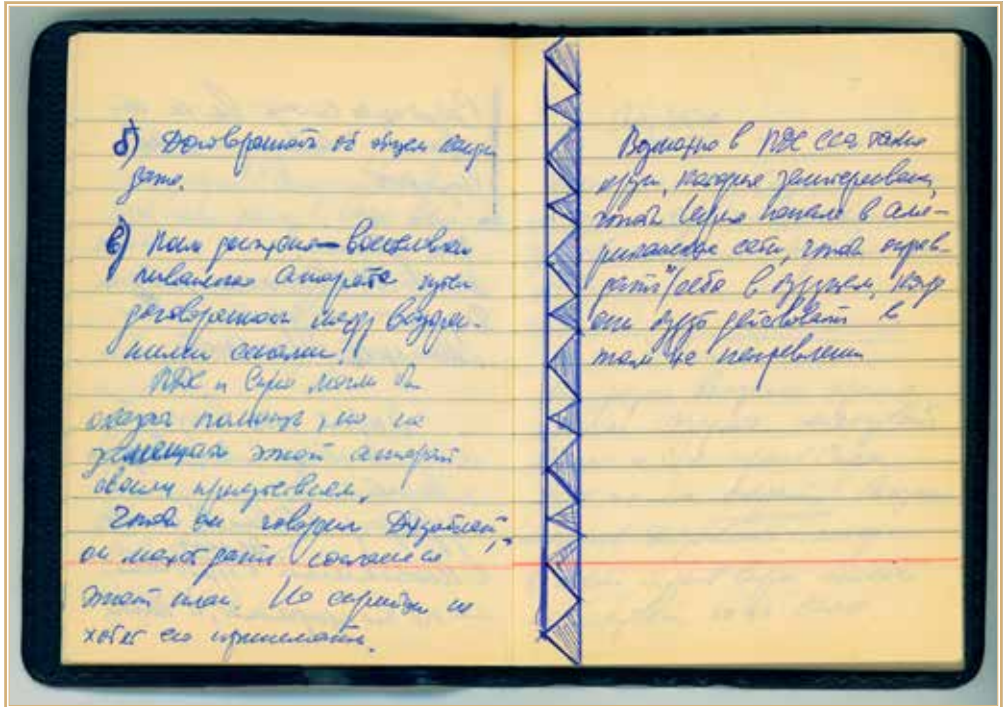
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Уггэнэ үүсгэнэ үүсгэнэ



14.4.76

Учредительное собрание
 4 марта, 1918 г.

Устав Общества:

1. Целью общества является...
 2. Общество имеет...
 3. Общество имеет...

Общество имеет...
 а) для...
 б) для...
 в) для...

Наше общество имеет...
 1. Целью общества является...
 2. Общество имеет...
 3. Общество имеет...

Общество имеет...
 а) для...
 б) для...
 в) для...

17.4.76

Вопросы

Проблемы:

- 1) Мы не хотим ни вранья сд. американо и ссср и т.д. Мы хотим, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср.
- 2) Мы не хотим никаких переговоров с ссср. Мы хотим, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср.

Как быть без американо и ссср и т.д. Мы хотим, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср.

Сначала надо, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср. Мы хотим, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср.

Тогда мы будем как вассалы в ссср и ссср. Мы хотим, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср.

3. Это будет означать? Если вассалы будут в ссср и ссср, то мы будем в ссср и ссср.
4. Как это будет? 1) Мы хотим, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср. Мы хотим, что бы вассалы были в ссср и ссср.

4. У нас ест капуста капуста
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17

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 3) капуста капуста капуста

17.4.76
Dopisani

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den upreca carlym
2 upreca: balij a
balijes baly upreca.
Ma ne uverbahe nakanu
palye a upreca.
Upreca uca upreca.
M. I. aly palye palye upreca
carlym.
M. I. aly palye palye upreca a
upreca aly uca upreca
upreca a C. D. upreca upreca
upreca palye palye palye
upreca a palye

(Tzdy)

Upreca carlym aly
upreca. Upreca - palye uca
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palye upreca upreca.
Upreca upreca palye uca
upreca, palye, upreca.
Upreca upreca upreca
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uca upreca upreca upreca
palye aly upreca aly aly
uca upreca palye palye aly
uca

4. Cabecas long - ...
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 vado ut.
 mouerem capura in castra
 cupio hinc
 vobis annis, a
 cum i nro → me
 no Acet
 vifici.

Capitulum videretur
 vificium?

3. Capitulum hinc.

no, mo cupura in
 no cupura in
 boia.

X. Acet no dno

Acet vobis
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Capitulum videretur
 vificium?
 Capitulum hinc
 no, mo cupura in
 boia

4. Acet concurrens in
 cupura vobis

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5. Acet concurrens in
 cupura vobis

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Acet concurrens in
 cupura vobis

Dns - dete arpejelan
 was beqy ne gym efus
 wasqyjan
 6. Mpat apadun an
 meq. bice. Kipusq
 apibec-blan. Mpatun
 -Ddy beap (no beqy
 or apusun apadun)
 Dns beqan e do beqan
 e Eunan, yparat, C. A.
 no nulanen genas
 P. Mpatun e papus apad.
 dete apad beqy apibec
 me papadun

Dyema: Ddy
 1) Men beqy e anen
 pampapilas apad
 beqy nbl e nby, un.
 2) Men beqy e beqy
 gechi beqy e nbl.
 3) Men beqy e nulanen
 anen beqy e
 anen beqy e nulanen
 4) no nyan e
 beqy papadun.

No ne penen apadun
 no ne beqy apadun Mpa
 apadun beqy papadun.
 Mpatun beqy nulanen
 beqy e beqy nulanen
 beqy apadun.
 Mpatun beqy nulanen?
 No beqy nulanen beqy
 beqy nulanen beqy nulanen.
~~Mpatun beqy nulanen~~
 B nulanen pen beqy e
 beqy nulanen beqy nulanen
 beqy nulanen beqy nulanen.

Mpatun beqy nulanen
 e beqy nulanen beqy nulanen.
Acap: Mpatun beqy nulanen
 beqy nulanen, no beqy
 beqy nulanen beqy nulanen.
 beqy nulanen beqy nulanen
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Деление, мал
 опис по биологическим, в
 епископическом
 → Деление, мал
 Это была информация: информация
 Мелкого бака - конклав и
 генерал.
 —

8.4.76
 Деление
 "Сергей" west german
 1) Не, работа в городе Деление
 пресса по Делению.
 2) Мелкий Деление - поле
 баг. информация. Де мун - Деление.
 Не информация о Делении.
 А как ПДК? Не Деление
 и Деление Деления.
 3) Деление Деления - информация
 Это была информация о Делении.
 Деление - Деление. Деление, Деление
 Деления Деления Деления
 Деления Деления Деления

Не упоминается там: 450,
 из каких государств, как
 из государств (или?) - 6 стр
 и др.

4) С. 110 - хроника...
 чего - название...
 и др.

5) С. 111 - ...
 ...

6) С. 112. Не упоминается
 там...

1. ...
 ...
 ...

2. ...

3. ...

4. ...



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Original paper



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The Mission of Y. M. Primakov: An Attempt at a Diplomatic Exit from the Kuwait Crisis (1990–1991)

Abstract

The article presents an interview prepared for publication between *RT Arabic* correspondent Khaled Ar-Rashd and Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov, an outstanding statesman, diplomat, and analyst. The interview covers the events of the Kuwait crisis of 1990, which marked the beginning of the armed conflict in the Persian Gulf and became one of the last major trials for the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Amid the rapid transformation of the international order, against the background of the weakening position of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, the actions of the Soviet leadership in response to Iraqi aggression became the subject of both international diplomacy and domestic political debate.

The interview was recorded many years after the events, in September 2010, when Primakov was able to assess them not only as a direct participant, but also, from a historical distance, as an analyst. In the course of preparation for publication, the author's original intonation was preserved.



The conversation analyzes internal contradictions within the leadership of the Soviet Union, diplomatic efforts to prevent a military operation against Iraq, the position of the Arab states, and the reaction of the international community. Special attention is paid to Primakov's personal mission as Special Envoy of the President of the USSR. The interview is accompanied by scholarly commentary that elucidates the historical context, personalities, diplomatic formulations, and assessments voiced in the dialogue. The publication introduces into academic circulation a unique testimony of a participant in key international events and processes of the early 1990s.

Taking into account Primakov's biography, his personal involvement, and the retrospective nature of his analysis, the interview constitutes a primary source of significance both for reconstructing a specific episode in the history of international relations and for understanding the mechanisms of foreign-policy decision-making under crisis conditions. The scholarly value of the material is further enhanced by the fact that some of the aspects discussed had not previously received detailed interpretation in open sources.

Keywords:

Iraq; Kuwait; Saddam Hussein; Hafez al-Assad; Hosni Mubarak; the Palestinian question; the League of Arab States; Operation Desert Storm (1991).

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Mission to Iraq

*Diplomacy is not a transaction. It is a duty.
Even if no one listens to you — you must speak.
Sometimes a single word at the right moment can prevent
a catastrophe. Even if it is uttered into the void.*

Y. M. Primakov



Presented here is an interview with Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov — an outstanding statesman, analyst, and diplomat — devoted to the events of the Kuwait crisis of 1990. The Kuwait crisis of 1990 marked the beginning of the armed conflict in the Persian Gulf and became one of the last major trials for the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. Under conditions of rapid change in the international order, against the background of the weakening position of the USSR and the end of the Cold War, the actions of the Soviet leadership in response to Iraqi aggression became the subject of both international diplomacy and domestic political debate.

The interview was recorded many years after the events, in September 2010, when Primakov spoke not only as a direct participant in the events, but also as an analyst capable of assessing them from a historical distance. In the course of preparation for publication, the author's original intonation was preserved.

The conversation examines internal contradictions within the leadership of the Soviet Union, diplomatic efforts to prevent a military operation against Iraq, the position of the Arab states, and the reaction of the international community. Special attention is given to Primakov's personal mission as Special Envoy of the President of the USSR. The interview is accompanied by scholarly commentary that reveals the historical context, the individuals involved, the diplomatic formulations, and the assessments voiced in the dialogue. The publication is intended to introduce into academic circulation a unique testimony of a participant in key international processes of the early 1990s.

Taking into account Primakov's biography, his personal involvement, and the retrospective nature of his analysis, the interview constitutes a primary source of significance both for reconstructing a specific episode in

the history of international relations and for understanding the mechanisms of foreign-policy decision-making in a crisis. The scholarly value of the material is enhanced by the fact that some of the aspects discussed had not previously received detailed interpretation in open sources.

Historical context of the events

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 became an event that shook the international system at the turn of the 1980s–1990s. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, one state undertook direct armed aggression against a sovereign UN member state, triggering a global political and legal crisis. Iraqi President Saddam Hussein declared Kuwait the “nineteenth province” of his country, justifying the annexation by alleged illegal oil extraction in disputed areas, historical claims, and the need to restore Iraq's economic sovereignty after the eight-year Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988).

The United States of America, taking advantage of the situation, emerged as the organizer of an international coalition that included both the Western countries and a number of Arab states (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, and others). On 2 August, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 660 condemning the invasion, followed in subsequent months by a series of decisions culminating in Resolution No. 678 (29 November 1990), which authorized the use of force if Iraq did not withdraw its troops from Kuwait by 15 January 1991. After this deadline, on 17 January, Operation Desert Storm began and continued until 28 February.

The USSR, finding itself amid a systemic internal crisis (political, economic, and administrative), adopted an ambivalent position. On the one hand, the Soviet Union supported UN resolutions and condemned Iraq's actions. On the other hand, Moscow, relying on traditionally close ties with Baghdad and a number of Arab capitals, insisted on a diplomatic resolution of the conflict. This reflected both foreign-policy realism and a desire to preserve a balance of relations with the Arab world, where the USSR still retained significant influence. Alongside the official position of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed by Eduard Shevardnadze, who opposed any compromises with Saddam Hussein, an alternative diplomatic initia-

tive was launched with the direct involvement of President Mikhail Gorbachev and his special envoy, Yevgeny Primakov, member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

Yevgeny Primakov, a Middle East expert who had previously headed the Institute of Oriental Studies and the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, was sent to Baghdad and then to Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia in search of a political exit from the crisis. His mission was to persuade Saddam Hussein of the need for an immediate withdrawal of troops in exchange for international guarantees and indirect discussion of the Palestinian issue. This position found understanding among a number of Arab leaders (Hafez al-Assad, Hosni Mubarak, King Fahd of Saudi Arabia), who, despite their formal participation in the anti-Iraqi coalition, were not interested in the complete destruction of Iraq as a state. Nevertheless, unity within the League of Arab States could not be achieved: contradictions between pro-Western regimes and countries with anti-American rhetoric (for example, Yemen, Libya, Algeria) led to paralysis of pan-Arab diplomacy.

Thus, the Soviet Union found itself in a dual position. On the one hand, it sought to preserve the role of a peacemaker and mediator claiming global influence; on the other hand, it was objectively losing leverage over its traditional partners and becoming increasingly dependent on Western financial and political structures. Against this backdrop, Primakov's diplomatic initiatives represent a rare example of Soviet foreign-policy activity in its final months, at a time when the international system was already rapidly shifting from a bipolar confrontation toward an American-centered order.

Interview with Y. M. Primakov

RT Arabic **correspondent Khaled Ar-Rashd:** Yevgeny Maksimovich, we are pleased to welcome you again to our studio. My first question concerns the reaction of the Soviet Union to Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait. In your book *Russia and the Arabs: Behind the Scenes*, you note that no one expected Saddam to take such a step without warning Moscow. What was the reaction of the Soviet leadership at different levels?



Ye.M. Primakov as a high school student
From the family archive of Ye.A. Primakov

Y. M. Primakov: It is important to distinguish between two points: one thing is that “no one could have imagined it”, and another is that “Saddam Hussein did not warn us”. These are not the same. In principle, it was possible to foresee such actions.

RT Arabic: Did you foresee this?

Y. M. Primakov: No, I am not claiming that I possessed such foresight. But such a scenario could have been considered. The Iraqi authorities repeatedly stated publicly that Kuwait was part of Iraqi territory, allegedly a new province of Iraq. They soon officially announced this as well. Moreover, the concentration of Iraqi troops at the border and direct threats — all of this also pointed to the possibility of aggression. Nevertheless, despite allied relations with the USSR, Iraq did not warn us either about the start of the war with Iran or about the invasion of Kuwait¹.

RT Arabic: And how did Soviet institutions react to these events?

Y. M. Primakov: The reaction was sharply negative at all levels, both in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in other agencies. No one even entertained the thought of supporting Iraq’s actions.

RT Arabic: Was a unified line of conduct developed? How did, for example, the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the KGB react?

¹ The USSR and Iraq signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1972, formally making them allies. However, in 1980 Iraq launched a war against Iran without notifying the USSR, as it later did in the case of Kuwait in 1990.

Y. M. Primakov: You want a detailed breakdown by agencies — who reacted how? Of course, I was not present at all discussions, but I can say unequivocally: the reaction was unanimously negative.

RT Arabic: I asked this question because, according to the testimony of Alexander Belonogov² and partly according to your own recollections, there were two directions in the USSR’s foreign-policy course: the official line of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs headed by Eduard Shevardnadze and your mission as the President’s special envoy. Sometimes they ran in parallel, and sometimes at odds with each other. What caused this divergence?

Y. M. Primakov: Let me clarify immediately: there were no disagreements regarding the assessment of the invasion itself. Everyone — the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the President, and myself — condemned Saddam’s actions. The disagreements concerned the ways out of the conflict. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Shevardnadze personally believed that negotiations with the aggressor were “immoral”. In a telegram he sent when, on Gorbachev’s instructions, I was flying to Baghdad, Shevardnadze wrote directly: “I consider contacts with Saddam Hussein to be immoral”.

RT Arabic: On what basis, in your view, did he hold such a position?

Y. M. Primakov: Listen, how can you ask me such a question — “on what basis did he hold such a position”?! He held this position because that is what he believed. And he aligned himself with those who also believed that no political contacts with Saddam should be maintained.

RT Arabic: But even the Americans believed that it was necessary to...

Y. M. Primakov: Everyone kept forgetting that up to five thousand of our citizens and more than one hundred military specialists were in Iraq! It is true that Saddam Hussein did not voice any threats against them — this is true. But with regard to Western specialists who were in Iraq at that time, he openly stated that he was ready to turn them into a “human shield” if American bombardments began³. And under these conditions, not to enter into contact with Saddam Hussein, at least on this issue, not to try to reason with him and not to

² *Aleksandr Mikhailovich Belonogov* was a Soviet and Russian diplomat; in 1990–1991 he served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR. His book *The MFA, the Kremlin: The Kuwait Crisis* contains personal testimony about the duality of Soviet foreign policy.

³ The tactic of using foreigners as “human shields” was indeed declared by Saddam Hussein’s regime. Many Western citizens were placed at Iraq’s strategic facilities as a deterrent prior to the start of the bombing campaign.

attempt to secure the withdrawal of troops from Kuwait — I believe that was simply impossible. From my point of view. And not only from mine — from the point of view of President Mikhail Gorbachev, who, despite the objections of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, instructed me to fly to Baghdad.

RT Arabic: Let us take the two positions — yours and Shevardnadze’s. You write that when Shevardnadze was visiting the United States, he said: “There is no need to listen to Primakov”.

Y. M. Primakov: He said that to the Americans later. But indeed, when I flew to the United States to inform George Bush of our position — of the need to propose a plan for defusing the situation through diplomatic and political means — that was when Shevardnadze said exactly that. American historian Michael Beschloss and political scientist Strobe Talbott write about it in their book⁴. It is noted there that, through his assistant, Shevardnadze contacted James Baker’s assistant, or perhaps even Baker himself, and said: “Do not pay attention to what Primakov is saying”.

RT Arabic: What does that mean?

Y.M. Primakov: It means that he was simply undermining the President’s mission. Because at that moment I was not acting on my own behalf — I was the official envoy of the President.

RT Arabic: But does this not indicate a duality in Soviet foreign policy?

Y.M. Primakov: There was no duality. If the position of the foreign minister did not coincide with that of the president, this does not mean that a dual policy was being pursued. Duality is when a policy of “pleasing both sides” is conducted. We had no such policy. We had a desire to compel Saddam Hussein to withdraw troops from Kuwait by peaceful means, by offering him an acceptable way out. What were we proposing? What was the essence of it? We understood that Saddam wanted to achieve something. He needed to “save face”. And in order to save face, he had to receive at least something. He told me directly during one of the trips: “After I finished the war with Iran, I got nothing. If I now simply leave Kuwait, the people will not forgive me for that”⁵.

⁴ *Michael Beschloss & Strobe Talbott. At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War (1993).* The book contains a detailed account of diplomatic contacts between the USSR and the United States during the Gulf crisis.

⁵ The reference is made to the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), during which Iraq suffered heavy losses and failed to achieve strategic gains. This reinforced Saddam’s desire to compensate for those failures through the annexation of Kuwait.

RT Arabic: Was that during the first meeting?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes. That is exactly what he said, ‘the people will not forgive me for that.’ (**RT Arabic:** And what did you reply to him then?) My mission was precisely that. We believed that it was possible to offer Saddam Hussein the following: to issue a statement on the immediate withdrawal of troops from occupied Kuwait and to begin implementing it. In return – unofficially, not for the press – on our side and on the side of the United States, guarantees could be given that negotiations on the Palestinian problem would begin.

RT Arabic: But you are aware of the power of the Israeli lobby and its influence on U.S. foreign policy. Was this realistic?

Y. M. Primakov: If you exclude everything in advance, then no forward movement is possible. Then there will be no attempts at Middle Eastern settlement either, (if) you yourself say in advance: everything is excluded!

RT Arabic: But this was later confirmed: in the end, this idea was abandoned?

Y. M. Primakov: And what exactly was confirmed? Only that there was a struggle, that there was movement. And in the course of such movement, one must not give up in advance, as you suggest. You are saying that since there is an Israeli lobby in the United States, then that’s it, the end, there is no point in even trying. But that is not how it works. Politics is not made when one loses heart.

RT Arabic: I say this because, for example, this is what Mohamed al-Mashat writes in his memoirs. He was Iraq’s ambassador to the United States during the Kuwait crisis. According to him, when he was going to America, he was instructed personally by Tariq Aziz⁶. He said: “Do not raise the Palestinian issue, do not criticize Israel”, and gave a list of American senators, mostly from the Israeli lobby, with whom relations needed to be built. Already then, Mashat decided that he did not want to continue working with Saddam. This means...

Y. M. Primakov: And what are you getting at? What do you want to prove with this quote? I do not understand what it has to do with this.

⁶ *Tariq Aziz* was Iraq’s foreign minister and deputy prime minister, and one of Saddam Hussein’s closest associates. Known as a pragmatic politician, he worked actively with Western diplomacy. His instructions to Ambassador Mashhad – to ignore the Palestinian issue and refrain from criticizing Israel – testify to Iraq’s dual-track policy aimed at preserving channels of communication with the West.



Ye.M. Primakov, the beginning of work at the Institute of World Economy and
International Relations of the USSR Academy of Sciences (IMEMO)
From the family archive of Ye.A. Primakov

RT Arabic: I want to say that Saddam Hussein’s supposed interest in resolving the Palestinian issue and the attempt to link it to the seizure of Kuwait was an illusion. It had no real foundation.

Y. M. Primakov: No, I do not think so. I disagree with you. Saddam really did want to link these issues — and this could have raised his authority in the Arab world. He could have become one of the main leaders if, upon withdrawing from Kuwait, he had managed to initiate progress on the Palestinian problem and move matters toward an Arab-Israeli settlement. That would have strengthened his position in the eyes of the Arab states.

RT Arabic: You proposed your version of a diplomatic settlement to the Americans. What was their reaction?

Y. M. Primakov: The reaction was very restrained. At first, they refused to discuss this proposal at all, citing — just as you have — Israel: that Israel would in no case accept such an approach⁷.

RT Arabic: So attempts to link withdrawal from Kuwait with the Palestinian issue did not work?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes, the linkage did not work — that is absolutely clear. But despite this, the position of the Soviet Union led to concrete results. Above all, it led to the release and return home of our five thousand citi-

⁷ Despite Soviet diplomatic efforts, the United States rejected any proposals that might have linked the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait to the Palestinian issue. This was explained by Washington’s alliance with Israel and its policy of “non-recognition of linkage” between different Middle Eastern problems.

zens and more than one hundred military specialists. They were evacuated. During my second trip, we also insisted that Saddam release other foreign nationals — citizens of Western countries — who were also in Iraq. Saddam said that he could do this on the condition that the Soviet Union and Western states issue a statement renouncing a military solution to the Kuwait crisis. I replied: “That is impossible”. In the end, we agreed on a different, indirect formulation — namely, that the settlement must be exclusively political. This was precisely what was voiced by Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand at a joint press conference in Paris⁸. And after that, Saddam did indeed release the Western citizens whom he had planned to use as hostages.

RT Arabic: And what did all these meetings ultimately lead to?

Y.M. Primakov: Politics cannot be painted in black and white, you understand? I cannot give a simple answer like: “There was a meeting — and here is the result”. What did these meetings yield? They showed that although Arab leaders were opposed to Saddam Hussein, they nevertheless understood that Iraq was an Arab country. And none of them, internally, wanted a strike against Iraq. Yes, they wanted a change of regime in Baghdad. But a direct blow — this is where the contradiction lay. This contradiction also manifested itself in the fact that, on the one hand, Arab military units took part in the coalition forces during the ground operation⁹. On the other hand, Hafez al-Assad, the President of Syria, seized upon our initiative and proposed convening a summit of Arab heads of state who would put forward to Saddam a proposal to begin negotiations under a pan-Arab guarantee.

RT Arabic: But you yourself write that you doubted the feasibility of such a summit.

Y.M. Primakov: I do not deny that later Hosni Mubarak told me: “At present this is hardly realistic”. But I am speaking about the position of the Arab states. It was aimed at finding a way out. They did not want everything to end in war. And they were looking for at least some kind of political solution.

⁸ A joint press conference by Mikhail Gorbachev and François Mitterrand took place in Paris in December 1990. A call for a political settlement of the crisis was voiced there, which gave Iraq a diplomatic pretext for releasing hostages.

⁹ Arab countries did indeed contribute forces to the anti-Iraq coalition in 1990–1991, including Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and others. Despite their participation, Arab leaders remained uneasy about the possible destruction of Iraq and the strengthening of Western influence in the region.

RT Arabic: Allow me to quote. This is how the USSR’s position is often assessed today in the Arab press. The U.S. Ambassador to the USSR, Jack Matlock, writes in his memoirs: “During the negotiations in Helsinki, alongside the Kuwait crisis, problems of the Soviet economy were also discussed. The willingness of the United States to support reforms in the USSR could have been withdrawn if Moscow had opposed Western policy in the Gulf” (back translation from Russian — *Editor*). Moreover, the Arab press reported that the Soviet Union received two tranches of USD 4 billion in credits in exchange for supporting the American line.

Y.M. Primakov: That is absolutely not true! You are citing materials that do not correspond to reality.

RT Arabic: But this is written by the U.S. Ambassador to the USSR, Jack Matlock, in his memoirs!

Y.M. Primakov: So what? The Helsinki talks took place on 9 September. That was before the start of coalition military operations against Iraq. The summit was proposed by President Bush himself, and Mikhail Gorbachev agreed. I was also present there. The discussion was not about someone offering us something in exchange for our support of the United States. The discussion was substantive — about how to stop Saddam Hussein. We also believed that it was necessary to force his withdrawal from Kuwait. But we disagreed with the Americans on how exactly this should be done. After the talks there was a lunch. I was seated at the table between Mrs. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, the President’s National Security Advisor. Scowcroft asked what I thought about Baghdad. A conversation ensued. He asked: “When was the last time you were in Baghdad?” He was interested in whether we maintained personal contacts with Saddam Hussein. I replied: “I haven’t been yet”. Now, regarding the billions you mentioned. You are confusing things. Those funds came much later — and they were from the International Monetary Fund. Yes, it was the IMF, not the United States directly¹⁰.

RT Arabic: Here, take a look. James Baker writes in his memoirs that Shevardnadze immediately proposed finding a more flexible wording when

¹⁰ Primakov appears to be referring to specific tranches of IMF assistance to Russia. However, the 1990–1991 Kuwait crisis did not coincide in time with the receipt of major IMF loans. Support in 2006 relates to the economy of post-Soviet Russia rather than the USSR. The notion of “credits in exchange for loyalty” lacks an evidentiary basis in this case.

the use of force was being discussed. He believed that after the Afghan experience, the Soviet public would not accept the USSR's direct consent to a military solution. Baker concludes that the Soviet Union could support the idea of using force, but only if the resolution were vague. That is, Shevardnadze seemed to be saying: use force, but avoid explicit wording?

Y. M. Primakov: First, it does not follow from that quotation that he said this explicitly. It may be Baker's interpretation. Yes, that is what he writes. But that does not mean that Shevardnadze said it word for word. Second, Shevardnadze's position really was that we could not vote for a resolution that explicitly spoke of the use of force against Iraq. I personally told Saddam that the use of force would be inevitable. We warned him. Not only I — Gorbachev conveyed the warning through me. He did not believe it. Saddam was guided by internal assumptions that had formed during the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988)¹¹. He remembered how the United States had effectively supported Iraq at that time, because Iraq was a counterweight to Iran after the Islamic Revolution. He was still proceeding from his experience of dealings with Donald Rumsfeld, when the Americans were seeking a strategic partner in him¹².

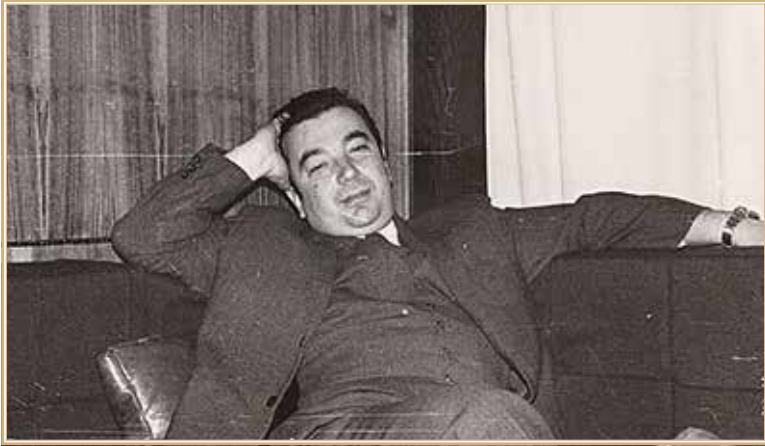
RT Arabic: When you went to Baghdad, what authority did you have?

Y. M. Primakov: I had the authority of the President of the Soviet Union. First, I went to Syria to see Assad. At that time, he was in a very difficult position: he was hardly accepted at all in the Arab world. He was very pleased that I came to him first. I explained that the visit began with him precisely because he remained the most consistent opponent of Saddam¹³.

¹¹ The Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) was a bloody conflict in which the United States de facto supported Iraq, fearing the spread of Iran's Islamic Revolution. This strengthened Saddam's belief that the West would not enter into open confrontation with him.

¹² *Donald Rumsfeld*, serving as a U.S. special envoy, met with Saddam Hussein in 1983; this was later perceived in Baghdad as political recognition. According to analysts, these contacts created an illusion of invulnerability for Saddam.

¹³ *Hafez al-Assad*, President of the Syrian Arab Republic (1971–2000), adhered to a hard anti-Iraq position during the Kuwait crisis. Syria joined the international coalition against Iraq. His support for the West reflected a deep split within the Arab world following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Primakov emphasized his mission as that of a representative of Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, bypassing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which indicates the existence of a parallel diplomatic line. His choice of Syria as his first stop underscored a deliberate attempt to mobilize the most uncompromising critics of Saddam Hussein within the Arab world. This suggests that the USSR sought to construct an eastern diplomatic front before meeting with the Iraqi leader himself.



Ye.M. Primakov. Office rest
From the family archive of Ye.A. Primakov

RT Arabic: What was Assad’s attitude toward Iraq’s actions?

Y. M. Primakov: Assad understood perfectly well that Saddam had committed not merely an act of aggression, but a blow to the entire concept of Arab unity. He undermined the solidarity of the Arab world. Then I went to Hosni Mubarak. He also received me with great trust¹⁴.

RT Arabic: What were your expectations from the visit to Baghdad?

Y.M. Primakov: We believed that Saddam was a man not devoid of rationality. We hoped that he understood where his aggression would lead. That he would at least try to bargain by saying “I will withdraw the troops if you put the Palestinian issue on the agenda”¹⁵.

RT Arabic: Did you consider such bargaining acceptable?

Y.M. Primakov: No. We did not consider it acceptable. But we saw in it an opportunity for diplomatic maneuver. And Gorbachev thought so as well, and I all the more so. He told me: “I am not instructing you to convey any conditions to Saddam. I am asking you to try to incline him toward a sensible decision”¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Hosni Mubarak*, President of Egypt (1981–2011), was a U.S. ally and one of the first Arab leaders to condemn Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait.

¹⁵ Saddam Hussein did indeed attempt to advance a condition: discussion of the Palestinian issue in exchange for the withdrawal of troops from Kuwait. This was viewed as an attempt to link two conflicts and legitimize the occupation.

¹⁶ Primakov emphasized that his mission was political and diplomatic in nature, without a mandate for formal negotiations or the transmission of binding conditions.

RT Arabic: Did you understand how fragile the Arab consensus was?

Y.M. Primakov: Of course. We saw that Saddam had jeopardized not only relations with the West, but also the Arab front. Egypt and Syria came out against him, and that already spoke volumes¹⁷.

RT Arabic: How did your first meeting with Saddam go?

Y. M. Primakov: He was polite, but reserved. He was a man who did not like debates. He listened to his interlocutor and then decided for himself. I set out the position: the Soviet Union considers the continuation of the occupation of Kuwait a mistake and insists on an immediate search for a way out in order to avoid war. He listened attentively, almost without interrupting.

RT Arabic: Was there a second meeting?

Y. M. Primakov: Yes, the next day he invited me again. He said that he had held a meeting with the leadership. But his position remained unchanged. He accepted none of the proposals. It was clear that he was not looking for a way out. He was convinced that the coalition would not dare to go to war¹⁸.

RT Arabic: How did you report the results of the meeting?

Y. M. Primakov: I immediately called Gorbachev. He said that he considered my assessment correct. But he asked me to be extremely careful in my wording: “God forbid you say something that Shevardnadze might perceive as a departure from the line of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs...”¹⁹

The next fragment of the interview reveals several levels of conflict: between the USSR and the United States, between different branches of Soviet power, and between the military logic of the West and Primakov’s diplomatic logic. Primakov’s perspective is emphatically realist: he does not idealize Saddam, but insists on preserving channels of communication. The contrast between Shevardnadze’s line and Primakov’s mission foreshadows the future split in Russian foreign policy after the collapse of the USSR — between the “Atlanticists” and the “statists”.

¹⁷ Egypt and Syria — key states in the Arab world — condemned Iraq, effectively splitting the League of Arab States.

¹⁸ Saddam’s strategy was based on an underestimation of the international coalition’s resolve. He hoped that the threat of force would remain a bluff.

¹⁹ *Eduard Shevardnadze*, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, opposed initiatives not sanctioned by the MFA. Primakov sought not so much to pressure Iraq into concessions as to create a diplomatic safety cushion for the USSR as a mediator. His contact with Gorbachev demonstrates the subtlety of the intra-Soviet hierarchy — between the initiative of a special envoy and the restraint of the official Foreign Ministry.

RT Arabic: How did you assess the U.S. position at that moment?

Y.M. Primakov: Even then it was clear that the Americans were betting on a force-based solution. Thatcher from the very beginning believed that Saddam simply had to be destroyed. Bush, however, was still wavering and seeking political legitimation through the UN. We understood this. Therefore, we tried to act within a framework that still left a chance for compromise²⁰.

RT Arabic: How did Washington react to your initiatives?

Y.M. Primakov: With caution. In Washington they did not believe that Saddam would make concessions. They believed that the USSR could only delay the process. I discussed this with Belonogov, our representative at the UN. He said: “They are convinced that Saddam cannot be persuaded. Only by force”.

RT Arabic: Did you retain confidence that diplomacy was still possible?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes. We believed that Saddam could at least be made to reflect, if one did not speak the language of threats. That was the essence of my mission — not an ultimatum, but an argument. Even if a desperate one. At that time, the Soviet Union still remained a factor. We were listened to. We were spoken to.

RT Arabic: And what was the U.S. reaction to your approach?

Y.M. Primakov: In Washington they understood this. They just did not believe in success. But they acknowledged that our intentions were sincere — especially since we acted transparently. I conducted negotiations on behalf of the President of the USSR. The Americans were informed — sometimes in advance.

RT Arabic: How was your mission perceived in Baghdad?

Y.M. Primakov: With respect. We were not perceived as enemies. On the contrary — as possible intermediaries. I was told: “You are the only ones who have not crossed over to the side of force”. This was said with respect, though also with a certain desperation. It was important for them that the USSR had not joined the coalition. That still gave them hope²¹.

²⁰ George H. W. Bush, President of the United States, insisted on a coalition legitimized through the UN. Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, argued for the immediate use of force without diplomatic delay.

²¹ The Iraqi leadership viewed the USSR as a historical ally. The Soviet refusal to participate in the military coalition allowed Baghdad to hope for a diplomatic solution.

RT Arabic: What were the limitations of your mission?

Y.M. Primakov: The limitations were internal. We knew that we could not promise Saddam anything concrete. There was no mandate for compromises — only for persuasion. It was diplomacy of “last hope”.

The following block of Yevgeny Primakov’s answers shows how the USSR attempted to restore at least a minimal common field of dialogue under conditions of a complete split in the Arab world. Primakov’s mission was received with respect, but not with hope. Practically all the leaders he met with did not believe in concessions on Saddam’s part.

RT Arabic: How did you assess the position of the Arab countries as a whole?

Y.M. Primakov: The situation was extremely confused. The League of Arab States was effectively paralyzed. Some countries supported Iraq — Libya, Yemen, Sudan. Others, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt, moved closer to the United States. There was also neutrality. This made a unified Arab position impossible²².

RT Arabic: What efforts did you undertake in other Arab capitals?

Y.M. Primakov: After Baghdad, I went to Jordan and then to Saudi Arabia. In Riyadh I had an important conversation with King Fahd. He listened to me. I set out our position: the USSR stands for a diplomatic solution. He said he understood, but doubted Saddam’s sincerity²³.

RT Arabic: And how was your mission received in Cairo?

Y.M. Primakov: In Cairo I was received by Mubarak. A very business-like approach. He said: “If Saddam withdraws the troops, then the UN and we are ready to stop. But no bargaining. Everything else later”. He feared that prolonging the dialogue would give Iraq a chance to entrench itself²⁴.

RT Arabic: What were you told in Jordan?

Y.M. Primakov: King Hussein showed great caution. Jordan was economically dependent on Iraq. But he did not want conflict. He was look-

²² In 1990 the League of Arab States was deeply divided: countries of the Maghreb and the Middle East assessed Iraq’s actions differently.

²³ King *Fahd ibn Abdulaziz Al Saud*, ruler of Saudi Arabia (1982–2005), allowed U.S. troops to be deployed on Saudi territory.

²⁴ Hosni Mubarak adhered to a position of “hard diplomacy”: no concessions in exchange for the de-occupation of Kuwait.

ing for a formula in which Iraq's retreat would look like a political victory rather than a capitulation. We were in solidarity with him on this point²⁵.

RT Arabic: What significance did your visit to Syria have?

Y.M. Primakov: Assad, as I have said, was the first I met. It was an attempt to secure support for possible pressure on Saddam. But Assad was a realist. He said: "Saddam can no longer be stopped. But if anyone can — it is you, the Russians". That was an acknowledgment²⁶.

RT Arabic: Did you relay messages to Gorbachev during the trip?

Y.M. Primakov: Constantly. We had a secure government communications channel. I informed him of every contact. Gorbachev emphasized: "Act, but within the framework of Security Council resolutions. And do not let the West think that we are on Saddam's side"²⁷.

RT Arabic: Did you feel that you were positioned between two logics — Western and Arab?

Y. M. Primakov: Yes. The West proceeded from sanctions and force, while the Arabs proceeded from the need to save face. For us, this meant the necessity of preserving the last diplomatic zone in which the USSR could be heard. We tried to be neither with the West nor with Iraq. It was a neutral, but active position.

RT Arabic: What role did contacts with the West play in your mission?

Y. M. Primakov: A very important one. We wanted neither side to perceive us as a player from the opposing camp. I did not meet personally with Americans, but through our representatives at the UN and the embassy we conveyed everything. This was Gorbachev's position: "Maximum transparency"²⁸.

RT Arabic: Were there attempts at coordination with France or other countries?

Y. M. Primakov: France showed interest. Mitterrand initially hoped that the issue could be resolved without war. But when it became clear that

²⁵ King *Hussein bin Talal*, ruler of Jordan (1952–1999), was one of the few Arab leaders who attempted to balance between the West and Iraq.

²⁶ Recognition on Assad's part underscored the residual authority of the USSR as a foreign policy actor.

²⁷ UN Security Council resolutions provided for sanctions and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.

²⁸ Gorbachev's foreign policy was built on the principle of "new political thinking", which implied maximum openness, rejection of confrontation, and an active role within the international security system.

Saddam would not retreat, Paris sided with the coalition. Nevertheless, they also viewed us as a possible channel of communication²⁹.

RT Arabic: What did you think about Saddam's prospects of retaining the power?

Y. M. Primakov: I believed that he had gone too far. His bet was that the United States would not dare to fight. He was convinced that an explosion would begin in the Arab world, that people would not accept a war against a Muslim country. But he miscalculated. He underestimated how seriously the West viewed the issue of oil and international stability³⁰.

RT Arabic: How did you perceive the UN ultimatum?

Y. M. Primakov: It was the point of no return. Resolution No. 678 gave Iraq a deadline until January 15, 1991. After that, the use of force became lawful. We understood that if Saddam did not retreat, war would be inevitable. And yet we hoped for a miracle until the very last moment³¹.

RT Arabic: What kind of atmosphere prevailed in those Arab capitals?

Y. M. Primakov: Tension. No one wanted war, but almost everyone was preparing for it. There was a general feeling that diplomacy had been exhausted. Nevertheless, they were waiting — perhaps the USSR would manage to achieve something. That, too, was difficult: to feel responsibility without having any real levers of influence.

RT Arabic: Did you feel personal pressure?

Y. M. Primakov: Yes. It was the hardest mission of my life. Not because nothing was working, but because there was a chance — and it was slipping away. I understood that perhaps whether or not there would be war depended on our mission. That is a terrifying responsibility. And there were almost no opportunities to influence events³².

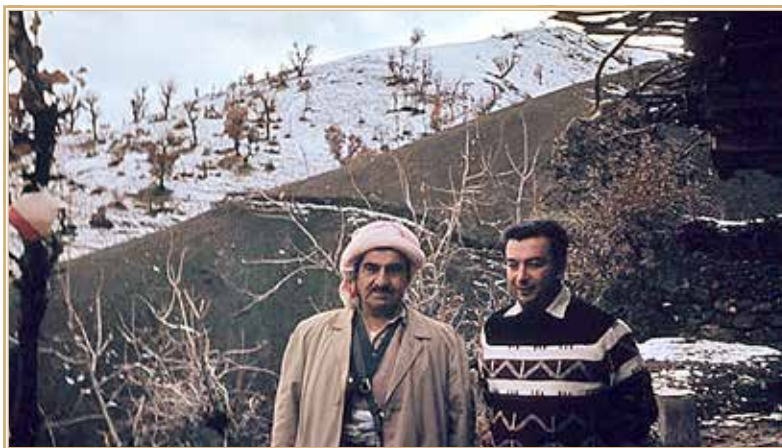
RT Arabic: Did you feel at the time that this was the last major foreign-policy operation of the USSR?

²⁹ *François Mitterrand*, President of France, initially supported initiatives for a peaceful settlement, but after diplomacy failed, he joined the coalition.

³⁰ Saddam Hussein hoped for a wave of Arab solidarity and antiwar sentiment; however, leading regional states acted pragmatically, guided by national interests.

³¹ UN Security Council Resolution No. 678 (adopted on November 29, 1990) authorized the use of force against Iraq if it did not withdraw its troops by January 15, 1991.

³² Primakov emphasized the personal and moral dimension of diplomacy, as opposed to the formal execution of instructions.



Ye.M. Primakov (right) on a trip to the Middle East
From the family archive of Ye.A. Primakov

Y. M. Primakov: Probably not. At the time it still seemed that we would manage to restructure, to find a new place in the world. Only later did it become clear that this was the Soviet Union’s last attempt to act as a global mediator³³.

RT Arabic: How did you assess Gorbachev’s position regarding your mission?

Y.M. Primakov: He supported me. He wanted the USSR to remain in history as a force for peace. He said: “We cannot be a side that supports war. But we also cannot justify Saddam”. It was a difficult position, but it was precisely this stance that allowed us to preserve trust on all sides³⁴.

RT Arabic: How do you assess the outcome of that mission today?

Y.M. Primakov: It did not produce results. The war began. But I do not consider it useless. We gave diplomacy a chance. If it was not realized, that is no longer our fault. History has shown that diplomacy must be persistent, even when it seems too late. Sometimes it is precisely at the last moment that something can still be changed³⁵.

³³ This refers to the period immediately preceding the collapse of the USSR (December 1991). Primakov’s mission was one of the last foreign policy actions of the superpower.

³⁴ Gorbachev’s policy in 1990–1991 reflected his desire to position the USSR as a constructive force that supported international law but refrained from the use of military force.

³⁵ Although Primakov’s mission did not prevent the war, it strengthened the USSR’s reputation as a responsible actor and preserved ties with Arab states, including Iraq.

RT Arabic: What significance did that mission have for you personally?

Y.M. Primakov: It was a trial. And a lesson. That was when I finally understood that diplomacy is the art of working on the edge. You must remain calm when you are told, “It’s all over”. And you must continue speaking even when others have already fallen silent. This later became the foundation of my approach to foreign policy — both when I headed the Foreign Ministry and when I led the government³⁶.

RT Arabic: How would you characterize Saddam after meeting him personally?

Y.M. Primakov: A very complex person. Closed, rigid, vain. He believed that the entire world should recognize him as a great Arab leader. He listened to no one. He had his own vision, period. He was an authoritarian leader with charisma but without flexibility. And that led him — and the country — to a catastrophe³⁷.

RT Arabic: Final question. Could the war have been avoided?

Y.M. Primakov: I think it could have, if Saddam had made at least a single step toward compromise. But he did not. And that became a fatal mistake. We were very close, but he did not move an inch. That was when I realized: diplomacy becomes powerless not when you lack arguments, but when the other side lacks the will to listen³⁸.

It is indicative that Y.M. Primakov emphasizes the importance of diplomacy not as a guarantee of success, but as a moral necessity even under the most unfavorable conditions. “Even a step without results can save a country’s face”. In his subsequent answers, Y.M. Primakov demonstrates a principled yet diplomatic position: he does not directly accuse the United States of provoking the conflict, but believes that their inaction was a factor that allowed Saddam to take a fatal step. His words reflect an understanding of the balance between assigning blame

³⁶ Primakov later used the experience of the 1991 mission as a foundation for his diplomacy in the 1990s, particularly during the war in Yugoslavia and the reform of Russia’s foreign policy.

³⁷ Primakov’s description of Saddam echoes later characterizations in international reports: concentration of power, a cult of personality, and an underestimation of external threats.

³⁸ This formulation reflects the philosophy of “diplomatic realism”: even with channels and resources in place, success depends on the willingness of both sides to listen and make concessions.

and preserving international contacts. Particularly important here are the contrasts between Shevardnadze's line and Primakov's more realist position.

RT Arabic: On July 31, 1990, two days before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for the Middle East John Kelly spoke before the U.S. Congress. He stated live on CNN: "We have no treaty obligations to defend any state in the Persian Gulf. Historically, we have refrained from intervening in border disputes or disagreements within OPEC". You are also aware of Saddam Hussein's conversation with the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad, Ms. Glaspie. Two days before the invasion, the United States had concluded an agreement with Baghdad on the supply of new weapons and radar systems. Did all of this not amount to a *carte blanche* for Saddam Hussein to act as he did?

Y.M. Primakov: I would not even leave this in the form of a question. You have essentially confirmed everything yourself. I agree that the United States did not restrain Iraq as it could have. I do not think they directly pushed Saddam toward invading Kuwait, but they did not stop him either. Whether this was a mistake or a deliberate policy, I do not know. But what is obvious, as your quotation confirms, is that the United States did not obstruct Iraq³⁹.

RT Arabic: After your conflict with Shevardnadze, you mention several episodes of direct disagreement in your memoirs. Some time later he

³⁹ *John Kelly*, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, testified before the U.S. Congress on July 31, 1990. In response to a direct question from a senator about whether the United States would defend Kuwait in the event of an attack, he stated: "We have no treaty obligations to defend Kuwait. Historically, we have avoided intervening in disputes over the borders of Arab states" (back translation from Russian — *Editor*). This statement, made two days before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, is often interpreted in historiography as a diplomatic signal of ambiguity, perceived in Baghdad as evidence of U.S. passivity. In this context, Saddam Hussein's meeting with U.S. Ambassador to Iraq April Glaspie on July 25, 1990 is also significant; she allegedly told him: "We have no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like your border disagreement with Kuwait". Later declassified diplomatic cables (the "Glaspie Cable") and the absence of a sharp public U.S. reaction reinforced the view that Iraq may have mistakenly interpreted the situation as tacit consent to a military solution. This episode — together with Kelly's position — became known in scholarly and political literature as the "Glaspie Cable Controversy" and a key element in arguments about U.S. foreign policy ambiguity on the eve of the Persian Gulf War.

resigned. In a conversation with Alexander Belonogov, he noted that Gorbachev in a number of cases listened to other people more than to Shevardnadze himself. When I asked, “Do you mean Primakov?”, he confirmed it. Do you believe that Shevardnadze’s resignation was a reaction to personal offense?

Y.M. Primakov: Absolutely not. That episode has nothing to do with the resignation. The reasons were different, they were connected with the situation in Georgia, with the dispersal of demonstrations, and with the escalating internal conflict. This was already a different dimension – not the Arab world, but the domestic agenda.

RT Arabic: After Shevardnadze’s resignation, what did Gorbachev want from you? What were you supposed to convey to Saddam Hussein?

Y.M. Primakov: He instructed me to convince Saddam of the need to immediately announce withdrawal from Kuwait and to begin a real, immediate pullout of troops.

RT Arabic: It seems strange that Gorbachev would give you instructions on the Middle East...

Y.M. Primakov: Why is that strange? If I was heading there as his special envoy, then of course he had to pass on a message that I was obliged to deliver to my interlocutor.

RT Arabic: But did you not formulate the content of the message yourself?

Y.M. Primakov: What are we talking about? We have already discussed that the USSR’s position on Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait was clearly negative. This was not only a moral stance, but a political one. We did not want to exacerbate relations either with the United States or with a number of Arab countries – that too was among the objectives of my mission...

RT Arabic: In your book *Minefield of Politics*, in the chapter *A War That Might Not Have Happened*, you recount a conversation with Margaret Thatcher in which she says: “Even if they withdraw from Kuwait, that bastard must be taught a lesson” (back translation from Russian- *Editor*). And in the same chapter you quote her as saying: “In any case, the use of force is inevitable”. You even asked her: “Do you really believe there are no other options?”

Y.M. Primakov: Well, do you see a contradiction between those two statements?

RT Arabic: You described Margaret Thatcher’s behavior as extremely aggressive...

Y.M. Primakov: It was. She insisted that even if Iraq withdrew its troops, punishment should still follow. She did not believe that Saddam would retreat voluntarily. For her it was a matter of principle — to demonstrate that the international community would not tolerate such behavior.

RT Arabic: In this connection — when you arrived in Iraq in January 1991, how many days before the start of the war was that?

Y.M. Primakov: I arrived in Baghdad on January 14, one day before the deadline set by the UN resolution expired. At that moment everything was already on the brink. The question was literally a matter of hours: either Saddam retreats, or the war begins.

RT Arabic: How many meetings did you have with Saddam?

Y.M. Primakov: Two. One in the evening of January 14, the second on the morning of the 15th. The first lasted almost two hours. The second was shorter, about forty minutes. But even then it was clear: he was not going to budge.

RT Arabic: What did you say to him?

Y.M. Primakov: I conveyed the position of the Soviet Union. We demanded the immediate withdrawal of troops from Kuwait. I spoke to him directly: if you do not leave, war will begin. You will not withstand a confrontation with the coalition. You must withdraw.

RT Arabic: And how did he react?

Y.M. Primakov: He said: “We are not afraid of war. We are ready to resist. We will not leave without guarantees that the Palestinian issue will also be resolved”. This was the condition he tried to put forward — to link Kuwait with Palestine.

RT Arabic: Could you accept that condition?

Y.M. Primakov: No. Gorbachev and I had agreed in advance: no conditions. Only unconditional withdrawal. Any other position was a trap. First Kuwait, then one could talk about Palestine — but not the other way around.

RT Arabic: Did you deliver a direct ultimatum to Saddam?

Y.M. Primakov: It was not an ultimatum, but an argument. We had no mandate for threats. But I spoke with absolute clarity: if he did not retreat, the coalition would launch the operation. He had a last chance — and he did not use it.

At this point Y.M. Primakov demonstrates the delicate strategy of Soviet diplomacy, which sought to preserve a balance between its historical alliance with Iraq and the USSR's obligations within the framework of the United Nations. His conduct was deliberately restrained and respectful even though the situation was effectively hopeless. Of particular importance is the fact that Saddam did not display aggression or hysteria, on the contrary, he maintained confidence to the very end in the possibility of strategic resistance, which indicates a systemic underestimation of the coalition's strength. Primakov, knowing that there were virtually no chances, nevertheless conveyed the position — not as an ultimatum, but as a moral warning. Here diplomacy served not negotiations, but the articulation of a moral stance.

RT Arabic: It is known that Saddam was irritated that you first visited Syria rather than arriving directly in Baghdad. How did you explain this?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes, he mentioned it at the beginning of our conversation. I replied: “You understand that symbolism is important in the Arab world. A visit to Syria, where the position was the most critical, showed that we wanted to hear different sides”. He nodded, but I think he did not forget the slight.

RT Arabic: Did he believe that the USSR had betrayed him?

Y.M. Primakov: I do not think so. Rather, he was disappointed. He expected greater support from us, as before. But times had changed. We acted within the framework of international law, and Saddam understood that — even if he did not accept it.

RT Arabic: Who else was present at the meetings?

Y.M. Primakov: The first meeting was one-on-one, with only interpreters present. At the second, members of his entourage were there. I remember Tariq Aziz — he was writing everything down. There were also military officers. Apparently, they wanted to use the meeting as a signal: the USSR was still maintaining dialogue with them.

RT Arabic: After the second meeting, did you leave Iraq immediately?

Y.M. Primakov: Immediately. I flew to Amman, and from there to Moscow. Already on the plane it became known that the ultimatum had expired. A few hours later the operation began. There was nothing more to say.

RT Arabic: How did you convey the information to Gorbachev?



Ye.M. Primakov. Episode from a trip to the Middle East
From the family archive of Ye.A. Primakov

Y.M. Primakov: Via the direct government line. I reported: “Saddam refuses to withdraw the troops and insists on preliminary conditions”. Gorbachev said: “Understood. Thank you”. He realized that the mission was over. That was perfectly clear.

RT Arabic: How did the international press react to your mission?

Y.M. Primakov: Mostly with respect. We were not accused of playing a double game. They wrote: “Moscow tried to save peace”. Even in the United States the reaction was restrained. Everyone understood that we had no tools other than dialogue.

Y.M. Primakov’s further account is important for understanding how the USSR’s diplomatic mission was positioned on the international stage under conditions of extreme time pressure. He emphasizes that he acted not on personal initiative, but carried out an official state mission. Of particular interest is his testimony about how the West perceived this mission: despite the general preparation for war, a degree of hope for a diplomatic reversal remained. The interview clearly distinguishes between the behavior of France and that of the Anglo-Saxon powers as Mitterrand still preserved room for political maneuvering.

RT Arabic: How did you perceive the behavior of the West — the United States, Great Britain, France — at that moment? Did you have any dialogue with Western partners?

Y.M. Primakov: There were no direct dialogues in those days, there was too little time. But I knew for certain that they were closely following my negotiations — through the UN, through the press. I think they even hoped that Saddam might change his mind. Not everyone in the West was enthusiastic about the prospect of war, especially France. But Thatcher and Bush were firmly committed.

RT Arabic: You mentioned France. How do you assess President Mitterrand's position?

Y.M. Primakov: He tried to maintain distance. The French supported the coalition, but were cautious in their rhetoric. I think Mitterrand still hoped that diplomacy would work. His approach differed from Anglo-American pressure.

RT Arabic: Some claim that you acted not only along Gorbachev's line, but also in opposition to the Foreign Ministry. Is that true?

Y.M. Primakov: No, it is not true. I acted strictly within the mandate I received from the President. Shevardnadze had already resigned by that time, and the new minister, Bessmertnykh, was only just getting up to speed. Therefore, I coordinated all steps directly with Gorbachev. This was legitimate and necessary⁴⁰.

RT Arabic: You were previously a journalist and an orientalist. Did that influence the style of your negotiations?

Y.M. Primakov: Undoubtedly. My training and experience working in the Arab world gave me an advantage. I knew how to speak, how to formulate things. In Eastern diplomacy, not only words matter, but also pauses and intonation. I was not an official reading out a note. I was a person speaking directly and with respect.

RT Arabic: Can you now say that Saddam Hussein trusted you?

Y.M. Primakov: I think so. He knew that I was not lying. Even when we disagreed, he heard that I was speaking honestly. I did not threaten, did not blackmail, did not promise. That inspired trust, at least at the level of personal communication.

⁴⁰ In January 1991, the USSR's Minister of Foreign Affairs was Alexander Bessmertnykh, who replaced Eduard Shevardnadze after the latter resigned on December 20, 1990 in protest against Gorbachev's policies. Bessmertnykh assumed office on January 15 — the day the UN ultimatum to Iraq expired.

RT Arabic: In hindsight, do you believe your mission had any chance of success?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes. Until the very end I believed that Saddam might change his mind. There were reasonable voices in Iraq — Tariq Aziz, for example. But apparently it was already too late. The entire logic of the regime was resistance to the end — even if the end was predictable.

Y.M. Primakov then emphasizes the moral dimension of his mission, restoring to diplomacy the status of a moral force even in the absence of political leverage. His analysis of Saddam's reaction shows how political isolation of a leader affects his perception of reality.

RT Arabic: Could Saddam have been persuaded? What do you consider his fatal mistake?

Y.M. Primakov: The mistake was not only the seizure of Kuwait. The mistake was the underestimation of the world's reaction. He believed that the Arab street would rise up, and that Western countries would not dare a full-scale operation. But neither happened. He overestimated his own capabilities and underestimated the determination of others.

RT Arabic: You wrote that during the conversation Saddam scarcely looked you in the eyes. What did that mean?

Y.M. Primakov: That was his manner. He spoke while looking aside, as if reading a text. Perhaps that was how he concealed emotions. Perhaps it was an element of authoritarian rhetoric — distance. In Arab culture, visual contact in political conversations is interpreted in different ways. But it did not mean disrespect. Rather, rehearsed rigidity⁴¹.

RT Arabic: Did you try to discuss humanitarian consequences with him?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes. I said that if war began, not only soldiers would suffer. There would be bombings, destruction, thousands of victims. But he believed that the people would stand with him. He said: "Our people endured Iran; they will endure America as well". He had a romanticized view of resistance.

⁴¹ In Arab political culture, avoiding direct eye contact may be interpreted as an expression of power, distance, or emotional control — especially in high-context negotiations. In Primakov's account, this observation reinforces Saddam's psychological portrait.

RT Arabic: Did he really believe he could win?

Y.M. Primakov: I do not think he believed in victory in the classical sense. But he believed he could impose a prolonged conflict, exhaust the coalition, and provoke international pressure for a ceasefire. A strategy of delay — that was his scenario⁴².

RT Arabic: After returning to Moscow, did you feel that the mission had failed?

Y.M. Primakov: I knew it had ended without results. But failure is when you do not even try. We did everything we could. The deadlines were unrealistic, the window of opportunity narrow. But it was necessary to try.

RT Arabic: What did you reply to those who said: “You went there knowing it was useless”?

Y.M. Primakov: I said: “And would you not have gone?” In politics, the result alone is not always what matters. Sometimes the attempt matters. It creates a precedent, a moral reference point. It says: the USSR tried. That matters — for history and for conscience.

RT Arabic: If you had known in advance that Saddam would refuse, would you still have flown there?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes. Without hesitation. Because diplomacy is not a transaction. It is a duty. Even if no one listens — you must speak. Sometimes a single word at the right moment can prevent a catastrophe. Even if it uttered into the void...

RT Arabic: How did you convey the results of the trip to Western partners?

Y.M. Primakov: I gave a press conference in Moscow. Then, through our diplomatic channels, reports were sent to Washington, Paris, and London. We honestly reported: Saddam is not retreating, he accepts no conditions, time has run out. I had no illusions that this would surprise anyone. But for transparency it was important to convey everything officially⁴³.

⁴² Iraq’s position on a “war of attrition” echoed the experience of the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), in which Saddam relied on wearing down the opponent. However, the international coalition forces in 1991 were incomparably more mobilized and technologically superior to the Iraqi army.

⁴³ After returning from Baghdad, Primakov held a press conference on January 17, 1991, where he outlined the results of the talks. At the same time, the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs circulated a note to the members of the Security Council confirming the failure of the peace initiative.

RT Arabic: Could the USSR have done something more — for example, offered security guarantees to Iraq?

Y.M. Primakov: No. At that moment we had neither the resources nor the international position for that. Any unilateral guarantees — especially bypassing the UN — would have been perceived as appeasing the aggressor. That would have destroyed our credibility. We chose principledness, even if it was unarmed.

RT Arabic: What was Gorbachev's personal reaction?

Y.M. Primakov: He took it calmly. He understood that we had done everything we could. And it must be said that even the West then acknowledged: the USSR acted with dignity. We did not allow double standards. We were for peace, but not at any price.

RT Arabic: If you were conducting such negotiations today, would you say something different to Saddam?

Y.M. Primakov: No. I would say the same thing. Because I spoke the truth. I did not promise him salvation. I said: "You are heading for catastrophe. You have a chance to retreat — use it". He did not use it.

RT Arabic: What significance did this mission have for the Soviet Union?

Y.M. Primakov: It was the last major diplomatic initiative of the USSR. Within a year, the country would cease to exist. But at that moment, we were still able to speak on behalf of a great power. And we did speak — with dignity and with responsibility. It was an attempt to preserve our honor and our principles. Even if no one was listening, we upheld them.

RT Arabic: And finally, do you believe the mission was not in vain?

Y.M. Primakov: Yes. Because history sometimes judges not by the result, but by the effort. We did what we were obliged to do. That is diplomacy.

Conclusion

The interview with Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov is a unique historical document that sheds light on the complex and contradictory processes that unfolded within the Soviet foreign-policy decision-making system at the turn of the 1980s–1990s. The account of a direct participant in the events makes it possible to reconstruct the substance of the Soviet Union's diplomatic initiatives during the Kuwait crisis.

In conditions of diminishing strategic stability, the USSR sought to preserve its influence in the Middle East primarily through peace-making diplomacy. Primakov's initiative of direct engagement with Saddam Hussein demonstrates not only an attempt to prevent a large-scale war, but also the Soviet Union's desire to position itself as a responsible global actor capable of influencing international processes despite its internal crises.

An important aspect of the interview is its disclosure of internal contradictions between different centers of decision-making — the President of the USSR, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the special presidential envoy.

The interview with Y.M. Primakov is of particular interest to historians studying the Middle East, to scholars of international relations, and to political scientists examining the mechanisms by which foreign-policy doctrine was transformed during the transition from a bipolar world to a new international architecture.

Yevgeny Maksimovich Primakov speaks not only on his own behalf, but also on behalf of a departing era in which the USSR retained the status of a guarantor of peace. His persistent emphasis on the moral — rather than purely pragmatic — function of diplomacy becomes a crucial lesson for contemporary participants in international relations. He does not regard his failure as a defeat, because diplomacy is measured not only by outcomes, but also by the manner of participation in the historical process. This approach constitutes the unique legacy of the Primakov school.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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The Syrian Vector of the Middle Eastern Policy of the USSR and Russia

Abstract

The collapse of the al-Assad regime in December 2024 as a result of an uprising by the armed Islamist opposition led by Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)¹ posed a serious challenge to Russia's Middle Eastern policy. Despite the change of power in the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR), Moscow — contrary to certain expectations — not only did not withdraw from Syria, but intensified contacts with the new Syrian authorities in order to preserve its military-political presence in the Mediterranean. Russian policy in the SAR has been shaped by geopolitical considerations, national security interests, and the historical legacy of Russian-Syrian relations. The strategic importance of Syria in Russia's Middle Eastern policy is demonstrated, among other things, by the special attention paid by the President of Russia to relations with Damascus. Beginning in February 2025, Vladimir Putin initiated several telephone conversations with Ahmed al-Sharaa, which opened a new chapter in bilateral relations and helped remove a number of acute issues that had hindered their development. The visit of a Russian interagency

¹ HTS is recognized in Russia as a terrorist organization and is banned.



delegation to Damascus on January 29, 2025 marked an important turning point in Russia's policy toward the SAR. Moscow made it clear that, despite the regime change, it remained interested in the development of bilateral relations. The talks held in Moscow on July 31, 2025 by Syrian Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani demonstrated that relations with Russia are critically important for the new regime in terms of its legitimation, strengthening security, sovereignty, and the territorial integrity of the country. The article examines the determinants of political interaction between Russia and Syria in historical retrospect, with the aim of identifying the factors that ensure the stability of these relations amid regional uncertainty and changing political conditions in both Syria and Russia. Particular attention is devoted to poorly studied aspects of Russian-Syrian relations in the sphere of security and the safeguarding of Russian interests in Syria. The influence of global and regional transformations on the nature of Russian-Syrian relations is also identified. The article emphasizes that Russian-Syrian relations are based not only on similar positions on key global and regional issues and mutual economic interests, but also on strong community-based and spiritual ties that have developed over the past 150 years. The author concludes that one of the possible ways to strengthen Russia's political position in the Middle East lies in mobilizing the potential accumulated by Moscow and Damascus through decades of tested bilateral cooperation in political, military-technical, and economic spheres.

Keywords:

Russia; Syria; Middle East; International relations; Foreign policy

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ver recent decades, Syria has played an important role in Russia's policy in the Middle East. Russia and Syria were bound by long-standing relations of friendship and cooperation, which reached their peak in the 1970s–1980s. In 1944, the USSR was among the first states to recognize the independence of the Syrian Arab Republic (SAR) and establish diplomatic relations with it². The coming to power of representatives of the left wing of the ruling Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in 1966 secured Damascus an important place in Russia's Middle Eastern policy³. However, it was only after Hafez al-Assad came to power in November 1970 that Syria became Russia's principal ally in the Middle East.

Russia's Mediterranean outpost

In 1971, construction of a Russian naval base began in Tartus, providing Moscow with strategic positions in the Mediterranean. Under Article 6 of the 1980 Soviet-Syrian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, Moscow was entitled to use its armed forces to defend Syria in the event of external aggression⁴. Russian military and civilian specialists effectively helped Syria build modern military and civilian infrastructure. More than 100,000 Syrians received education in universities of the USSR/Russia. Until 1984, the "Association of Postgraduate Alumni", founded in 1980 by Rifaat al-Assad, brother of the Syrian president (who himself defended a PhD dissertation in the Soviet Union) operated successfully in Damascus⁵. The association united around 50,000 Syrians and other Arabs who had defended dissertations in the USSR and Eastern European countries, many of whom later occupied high positions in

² *Ginat R.* The Soviet Union and the Syrian Ba'ath Regime: From Hesitation to Rapprochement. *Middle Eastern Studies*, Cilt 36. 2000. No 2. P. 150–171.

³ *Laqueur W.* Russia Enters the Middle East. *Foreign Affairs*. 1969. No 2. Vol. 4. P. 296–308.

⁴ *Committeri C.* (2012). When Domestic Factors Prevail Upon Foreign Ambitions: Russia's Strategic Game in Syria. Roma: Istituto Affari Internazionali. P. 3–9.

⁵ See: *Rifat Ali al-Assad.* Socio-Economic Development of Syria in the Period 1946–1963. PhD dissertation. Moscow, 1974.

local government structures. Approximately 35,000 Syrians who had received training in Russia served as officers in the Syrian armed forces, many of whom were married to citizens of the USSR/Russia.

Military-technical cooperation between Syria and the USSR began in 1956. Damascus received 25 MiG-21 fighter jets, as well as other types of military equipment and armaments. After the dissolution of the United Arab Republic, Egypt retained a significant portion of the Syrian Air Force. Cairo held Syrian pilots for a long time, including Hafez al-Assad himself. As a result, Damascus had to rebuild its air force from scratch⁶.

Russian assistance played a decisive role in the development of Syria's modern air force. On the eve of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Russia supplied the SAR with around one hundred MiG-21 aircraft. Syrian pilots gained combat experience by jointly participating with their Soviet counterparts in the preparation of combat operations. Between 1968 and 1973, a significant number of MiG-21 and MiG-17 aircraft were sent to Poland for repair and modernization. The Syrian Air Force suffered an acute shortage of aircraft and pilots due to heavy losses in clashes with Israeli aviation. After the October War of 1973, the Syrian Air Force possessed 338 combat aircraft, including 200 MiG-21s, 80 MiG-17s, and 58 Su-7s. Syria became one of the major importers of Russian military equipment. From 1982 to 1986, the regime purchased from Russia approximately 40 MiG-23s and 20 MiG-25s, as well as around 100 Su-22 and Su-22M aircraft. The SAR was unable to repay its debt to Moscow amounting to USD 17 billion. As a result, Damascus received only 24 of the 48 MiG-29 aircraft and 20 of the 24 Su-24 aircraft ordered in 1986. Moscow owned a number of important facilities in various regions of Syria as Russian state property. A Russian diaspora numbering between 250,000 and 300,000 people existed in Syria, including natives of the North Caucasus, the majority of whom held Russian citizenship.

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia continued its relations with Syria. However, their character changed significantly, and not for the better. The former multilateral and multi-level ties receded into the background. Russian-Syrian relations effectively "shrunk", becoming

⁶ *Hicham Bou Nassif*. "Second-Class": The Grievances of Sunni Officers in the Syrian Armed Forces. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. Vol. 38. Issue 5. 2015.

largely limited to the supply of Russian weapons and spare parts. Iran and Turkey sought to replace Russia's former position in Syria.

Remaining an ally of the Soviet Union, Syria for decades was a state of socialist orientation that adopted the Soviet model of economic planning. The accumulation of financial resources occurred mainly due to the external factor of economic and military assistance from the USSR. Financial support also came from Arab oil-exporting countries within the framework of so-called "Arab solidarity", which brought Syria USD 4 billion in just five years between 1975 and 1980 and ensured economic growth. During this period, Syrians developed a strong dependence on foreign capital. As a result of falling oil prices (which led to a reduction in assistance under "Arab solidarity") and the collapse of the USSR, the country proved unprepared for an independent restructuring of its economic model. After 1991, Russia shifted to commercial terms in military-technical cooperation. As a result, a certain decline emerged in this area of Russian-Syrian relations, also caused by the lack of coordination between the two sides regarding the settlement of Syria's debt on state credits inherited from the former USSR.

The shortage of spare parts and fuel had a negative impact on the armed forces of the Syrian Arab Republic. Syrian aviation remained grounded at airfields. Average monthly flight-hour indicators declined sharply. Many officers were forced to take secondary employment as taxi drivers. Under conditions in which Russia shifted to new, market-based principles for providing military assistance to the SAR, and given the high prices of modern Russian weapons systems, the Syrian leadership began searching for alternative partners in the sphere of military-technical cooperation. The lifting by Western European states of the arms embargo on the SAR in 1994 did not lead to an expansion of defense ties with Damascus, owing to the continued tension in Syrian-Israeli relations. Military relations between Syria and Eastern European states also failed to develop significantly. In the absence of adequate state control over arms exports in these countries and amid the crisis affecting their military-industrial complexes, military-technical cooperation was carried out mainly through representatives of private companies, research-and-production associations, and manufacturing plants. After acquiring in one of these countries certain types of military equipment



Rifaat al-Assad
From open sources

that exhibited serious technical deficiencies, the Syrians treated new proposals from Eastern European partners with caution. Contacts in the military sphere with former Soviet republics — Armenia, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan — were predominantly of a one-off, transactional nature. Military cooperation with North Korea and China also encountered certain difficulties. Beijing’s refusal to supply Syria with offensive weapons, as well as the high cost of the military equipment and its relatively low quality, impeded the development of military cooperation with China.

At the same time, taking into account the continuing uncertainty surrounding peace with Israel and certain frictions in Damascus’s relations with other neighboring states, Syria’s military-political leadership consistently focused on improving the combat readiness of the national armed forces. The Syrian authorities viewed them as one of the most important factors in confronting Israel, a necessary element in resolving regional political issues, and the principal pillar of support for the ruling regime within the country. Despite the “new philosophy” in foreign policy, Russia needed reliable, time-tested partners in the Middle East. For their part, the Syrians always regarded Russia as their main partner in military-technical cooperation and as a key source of modern weapons systems.

After 1995, the Russian leadership undertook a number of active political and diplomatic steps aimed at restoring Russia's former positions in the Middle East. Above all, Russia sought to strengthen its status as a co-sponsor of the peace process. In December 1996, Moscow proposed organizing a meeting of heads of state involving Israel, the Palestinians, and Arab countries in order to revitalize the Madrid formula for Middle East settlement and resume multilateral negotiations. This was particularly important for Russia in terms of ensuring its participation and the consideration of Russian state interests in the process of shaping new geopolitical realities in the region. Russian diplomacy made efforts to create a favorable climate for Arab-Israeli negotiations. In 1996–1997, the Russian foreign minister conducted a series of talks with the leadership of a number of Arab states, Israel, and the Palestinian National Authority. In November 1997, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Viktor Posuvalyuk was appointed Special Representative of the Russian President to the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, with a status and functions comparable to those of the U.S. representative Dennis Ross. Russia attempted to persuade Syria and Iran to exert appropriate pressure on radical movements and groups in the Levant that sought to derail Palestinian-Israeli reconciliation. As a result, Damascus and Tehran in principle agreed on the necessity of countering and combating terrorism “in any situation and under all circumstances”.

Within the framework of these efforts, Russian diplomacy emphasized the potential benefits of traditionally close ties with Syria and the Palestinians. In 1997, Russia and Syria resumed negotiations on the terms of Syria's repayment of its debt to the Russian side (approximately USD 11 billion). Excessively rigid demands for repayment of the Syrian debt (especially in comparison with precedents involving India (a 40-year deferment) and Jordan with more than 80% of its debt written off) ultimately worked against Russia itself. Damascus effectively adapted to cool relations with Moscow and did not experience an urgent need for the rapid settlement of the debt issue. Russia, meanwhile, suffered not only lost profits but also direct economic losses. Overdue debt continued to grow (reaching approximately USD 7 billion by mid-1997), further complicating the prospects of reaching mutually acceptable repayment terms in the future. In June 1997, the Russian ambassador to

the SAR made it clear that Russia sought to resolve the issue through dialogue and that it should not become an obstacle to the development of bilateral cooperation in various fields. In 1997, Russia and Syria resumed negotiations on the terms of Syria's repayment of its debt to the Russian side⁷.

As a result, military-technical cooperation (MTC) between Russia and Syria intensified. For Russia, expanding MTC with Syria was of great importance, since Russia had significantly weakened its position in the Middle Eastern arms market. Beyond direct economic benefits (in the first half of the 1990s, Syrians submitted requests to the Russian side for arms purchases worth up to USD 5 billion), increased military cooperation with Syria contributed to the revival of bilateral economic ties on a fundamentally new basis. Given the special role of the officer corps in Syria, the development of bilateral MTC provided solid stabilizing foundations for long-term relations between the two countries. In the spring of 1992, negotiations were held in Damascus between a delegation of the state military exports corporation Rosvooruzhenie and the Syrian side regarding contracts concluded in 1992–1993. In the summer of 1992, a high-level Syrian delegation visited Russia with the aim of signing contracts for the manufacture and supply of certain types of modern weapons to the SAR. In August 1997, a number of Arab media outlets reported deliveries of Russian military equipment to the SAR worth USD 3 billion.

The Syrian side showed particular interest in acquiring modern weapons systems, including MiG-31, MiG-29, Su-27, and Su-22 aircraft; Ka-50 helicopters; T-90 tanks; S-300 air defense systems; and electronic warfare and communications equipment⁸. The Syrian Air Force was able to increase the number of training flight hours and concluded a contract with Russia for the modernization of 36 gun systems for Mi-25 helicopters, 24 of which were delivered to the SAR on the eve of the events of March 2011. In 2009, the Russian Aircraft Corporation "MiG" assisted the Syrian Air Force in upgrading aircraft protection systems.

⁷ Cordesman A.H. Israel and Syria: The New Strategic and Military Realities after the Death of Hafez Assad. CSIS. Wash. 2000. P. 12–14; If Its Syria: Syrian Military Forces and Capabilities. CSIS. Wash., 2003. P. 2–12.

⁸ Al-Wasat, 11.08.1997.

Russia modernized most of the Su-24 aircraft. On the eve of the events of 2011, the Syrian Air Force operated a fleet of 535 aircraft.

Despite the fact that more than 80% of the SAR's armed forces were equipped with Russian-made military hardware, it would be incorrect to limit Russian-Syrian relations solely to traditional areas of cooperation. Beginning in 1992, Russian-Syrian trade, economic, and technical cooperation faced difficulties due to unresolved issues related to the repayment of Soviet-era credits and the termination of state support for Russian exports to Syria. Nevertheless, Russia retained its importance for the SAR as a potentially significant economic partner. With the assistance of Russian organizations, Syria undertook the construction of the Tishrin hydropower complex on the Euphrates River, continued design, irrigation construction, and land development in the Maskanah area and around Aleppo, and received support in oil production and a number of other projects. Facilities built and operated with Russian participation played an important role in Syria's economy. By the mid-1990s, they accounted for one-third of the country's electricity generation, approximately 30% of oil production, and the irrigation of more than 50,000 hectares of arid land in the Western Maskanah massif and coastal areas.

At the end of 1997, Russian-Syrian cooperation in the field of nuclear energy began. The Syrian side expressed interest in holding relevant negotiations to determine possible areas of cooperation and to sign an appropriate memorandum. An official statement by the Russian government emphasized the need to develop relations in this sphere⁹.

During negotiations held by a Russian economic delegation in Damascus in September 2000, a number of agreements on trade and economic exchange were signed. One of the most important documents was an agreement on the avoidance of double taxation, which opened broad opportunities for the development of bilateral trade and economic ties involving both state-owned and private enterprises. Although the state sector in Syria was gradually losing its former positions, its role during the transition period of the Syrian economy remained highly significant as a social buffer and a source of support for the national bourgeoisie.

⁹ Modern Syria. From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in The Middle East. Brighton, 1999. P. 75, 93–95.



Soviet officers of the 231st anti-aircraft missile regiment together with Syrian colleagues — group photo
From open sources

Russia considered it justified to participate in the construction of new facilities and the implementation of projects in areas traditionally associated with Russian-Syrian cooperation, such as energy, the oil and gas industry, geological exploration, irrigation and water management construction, land development in coastal areas, and related fields. This was all the more relevant given that, over years of cooperation with the technical assistance of Soviet organizations, Syria had built a significant number of facilities crucial to its economy. These included core sectors of the Syrian economy, primarily energy, oil extraction, irrigation and transport construction, ferrous metallurgy, and other industries. Many of these facilities were effectively idle; construction of some had been suspended, while others required re-equipment and modernization.

Hafez al-Assad constantly sought new external resources capable of ensuring economic growth. New industries were actively developing in Syria, particularly in communications, telecommunications, and information technology. Given Russia's original "know-how" in these areas (which was not inferior to Western analogues and in some parameters even surpassed them), relevant Russian organizations actively promoted their projects on the Syrian market.

Another important area of joint effort was cooperation in the humanitarian sphere, which included training Syrian specialists at Russian universities, establishing joint research centers, and publishing informational and promotional materials on current issues of bilateral rela-

tions and the regional situation. Some of these projects proved highly effective. Although relatively inexpensive, they played an important role in providing support for both Russian and Syrian business, without which the establishment of productive commercial ties would have been impossible. These issues were addressed during the visit of a Syrian economic delegation to Moscow in late January 2001¹⁰.

In the summer of 1999, after a 12-year hiatus, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad paid an official visit to Russia. His talks with the Russian leadership, as well as earlier visits to Moscow by Farouk al-Sharaa and a high-ranking military delegation, demonstrated that the Syrian president highly valued the potential of Russian-Syrian relations. Al-Assad understood that strong ties with Russia could help his successor — his son — govern the country during the transitional period.

The accession to power of Bashar al-Assad in the Syrian Arab Republic in June 2000 marked a new stage in the development of Russian-Syrian relations. Bashar al-Assad did not forget the positive legacy created by his father in bilateral Russian-Syrian relations and contributed to their further strengthening and elevation to a qualitatively new level. Moreover, there were objective prerequisites for the development of bilateral ties. The deterioration of the military-political situation around Syria after the war in Iraq and the stagnation of the Middle East peace process compelled the Syrian leadership to recall that old friends are best.

Thus, during a telephone conversation between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in November 2002, a convergence of Russian and Syrian positions on the most acute Middle Eastern issues became evident. Like Russia, Syria voted in favor of UN Security Council Resolution No. 1441 on Iraq, supporting a peaceful solution to the Iraqi problem. Damascus advocated stability and predictability in the development of the military-political situation in the Middle East and adjacent regions bordering Russia and the CIS. In this regard, Syria supported the idea of convening an international peace conference on the Middle East, believing that a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region could be achieved only through multilateral ne-

¹⁰ Modern Syria. From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in The Middle East. Brighton, 1999. P. 75, 93–95.

gotiations with Russia's active participation as a co-sponsor of the Middle East peace process. In the first ten days of December 2003, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Saltanov paid a visit to Damascus, where he was received by Bashar al-Assad and delivered a personal message from President Vladimir Putin¹¹. As Russia's foreign minister stated during his visit to Damascus in the summer of 2004, involving Syria and Lebanon in the implementation of the "Road Map" project could ensure its successful advancement. The visit to Russia in January 2003 by Syrian Vice President Abdul Halim Khaddam undoubtedly constituted an important event in the sphere of Russian-Syrian relations.

In 2002, during negotiations between Russian and Syrian economic delegations in Moscow and Damascus, a number of important agreements were signed in the fields of trade, economic, and scientific-technical cooperation. The signing of these documents created favorable conditions for the foreign economic activity of Russian organizations in the Syrian market and opened new areas of cooperation in the financial-banking and investment-credit spheres, tourism, and other fields. In November 2003, the Russian company Tatneft won a tender for the exploration and development of one of the major oil fields in the SAR¹².

A serious obstacle to the normalization of all areas of Russian-Syrian relations was the unresolved issue of Syria's debt to Russia. Negotiations aimed at resolving this problem were held in Damascus in December 2003 between Russian Deputy Finance Minister Alexey Ulyukaev and Syrian Prime Minister Naji al-Otari and Finance Minister Mohammad al-Hussein¹³. Of no small importance to Russia was the fact that the Syrian port of Tartus was the only naval facility in the Mediterranean where the Russian Navy could be based on a non-currency basis. In February 2004, Russian television aired a report on the restoration of the Russian military base in Tartus, which was being prepared to receive a Russian naval squadron.

The meeting between Vladimir Putin and Bashar al-Assad in Moscow in January 2005 gave Russian-Syrian relations the long-sought im-

¹¹ Al-Ba'ath. 05.12.2003.

¹² Interfax. 27.11.2003.

¹³ Al-Ba'ath. 03.12.2003.

petus that they had been unable to gain since the collapse of the USSR. The Syrian president's visit to Moscow in the winter of 2006 and his meeting with his Russian counterpart further consolidated this trend in bilateral relations. The settlement of the Syrian debt issue (which had literally shackled bilateral relations and was used by opponents of their development) opened new horizons for cooperation and imparted a positive dynamic to it. By writing off 73% (approximately USD 10 billion) of Syria's Soviet-era debt, Russia demonstrated continuity in its policy toward its Arab partners in the Middle East and made it clear that it sought to develop cooperation with them on a broader basis, without limiting itself to the narrowly material considerations. Moreover, Russia and Syria managed to convert the resolution of this difficult issue into the acquisition of new political capital and mutual economic benefit. As a result, several dozen Russian companies and enterprises entered the Syrian market. Russia provided tangible assistance to Syria's socio-economic modernization. The 10th Congress of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, held in June 2005, recommended deepening all forms of cooperation and coordination with Russia. This recommendation also envisaged the use of Russian capabilities to strengthen Syria's defense potential and modernize its armed forces. The agreement on the development of military-technical cooperation between Damascus and Moscow, concluded in May 2005 on new mutually beneficial terms, not only ensured the supply of modern Russian weapons to the SAR, but was even more focused on training modern military personnel for the Syrian army. Regular contacts between representatives of the two defense ministries contributed to clarifying the parameters of this cooperation and assessing developments in the regional military-political situation.

Under conditions of escalating tension in the Middle East, bilateral cooperation acquired greater military significance than purely political importance. In this context, accusations that Russia was disrupting the existing balance of power in the region appeared largely contrived, since it was hardly possible to speak seriously of any balance after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the war in Lebanon in 2006. Russian-Syrian military-technical cooperation contributed to strengthening stability in the Middle East and safeguarding Russian interests there. Given the growing role of the military in the politics of Arab Eastern states, including Syria,

during the transitional period Russia's assistance in modernizing the Syrian army was intended to ensure the military's "consent" to the course of reforms and to reduce the inevitable costs for the armed forces associated with the introduction of market mechanisms. Interparliamentary and interparty contacts between the two countries noticeably intensified. Representatives of the parliamentary majority increasingly became members of Russian delegations. As a result, interparliamentary dialogue between Syria and Russia expanded and acquired a new quality. The activation of bilateral relations and their enrichment with concrete content raised the level of political ties between Russia and Syria, introducing greater trust and coordination in approaches to resolving acute regional problems. This situation was largely explained by Russia's aspiration and readiness to play a more active role in world affairs and, consequently, in political processes in the Middle East, which was becoming an increasingly important factor in global politics. Taking into account the traditionally friendly ties between Russia and Syria, the principled position of the Syrian leadership on key Middle Eastern issues, and the political climate in the region after the Iraq war, Russia's full-fledged return to the Arab East appeared most optimal precisely through the "Syrian gateway". Moreover, after Russia's traditional partner Iraq found itself in a "gray zone", Syria, owing to its geostrategic position at the center of the Middle East, became an important hub for the intersection of transportation, trade, and energy routes between the Persian Gulf countries, Turkey, and Europe. For its part, Damascus saw rapprochement with Russia as an opportunity to break out of isolation and as a certain guarantee of the survival of the ruling regime.

The "Russian Team" in the corridors of Syrian Power

During the rule of Hafez al-Assad and until the late 1990s, Moscow played a key role in shaping the main directions of Syria's foreign policy. To a large extent, this exceptional role of the USSR (and later the Russian Federation) in Syria was ensured by a number of special circumstances, one of which was the presence of the so-called "Russian Team" within the shadow structures of Syrian power. Its representatives were able to exert direct influence on the decision-making mechanism regarding key foreign policy issues.

The Russian Team took shape as an organized group in the early 1970s and operated successfully until the late 1990s. Its members included graduates of Soviet military academies, some of whom had been trained at KGB intelligence centers. Many of them held very high-ranking positions in the army, security services, and leadership of the ruling Ba'ath Party. Virtually no one in the West or in Middle Eastern countries knew about them. Several persons were known only because of the high government posts they occupied. Yet even within Syria itself, few were aware of the existence of the Russian Team as an organized force.

It is characteristic that, despite their broad opportunities due to the positions they held within the system of real power, members of the Team cooperated with Moscow mainly on an ideological and political basis, and exclusively on issues of foreign policy. Moscow sought not to interfere in Syria's "internal political kitchen" as long as this did not threaten the country's legitimate authorities and, consequently, undermine the special nature of Syrian-Russian relations. The work of the Team was conducted against a relatively favorable backdrop, determined by Hafez al-Assad's special attitude toward the formulation of foreign policy.

First, under Hafez al-Assad, foreign policy was strictly pragmatic and secular in nature, subordinated to the achievement of a principal goal: to assert the position and role of the SAR as the center of the Arab Mashriq while maintaining balanced relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Western countries. Second, Hafez al-Assad believed that foreign policy should not be the domain of the "security services" and regarded unauthorized interference by intelligence agencies in this sensitive sphere as an excess¹⁴. He sought to reduce the influence of the army and security services on the process of making key foreign policy decisions. Because of this attitude toward the role of intelligence services, members of the Russian Team operated largely autonomously, outside the framework of control by Syrian security structures.

The names of the true architects of Syrian foreign policy were little known even to a narrow circle of those close to the Syrian president. The

¹⁴ For more details on Syrian intelligence services, see: *Ziadeh R.* 2013. *Power and Policy in Syria. Intelligence Services, Foreign Relations and Democracy in the Modern Middle East.* Beirut (in Arabic). [As-Sulta wa-l-Istihbarat fi Syria]

solutions they proposed were only formally channeled through the Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For example, Brigadier General Ism Majhoul (Some names have been changed by the author for ethical reasons. — V.M.) was the author of many key decisions in shaping Syria's relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Lebanon between 1976 and 1999. Another member of this group, Brigadier General Naseit Ismu, oversaw one of the most important areas of Russian-Syrian cooperation and died under mysterious circumstances at his estate on the Mediterranean coast near Latakia. Yet another member of the Team was known in narrow circles by the pseudonym "al-Ankabut" ("The Spider"). One of his main tasks was to prevent "distortions" in Syria's foreign policy resulting from the voluntarist interference of the leadership of certain Syrian intelligence services. It was largely due to his actions that high-ranking Syrian intelligence officials Muhammad Khouli (Air Force Intelligence) and Bashir Najjar (General Intelligence Directorate) were forced to resign.

One of the important factors behind the effectiveness of the Russian Team was the fact that its members were not corrupt. They did not place personal enrichment at the center of their work, were not financially dependent on Iran or Saudi Arabia, and sought to maintain balance in Syria's relations with its Arab and regional partners. The Team acted in the interests of Syria's national security, which fully corresponded to Moscow's Middle Eastern policy, which regarded Damascus as its outpost in the region and sought not to impose its own political "agenda" on the Syrian leadership.

Moscow was extremely concerned by the coup attempt undertaken in 1984 by the president's brother, Rifaat al-Assad. During those tense days for Damascus, a member of the CPSU Politburo, Heydar Aliyev, arrived in the Syrian capital on an unofficial visit and held lengthy negotiations with Hafez al-Assad over the course of three days. Moscow was deeply uninterested in destabilizing the situation in Syria and did everything possible to prevent a crisis. Rifaat al-Assad was sent to Moscow accompanied by senior officers of the General Staff of the Syrian Armed Forces and Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa. Soon thereafter, Rifaat left the hospitable Russian capital.

According to the declassified British foreign policy archives released in 2017, London sought to persuade Rifaat to return to Damascus. Brit-

ish officials believed that if, through pressure by the United States, Egypt, and Israel on Hafez al-Assad, they succeeded in returning Rifaat to Syria, this could soften the regime's policies and somewhat weaken its ties with the USSR. Despite his skepticism toward Article 6 of the 1982 Treaty of Friendship with the USSR, Rifaat categorically refused to follow the British plan.

The year 1999 became critical for the Russian Team, as it proved to be filled with a number of unfavorable events for Syria that, as later became clear, had an extremely negative impact on the country's most important domestic and foreign policy development processes. During this period, Hafez al-Assad's illness sharply worsened, intensifying the struggle for power within his inner circle and, as a result, deepening the split among the ruling elites.

It was precisely at this time that the influential Syrian intelligence general Bahjat Suleiman decided to focus closely on members of the Russian Team. He had previously sought ways to approach them, hoping to use their influence to strengthen his own position within Hafez al-Assad's inner circle. However, he was unable to find common ground with them and was rebuffed. By the end of the 1990s, the situation within the power vertical of the Syrian Arab Republic had changed significantly as a result of a series of large-scale reshuffles in the army and intelligence services carried out by Hafez al-Assad as part of his course toward establishing Bashar al-Assad as the sole alternative successor. Members of the Team were forced to confront a number of new influential figures within the regime, and their positions gradually began to weaken.

Among the few who attempted to help individual members of the Team was Assef Shawkat. Perhaps he simply did not see the full picture and did not fully understand whom he was dealing with. Moreover, at that time he enjoyed relative independence, being the husband of Hafez al-Assad's daughter and the brother-in-law of the future president. Yet even his patronage failed to save some members of the Team, which soon effectively disintegrated and ceased its activities. Very soon, Assef Shawkat himself required assistance. Just one year after Bashar al-Assad's re-election for a second presidential term (2007), Damascus witnessed an escalation of the struggle for power within the president's immediate circle. In the summer of 2008, the head of Syria's Military Coun-

terintelligence Directorate, Assef Shawkat (an Alawite and the husband of the president's sister), attempted to establish control over all Syrian intelligence services. His security-service rivals tried to assign him responsibility for the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hari-ri (2005), the Israeli Air Force's bombing of strategic military facilities (2007), and the killing of Imad Mughniyeh, one of Hezbollah's leaders (2008). Assef Shawkat and other conspirators (around one hundred Alawite intelligence officers) were arrested. His wife Bushra al-Assad requested political asylum in the UAE. Following the intervention of the president's mother, Anisa Makhoul, Bushra was allowed to return home; her husband was released and appointed Deputy Chief of Staff of the Syrian Armed Forces, receiving promotion to the rank of general¹⁵.

Such a situation testified to the emergence of the first signs of a crisis of power, the potential strengthening of confessional strife, and the fragmentation of society, processes that would soon erupt into the mass protests that began in March 2011. Gradually, the space within Syria's shadow power structures was occupied by the group of Bahjat Suleiman, who by that time had managed to grow closer to Bashar al-Assad and his influential cousins. One of Suleiman's associates was Major General Hisham al-Bakhtiar, who became responsible for Syria's foreign policy and national security. In narrow circles, he was well known as "Iran's man in Syria", a fact hinted at even by his surname. It was precisely to him that the unprecedented rapprochement between Damascus and Tehran was attributed, an alignment that had an extremely negative impact on Syria's position in the Arab world, plunging the country into endless regional confrontation, and turning Syria into a "playing card" in the global power struggle in the Middle East.

Moscow saw what was happening to its former Russian Team. Perhaps adhering to its principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of friendly Syria, or for other reasons, Russia in practice did little to prevent this group's removal from the corridors of real power in the SAR. At the same time, much had changed within Syria itself. Formerly powerful "friends of the USSR/Russia", generals Ali Duba and Ali Haydar

¹⁵ From the author's private conversations with Syrian representatives, 2007–2008, Damascus–Moscow.

(Syrian special forces), had grown old, retired, and spent time with their grandchildren in estates in Latakia. Farouk al-Sharaa (Vice President since 2006) found himself unemployed soon after the start of the Syrian civil war and spent most of his time at home in Damascus. Vice President Abdel Halim Khaddam was declared a traitor to the nation and emigrated to Paris in 2005; he died of cancer in March 2020. Formerly all-powerful Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass left Syria in 2012 and died in Paris five years later. The powerful “wallet” (financial gatekeeper) of the al-Assad family, Mohammed Makhlouf, who in the 1980s had competed with Rifaat al-Assad in trade and financial ventures, moved to Russia and died there in 2020 from COVID-19.

Moscow might have decided to try to strengthen relations with a new team on a different basis — one more in keeping with the spirit of the times, in which free-market relations became a central slogan. Much could have been achieved, and things would have continued this way for some time, had it not been for the Arab Spring. From the beginning of the Arab Spring, various Russian intelligence services began scouring Syria in search of members of the former Russian Team. However, Moscow was in for an unpleasant surprise: thorough searches revealed that none of the Team’s members occupied even minimally significant positions within the Syrian leadership. Moscow understood that the Team had been weakening, but did not expect it to be purged with such thoroughness.

At the same time, Syria remained the only relic ally of the Soviet era in the Middle East through which Moscow could feel the political pulse of the Arab world¹⁶. In 2008, reconstruction of the Russian naval facility in Tartus began. Military supplies to Syria accounted for 10 percent of Russia’s total arms exports. During Dmitry Medvedev’s visit to Damascus in May 2010, more than ten new agreements and cooperation protocols were signed in various fields, including telecommunications, banking, military-technical cooperation, and the oil and gas sector. Syria still owed about \$4 billion from the total amount of previously forgiven Soviet debts.

¹⁶ *Akhmedov V. Al-Istiqrar fi al-Sharq al-Awsat: Khiyar Suria wa-Rusia (Stability in the Middle East: The Choice of Russia and Syria)*. VolterNet. May 30.2007. <https://www.voltairenet.org/article148606.html> (accessed 26.05.2024). In Arabic.



Mustafa Tlass
From open sources

Bashar al-Assad proposed that Russia support the emerging new “geopolitical reality” along the Beirut–Damascus–Ankara–Baghdad–Tehran axis, in alliance with Baku, Yerevan, Kyiv, and Minsk. In the summer of 2011, Assad, using Syrian leverage in Lebanon, facilitated the participation of Russian companies in the exploration and development of gas fields in Lebanese territorial waters. All of this seriously alarmed the United States and other Western countries, whose authorities had declared the Syrian regime illegitimate from the very beginning of the Syrian events.

Russia and the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic

The events that began in March 2011 did not catch Moscow by surprise. Before the conflict and during its first year, senior Russian officials (Sergey Lavrov, Alexander Saltanov, Mikhail Fradkov) repeatedly warned Bashar al-Assad of the danger threatening Damascus. However, at that time the Syrian president did not treat Moscow’s warnings with attention. In July 2011, Russia’s official representative

Alexander Dzasokhov visited Damascus and met with Syrian leaders. In an interview following the trip, Dzasokhov noted in particular that Moscow very much wanted the Syrian regime to provide it with more positive grounds for support¹⁷. Relying on information from the Syrian opposition and defectors, the United States closely monitored the February 2012 visit to Damascus by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Director of Foreign Intelligence Service Mikhail Fradkov. According to the opposition sources cited by some Arab media outlets, during this visit a scenario for a non-violent transfer of power in Syria was discussed (in a hypothetical sense — *author*). However, it could not be implemented in practice. Moscow was not prepared to abandon its support for Bashar al-Assad's legitimate government or its involvement in resolving the Syrian crisis. Otherwise, Russian interests in Syria and the region could have suffered serious damage¹⁸. In an interview with Kommersant FM, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov outlined Russia's position on Syria in detail. He made it clear that Russia was not attempting to justify the Syrian leadership, which had reacted incorrectly to the initial manifestations of "peaceful" protests. Lavrov noted that despite numerous promises to Russia, Syrian leaders had made many mistakes and had delayed steps that were moving in the right direction. At the same time, he emphasized that the Syrian conflict had largely been provoked from outside¹⁹. Russia's policy during the Syrian conflict was dictated by broader geopolitical considerations. The Arab Spring undermined Arab regimes friendly to Russia. The alternative rulers (Islamists and Western-oriented democracies) were unacceptable to Moscow. Therefore, in Syria, Russia

¹⁷ RIA Novosti. The Syrian Crisis: Paths to Settlement from the Perspective of Moscow and Beijing. <https://ria.ru/20120213/564785904.html>, 13 February 2012.

¹⁸ An-Nashra (2012). Rusia Tu'ti Suria al-Daw' al-Akhdar wa-l-Hallu Yumkin an Yatahaqqaq fi Usbu'ayn (Russia Gives Syria the Green Light and a Solution May Be Reached Within Two Weeks). 16 February 2012. <https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/439926/> (accessed 05.01.2023). In Arabic.

¹⁹ Interview with Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov on Kommersant FM radio, Moscow, 20 March 2012. https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1700371/ (accessed 20.05.2024).

sought to erect a barrier against Arab revolutions and their potential spread into Central Asia and the South Caucasus²⁰.

Until the launch of the Russian Aerospace Forces' operation in Syria in September 2015, Moscow had largely limited itself to political support for the Syrian leadership at the UN and other international platforms. Russia consistently fulfilled its contractual obligations to the Syrian regime but, unlike Tehran, did not deploy its troops in Syria. Russia blocked UN Security Council resolutions and subjected to scrutiny any plans on Syria (Geneva I and II) that envisaged the use of force against the Syrian regime. Moscow consistently adhered to a course aimed at the peaceful political resolution of the Syrian conflict and a democratic transition of power in the SAR.

Moscow and the Syrian political opposition

From the very beginning of the Syrian events, Russia attempted to establish a dialogue with the Syrian opposition and to gain certain positions there. However, in most cases such attempts ended unsuccessfully. Unlike the United States and Great Britain, Russia, with rare exceptions, tried not to engage in active work with opposition forces in the countries governed by regimes friendly to it. As a result, Moscow's relations with the internal Syrian opposition lacked a political background. Representatives of the "homegrown" Syrian opposition in Russia differed little from the political activists who had grouped themselves around the Syrian embassy in Moscow and were not taken seriously by the relevant Russian institutions as potential "assistants" within Syria's power structures. At a certain stage, relations between Moscow and the Syrian opposition reached an impasse when it came to the issue of regime change and the resignation of Bashar al-Assad. Moreover, Moscow was highly skeptical about the presence within some opposition groups (primarily

²⁰ For more on the Arab Spring, see: *Grinin L., Korotayev A. (2022). Arab Spring: Causes, conditions, and driving forces. In J.A. Goldstone, L. Grinin, & A. Korotayev (Eds.), New waves of revolutions in the 21st century – Understanding the causes and effects of disruptive political changes (p. 595–624). Springer. <http://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86468-2-23>.*

the Syrian National Council) of a significant number of Muslim Brotherhood members, whose organization was legally designated in Russia as terrorist. Russia feared that representatives of “Islamists” might come to power in post-Assad Syria. Such sentiments were reinforced by developments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. At the same time, in practical terms and from the standpoint of Moscow’s strategic interests in Syria and the Middle East as a whole, Russian representatives were far from seeing only a “green” hue in the Arab protest movement.

In late June 2011, representatives of the Syrian opposition arrived in Moscow. The Russian side urged them to begin a dialogue with the regime in order to move the conflict into the political realm. The opposition made it clear that it was ready to cooperate with certain representatives of the regime and its political institutions not implicated in crimes. At the same time, its representatives insisted on the necessity of Bashar al-Assad’s prior resignation and the removal of his regime. However, the Russian side could not agree with the opposition’s demand for the resignation of a regime to which it had been providing not only political but also military support (since August 2011)²¹. It is noteworthy that during negotiations between Russian representatives and the SNC, its head Burhan Ghalioun promised Russia, in the event of the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad’s regime, to preserve all contracts and to build another naval base in Latakia. Despite this, Russia stood by Bashar al-Assad.

This step was understandable and logical in the prevailing circumstances. The SNC was still in the process of formation, and Russia had no reliable and tested operational positions there. Moscow was alarmed by the opposition’s desire to disband the leading Syrian intelligence services, such as the Military Counterintelligence Directorate and the General Intelligence Directorate, with which their Russian counterparts had working relations²². Moreover, the Syrian opposition had not been recognized by leading members of the international community,

²¹ Information obtained by the author during meetings with members of the delegation.

²² *Sakr K. Al-Tansiq Bayna al-Jihat al-Suriyya wa-Shuraka’iha al-Rus* (Coordination Between Syrian Services and Their Russian Partners). Al-Quds al-Arabi, 2 December 2011. <https://www.alquds.co.uk/> (accessed 21.09.2023). In Arabic.



Burhan Ghalioun
From open sources

above all by Arab countries of the Middle East. Therefore, any change in Russia's status quo in Syria would automatically lead, if not to the loss, then to the erosion of its positions in the Levant. By allowing a change in the paradigm of power in the Syrian Arab Republic, Russia would never again be able to have what it had possessed before. In the second half of April 2012, representatives of the opposition from the National Coordination Committee (NCC) arrived in Moscow. During negotiations in Moscow, the Committee supported Kofi Annan's peace plan and expressed a desire to establish constructive relations with Russia. At the same time, a number of the Committee's leaders advocated a change of Syria's legitimate authorities and a radical reform of the Syrian security agencies. Unlike the SNC, the Committee opposed any external interference in Syrian affairs and the militarization of the Syrian crisis, and objected to the monopolization by any single structure of the right to represent the interests of the Syrian revolution²³.

Among various representatives of the Syrian opposition there existed a fairly broad spectrum of assessments of Russia's role in the Syrian

²³ Akhmedov V. Does the Syrian opposition present a real challenge? Burning Point. 25.04.2012. http://english.ruvr.ru/radio_broadcast/25298789/52513008.html.

events. One of the patriarchs of the “Damascus Spring” of 2000–2001, Michel Kilo, believed that a political solution in the SAR was in Moscow’s hands. He thought it necessary to secure Russia’s support in resolving the crisis through dialogue and thereby preserve Syrian statehood. Unlike the United States, Russia could not allow the destruction of the Syrian state and was sincerely interested in a peaceful resolution of the Syrian crisis. At the same time, he emphasized that Moscow had made serious miscalculations in assessing the Syrian events. He assured the Russian leadership that the Syrian opposition did not seek to remove Moscow from Syria, but rather saw Russia as a certain counterbalance to Western influence in the interests of preserving the country’s national independence after a change of regime.

One of the members of the Syrian opposition delegation that visited Moscow in April 2012, Haytham Manna, who was part of the SNC leadership, mistakenly believed that Russia fully supported Kofi Annan’s peace plan and did not set any preliminary conditions for the period of the SAR’s transition to democracy²⁴. In Manna’s view, the sixth point of Annan’s plan referred to dialogue with the state. The theme of the regime and the state in Syria as applied to Moscow’s position was also developed by Aref Dalila. He believed, in particular, that traditional Soviet “thinking” still dominated in the Russian Federation and that Moscow did not see much difference between the regime and the state. Dalila noted that during negotiations between the Committee’s delegation and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and his deputy Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian side repeatedly assured the Syrians that Moscow did not support any single person or regime and stood for reforms in Syria. For its part, Moscow believed that the Syrian opposition had still not presented an alternative political platform or a reform program for the SAR. According to Dalila, the Syrian opposition’s arguments that regime reforms amounted to little more than nothing under the conditions of total unfreedom in the country failed to find understanding in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

²⁴ Al-Rai (2011). Michel Kilo to Al-Rai: Daraa Has Broken the Wall of Silence. 27 March 2011. <https://www.alraimedia.com/Alrai/Article/264903/> (accessed 15.12.2011). In Arabic.

Overall, the above assessments of Moscow's role in the Syrian crisis were positive in nature. However, they reflected the viewpoint of the left-liberal wing of the Syrian opposition and representatives of one part of the country's creative and scientific-technical intelligentsia. From the very beginning of the "Damascus Spring" in 2001, they believed in the possibility of reforming the political system of the SAR from above through evolution rather than revolution. When in February 2001 Bashar al-Assad, under pressure from his security entourage, curtailed the reform program, their positions weakened noticeably. Moreover, their opinion never played a decisive role within the Syrian opposition movement, and under conditions of civil war it had little chance of becoming dominant. Armed opposition units held a different view of Moscow's policy in the SAR. Many of them believed that Russia was incapable of truly "intervening" in Syrian affairs and carrying its line through to a victorious conclusion. Moscow, they argued, had enough strength only to preserve its positions in the near abroad, while regimes like that of al-Assad were needed by Russia in order to project its influence onto "distant frontiers"²⁵.

The Syrian opposition became markedly more active after the explosion in July 2012 at the SAR National Security headquarters, as a result of which several high-ranking leaders of the Syrian security services were killed²⁶. On the eve of the Syrian Opposition Conference scheduled for early July 2012 in Cairo, 26 SNC members illegally entered Syrian territory to coordinate the actions of internal and external opposition units. During a visit to Moscow in July 2012, Syrian opposition representative Michel Kilo lobbied for the candidacy of General Manaf Tlass (who had fled to the West and was the son of former Syrian Defense Minister Mustafa Tlass) as head of Syria's transitional government in the event of Bashar al-Assad's departure. Manaf Tlass advocated preserving the "healthy" part of the regime built by Hafez al-Assad as a guarantee of saving Syrian statehood from complete destruction and, on that basis, uniting all opposition forces. Many of the figures involved

²⁵ From the author's conversations with representatives of the Syrian opposition, Damascus–Moscow, 2001–2015.

²⁶ *Hicham Bou Nassif*. "Second-Class": The Grievances of Sunni Officers in the Syrian Armed Forces. *Journal of Strategic Studies*. 2015. Vol. 38. Issue 5. P. 626–649.

in this plan were well known to Moscow. Nevertheless, Russia opposed al-Assad's resignation.

In an interview with the Saudi newspaper *Al-Watan*, the Russian President's Special Representative for the Middle East, Mikhail Bogdanov, stated that Moscow sought to adhere to "neutrality" and not to give preference to either side of the conflict. Russia was doing much to achieve a rapid ceasefire in Syria and maintained contacts with the Syrian opposition in search of a way out of the current situation²⁷. In early September, Bogdanov was in Paris, where, according to Syrian opposition sources, he met with SNC President Abdulbaset Sieda, Manaf Tlass, and a delegation of the Coordination Committees. The meetings of the Russian representative in Paris coincided with a visit to Moscow by delegates of one of the Syrian opposition groups loyal to Moscow and the Syrian regime, the "Path for Peaceful Change in Syria", headed by Fateh Jassem, who at one time had led the combat wing of the Syrian Communist Party (the Fighting Vanguard - *author*). Representatives of the Syrian Muslim and Christian clergy also arrived in Moscow. Following consultations with the Syrian opposition, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs demanded that the head of the NCSROF, Moaz al-Khatib, present concrete proposals for establishing a dialogue with al-Assad.

The meeting between the Syrian opposition and representatives of the regime held in Moscow in late January 2014, despite a number of certain shortcomings, could be regarded as a certain success of Russian diplomacy. First, for several years Russia had been striving to organize such a forum in its capital. Second, the holding of this event was supported not only by Washington but also by Riyadh. This sent a clear signal that the key international and regional actors in the Syrian crisis viewed Moscow as one of the principal participants in the future process of Syrian settlement and were prepared to take its opinion on the Syrian issue into account. Third, despite a number of known difficulties, the organizers and moderators of the Moscow forum managed to carry it out almost in full. At the final stage, the participants were able to agree on a document entitled the "10 Moscow Principles", the most important of which was the recognition of a political settlement as the

²⁷ Al-Watan (Saudi Arabia). 14.08.2012.

only viable way to resolve the Syrian crisis. The need for a joint struggle against the terrorist threat posed by jihadist organizations operating in the Syrian Arab Republic, such as ISIS, was emphasized.

Russia continued to conduct negotiations with the opposition while supporting the Syrian regime. However, this situation could not last indefinitely. In the context of civil war and the threat of foreign intervention, one or both of the opposing sides could at some point cease to trust Russia, and Russian interests in Syria would then be put at risk²⁸.

Russia's forceful entry into the Middle East

From the beginning of 2015, developments in Syria and the region as a whole formed a new military-political reality that compelled Moscow to revise its strategy in the Syrian conflict. After the failure of the Syrian peace conferences “Geneva I” (June 2012) and “Geneva II” (January 2014), it became clear that diplomatic efforts to resolve the Syrian crisis peacefully had collapsed. The Ukrainian crisis marked a rupture in Russian–American relations and buried prospects for cooperation between Moscow and Washington in combating the terrorist threat in the Middle East. The Syrian army and Iranian armed forces (represented by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of Iran and the Artesh (regular Iranian army units), supported by Hezbollah and Shiite militias) were unable to contain the massive offensive of the armed Syrian opposition. By the autumn of 2015, the Syrian regime controlled no more than 15 percent of the country’s territory. Russia’s main ally in the Middle East was on the verge of collapse.

A group of factors rooted in geopolitical considerations and national security interests influenced Moscow’s decision to deploy its armed forces to Syria. The introduction of Russian troops into the SAR took place against the backdrop of an intensifying confrontation with the United States and NATO. In this sense, the issue was not so much competition between Moscow and Washington for Syria as the assertion of new principles of the global world order. The Western position on

²⁸ ISIS (Islamic State) is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

Crimea (consolidated by Washington and NATO's expansion toward Russia's borders) forced Moscow to strengthen its military presence in the Mediterranean in order to deter potential Western aggression from the southern flanks and prevent the penetration of extremist and terrorist forces into Russia. Military support for the regime in its struggle against international terrorism and the armed opposition, in the interests of preserving Syrian statehood, became the priority task of the operation of the Russian Aerospace Forces in the SAR. Russia's involvement in the Syrian conflict was determined by the priorities of its foreign policy. Moscow consistently supported existing regimes and opposed their violent overthrow. The Russian special operation forced the Syrian opposition to return to the negotiating table. Moscow's diplomatic initiatives aimed at ceasefires and the creation of de-escalation zones, combined with military operations, played a decisive role in strengthening control over a significant part of Syrian territory. In the conditions of civil war, the Syrian armed forces underwent a radical transformation, with their manpower reduced by 50 percent. Russia provided substantial military-technical and logistical support to the Syrian Arab Armed Forces and created new units within the Syrian army.

As a result of the weakening of state institutions in the SAR, Syrian security agencies turned into autonomous centers of power based on the principle of loyalty. This contradicted Moscow's policy on Syrian normalization in addressing key issues such as return of refugees, drug control, and border control. Moscow contributed to strengthening the personnel base of the Syrian security services through the implementation of training and educational programs for Syrian officers. The civil war had had a devastating impact on Syrian society and the national economy. Russian military and civilian specialists, together with their Syrian counterparts, began restoring oil and gas and energy infrastructure. Work was carried out to modernize thermal power plants, reconstruct gas transportation infrastructure, and refurbish oil refining facilities. Russia's diplomatic and military efforts contributed to the resolution of Moscow's tactical objectives in the SAR and ensured Russia's strategic interests in the Middle East. Moscow established almost complete control over Syrian airspace and secured its positions along the Mediterranean coastal belt from north to south. Support for

the pro-regime forces helped ensure Bashar al-Assad's victory over the armed Syrian opposition and international terrorism. The armed opposition was virtually crushed. The regime's political opponents relied mainly on support from external forces in Arab countries, Turkey, and a number of Western states. Russia returned most of Syrian territory under the control of the Syrian government. The balance of power in the SAR shifted in favor of the ruling regime. The issue of changing the incumbent authorities in the SAR was removed from the Syrian negotiation agenda. Russia became a key participant in the Syrian conflict, whose position the United States, Europe, and leading regional countries were forced to take into account.

Conclusion

Russia's "return" to the Middle East coincided with an escalation of tensions in international relations. The restoration of a semblance of multipolarity as a result of Moscow's forceful entry into Syria did not guarantee security in the region. Russia found itself drawn into a major regional game involving the United States, Israel, Iran, Turkey, and Arab countries. Under these circumstances, it was hardly possible to speak of the absolute dominance of any one participant in the Middle Eastern conflict in completely reformatting the local military-political infrastructure in accordance with its own national strategy.

Despite the successes achieved in Syria, political rivalry persisted, rooted in internal contradictions. Many regions of the country fell prey to extremist groups. Syria became politically fragmented into zones of influence of regional and international forces. The war in Gaza intensified the Iranian-Israeli confrontation, including in zones of vital interest to Russia (the South Caucasus), which posed a potential threat to Moscow's positions in the Middle East and affected the national security of the Russian Federation.

From the beginning of 2024, Moscow became particularly disillusioned with the policies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who proved unable to curb corruption within his inner circle, among trusted businessmen managing his family's finances, or to suppress the activities of

drug traffickers and arms barons along the Mediterranean coast and in southern Syria. Against the backdrop of a severe economic situation, this reduced the level of social support for the regime. The large-scale reshuffles in the army undertaken by Bashar al-Assad in the summer of 2024, aimed at limiting the omnipotence of the security services, were clearly overdue and only alarmed the heads of local security agencies, reducing their motivation to defend the regime. Assad's unwillingness to ensure the peaceful return of refugees, enter into dialogue with the opposition, begin a peaceful transition of power, and halt drug trafficking to neighboring Jordan, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia slowed Moscow's efforts to finally end the armed phase of the conflict and remove Syria from political isolation on the basis of consolidated Arab support.

Assad's refusal to meet with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan effectively torpedoed Moscow's high-level efforts toward Syrian–Turkish normalization, which aimed to encourage Ankara to take decisive measures against the jihadists in Idlib and normalize the situation in the Kurdish areas of northeastern Syria. Contrary to Russian warnings, Bashar al-Assad's unilateral orientation toward Iran and Hezbollah led to Damascus being drawn into the war in Gaza. As a result, Assad found himself trapped between the Israeli “rock” and the Iranian “hard place”. Attempts by Assad to maneuver between Tel Aviv and Tehran ended fatally for his personal power²⁹.

Two months before the outbreak of the HTS offensive, Moscow warned Assad of a planned terrorist attack from Idlib. After the capture of Aleppo, Russian intelligence received information that about 80 percent of the population was ready to support an Islamist advance on Hama, Homs, and Damascus. At the same time, data were obtained on large-scale betrayal within the army as a result of a catastrophic decline in material and financial support for soldiers and officers. During Assad's visit to Moscow in late November 2024, he was urged to immediately begin dialogue with the political opposition and to start formalizing procedures for a political transition of power in accordance with

²⁹ Al-Quds. Hal Hiya Kalimat Sir Bashar al-Assad? (Is This Bashar al-Assad's Password?) 1 December 2024. <https://www.alquds.co.uk> / <https://tinyurl.com/mrxcvh88> (accessed 05.12.2024). In Arabic.

UN Security Council Resolution No. 2254. However, as in March 2011, Assad ignored Russian warnings.

The change in the balance of power within Syria and the growth of international rivalry strengthened expansionist sentiments among some opponents of the Syrian regime and, conversely, reduced the level of support for it from Russia and Iran. The political costs of supporting al-Assad (who by his actions was effectively nullifying Moscow's achievements in rescuing him and consolidating Russian influence in the Mediterranean and the Middle East) risked becoming far higher than the potential benefits of preserving the regime. In order to avoid large-scale bloodshed in Syria, the Russian Aerospace Forces refused to provide air support to pro-Iranian armed militias that were preparing to advance from Iraq to assist the regime. As a result, the Syrian regime proved unable to withstand socio-economic overloads and was overthrown by the Islamist opposition led by HTS.

The fall of the Assad regime marked a critical turning point in the Syrian conflict and influenced the definition of parameters for the future development of the Middle East. The Ba'athist regime of al-Assad was replaced by Islamists represented by HTS, an organization that only recently had been the Syrian branch of al-Qaeda. In January 2025, the head of HTS, Ahmed al-Sharaa (al-Golani), was elected Syria's new president for a transitional period. The new authorities faced the tasks of building an inclusive state and preserving the country's territorial integrity. An emphasis on external relations distracted al-Sharaa from addressing acute socio-economic problems and security issues. Flirting with the United States and the Arab monarchies of the Persian Gulf did not help remove the threat of de facto occupation of a number of strategic areas in the south, northeast, and west of the Syrian Arab Republic by Israel and Turkey, respectively. One-off investments from Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE could not produce the expected effect in terms of economic recovery. Ensuring effective governance across the entire country solely by extrapolating the successful administrative experience of the Syrian Salvation Government in Idlib proved impossible³⁰. Syria remains a frag-

³⁰ In 2017, HTS established the "Salvation Government" in Idlib, which proved relatively effective in administering territories under Islamist control.

mented country where the interests collide not only of the victorious opposition and Assad loyalists, but also of diverse ethnic and confessional groups, as well as regional and global powers. Certain areas are under the control of external forces and are turning into autonomous centers of power, which may ultimately lead to the country's disintegration.

In March 2025, supporters of the ousted President al-Assad attempted to regain power by staging a bloody uprising on the Mediterranean coast. The armed revolt of Assad loyalists, aimed at creating a territorial enclave on the Syrian coast with the support of external forces, revealed a number of important trends in the development of Syria's future³¹. Since HTS had come to power in the SAR, the coastal uprising was far from the first clash between supporters and opponents of the new authorities. However, it became the most bloody and dangerous one. Since December 2024, Syria's Mediterranean coast has witnessed armed clashes between Islamists and supporters of al-Assad. Both sides enjoyed support from Israel, Turkey, and Iran as part of their regional rivalry and struggle for Syria. Tel Aviv, Ankara, and Tehran equally exploited the religious factor, playing on the fears of the local population: Alawites on the coast, Druze in the south, and Kurds in northeastern Syria.

Unlike previous conflicts, the uprising of Assad loyalists in March 2025 was carefully planned and prepared. Statements by Alawite sheikhs indicated that the rebels expected to seize all coastal areas and secure the support of Russian troops stationed at the bases in Tartus and Khmeimim. The insurgents also counted on exploiting the conflict between the new Syrian authorities and Israel, which supported the separatist aspirations of the Druze of Suwayda and also provided assistance to Kurdish opposition groups in the northeast of the country. The organizers of the uprising relied on support from Iran, which sought to change the balance of power in Syria in its favor.

The methods used by the authorities to suppress the Alawite revolt on the coast and the secessionist actions of the Druze in July 2025 in Suwayda strengthened doubts al-Sharaa's readiness to fulfill previously assumed ob-

³¹ Asharq Al-Awsat. Hiwar Wazir al-Kharijiyya al-Suri ma'a Tony Blair fi Davos (Conversation of the Syrian Foreign Minister with Tony Blair in Davos). 13 January 2025. <https://www.mc-doualiya.com> / <https://tinyurl.com/bddftnzb> (accessed 01.02.2025). In Arabic.

ligations toward minorities. Despite his statements condemning excessive violence, the danger of a recurrence of such events persists due to insufficient preventive work by security agencies with the civilian population. Ineffective methods employed by security forces to disarm civilians and suppress the activities of arms dealers perpetuate the threat of militarization of the local population along confessional lines. Large quantities of weapons remain in civilian hands in Damascus, Suwayda, Hama, and Aleppo³².

Events on the Syrian coast and in the south occurred against the backdrop of a sharp deterioration in the material conditions of the local population as a result of government measures to restructure the state sector of the economy, unresolved relations between the transitional government and the Druze community, and tensions with the administration of the Kurdish regions. The government was preparing to privatize 107 state-owned enterprises and intended to shut down unprofitable ones. According to government estimates, no more than 600,000 people (50% of those employed in the public sector) should remain in the state sector. The dismissal of hundreds of thousands of civilian and military specialists could negatively affect internal political stability, triggering a growth in unemployment and social tension. The new authorities would require around USD 10 billion annually to restore social infrastructure and maintain it at an adequate level. Today, the Syrian economy continues to operate in a wartime mode, and its transition to peaceful development will require great effort and significant expenditures. If we speak only of the civilian economy, the GDP associated with it is unlikely to exceed USD 18 billion. To return to previous GDP levels, the Syrian economy would need to grow by 6–7% annually. Such growth can be expected only in certain sectors under favorable contracts, and sustaining it over a long period is impossible. At best, growth will fluctuate within 4–5% per year. According to various estimates, economic reconstruction will require at least ten years to return to the indicators of 2010³³.

³² Al-Quds. 2025. How Syria might rig off tyrannical regime's image? Al-Quds. 03.12.2025. <https://www.alquds.co.uk> (accessed 03.18.2025 (in Arabic)). [Keifa-tfhju-syria-vin-nizam-al-abd?].

³³ Omran Strategic Studies. Governance Challenges in the Upcoming Phase: General Concepts. Omran for Strategic Studies. 02 January 2025/<https://www.OmranStudies.org/>. 03.01.2025EN.pdf/. P. 1–8 (accessed 05/01/2025).

Prolonged uncertainty in constitutional and party-political development, against the backdrop of a difficult socio-economic situation, slowed the processes of national reconciliation, the provision of internal security through the creation of a new army, and the development of an independent foreign policy capable of ensuring the national sovereignty of the SAR. At the same time, political dynamics in the SAR and intensifying international competition amid the regional escalation caused by the war in Gaza have demonstrated that the likelihood of new territorial fractures in the Middle East is more real than before. Under these conditions, the new Syrian authorities needed, within a short period of time, to restructure the national strategy in order to retain power and preserve the country's territorial integrity. The transitional government's ability to ensure economic security largely depended on the new authorities' policy in establishing a system of governance over Syrian territory. During the crisis, many areas of Syria slipped out of Damascus's control, giving rise to the development of various governance models based on local legislative practices. The civil war led to further defragmentation of the centralized system of governance and the development of local self-government, taking into account regional specificities and established practices of resource distribution and provision of social needs. After the change of power, the task of unifying the country and creating a new system of administrative governance became extremely urgent. The former system of local self-government required large-scale reform.

In Idlib, the HTS government abandoned the provincial principle of governance, placing emphasis on the development of several large municipal districts. Such an approach is unlikely to be applicable in other Syrian provinces. Given the prolonged fragmentation of the local population along ethnic and confessional lines, the authorities in Damascus will struggle to achieve a centralized system of governance. It is hardly possible to manage various social groups solely on the basis of their religious or ethnic preferences and loyalties.

At the same time, Syria cannot be governed in an asymmetric manner. Attempts by the new authorities to balance civil relations solely on the basis of confessional identity may place the administration in a difficult position in areas where the cultural and religious customs and

beliefs of the local population do not correspond to the ideological and political orientations of the authorities. Agreements with individual representatives of local communities do not guarantee the loyalty of other provincial leaders. The prospects for creating an effective governance system largely depend on the ability of the new authorities to adapt to a changing socio-economic situation and to identify common patterns across different models of local self-government in order to create equal opportunities in the distribution of resources and material benefits.

Economic threats can pose dangers equally from the standpoint of maintaining defense capability and preserving civil peace in the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as for regional security in the Middle East. An economic downturn and the unjust distribution of economic benefits can lead to the political defeat of the regime.

The weakening of Iran's positions in the Middle East pushed Tehran to come very close to developing nuclear weapons. The Iranian nuclear issue could have affected the nature of U.S. relations with its Arab allies in matters of nuclear nonproliferation, which would have had a negative impact on international security. Under these circumstances, Tel Aviv and Washington carried out military strikes against Iran in order to resolve the Iranian nuclear problem once and for all and to cut Hamas and Hezbollah off from their supply base, which led to a new surge of tension in the Middle East. Many military and political figures in Israel still harbor plans to launch new military strikes against Iran with the involvement of U.S. military contingents in the Middle East. Developments in Syria's political dynamics show that the likelihood of new territorial fragmentation in the Middle East today is more real than ever before.

Under these conditions, Russia's Middle East policy is acquiring new dimensions. Today, Russia's outlook in the Middle East is mostly shaped by available resources and the policies of regional players. Middle Eastern states control the regional agenda and largely determine the nature of relations with Russia. A relatively limited set of non-military instruments constrains Moscow's influence on the policies of regional powers, including Syria. Russia needs to consolidate the long-term character of its relations with regional powers and expand its presence

in the region in order to gain the ability to shape regional dynamics in its favor. Alongside civilizational, humanitarian, and cultural aspects of relations with Middle Eastern states, the task of establishing reliable military, economic, and political positions in the Middle East is of particular importance. Otherwise, in the long term this may lead to a decline in Russian influence in the region.

From this perspective, strengthening Russian influence in the SAR could facilitate Russia's achievement of the above-mentioned objectives. During negotiations with the Syrian delegation in Moscow on July 31, 2025, the parties discussed the possibility of revising bilateral agreements in the fields of defense and security, joint counterterrorism efforts, and military-technical cooperation. Given that 80% of Syrian armed forces equipment consists of Russian-made weapons and hardware, and that Syria's state debt to Russia amounts to approximately USD 15 billion, it is assumed that new agreements would be made more attractive for the al-Sharaa regime than the previous arrangements with al-Assad. At the same time, Moscow will not extradite al-Assad and his close associates, but is prepared to consider the issue of unfreezing Syrian financial assets held in Russian banks and affiliated commercial structures.

Damascus is interested in Russia intensifying efforts to transform the Khmeimim airbase into an air-defense shield for Syria's Mediterranean and central regions by deploying Russian air-defense systems such as the S-300 and S-400, as well as electronic warfare assets that were dismantled in 2016. For its part, Moscow wants the Syrian authorities to agree that the base, as before, should remain under Russian military control and serve operational-tactical and logistical purposes for Russian operations in Africa and for ensuring Russia's strategic security on its southern flanks. In the interest of ensuring security on the Golan Heights, Moscow is prepared to consider the deployment of a Russian peacekeeping contingent in al-Quneitra. Russia is also interested in continuing to strengthen its military presence at the airfield in Qamishli. Possible steps include Russia's participation in opening new border crossings on the Syrian-Turkish border (similar to Abu al-Zeydan in 2024), joint Russian-Turkish patrols along the M4 highway, and the resumption of work begun in 2024 on constructing a Russian base in the Ayn al-Arab area.

These measures could facilitate the establishment of working contacts in the fight against international terrorism with Kurdish armed formations, which control several prisons holding tens of thousands of ISIS militants along with their families. It would also be easier for Moscow to work on adapting to new conditions those officers of the Assad army and security services who took refuge in this area, gradually incorporating them into the structures of the new Syrian army, based on the experience of interaction with the former Eighth Brigade of the Syrian Arab Army, militias, and tribes of southern Syria in 2021–2022³⁴.

Strengthening security in northeastern Syria could create favorable conditions for attracting Russian oil and gas companies to this resource-rich region. The participation of Russian companies in exploration, extraction, restoration, and use of oil and gas pipeline routes from Iraq to Baniyas and Latakia appears particularly important in light of crude oil deliveries from Azerbaijan to Europe via northern Syria under the patronage of Turkey and the United States, which began in August 2025 without any regard for Russian interests. The several hundred thousand tons of crude oil supplied by Russia since February 2025 via a tanker fleet operating under foreign flags certainly improve Russia's image in Syrian business circles, but do not provide a comprehensive solution to the problem of strengthening Russian influence in Syria's political and economic niche. Enhancing Russia's presence in areas critical to Syria's security implies accompanying military measures with active humanitarian diplomacy. From this perspective, it would be advisable to extend agreements reached with the Syrian regime on establishing a Russian military field hospital in al-Suwayda to the coastal regions and northeastern Syria. Since the 1970s–1980s, contacts with the Druze community of Lebanon and Syria have served as an important instrument for strengthening Russia's positions in the Levant. Today, about 90% of Druze doctors and engineers in the Levant were educated in Russia, and many are married to Russian citizens. An active segment of the Syrian diaspora in Moscow is represented by the Druze. Removing the "Druze dossier" from the influence of Israel and the United States

³⁴ *Grajewski N.* The Evolution of Russian and Iranian Cooperation in Syria. CSIS, 2021.

and returning it to Russia's political assets appears important given the situation in southern Syria.

Moscow has extensive experience in interacting with religious minorities of the Levant. Unlike France and Great Britain, Russia never had colonies in the Levant. Taking into account the general trend of anti-neocolonialism in Arab countries' policies, Moscow can intensify its engagement with Syrian minorities based on their sympathies toward Russia. Such sentiments manifested themselves quite clearly during the Syrian conflict and the events on the Syrian coast in March 2025. The societal dimension of Russia's policy in the SAR should not contradict the development of relations with the new Syrian leadership, which represents the Sunni majority, and should be pursued under the banner of creating favorable conditions for a national dialogue in the interests of the swift adoption of a new Constitution and the strengthening of Syria's unity and sovereignty. From this standpoint, Russia's interaction with minorities should be based not on confessional grounds but on principles of citizenship. Otherwise, Moscow risks losing out to large transboundary ethno-confessional communities of the Arab East, which increasingly influence the determination of key policy parameters of regional states.

In this regard, it is worth noting that the brother of the current Syrian leader (who has held several senior positions in the new administration) graduated from Voronezh State Medical Academy with a degree in gynecology and is married to a Russian citizen who runs a business in southern Russia. This seemingly isolated fact underscores the need to resume active engagement with the Russian-speaking diaspora, which prior to the events of 2011, together with Russian women married to Syrians and migrants from Russia's North Caucasus regions, had numbered around 250,000 people and later became divided over assessments of Moscow's policy during the Civil War. Such work implies not only granting Russian citizenship and issuing Russian foreign passports, but also mobilizing the Russian-speaking diaspora of the SAR in Russia's interests. At the same time, given the uncertainty surrounding the current Syrian regime's ability to retain power amid escalating tensions in the Middle East, these measures should be pursued in a balanced and carefully considered manner.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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Syria: a Search for a Path of Development (1960s — Early 2000s)

Abstract

The article examines the experience of the socio-political development of Syrian society. The main focus is placed on an analysis of the policy of “socialist orientation” and on the attempt by the ruling party during the period under consideration — the Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party — to implement a Syrian version of “Arab socialism”. The methodological framework of the study is based on the principles of historicism, scientific objectivity, and reliability. This research is aimed at filling a certain gap that exists in contemporary Arab studies concerning the scholarly analysis of the phenomenon of “socialist orientation”. In preparing the article, the author also drew upon personal experience gained during numerous missions to Syria, as well as conversations with representatives of the academic community, socio-political and religious institutions, and members of opposition organizations. The conclusion states that as a result of the reforms carried out by the Syrian leadership, significant achievements were made in the socio-economic, political,



and cultural development of Syrian society. These achievements were also confirmed in the works of well-known Western scholars. At the same time, the state-political system that took shape both in Syria and in other countries that implemented the socialist concept made it possible for the ruling political forces to remain in power for decades. This situation created conditions for the development of such negative phenomena as nepotism, corruption, and the inability or unwillingness of the ruling elite to resolve problems that had matured within society. On the other hand, as an alternative to Western liberalism – which, as historical experience confirms, has failed to demonstrate an ability to resolve the pressing problems of social development – the socialist concept may contribute to the formation of a new and more just world order advocated by Russia and the countries of the Global South.

Keywords:

Syria; Socialist orientation; Socio-economic development

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After gaining independence and the withdrawal of foreign troops from its territory in 1946, Syria faced the choice of a further path of development. This stage was marked in Syrian society by the formation of political parties and movements of various ideological orientations, which actively struggled for power. This period in

the history of the Arab countries, including Syria, was defined by prominent Russian scholars of Oriental studies Vladimir Baranovsky and Vitaly Naumkin as a “period of harsh authoritarianism (1950–1960), when painful searches for an optimal path of development, fierce competition among political forces, the inclination of political leaders toward messianism, and military intervention... led to frequent changes of power”¹. At the same time, ideas of pan-Arabism, which were widely disseminated in Arab public consciousness, became a stimulus for the creation in 1958 of a unified state by Syria and Egypt – the United Arab Republic (UAR). Nevertheless, the problems that arose in the process, along with the desire of the Egyptian leadership under Gamal Abdel Nasser to dominate this alliance, led to Syria’s withdrawal from the UAR in 1961.

At the same time, the USSR and the countries of the socialist camp demonstrated impressive successes in social and economic development. Thus, the well-known American scholar William Quandt noted that “Soviet Russia, despite the negative aspects of its development, set an example of solving many social problems and managed within the lifetime of one generation to carry out industrialization and transform itself from an agrarian country into a superpower possessing nuclear weapons and successfully mastering outer space”². Moreover, the USSR, which by right was the principal victor over fascism in the Second World War, significantly strengthened its role and importance in global politics, becoming the second world superpower. At the same time, the socialist camp, led at that period by the USSR and China, the world’s largest powers, comprised the countries of Eastern Europe, Cuba, the DPRK, and Vietnam. It was also supported by communist parties in Western Europe, which were increasing their influence, especially in France and Italy, as well as by the emerging

¹ The Middle East in a Changing Global Context (collective monograph). Edited by V.G. Baranovsky, V.V. Naumkin. Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences. Moscow, 2018, p. 136.

² *Quandt W.* Algeria: aux portes de la démocratie // Jeune Afrique. 1999. № 1996, 2002, 2023, 2024. C.43.

Non-Aligned Movement. Thus, in the eyes of many, the historical rivalry between capitalism and socialism during that period appeared to be tilting in favor of the latter.

This example of the successful implementation of the socialist concept contributed to the spread of socialist ideas in Arab countries, especially in those that gained independence as a result of national liberation struggles and experienced anti-monarchical revolutions, such as Egypt, Iraq, Algeria, Syria, and South Yemen. During this period, supporters of the socialist idea or socialist orientation in Arab countries advanced various versions of it – Arab, national, and Islamic socialism. At the same time, a number of ideologues of socialist orientation asserted that Islam did not contradict socialist doctrine, especially with regard to the proclamation of “Islamic social justice”. Some of its proponents even claimed that the first socialist was the Muslim historian, philosopher, and public figure Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), who developed ideas of historical cycles and the creation of a “just society” headed by a philosopher-ruler. In turn, Algerian President Houari Boumédiène (1932–1978) emphasized the “correspondence of Algerian socialism to the spirit of Islam”, stating that “our revolution and social transformations are logically integrated into the historical retrospective of Islam, which is revolutionary in its essence”³.

A peculiar alliance between Islam and the doctrine of national socialism at this stage represented a historically conditioned phenomenon. As confirmed by the prominent Russian scholar Aleksey Malashenko, “the idea of socialism proved to be consonant with notions of equality and social justice at the level of traditional Arab-Muslim consciousness. They perceived socialism as something that did not contradict the value orientations of Islam, which proclaimed the priority of the collective over the individual”⁴.

³ Franco A., *Sereni J.-P.* Un Algérien nommé Boumediène. Paris, 1976. C. 375.

⁴ Malashenko A.V., Muzikář J. In Search of an Alternative: Arab Concepts of Development Paths. Institute of Oriental Studies, USSR Academy of Sciences. Moscow: Nauka, 1991, p. 68.

In Syria, such ideas were proclaimed by the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party (ASRP), or Ba'ath Party (*ba'ath* meaning “renaissance” in Arabic)⁵, which came to power in 1963. Advocating Arab unity and the construction of “Arab socialism,” the ASRP advanced its doctrine on the basis of the ideas of pan-Arabism, elements of socialist theory, and Islam. This made it possible to implement in Syria a program of socio-economic and political transformations in accordance with the ideology of the ASRP.

In the course of internal party confrontation within the ASRP, a group headed by Minister of Defense Hafez al-Assad came to power in 1970⁶. The accession of al-Assad to power can be de-

⁵ The Arab Socialist Resurrection Party (Ba'ath) was founded in April 1947 in Damascus as a pan-Arab political party proclaiming the ideas of Arab socialism and pan-Arabism. Its slogan was “Unity, Freedom, Socialism”. The founders of Ba'ath were prominent Arab political figures: Michel Aflaq (an Orthodox Christian), the principal ideologue of Ba'athism; Salah ad-Din al-Bitar (a Sunni Muslim); and Zaki al-Arsuzi (an Alawite). Michel Aflaq supported many aspects of Marxism, believing that the Marxist concept of the “importance of economic conditions of life” was one of humanity’s major discoveries of the modern era. However, he disagreed with the Marxist view that dialectical materialism constituted the sole truth, arguing that Marxism had forgotten human spirituality. While convinced that Marxist concepts could successfully operate in other small and weak societies, he believed that dialectical materialism alone was not suitable for the Arab world. The party acquired its current name – the Arab Socialist Resurrection Party – after merging in 1954 with the Arab Socialist Party led by Akram al-Hourani (prior to 1954 it was known as the Arab Resurrection Party). The Ba'ath Party came to power in Iraq in February 1963 and in Syria in March 1963. In 1966, the unified party split into de facto independent Syrian and Iraqi branches; the Iraqi Ba'ath was removed from power in April 2003 as a result of the U.S.-led military intervention. In the 2000s, Ba'ath organizations operated in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia, and Yemen. See: *Pir-Budagova E.P. History of Syria. The Twentieth Century. Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS. Moscow, 2015, p. 81; Salem P. Bitter Legacy: Ideology and Politics in the Arab World. USA. Syracuse University Press, 1994. P.68.*

⁶ *Hafez al-Assad* (1930–2000), during his rule (1970–2000), succeeded in transforming Syria from a “backward, poor, exploited country into a modernized and relatively prosperous state that stood at the forefront of Third World countries”. In the Arab press he was often called the “Arab Stalin”. U.S. President Richard Nixon referred to him as a genius. Arab League Secretary-General Chedli Klibi in the 1980s called Assad the “de Gaulle of the Arab world”. See: *Political Portraits of Leaders of the Middle and Near Eastern*



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defined as the result of a struggle for leadership within the left wing of the ASRP. At the same time, al-Assad and his supporters declared that they were continuing the policy of the previous leadership while correcting, in their view, erroneous actions that did not correspond to the program of the ASRP. In Syrian political historiography, Hafez al-Assad's rise to power has been defined as the "Corrective Movement". At the same time, it was emphasized that "the ASRP, as a party of workers, peasants, artisans, and the revolutionary intelligentsia, has always expressed the aspiration of the Arab people to create a society whose goal would be unity, freedom, and socialism"⁷.

Countries. Edited by V.V. Naumkin, V.V. Popov. Moscow: MGIMO University, 2015, pp. 78–79.

⁷ Al-harakat at-tashihiyya min al-mu'tamar al-qawmi al-istithna'i al-ashir ila al-mu'tamar al-qawmi ath-thalith ashar (The Corrective Movement from the Tenth Extraordinary National Congress to the Thirteenth National Congress). 1901980. Damascus. P. 23–26.

In 1972, on the initiative of the ASRP leadership, the political coalition known as the National Progressive Front (NPF) was formed. It included the political parties that enjoyed the greatest influence in Syria: the Arab Socialist Renaissance Party (ASRP), the Arab Socialist Union, the Arab Socialist Movement, the Socialist Unionists, and the Syrian Communist Party (SCP). The creation of the NPF significantly expanded the social base and support for al-Assad's leadership within Syrian society. The NPF adopted its programmatic documents — the Charter and the Statute — which corresponded to the ideological principles of the ASRP. The NPF defined the strategic goal of its activities as “contributing to the completion of the formation of a democratic, popular system, its constitutional institutions, and ultimately the construction of a unified Arab socialist society”⁸. In 1973, a constitution was adopted in Syria by a nationwide referendum, in which the Syrian Arab Republic was defined as a “sovereign, socialist, popular-democratic state”. It was affirmed that the state economy was planned and socialist, aimed at eliminating all forms of exploitation⁹. In accordance with the constitution, legislative power belonged to the People's Assembly (parliament), elected for a four-year term. At the same time, a special quota in the Assembly was allocated for representatives of workers and peasants. Executive power was vested in the president of the republic, elected for a seven-year term¹⁰. Following the referendum, the General Secretary of the ASRP, Hafez al-Assad, was elected President of the Syrian Arab Republic. At the same time, the ASRP, organized according to a territorial-production principle and having established its party committees in all Syrian provinces, continued to play a leading role in the

⁸ Charter of the National Progressive Front of the Syrian Arab Republic. In: *Modern Syria*. Moscow: Nauka, 1974. P. 349–350.

⁹ *History of the East*, Vol. VI. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS; Eastern Literature Publishers, 2008, pp. 200–201.

¹⁰ According to the 1973 Constitution, the candidacy of the President of the Republic was nominated by the Ba'ath Party and subsequently approved by a nationwide referendum.

implementation of the country's key development parameters and directions¹¹.

However, this constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic did not contain an article defining Islam as the state religion (as was also the case in previous Syrian constitutions). This situation, together with the fact that the elected president was an Alawite¹², provoked a series of anti-government protests in certain Sunni regions of the country. Most participants in these protests were members of the Islamist organization the Muslim Brotherhood¹³, who regarded the Alawites as a sect not belonging to the Muslim ummah (community)¹⁴. In order to resolve the conflict situation, Hafez al-Assad

¹¹ *Khodynskaya-Golenishcheva M.S.* Syria: The Difficult Path from War to Peace. Multilateral Diplomacy of the Syrian Settlement. Moscow: Abris, 2019, p. 13.

¹² Alawites (Nusayris) are members of an ethno-confessional Muslim community that emerged in the 10th century among “extreme” Shi‘ites in northern Syria. Their doctrine is based on Ismailism with elements of Gnostic Christianity and astral cults. Alawites reject many Islamic prescriptions, venerate Jesus Christ and a number of Christian saints, and observe certain Christian holidays. See: Islam. Encyclopedic Dictionary. Moscow: Nauka, 1991, p. 194.

¹³ The Muslim Brotherhood Association (banned in the Russian Federation) was founded in Egypt in 1928 by Sheikh Hasan al-Banna (1906–1949), who promoted pan-Islamism, the concept of jihad, and the idea of an “Islamic state.” A key role in shaping the Brotherhood’s ideology was played by the works of Sayyid Qutb (above all Social Justice in Islam), Muhammad al-Ghazali, and Mustafa al-Siba‘i (whose writings articulated the principles of “Muslim socialism”). The ultimate goal of the Brotherhood was the creation, in Muslim countries, of a society built on the principles of “Islamic justice” through strict observance of Islamic norms set forth in the Qur’an and Sharia. According to the Brotherhood, this objective could be achieved through an “Islamic path of development” distinct from both capitalism and socialism. The Brotherhood became one of the most influential and mass-based Islamist organizations in the Arab-Muslim world, evolving from charitable and educational activities to active political participation, including the use of terror. In Syria, the Brotherhood became active from the 1960s onward, recruiting primarily through mosques among students and senior school pupils. See: Islam. Encyclopedic Dictionary. USSR Academy of Sciences. Moscow: Nauka, 1991, p. 117; *Pir-Budagova E.P.* History of Syria. The Twentieth Century. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, 2015, p. 239.

¹⁴ The radical segment of Sunni theologians did not consider Alawites part of the Muslim ummah, relying on the views of the prominent Sunni thinker Ibn

initiated the inclusion in the constitution of an article stipulating that the president of the Syrian Arab Republic must profess Islam. At the same time, at al-Assad's request, the head of the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council of Lebanon, Musa al-Sadr, issued a fatwa (religious ruling) defining the Alawites as a part of the Shiite branch of Islam and, accordingly, as belonging to the Muslim community¹⁵.

During this period, significant socio-economic transformations were carried out in Syria on the basis of the programmatic doctrine of the ASRP. In order to strengthen and develop the state sector of the economy, a number of enterprises were nationalized, and an agrarian reform was implemented, as a result of which peasants, who constituted the majority of the country's population, received land allotments and experienced a substantial improvement in their living standards. This was an important aspect of the social policy of the ASRP.

The significant achievements resulting from the policy of socialist orientation and the ideologically close doctrine of the Syrian Arab Republic's leadership stimulated the further expansion of political, economic, military-technical, and cultural cooperation between the SAR and the USSR, as well as the countries of the socialist bloc. As confirmed by the well-known Soviet/Russian scholar of Oriental studies and statesman Yevgeny M. Primakov, "Syria became the main pillar of Soviet policy in the Middle East"¹⁶. In 1980, the USSR and the SAR concluded a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Soviet specialists provided substantial assistance in the construction of energy complexes, the laying of railways, the development of the country's natural resources, and the strengthening of the defensive capabilities of the Syrian army. Within the framework of military-technical cooperation, a Soviet naval base was established in the Latakia–Baniyas area, as well as a military airfield for long-range aviation. Coordination between

Taymiyyah (1263–1328), who defined Alawites as a "heretical sect" and called for struggle against them. See: *Guidère M. Le choc des révolutions arabes*. Editions Autrement. Paris, 2012. C. 182.

¹⁵ *Seale P. Asad. The Struggle for the Middle East*. L., 1988. P. 174.

¹⁶ *Seale P. Asad. The Struggle for the Middle East*. L., 1988. P. 174.



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From open sources

the special services of the two countries in countering the actions of hostile actors was expanded¹⁷. A Syrian cosmonaut took part in scientific research by flying aboard a Soviet space station. Thousands of Syrian students studied at higher educational institutions in the USSR. Many of them formed mixed families, whose children spoke both Russian and Arabic and became bearers of two cultures, thereby strengthening humanitarian ties between the two countries. At the same time, an entire district formed in Damascus in which such mixed families lived, which came to be known as the “Russian” district. During repeated business and academic trips to Syria, the author had the opportunity to visit it and to communicate with members of such families and graduates of Soviet and Russian universities.

During this period, Syria made extensive use of the experience of the USSR, as well as Cuba, Yugoslavia, and China, both in

¹⁷ Veterans of Soviet intelligence services recalled in their memoirs that they could contact their Syrian counterparts to resolve specific tasks as easily as they could approach colleagues in the Soviet republics.

party–state construction and in the theoretical development of the doctrine of “socialist orientation”. At the same time, the ASRP leadership put forward its own original concept on this issue. For example, it took into account the role of Islam, professed by the majority of Syrian citizens and defined as the state religion. Nevertheless, Syria during the period of ASRP rule was essentially a secular state, characterized by equality of all confessions and the absence of religious fanaticism. At the same time, as noted by Russian researchers, “the Ba’athists as a whole showed little interest in religion, viewing it as a rudiment of a bygone era”¹⁸. At the same time, the thesis of the necessity of workers’ participation in enterprise management was implemented, along with their further professional and cultural–political development and the formation of active supporters of the political course pursued by the ASRP¹⁹.

Alongside significant achievements in socio-economic development and a substantial expansion of the social base of the ruling ASRP, Syria in the 1980s witnessed a certain activation of opposition forces. These consisted of segments of the population who considered themselves “victims” of the nationalization of part of the private sector and of agrarian reform, as well as radical representatives of Sunni Islam — primarily the Muslim Brotherhood — who were dissatisfied with what they regarded as the monopolistic position of Alawites within the structures of power.

The Muslim Brotherhood carried out terrorist acts against employees of state institutions, military personnel, representatives of the Alawite intelligentsia, and Syrians who had business or family contacts with the USSR — doctors, teachers, research-

¹⁸ Naumkin V.V., Kuznetsov V.A. Arab Kaleidoscope. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, 2025, p. 477.

¹⁹ Members of a Syrian Ba’ath Party delegation, during a discussion with Russian party–trade union officials attended by the author, responded to the Russian argument that production efficiency required workers to remain at one workstation performing the same operation for years by stating that “promising workers should be given opportunities to raise their professional and cultural–political level and be helped to become the vanguard that will contribute to the creation of a truly socialist society”. Author’s archive. Moscow, 1988.



Hafez al-Assad and Boris Yeltsin
From open sources

ers, and entrepreneurs²⁰. In 1982, the Muslim Brotherhood organized an armed uprising in the city of Hama²¹, which the prominent Russian scholar of Oriental studies Robert G. Landa characterized as “a dangerous outbreak of clerical obscurantism and extremism. Alongside bombings and assassinations,

²⁰ In June 1979, a terrorist attack killed dozens of Alawite cadets at a military academy in Aleppo. In 1980–1981, several Soviet military advisers were killed in terrorist attacks. Syrian citizens working in organizations cooperating with the USSR in the economic and cultural spheres were also targeted. One acquaintance of the author, the head of a Syrian tourist company sending tourists to the USSR, was shot dead in Damascus by a member of the Muslim Brotherhood. Author’s archive. Damascus, 1982.

²¹ The Islamist opposition, led primarily by the Muslim Brotherhood, formed in 1980 a united organization known as the Islamic Front of Syria, which articulated its goals and demands in the Declaration of the Islamic Revolution. Among other points, it proclaimed a struggle against the “despotism of the minority” and for the restoration of the sovereignty of the majority. The most radical Islamist group, the Fighting Vanguard, which advocated armed struggle against the regime, launched an armed uprising in the city of Hama in February 1982; it was brutally suppressed by government forces. See: History of the East, Vol. VI. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, 2008, p. 202.

the provocation of confrontation on confessional grounds, arson, and pogroms, the Muslim Brotherhood distributed leaflets demanding the return of land to landlords, the repeal of the constitution, the establishment of sharia as the basis of legislation, and the prohibition of women's education at universities"²². To suppress the uprising, the Syrian government army was deployed. In order to counter Islamist extremism, the Syrian parliament adopted legislative acts banning the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood and establishing criminal liability, up to and including the death penalty, for membership in the organization. These effective measures undertaken by the leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic contributed to the suppression of terrorist groups and to a significant stabilization of the situation in the country. At the same time, the intensification of the struggle against extremist manifestations led to an increase in the size of law-enforcement structures, the expansion of their powers, and the enhancement of their role in the socio-political life of Syrian society as a whole. It should be noted that similar processes occurred in other countries pursuing policies of socialist orientation during their struggles against Islamist terrorism. Nevertheless, the actions of the Syrian authorities in this sphere were objectively necessary and justified, since they resulted in the suppression of terrorist activity by the Muslim Brotherhood, prevented the deaths of many Syrians, and stabilized the situation in the country at that time.

At the same time, the majority of Syrian citizens supported the political course pursued by the country's leadership. This was due primarily to the fact that the transformations implemented by the authorities led to an improvement in both the standard and quality of life. It should also be noted that in Syria, as in virtually all countries of socialist orientation, the Soviet experience of total nationalization of industrial enterprises, trade, and services, as well as agricultural collectivization, the creation of a one-par-

²² *Landa R.G.* History of the Arab Countries. Moscow: Oriental University, 2005, p. 246.

ty state system, and especially a struggle against religion, was not replicated.

A particularly significant rise in living standards affected the Syrian peasantry, whose lives in many respects changed for the better. Alongside the growth in material well-being, Syrian fellahin were given the opportunity to obtain education and raise their cultural level. For example, Professor of the Department of Economics at Damascus University, a prominent member of the ASRP and a deputy of the Syrian parliament, Bassam Abu Abdallah, told the author that “he was born into a poor, large peasant family. Only thanks to the socio-economic reforms of the ASRP, which changed life in Syria, did he make the journey from peasant to professor and parliamentarian”²³. At the same time, the successful results of this social policy served as clear confirmation — among other groups, including Syrian peasants professing Sunni Islam — that the leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic was acting in the interests of all Syrian citizens. Alongside this, a system of partially free education and free medical care was introduced. The Syrian leadership also supported the trade union movement. In accordance with adopted laws, the participation of workers’ representatives in enterprise management was envisaged. Trade union organizations were created in both the public and private sectors, as well as within the agricultural sector. Thus, during the implementation of the policy of socialist orientation in this period, Syrian society achieved significant results. This was also confirmed by prominent Western researchers, who noted that in the 2000s the economy of the Syrian Arab Republic was “the most dynamically developing in the region, with annual GDP growth of 5–6%”²⁴.

At the same time, the cultural and educational level of Syrian society rose substantially and compared favorably with that of other Arab countries. Thus, by the 2000s, literacy among those

²³ Conversation with Professor Bassam Abu Abdallah, January 6, 2012. Damascus. Author’s archive.

²⁴ *Rimbaud M.* Tempête sur le Grand Moyen-Orient. Paris: Editions Ellipses, 2015. P. 359.

over the age of 15 reached 86% for men and 73.6% for women. Life expectancy stood at 70 years. For comparison, in the Russian Federation during the same period, according to the UN quality-of-life ranking (HDI), this figure was 66.5 years²⁵.

The defeat of socialism in the 1990s in the countries of Eastern Europe and the USSR was negatively perceived in Syria²⁶, as in all countries of socialist orientation. For their part, Western ideologues proclaimed the complete victory of the capitalist system and liberal democracy as the optimal form of state and political governance for human society, and accordingly announced the “end of history” and the establishment of a unipolar world system led by the United States. Nevertheless, China continued along the path of building “socialism with Chinese characteristics”, becoming the world’s second great power. Cuba, the DPRK, and a number of Latin American countries also continued to develop on the principles of the socialist concept. In turn, from the 2000s onward Russia restored its status as a world power and has pursued a nationally oriented policy.

In the 2000s, following the accession to power of President Bashar al-Assad, the Syrian leadership took steps to adapt its political course both to the changed international situation and to the need to address problems existing within society. These issues were largely addressed at the 10th Congress of the ASRP held in 2005, at which important decisions were adopted for the further socio-economic and political development of Syrian society. During the Congress, which was held under the slogan “New Thinking for the Sake of Progress”, a law on political parties was approved that allowed for the activities of opposition organizations. At the same time, parties not included in the Progressive National Front were

²⁵ <http://www.cbssyr.org> in Central Bureau of Statistics. Bulletin of labor force 2010 (accessed 29.01.2025).

²⁶ In 1992, in Damascus, a Syrian trade-union official, upon learning that after the collapse of the USSR the “Cosmos” pavilion at VDNKh in Moscow had been turned into a foreign car showroom and that all exhibits — including Yuri Gagarin’s space suit — had been sold off, bitterly remarked to the author that “the Russians have lazy blood, like the flow of the Volga River”. March 12, 1992. Damascus. Author’s archive.



Hafez al-Assad (left) and Bashar al-Assad
From open sources

granted the right to participate in discussions and submit proposals on the most important issues of national development. At the same time, the creation of political organizations on a religious or ethnic basis was prohibited. Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood and Kurdish nationalist organizations were excluded from socio-political life. At the same time, the issue of amending Article 8 of the constitution – according to which the ASRP was proclaimed the leading party – was not raised, despite attempts by the opposition to do so²⁷.

The Congress also adopted a decision to develop a socially oriented market economy and the financial and banking sector. At the same time, as the historical experience of capitalist develop-

²⁷ This article was abolished in the new Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic adopted and approved by parliament in 2012 following broad discussions within the National Progressive Front, in which the Syrian Communist Party actively participated.

See: Ad-Dustur ad-Dimuqrati Fi'l-ian. Siyasatuna 2011–2012. At-Tali'a, Nos. 92–93, pp. 138–139. Damascus, 2017.



Michel Kilo
From open sources

ment has shown, the free market system, alongside certain macro-economic effects, provokes rising unemployment, inflation, social stratification, an increase in the number of impoverished people, and heightened social tension. These processes were to some extent present in Syria.

As a result of political democratization, independent public associations began to form in the country, known as “forums of national dialogue”. In total, more than twenty such forums were created in Syria in the 2000s, involving mainly representatives of the Syrian creative and humanitarian intelligentsia. For example, the “Forum of Culture and Human Rights” was established by a group of adherents of leftist ideology led by Khalil Maatouk, a member of the Syrian Communist Party. In turn, representatives of the Kurdish community advocating greater rights also created their own forums. The Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, which was in exile, held its congress in London in 2002 and published a call to continue political struggle. At the same time, one of the radical leaders of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, Ali Sadr al-Din al-Bayanouni, who was also in exile in London, issued an appeal to Syrian army servicemen to “come

out in support of the Muslim Brotherhood in the cause of the peaceful transformation of Syria”²⁸.

Syrian émigrés who were supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood in France created the group “Avant-Garde”, which published its own journal *ar-Rā'id* (Arabic for “the one who shows the way”). Members of the Avant-Garde were part of the French Muslim organization Union of Islamic Organizations of France (*Union des organisations islamiques de France* – UOIF)²⁹. In the United States, Syrian émigré businessmen Farid al-Ghadry and Abdel Aziz Mouflat in the early 2000s established, as foreign opposition to the Syrian authorities, two parties of a liberal-democratic orientation – the Reform Party of Syria and the National Democratic Renaissance Party³⁰.

However, these opposition organizations were small in number and did not enjoy any broad support either outside Syria or, even more so, within Syria itself, since their liberal-democratic and Islamist doctrines did not have significant influence in Syrian society.

At the same time, the measures undertaken by the leadership of the Syrian Arab Republic aimed at democratizing socio-political life provided Syrian opposition forces with the opportunity to openly put forward their proposals for resolving problems that had matured within society. However, within opposition organizations, leaders advocating harsh and often biased criticism of the period of President Hafez al-Assad’s rule, as well as of the existing regime, came to dominate, which did not facilitate the continuation of dialogue with the authorities. In this regard, Ali Abdallah al-Ahmad, a member of the leadership of one opposition group headed by the well-known figure of the liberal opposition

²⁸ *Guidère M.* Le choc des révolutions arabes. Paris: Editions Autrement, 2012. P. 188.

²⁹ *Dolgov B.V.* The Arab-Muslim Community in France: Islamic Identity and Secular Democracy (1980–2016). Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS. Moscow: LENAND, 2017, p. 28.

³⁰ *Zisser E.* Commanding Syria. Bashar al-Asad and the First Years in Power. London, 2007. P. 95.

Michel Kilo, stated in a conversation with the author that “the Syrian opposition missed its opportunity when it was possible to carry out reforms to democratize the state system by political means. The oppositionists became absorbed in harsh criticism of the regime; internal struggles related to personal ambitions took place within their ranks. At present, no one will listen to them, and Syria’s fate will be decided on the battlefield”³¹. For his part, President Bashar al-Assad, responding to opposition demands for greater democratization, stated that Syria would continue gradual reforms but would not comply with the demands of irresponsible individuals who did not represent the majority of the people. The Syrian leadership also reasonably believed that further reform of the state-political system could lead to its disorganization, the destabilization of society, and the disintegration of the country — an outcome demonstrated at that time by the negative experience of the former USSR, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

Conclusion

During the period from the 1960s to the early 2000s, Syria demonstrated a model of development based on the concept of “socialist orientation,” the ultimate goal of which was the construction of a Syrian variant of a “socialist society.” It should be noted that in its socio-economic development along this path, Syria achieved significant successes with the support of friendly states.

At the same time, a state-political system in which the ruling political force enjoys power privileges for decades is capable of provoking such negative phenomena as nepotism, corruption, and abuse by power structures. Such a situation may also lead to the detachment of those in power from the pressing problems of society and to their inability or unwillingness to resolve them and

³¹ Conversation with Ali Abdallah al-Ahmed, November 20, 2015. Damascus. Author’s archive.

to act in the interests of the majority of citizens. In addition, the lack of interest on the part of the ruling elite in addressing socially demanded and long-overdue problems leads to stagnation in the further necessary development of the socialist concept, both in theoretical and practical terms. Western states made use of these negative phenomena, increasing pressure in order to discredit and change the leadership both in Syria and in other countries pursuing policies of socialist construction. At the same time, as an alternative to Western liberalism – which has failed to demonstrate an ability to resolve the urgent problems of societal development – elements of the socialist concept may become an integral part of a new, more just world order being advanced by Russia and the countries of the Global South.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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The Gaza Strip in the Context of Israel's Ben-Gurion Canal Project

Abstract

For Israel, which until the signing of the Camp David Accords in September 1978 had remained in complete regional isolation, the task of finding routes that would provide it with unhindered access to global trade arteries while bypassing the Suez Canal has always been of fundamental importance. A logical outcome of the failure of the Tripartite Aggression involving Britain, France, and Israel was the closure of the Suez Canal — nationalized by the Egyptian government in 1956 — to Israeli shipping. This canal constituted the main artery linking the countries of Asia and Africa with Europe. It was precisely during this period that the idea of constructing an analogue of the Suez Canal between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea began to be actively promoted within Israel itself and in pro-Israeli circles abroad. The project was named after the founding father of the “Jewish state” and its first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion. For various economic, political, and environmental reasons, the implementation of this idea was repeatedly postponed. However, since Israel launched a combined-arms military operation in Gaza in response to



the Hamas terrorist attack of October 7, 2023, the discourse surrounding the construction of an alternative canal has once again intensified. This article analyzes the historical prerequisites for the emergence of plans to construct a new “two seas” canal, reveals the significance of the Gaza Strip for the realization of this project, outlines the main characteristics of the hypothetical structure, and examines the objective economic and political factors hindering its construction.

At present, the idea of building a trans-Israeli canal is supported by the United States and its allies. If the “Ben-Gurion Canal” becomes a reality, it would secure for Israel the status of a global center of shipping and international trade. At the same time, Egypt would cease to be the monopolist of the most convenient route linking three continents. The results of this study may serve as a useful source for understanding the current situation at the epicenter of the Palestinian–Israeli confrontation.

Keywords:

Middle East; Arab–Israeli conflict; Palestinian problem; Suez Canal; Gaza Strip; Ben-Gurion Canal

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Introduction

Projects aimed at creating a new maritime route between Asia and Europe through Israeli territory became a prominent topic in the media space and analytical publications after March 2021, when the Suez Canal was

blocked by the Japanese container ship *Ever Given*, which ran aground and created a massive traffic jam. The closure of this crucial shipping route for six days dealt a significant blow to global trade, as each hour of downtime resulted in aggregate losses for affected companies estimated at USD 400 million¹. Some foreign experts began to argue that the Suez Canal was outdated and no longer met the requirements of modern shipping (Ranzan, Chislaji, Fernández, Li, Ding, Huang, Ringsberg, Gong, Fournier, Chang, Jialu, Di Xu). Quite often, the Israeli “two seas” project was proposed as the best alternative, which, if implemented, could surpass the Suez Canal in efficiency (Pezzulli, Patial, Lopi, Fisher, Gilag)².

Many commentators linked the massacre unleashed by Israel in Gaza after October 7, 2023, precisely to the “clearing” of the northern part of the Strip in order to transform it into a site for the construction of port infrastructure for a maritime canal (Fernando, Khalil, Ridley, Šerić, Midhurst)³.

¹ *Vlamiš K.* The giant ship stuck in the Suez Canal is costing the global economy an estimated \$400 million per hour // The Business Insider. March 26, 2021. URL: <https://www.businessinsider.com/boat-stuck-suez-canal-costing-estimated-400-million-per-hour-2021-3> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

² *Pezzulli B.* The Ben Gurion Canal: Vision Amidst Upheaval // The Times of Israel. February 26, 2024. URL: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-ben-gurion-canal-vision-amidst-upheaval/> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Patial R.C.* Alternate Suez Canal (The Israeli Ben-Gurion Canal) – OpEd // Eurasia Review. November 7, 2013. URL: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/07112023-alternate-suez-canal-the-israeli-ben-gurion-canal-oped/> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Lopi F.* *Suez*. Ever Given grounding prompts plan for canal along Egypt-Israel border // The Guardian. April 1, 2021. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/01/suez-2-ever-given-grounding-prompts-plan-for-canal-along-egypt-israel-border> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Fisher I.* Can Israel's Eilat Become an Alternative to Suez Canal? // Haaretz. August 1, 2021, URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2021-04-01/ty-article/suez-canal-ship-eilat-cant-become-alternative-global-shipping/0000017f-e628-df2c-a1ff-fe79e1440000> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Gilag M.* Israel Is Planning an ‘Inland Suez Canal’ Across Its Desert. At What Cost? // Haaretz. January 17, 2023. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-01-17/ty-article-magazine/.premium/israels-ambitious-railway-to-eilat-dream-or-environmental-train-wreck/00000185-bf24-d244-ade5-ff36aef40000> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

³ *Fernando M.* What is Israel’s proposed Ben Gurion Canal and is it related to Gaza? // TRT World. November 17, 2023. URL: <https://www.trtworld.com/middle-east/what-is-israels-proposed-ben-gurion-canal-and-is-it->

On September 9, 2023 — less than a month before the October events in Gaza — at the G20 summit in New Delhi, the governments of Germany, India, Jordan, Italy, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and France signed a Memorandum of Understanding providing for the creation of the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). The land route passing through Israeli territory and the port of Haifa constitute integral parts of this corridor. In his speech at the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu described the G20 project as a “blessing” for the Middle East, while calling Iran and its allies a “curse”⁴. It is noteworthy that despite the fact that some G20 countries condemned the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in Gaza, following Houthi attacks on vessels belonging to states cooperating with Israel, cargo transportation continues through the ports of Dubai, Bahrain, and Jordan along the Israeli land route to the port of Haifa. However, the India–Middle East–Europe route has a serious drawback: it is extremely costly due to the need to unload cargo at the ports of Aqaba or Eilat and reload it onto ships at the port of Haifa⁵.

related-to-gaza-16098520 (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Khalil S.* What is Israel's Ben Gurion canal plan and why Gaza matters // MENA. November 17, 2023. URL: <https://www.newarab.com/news/what-israels-ben-gurion-canal-plan-and-why-gaza-matters> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Ridley Y.* An alternative to the Suez Canal is central to Israel's genocide of the Palestinians // Middle East Monitor. November 5, 2023. URL: <https://www.middleeast-monitor.com/20231105-an-alternative-to-the-suez-canal-is-central-to-israels-genocide-of-the-palestinians/> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Šerić M.* The Ben Gurion Canal: Israel's Potential Revolutionary Alternative To Suez Analysis. Eurasia Review. November 17, 2013. URL: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/17112023-the-ben-gurion-canal-israels-potential-revolutionary-alternative-to-suez-analysis/> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Midhurst R.* Israel' destroys Gaza to control world's most important shipping lane // AlMayadeen. December 1, 2023. URL: <https://english.almayadeen.net/articles/analysis/israel--destroys-gaza-to-control-world-s-most-important-shi> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

⁴ *Berman L.* Netanyahu holds up maps illustrating the “blessing” and “curse” facing Mideast // The Times of Israel. 27 September, 2024. URL: https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/netanyahu-holds-up-maps-illustrating-the-blessing-and-curse-facing-mideast/ (accessed: 12.10.2024).

⁵ *Wrobel S.* Houthi bypass: Quietly, goods forge overland path to Israel via Saudi Arabia, Jordan // The Times of Israel. 14 February, 2024. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/houthi-bypass-quietly-goods-forge-overland-path-to-israel-via-saudi-arabia-jordan/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

This gives rise to the main research questions of this article: what is the likelihood of implementing the idea of constructing a new maritime canal whose terminal logistics infrastructure would be located in the Gaza Strip? Why are Israel and the United States interested in turning this small enclave into a construction site for projects of such scale? To answer these questions, the author employed a systems approach to analyze the most reliable sources, materials, and expert assessments. The study is based on the principles of historicism, realism, and objectivity, as well as on the author's personal experience of diplomatic service in the area of the Palestinian–Israeli confrontation, including in the Gaza Strip. The main difficulty encountered in analyzing the topic was that many Israeli and American documents concerning the construction of the “two seas canal” remain classified. There is not even a “Ben-Gurion Canal” entry in Hebrew in Wikipedia. Nevertheless, some information has filtered into the Israeli press⁶, as well as into local publications addressing the development of the Negev and Holot Halutsa desert regions in southern Israel, through which the canal route was planned to pass (Gradus, Hayuth, Stern).

⁶ Pezzulli B. The Ben Gurion Canal: Vision Amidst Upheaval // The Times of Israel, February 26, 2004. URL: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-ben-gurion-canal-vision-amidst-upheaval/> ; Musmar F. The Ben Gurion Canal project // Israel HaYom, May 5, 2024. URL: <https://www.israelhayom.com/2024/05/12/the-ben-gurion-canal-project/> (accessed: 12.03.2025).

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Bostug S. Taalat a-yamim: a-istoriya shel fantaziya [The Two Seas Canal: the history of a fantastical project] // Haaretz, 13.10.2022. (In Hebrew) URL: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/blogs/sadna/2022-10-13/ty-article-magazine/00000183-cb50-d756-adcb-cff8f05b0000> (accessed: 12.03.2025).

Historical aspect

Gaza is one of the oldest city-states in the world. The name “Gaza” first appears in the military reports of Thutmose III of Egypt in the 15th century BCE (Katzenstein, 1982, pp. 111–113). After this conqueror-phaaraoh’s victory in 1457 BCE over a coalition of Canaanite tribes in the Jezreel Valley, Gaza became the administrative capital of Canaan (Hasel, 1998, p. 258). The Greeks and Persians referred to Gaza as the “city of treasures” or the “city of a hoard” (Pomponius, 2017, p. 59).

According to the ancient historian Arrian, who compiled a chronology of Alexander the Great’s campaigns, “Gaza lies at most twenty stadia from the sea. The road to it runs through loose sands; the seabed near the city is muddy and viscous. Gaza is a large city; it is situated on a high embankment, which is further surrounded by a strong wall. This is the last city on the road from Phoenicia to Egypt” (Arrian, 1962, p. 102).

Even in antiquity, Gaza was a major trading center, benefiting on the one hand from its proximity to the sea and on the other from its location at the crossroads of caravan routes from Egypt to Canaan, Arabia, Syria, and Phoenicia. Throughout the Roman period, Gaza was a prosperous city and received grants from several emperors. The city was governed by a senate of 500 members, and its population consisted of a wide variety of peoples — Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians, Jews, Egyptians, Persians, and Arab Bedouins.

During the reign of the Byzantine emperors, Gaza flourished and was an important center of southern Palestine (Kaegy, 2005, p. 35). The Christian philosopher Aeneas (5th–6th centuries CE) referred to Gaza as the “Athens of Asia” (Tunison, 1960, p. 11).

With the arrival of the Arabs in the 7th century, Gaza became not only a commercial center but also a spiritual and educational one. In the Old City, in the Daraj Quarter, lies one of the most revered shrines of the Muslim world, the tomb of Hashim ibn Abd Manaf, the grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad. Gaza was also the birthplace of the founder of the Shafi’i madhhab, one of the four principal legal schools of Sunni Islam. Under the Crusaders, Gaza was transformed in 1149 into a fortified castle for the Knights Templar. In 1187, the legendary Salah ad-Din returned the city and its surroundings to the rule of the Egyptian caliphs of the Ayyubid dynasty.

In 1260, the Mongols under the command of Hulegu Khan virtually wiped Gaza off the face of the earth. Its revival began only after the enclave was incorporated into the Ottoman Empire in 1516.

For the Ottoman Empire, Gaza, located at the junction of three continents, was of immense strategic importance. It was no coincidence that the Turkish authorities designated this territory as a separate administrative district, the Gaza Sanjak. The period of Ottoman rule became Gaza's golden age. The city of Gaza was considered the unofficial capital of Palestine.

The American scholar Edward Robinson visited Gaza in 1838 and described it as a "densely populated city, larger than Jerusalem". Robinson noted that Gaza benefited from trade due to its strategic position on the caravan route between Egypt, Syria, and Arabia (Robinson, 1841, pp. 38–40).

By the time Gaza was conquered by the Turks, the canal linking the Nile with the Red Sea (which had existed since the time of the pharaohs of the Twelfth Dynasty (1991–1802 BCE)) had been out of operation for seven and a half centuries (Breasted, 1906, pp. 290–292). However, the Ottoman conquerors were aware that during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246/245 BCE), a wide navigable canal had been constructed from the Nile to the Gulf of Heroopolis (the Gulf of Suez). The canal was equipped with a system of locks that prevented the mixing of salt water from the Red Sea with the fresh water of the Nile. Along the coastline of the Gulf of Heroopolis were prosperous Hellenistic cities such as Arsinoë, Heroopolis, and Olbia. The canal was regularly restored and remained operational under Persian, Roman, Byzantine rulers, and Arab governors of the Caliphate until 767 CE, when the Abbasid caliph al-Mansur ordered its closure in order to prevent the delivery of goods from the East to his Arab adversaries (Rappoport, 1993, pp. 248–257).

The Grand Vizier of the Ottoman Empire, Sokollu Mehmed Pasha (1565–1579), who served under Sultans Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim II, and Murad III, actively promoted one of his favored projects, which envisaged the restoration of the ancient canal of the pharaohs. He instructed the governor of Egypt to dispatch engineers and architects to assess the feasibility of constructing such a canal in order to provide more comfortable conditions for Muslims undertaking the pilgrimage



Fig. 1. Project of a maritime canal by Sokollu Mehmed Pasha
 Casale G. *The Ottoman Age of Exploration*. Oxford University Press, 2010, P. 136.

(hajj) to Mecca and Medina. The Grand Vizier also hoped that the canal would make it possible to rapidly transfer warships and troops to defeat the Portuguese, who at that time dominated the Suez and Persian Gulfs, thereby opening for the Porte a wide gateway to penetration into India (Casale, 2010, pp. 135–136). The Grand Vizier’s ambitions survived only in archival documents.

Several centuries later, the idea of reincarnating a canal connecting two seas attracted special attention from Zionist thinkers. The canal promised broad prospects for the construction of power plants, artificial rapids, and drainage aqueducts. According to the project developers, the canal could prevent the discharge of fresh water from the Jordan River into the Dead Sea, making it possible instead to use this water for irrigating the arid regions of southern Palestine. This aligned with plans to settle unused lands and establish a wide network of Jewish settlements in the area.

Theodor Herzl, who in his famous 1896 pamphlet *The Jewish State* predicted the establishment of such a state within fifty years (Herzl, 1997, p. 482), was the first to support the idea of constructing a canal from sea to sea, an idea fervently promoted by the Jewish industrialist

Johann Kremenetzky. Evidence of this is found in an entry from Herzl's diary dated August 23, 1896:

“I had a long conversation with the electrical specialist Kremenetzky... On the banks of the Jordan, at the point where the river flows into the Dead Sea, whose salinity is extremely high, large enterprises for the production of chemical substances could be established. The fresh waters flowing there could now be diverted and used for drinking. An alternative to this flow would be the pumping of water from the Mediterranean Sea through a canal, which would partly run underground due to the mountainous terrain... and the difference in elevation between the two seas could be used as the driving force for machinery (a waterfall with a power of many thousands of horsepower...)” (Gabriel, 2008).

The dream of constructing canals on the territory of historical Palestine found literary expression in Herzl's utopian novel *Altneuland* (*The Old New Land*) (Herzl, 1903, p. 190).

In 1899, the idea of linking the Dead Sea and the Mediterranean was further developed by engineer Max Bourcart, who proposed diverting Mediterranean waters into the Dead Sea from the coast at the border of Palestine and Lebanon through the Jezreel Valley to the Beisan (Beit She'an) Valley, and from there through the Jordan Rift Valley to the Dead Sea⁷. Due to its high cost, the plan was criticized and temporarily forgotten.

At the end of World War II, American engineers and ardent proponents of the Zionist project to create a “state for the Jews”, Simcha Blass and James B. Hayes, independently developed blueprints proposing the intake of Mediterranean Sea water from a point south of Acre and its redirection via canals and an underground tunnel beneath the mountains of Lower Galilee into the Sea of Galilee (Lake Kinneret), which would thereby become saline. At the same time, it was not ruled out that the Jordan River's course would be diverted away from Lake Kinneret, with its fresh water directed through a canal system to irrigate agriculturally suitable lands. Excess water, via a series of artificial lakes, would then be conveyed to the Dead Sea (Blass, 1944, pp. 132–138).

⁷ *Bostug S. Taalat a-yamim: a-istoriya shel fantaziya* [The Two Seas Canal: the history of a fantastical project]. Haaretz, October 13, 2022. In Hebrew. URL: <https://www.haaretz.co.il/blogs/sadna/2022-10-13/ty-article-magazine/00000183-cb50-d756-adcb-cff8f05b0000> (accessed: 12.03.2025).

In 1953, the Israeli authorities attempted to implement part of the American project: construction began on a canal approximately ten kilometers from Lake Kinneret to divert the Jordan River waters into it from the river's upper course. However, after work commenced, Syria lodged a strong protest at the United Nations, arguing that such an experiment could harm Syria's water-use system. As a result, in October 1953 the UN Security Council prohibited any work on diverting the Jordan River waters⁸. Thus, all the projects proposed in the first years of Israel's existence proved either too costly for the newly established state or were abandoned for political reasons.

Israel's Ben-Gurion Canal project

Israeli projects for a maritime "two seas" canal constitute a collective designation for several plans involving the construction of a network of waterways. As a rule, all such projects are linked to the Jordan River Valley, the Dead Sea, and the desert strip of the Arava, as well as the surrounding seas — the Red Sea in the south and the Mediterranean Sea in the west. Most of them also envisage the inflow of fresh or seawater into the Jordan Valley and the Dead Sea.

One of the most well-known projects planned to use waters from the Jordan River basin to irrigate the Negev and the Jordan Valley, as well as to pump seawater from the Mediterranean into the Dead Sea in order to stabilize its level. The elevation difference between the Jordan Valley and the world's saltiest body of water (120 meters) was to be used for generating hydroelectric power. The project also included additional objectives, such as seawater desalination, stabilization or increase of the Dead Sea's level, and the strengthening of regional peace through cooperation among parties interested in developing the Dead Sea and Red Sea regions. Following extensive public debate, the project became known as *Ta'alat ha-Yamim* ("Canal of the Seas").

⁸ UN Security Council Resolution No. 100. Document S/RES/100(1953), October 27, 1953. Resolutions and Decisions Adopted by the Security Council in 1953. New York: United Nations, 1953, P. 1–2.

In the second half of the twentieth century, plans for constructing a new maritime communication canal between the Mediterranean and the Red Seas were discussed by the United States and Israel in conditions of strict confidentiality after the failure of the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt in 1956. One of the earliest such projects was named after Prime Minister Ben-Gurion in the early 1960s. The project envisaged the construction of a waterway 250 km long, running from the Israeli port of Eilat (which has a 14-kilometer coastline on the Red Sea) then approximately 100 km through the uninhabited Arava Valley, and from there northward to the border with the Gaza Strip. The estimated cost of the project was USD 100 billion⁹, and it was projected that the canal would generate USD 10 billion annually. However, the project faced two major obstacles: first, it failed to attract investor interest because it ran in close proximity to areas of military conflict; second, it required the consent of Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, all of which have access to the Gulf of Aqaba but at the time maintained overtly hostile positions toward Israel.

In July 1963, Howard David Maccabee of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, working under contract with the U.S. Department of Energy, prepared a classified memorandum entitled *The Use of Nuclear Explosives for the Excavation of a Sea-Level Canal across the Negev Desert in Israel, Connecting the Mediterranean with the Gulf of Aqab* (Maccabee, 1963, pp. 1–6). The memorandum was declassified in 1996. The author proposed excavating a canal 160 miles (257 km) long across Israeli territory, linking the Mediterranean Sea with the Gulf of Aqaba and thus with the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean.

Because of its favorable geographical position, the “coastal plain of Gaza” was identified as the terminal point of the canal. Elevated sections reaching heights of up to 1,500 feet (457 meters) were to be leveled to sea level using a series of nuclear explosions.

The idea of linking the Mediterranean and the Red Sea acquired practical significance after the War of 1967. In six days of hostilities, Israel occupied the Gaza Strip and the entire Sinai Peninsula, including the

⁹ Musmar F. The Ben Gurion Canal; The Old New Project. Center for Arab-Eurasian Studies (CAES), 2024. URL: <https://eurasiaen.org/the-ben-gurion-canal-the-old-new-project/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).



Fig. 2. Israel's Ben-Gurion Canal Project

An Alternative to the Suez Canal Is Central to Israel's Genocide of the Palestinians // Middle East Monitor, November 5, 2023.

URL: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231105-an-alternative-to-the-suez-canal-is-central-to-israels-genocide-of-the-palestinians/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

eastern bank of the Suez Canal, which remained closed to navigation until June 1975. Indirect evidence that Israel intended to begin construction of the “Ben-Gurion Canal” is provided by Israel’s active settlement policy in the Gaza area and the Sinai Peninsula: during a decade of occupation, 21 settlements were established in Gaza and 18 in Sinai, with a total Jewish population of 25,500 (Krylov, 2011, pp. 215, 226).

The bloc of Israeli settlements in Sinai was linked to settlements concentrated in the Gaza Strip, whose total area is 365 square kilometers. It was presumably here that the junction between the canal’s channel and the waters of the Mediterranean Sea was to be located. Construction work on the canal was to rely on cheap Palestinian Arab labor, and Gaza was viewed by Israelis as an ideal reservoir of such manpower. As a result of the Arab–Israeli wars, 1.7 million refugees had accumulated in the area; about 70% of the Strip’s population were unemployed youths under the age of 25 (Saker, 1995, p. 342).

In the early years of occupation, unlike in the West Bank, the Israeli military administration in Gaza established a special development fund

and actively implemented employment programs for Palestinians. As a result, employment in what had formerly been a remote Egyptian province reached 98% by 1973 (Saker, 1995, p. 342). This clearly indicated Israel's intention to make extensive use of this potential in the future.

Meanwhile, the victorious euphoria that swept Israeli society after 1967 quickly gave way to mounting economic problems generated by the Six-Day War. The annexation of territories four times larger than Israel itself required enormous expenditures to maintain control. Defense spending rose sharply in the postwar period, from 19.46 billion shekels (17.43% of GDP) to 65.38 billion shekels (30.46% of GDP) by 1975¹⁰. Moreover, in addition to regional isolation, Israel's international isolation increased significantly after the war. Under these conditions, the state could not count on external investments that would have allowed it to begin implementing the plan to connect the two seas by canal.

At the historic elections for the Ninth Knesset in July 1977, the Labor Party ceased to be the ruling party; for the first time, the right-wing nationalist bloc Likud came to power. The new Minister of Finance, Simcha Erlich, decided to promote a project to build a maritime canal. He initiated the creation of a committee tasked with developing a feasibility study for the project. Erlich also approached the German government for assistance in financing the undertaking¹¹. A year later, it was decided to freeze the project due to lack of funds.

In 1980, Minister of Finance Yigal Gurvitz and Minister of Energy Yitzhak Modai revived the work of the disbanded committee and instructed it to study three alternative routes. One of them ran between the Gaza Strip and the southern part of the Dead Sea. Ultimately, it was

¹⁰ Israel Military Spending/Defense Budget 1960–2024 / Macrotrends LLC, Los Angeles, California, US, 2024. URL: <https://www.macrotrends.net/global-metrics/countries/ISR/israel/military-spending-defense-budget> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

¹¹ Sar aozar li-Shvajz bedarko le-Germaniya [The Minister of Finance is heading to Switzerland en route to Germany] // Davar. 04.10.1977. (In Hebrew) URL: https://www.nli.org.il/he/newspapers/dav/1977/12/04/01/article/21?&dliv=none&e=-----he-20--1--img-txIN%7ctx-TI1&utm_source=he.wikipedia.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=%22תלעתת+מימיה%22&utm_content=itonut (accessed: 12.10.2024).

this southern route that was chosen. Mediterranean Dead Sea Company Ltd. was established and tasked with raising the required USD 800 million in Europe and the United States¹². On May 28, 1981, in the presence of Prime Minister Menachem Begin, a ceremony was held to mark the start of tunnel drilling.

The decision to build the maritime canal provoked condemnation and protests within the international community, since it was planned to be dug precisely through the Gaza Strip, as well as because of the possible consequences for the use of the Jordan River's water resources by Jordanian farmers. Strong objections were voiced in Jordan; Egypt and the United Kingdom condemned the project. The UN General Assembly also adopted a resolution stating that the construction of the canal violated international law and called on Israel to immediately cease any actions and/or plans for earthworks aimed at implementing this project¹³. At the end of 1985, under the pretext that the project to connect the two seas required far more substantial capital investments, the Israeli government decided to halt its implementation, and the Med-Dead Company was dissolved¹⁴.

In addition, many factors pointed to serious environmental risks inherent in Israeli projects to construct maritime canals. These risks include the fact that the mixing of seawaters could cause abrupt changes in the seas under consideration; there is a high probability of seawater intrusion into groundwater along the route of pipeline construction; and

¹² Mimun aproekt taalat ayamim yutal al' abonds [The financing of the Canal of the Seas will be carried out through the issuance of bonds] // Davar. 23.01.1981. (In Hebrew) URL: <https://www.nli.org.il/he/newspapers/dav/1981/01/23/01/article/38?&dliw=none&e=-----he-20--1--img> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

¹³ UN General Assembly Resolution 39/101, "Decision of Israel to Construct a Canal Linking the Mediterranean Sea with the Dead Sea". Resolutions of the Thirty-Ninth Session of the General Assembly. New York: United Nations, 1984, p. 168.

¹⁴ Shorer O. Proekt taalat ayamim tava be-mitat neshika [The Canal of the Seas project is stalled due to lack of funding] // Maariv. 23.12.1985. (In Hebrew) URL: https://www.nli.org.il/he/newspapers/mar/1985/12/23/01/article/100?&dliw=none&e=-----he-20--1--imgtxIN%7ctx-TI1&utm_source=he.wikipedia.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=%22תלעת+תימיה%22&utm_content=itonut (accessed: 12.10.2024);

there is also the risk of disrupting the fragile ecosystem of the Red Sea as a result of desalination operations. Environmental risks were studied in detail in 2009–2012 by expert groups appointed by the World Bank. The reports presented contained the following conclusions: connecting the Mediterranean, Red, and Dead Seas by canal branches is entirely permissible and will not have negative environmental consequences¹⁵. No changes in the Dead Sea will occur if up to 400 million cubic meters per year are discharged into it, and there is a possibility of preventing seawater intrusion into groundwater. With careful planning and construction, no serious changes in the Red Sea were expected due to the relatively limited scale of water withdrawal¹⁶.

During a short lull in the Palestinian–Israeli confrontation in December 2013, Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority signed a memorandum of understanding on resolving water issues between the countries. The agreement provided for the restoration of a desalination plant in Aqaba and the construction of an Israeli–Jordanian pipeline to transport brine from the desalination plant to the Dead Sea. This project could have become the first step toward building a maritime canal from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea; however, after Israel launched a military operation to eliminate Hamas in late 2023, Jordan announced the denunciation of the agreement; earlier, the Palestinians had also withdrawn from participation in it¹⁷.

The economic aspect of linking the Mediterranean Sea and the Red Sea

For Israel's economy, the issue of building various transport arteries between the Mediterranean and Red Seas has always been relevant. As early as 1970, a special oil pipeline was built for the re-export of oil bypassing

¹⁵ Red Sea – Dead Sea Water Conveyance Study Program. Final Report. Washington: The World Bank, 2011. P. 9, 283.

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 4.

¹⁷ Red Sea water desalination project moving ahead // The Jordan Times. 17.12.2013. URL: <http://jordantimes.com/red-sea-water-desalination-project-moving-ahead> (accessed: 12.10.2024);

the Suez Canal. It connects the cities of Eilat and Haifa. At present, the total length of the pipeline is 418 km, and its capacity is about 500,000 barrels (28 million tons) per year¹⁸. Crude oil is delivered by tankers to the port of Ashkelon; part of it is then pumped through the pipeline to the refinery in Haifa, while another part goes to the terminal in Eilat, where it is reloaded onto tankers for re-export to Asia. During the Suez Crisis, Israel actively used the highway connecting the ports of Eilat and Ashkelon for exporting goods.

In 1959, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion approved a plan for the development of the Negev, which envisaged the construction of a railway from the port of Eilat to the port of Ashkelon (the Med-Red project)¹⁹. France showed great interest in this project. Subsequently, the project was repeatedly discussed at the ministerial level but was constantly postponed for financial reasons. Only in 2013 did the cabinet of B. Netanyahu approve the plan to build the Med-Red railway connection. China, India, Canada, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea, and the United States expressed readiness to participate in financing the project. It was expected that after the opening of the line, the flow of tourists to Eilat would double. The transportation of about 2.5 million tons of cargo and 140,000 vehicles per year was also envisaged. According to the project, in addition to serving the local market, the railway would serve Asian countries transporting goods to Europe, and in this regard Med-Red could pose serious competition to the Suez Canal²⁰. However, due to the high cost of the project (40 billion shekels, or about USD 11.4 billion), it was again postponed. According to experts, the railway from Eilat to Ashdod would not become profitable, unlike a maritime canal,

¹⁸ The Eilat Ashkelon Pipeline Co. Ltd. (EAPC). Ashkelon: EAPC, 2013. P. 8.

¹⁹ Tohmit humash le-pituaah a-Negev [A five-year plan for the development of the Negev] // HaIzofe. 16.03.1959. (In Hebrew) URL: <https://www.nli.org.il/he/newspapers/?a=is&oid=hzh19590316-01&type=staticpdf&e=-----he-20--1--img-txIN%7ctxTI-----1> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

²⁰ *Bar-Eli* A. Arakevet le-Eilat: anesia le-Tel'-Aviv — shaataim va-hezi; akav jesharet 3,5 million nosim ba-shana [A railway to Eilat: travel to Tel Aviv — two and a half hours; the line will serve 3.5 million passengers per year] // TheMarker. 22.11.2010. (In Hebrew) URL: <https://www.themarker.com/dynamo/cars/2010-11-22/ty-article/0000017f-ec5c-ddba-a37f-ee7e60680000> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

since unloading from a ship to railcars and subsequent loading from railcars back onto a ship would require the costs disproportionate to the cost of building Med-Red. The President of the Israeli Chamber of Shipping, Yoram Sebbah, like many other opponents of the railway project, argues that unloading 20,000 containers (a single vessel's cargo) onto a train capable of taking no more than a hundred containers requires complex and expensive logistics, and in this respect Med-Red will never be able to compete with a maritime canal²¹.

In 2020, with the mediation of the administration of U.S. President Trump, it was possible to agree on the principles of normalizing relations between Israel and four countries of the region: the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Qatar, with a number of significant reservations, joined the supporters of the Abraham Accords, from which the political component was removed (Krylov, Fedorchenko, Maryasis, 2022, p. 137). Israel expected that the new U.S. Middle East initiative would allow it to purchase oil and other petroleum products from the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, previously inaccessible due to sanctions restrictions. Just one month after the signing of the cooperation agreement between Israel and the UAE in October 2020, the Israeli state company Europe Asia Pipeline Co (EAPC) and the UAE-based MED-RED Land Bridge Ltd. signed an agreement on transporting crude oil and fuel from the Persian Gulf to Western markets from Eilat to the port of Ashkelon. However, Israel's Supreme Court upheld a lawsuit filed by local environmental activists and froze the deal due to possible risks to the environment and the ecology of the Mediterranean and Red Sea basins²². The court's decision once again confirmed that neither a pipeline nor a railway line could become a worthy alternative to a maritime canal.

²¹ *Fisher I.* Can Israel's Eilat Become an Alternative to Suez Canal? // Haaretz. April 1, 2021. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2021-04-01/ty-article/suez-canal-ship-eilat-cant-become-alternative-global-ship-ping/0000017f-e628-df2c-a1ff-fe79e1440000> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

²² *Rabinovitch A.* Scrap UAE pipeline deal over oil risks to Red Sea, Israeli minister says // Reuters, November 16, 2021. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/israels-energy-minister-calls-cancel-oil-pipeline-deal-with-uae-firm-2021-11-16/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

Israel's intervention in the Gaza Strip and the renewed relevance of the idea of building the Ben-Gurion Canal

On April 2, 2021, Israel announced that work on laying the Ben-Gurion Canal would begin by June 2021 and could take several years. It was assumed that the project would be supported by the United States, as well as Saudi Arabia and other GCC countries interested in reducing the cost of energy transit²³. However, neither Washington nor Riyadh supported the Israeli initiative.

The issue of building an analogue of the Suez Canal was raised again after the start of Israel's asymmetric military operation in the Gaza Strip in October 2023. The reoccupation of the enclave, in addition to eliminating Hamas, opened up broad prospects for implementing the old idea²⁴. Evidence in favor of the view that something else was hidden behind Israel's argument about the need to destroy Hamas was also provided by the fact that the most intensive bombardments were carried out precisely in northern Gaza, that is, in the area of the supposed terminal point of the canal on its way to the Mediterranean Sea, as well as by the fact that Israeli forces persistently urged Palestinians to leave precisely the northern areas of the Strip. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, by early 2025, 1.1 million and 685,000 forcibly displaced persons had accumulated in the southern cities of Rafah and Khan Yunis, respectively, eking out a meager existence on an area of 63.1 square kilometers. Population density in Rafah on the eve of the aggression was 4,360 people per square kilometer, whereas it has now reached approximately 17,500 people per square kilometer²⁵. The population living in the governorates of Gaza and North Gaza, according to the same source, now amounts to no more than half a million

²³ *Musmar F.* The Ben Gurion Canal: multi-billion-dollar investment project // Global Arab Network, May 22, 2024. URL: <https://www.english.globalarab-network.com/2024/05/22/the-ben-gurion-canal-multi-billion-dollar-investment-project/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

²⁴ *Musmar F.* The Ben Gurion Canal project // Israel HaYom, May 5, 2024. URL: <https://www.israelhayom.com/2024/05/12/the-ben-gurion-canal-project/> (accessed: 12.03.2025).

²⁵ Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS). 1.1 million Palestinians are in Rafah Governorate. April 25, 2024. URL: <https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/post.aspx?lang=en&ItemID=5748> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

people. It is precisely these administrative areas that have suffered the most severe destruction; all infrastructure has been completely destroyed there, and many of the survivors are likely to leave these places as well.

An indirect confirmation that Israel was looking for a suitable pretext for intervention in Gaza is the “unexpected” failure of all its intelligence services, which allegedly had no information about the terrorist raid by Hamas militants beyond the “security wall” on October 7, 2023. Some serious Western analysts are convinced that Mossad and other Israeli services had been warned by U.S. and Egyptian intelligence about the impending invasion from Gaza into Israeli territory but took no action to prevent the violence²⁶. The construction of an expensive canal just a few dozen kilometers from a sector which, according to the lexicon of Israeli politicians, is a “terrorist entity”, would hardly have attracted interest from potential sponsors. The elimination of Hamas and the establishment of full Israeli control over Gaza, on the other hand, would create entirely new realities on the ground for promoting the Ben-Gurion Project.

The canal, without any doubt, is beneficial for Israel from an economic standpoint. It will clearly be more efficient than the Suez Canal, since it will be built using modern technologies, and its capabilities will allow a larger number of vessels to pass thanks to simultaneous two-way navigation of large ships along two branches. Each proposed branch of the canal will have a depth of 50 meters, which is 10 meters deeper than the Suez Canal, and a width of about 200 meters (the bottom width of the Suez Canal is 45–60 meters)²⁷. Super-tankers and vessels 300

²⁶ *Bergman R., Goldman A.* Israel Knew Hamas’s Attack Plan More Than a Year Ago // The New York Times, December 2, 2023. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/30/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-attack-intelligence.html> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Beaumont P.* Israeli intelligence leak details extent of warnings over Hamas attack // The Guardian, 28 November, 2023. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/28/israeli-military-had-warning-of-hamas-training-for-attack-reports-say> (accessed: 12.10.2024); *Israeli army knew of Hamas's plans on 7 October, report finds* // Middle East Eye, 18 June, 2024. URL: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israeli-army-knew-hamas-plans-report-finds> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

²⁷ *Musmar F.* The Ben Gurion Canal: Multi-Billion-Dollar Investment Project // Fikir Academy for strategic Studies, May 23, 2024. URL: <https://fikirandstrategicconsultationsacademy.com/perspectives-papers/f/the-ben-gurion-canal-multi-billion-dollar-investment-project>(accessed: 12.10.2024).

meters long and 110 meters wide will be able to pass simultaneously in both directions along the branches.

In addition, unlike the Suez Canal, which is located along sandy shores and constantly requires dredging, the Israeli canal will run through solid rocky ground, which will significantly reduce maintenance costs. Israel plans to build small towns, hotels, restaurants, and commercial zones along the canal's route.

According to preliminary estimates, construction of the trans-Israeli waterway could cost USD 55 billion and will pay for itself within ten years²⁸. If the military operation to clear Gaza of all those resisting the Israeli occupation is completed in the manner openly declared by B. Netanyahu and members of his inner circle²⁹, this would make it possible to significantly shorten the canal's route, reduce costs, and decrease the time required for its construction. Some experts believe that Israel's profit from operating the canal would amount to USD 6 billion per year³⁰, while Egypt's annual revenue from the Suez Canal would fall from USD 9.3 billion³¹ to

²⁸ Gellendter J. An Israeli Suez Canal // The Jerusalem Post, March 7, 2015. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/an-israeli-suez-canal-393225> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

²⁹ In his public speech on October 28, 2023, B. Netanyahu quoted the Torah, comparing Palestinians to the Amalekites, enemies of the Israelites three millennia ago: "Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant..." (1 Samuel 15:1–3). Sharon J. PM's office says it's 'preposterous' to say his invoking Amalek was a genocide call // The Times of Israel, January 16, 2024. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pms-office-says-its-preposterous-to-say-invoking-amalek-was-a-genocide-call/>; Netanyahu's references to violent biblical passages raise alarm among critics // NPR, November 7, 2023. URL: <https://www.npr.org/2023/11/07/1211133201/netanyahus-references-to-violent-biblical-passages-raise-alarm-among-critics>

³⁰ Šerić M. The Ben Gurion Canal: Israel's Potential Revolutionary Alternative To Suez Analysis // Eurasia Review. November 17, 2023. URL: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/17112023-the-ben-gurion-canal-israels-potential-revolutionary-alternative-to-suez-analysis/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

³¹ Suez Canal annual revenue hits record \$9.4 billion, chairman says // Reuters, June 21, 2023. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/suez-canal-annual-revenue-hits-record-94-bln-chairman-2023-06-21/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

USD 4 billion³². The emergence of an alternative Israeli canal threatens to seriously undermine the entire Egyptian economy and set the country back in its development by many decades.

Conclusion

Israel, the United States, and their NATO allies are interested, for geopolitical, strategic, and economic reasons, in the emergence of a new short route from the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. These states have always viewed the transfer of the Suez Canal under Egypt's sovereignty with disapproval. This irritation has only intensified due to the refusal of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's government to participate in Western sanctions policy against Russia. As of the end of 2023, trade turnover between Russia and Egypt increased by 25 percent compared to the same period of the previous year and exceeded USD 7 billion. Egypt became a full member of BRICS on January 1, 2024, and the West is dissatisfied with a situation in which Cairo directly, and Russia and China indirectly, dominate such a strategically important zone as the Suez Canal.

In the context of the reformatting of the geopolitical situation in the region, Egypt's rapprochement with Russia and China, and the growing threat to shipping from the Houthis on the approaches to the Suez corridor, the United States may well support the idea of constructing an alternative canal. It is no coincidence that after being elected president once again, D. Trump received B. Netanyahu as his first foreign guest. With his characteristic assertiveness, D. Trump proposed an updated "deal of the century", which this time envisages:

1. the establishment of U.S.–Israeli control over the entire Gaza Strip;
2. demining operations and the clearing of the territory of destroyed buildings;
3. the creation of conditions for future economic development;

³² *Patial R.C.* Alternate Suez Canal (The Israeli Ben Gurion Canal) — OpEd // Eurasia Review, November 7, 2023. URL: <https://www.eurasiareview.com/07112023-alternate-suez-canal-the-israeli-ben-gurion-canal-oped/> (accessed: 12.10.2024).

4. the creation of an unlimited number of jobs and housing for the population of this area, which Donald Trump called the “future Middle Eastern Riviera”.

According to Trump’s plan, the two-million-strong Palestinian population of the Strip must undergo a transfer procedure to other countries, among which Egypt, Jordan, and Somalia are named. Under the pretext of protecting their economic interests, American politicians (like Britain and France, which once owned the Suez Canal) will gain a new incentive to strengthen their military presence in the region and new opportunities to enhance their control over the most important international trade routes. For B. Netanyahu and his entourage, involving the United States in establishing a “peaceful order” in the region through the de-Palestinianization of an extremely important strategic point of the globe, namely the Gaza Strip, opens a wide window of opportunity for implementing the plan to build the “Ben-Gurion Canal”. If Israel’s current share of global trade cargo transportation passing through the Red Sea is 2 percent, then the implementation of plans to build a maritime route alternative to the Suez Canal would make it possible to significantly increase this state’s revenues from the transit of goods between the two seas.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.



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Revisiting the Issue of the “Orthodox Factor” in the Critical Year of the Lebanese Civil War

Abstract

The article examines the year 1978 as an important stage of the Lebanese Civil War, and the author offers his assessment of the positions of Orthodox figures on the basis of documentary evidence collected by him and information cited by other researchers. Despite the obvious pragmatic orientation and the one-sided nature of the information contained in these documents, they are nevertheless quite useful for addressing the question posed in the title. The participation of Orthodox figures at various levels of Lebanese politics (including the highest) provides grounds for an affirmative answer to the question of the existence of an “Orthodox factor” in politics. However, this factor does not appear unified or cohesive: the Orthodox — like all the other communities — did not act from a single position or as a united front. Lebanese Orthodox Christians were an organic part of Lebanese society, and their political positions were diverse. They were not an exception in terms of the diversity of ideological orientations, ranging from extremely “right-wing” nationalist views to “left-wing” ones

(Syrianism, Pan-Arabism, internationalism). They demonstrated a high degree of ideological solidarity, while the confessional solidarity was far from being their primary concern. In defending their rights, the Orthodox did not single out their community among others either as the worthiest or the most vulnerable; this was not a narrowly confessional vision of priorities but rather one that fit into a broader civic understanding of the good of the country, while preserving the integrity of its society and territory. The affiliation of Lebanese Orthodox Christians with various parties and their adherence to a wide spectrum of ideologies reveal their similarity in this respect to representatives of other Lebanese confessions. This also applies to the question of external influences, especially Syrian influence, which was the most sensitive issue at that time. A methodological question is also raised concerning the legitimacy of using the term “political confessionalism” as a scholarly concept in relation to the Lebanese events of those years, when ideology still largely dominated the public consciousness of Arabs.

Keywords:

The Lebanese Orthodox; Lebanese Civil War; Orthodox activism in Lebanon; Political confessionalism

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Introduction

The impetus for turning to this topic was the visibly growing relevance of nationalism amid the intensified involvement of various external forces in ongoing conflicts. As it happened, the author came into possession of documentary materials concerning the participation, in one form or another, of Orthodox figures in Lebanon in the events of the Civil War, specifically in 1978. These documents consist of declassified confidential reports sent by U.S. Department of State residents in Beirut concerning the current situation, and they touch upon the positions of a number of Orthodox politicians and clergy, as well as their reactions to the turbulent events unfolding at that time¹.

1978 can be considered a key year in the Lebanese Civil War in terms of the final crystallization of the opposing camps. This took place against the backdrop of the direct involvement of international organizations in the armed conflict, both regional (for example, the League of Arab States) and global (the UN). Their peacekeeping mission consisted not only in separating the warring parties but also in enforcing the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from the country. This extremely complex context previously made it impossible to pose in a focused manner the question of clarifying the political positions of the Orthodox, or their activism more generally, during that period. The documents cited in the article, despite their bias, nevertheless shed some light on this issue.

A Fundamental Turning Point in the Lebanese Civil War

The first stage of the Lebanese Civil War was the so-called “Palestinian” stage (April 1975 – August 1976), and it is characteristic that in historiography up

¹ The documents cited were collected by the author over several years through a subscription-based access to the American Digital National Security Archive, which is no longer operational (<https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.usr.shpl.ru/dnsa>).

to the 1990s it was most often identified as a separate “War in Lebanon of 1975–1976”. Professor of sociology at the Lebanese University Ahmad Beydoun, who remained in Lebanon throughout the entire turbulent period, insisted on defining the “two-year war” of 1975–1976 as the first phase of a long Lebanese tragedy². Some historians rightly use the term “foreign war” for these events, emphasizing the external factor as paramount.

In essence, this was a bloody confrontation between certain Lebanese party militias and Palestinian armed formations on Lebanese territory, primarily on an ideological basis. Alongside the leftist ideas, it was fueled by the pathos of the struggle of all Arabs for Palestinian rights. As a result, an important trigger for the escalation of the situation in Lebanon was the weak response to Israeli raids on the large Palestinian camp in Nabatiyya and the border village of Kfar Shuba in early 1975, which provoked Palestinian outrage³. Palestinian activism, in turn, encountered a nervous reaction from Lebanese militiamen setting out to curb the militants who had “run amok” in their homeland. The well-known events of the spring of 1975 quickly escalated into an internal conflict and spread to many Lebanese regions, including the capital.

Further deterioration of the situation required military intervention, first by Syria in June 1976 (initially to protect two Maronite villages), and then, in October 1976, by other Arab countries. The Arab Security Force, created by a decision of a summit meeting (attended by the leaders of Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Kuwait, and Yasser Arafat representing Palestine) in Riyadh on October 17, were renamed the Arab Deterrent Force (ADF), with the Lebanese president designated as their commander. Already on October 25–26, at the Cairo extraordinary summit of heads of state, the budget of the ADF was established, with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait becoming its main donors⁴. The ADF was deployed

² *Beydoun A.* Le Liban: itinéraires dans une guerre incivile. Paris: Karthala; Amman: Cermoc, 1993 (Collection “Hommes et Sociétés”). P. 82. See also: *Timofeev I.V.* Among Gray Walls and Hot Dust... A Chronicle of the Lebanese Tragedy. Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1984, 127 pp.

³ *Chamie J.* The Lebanese Civil War: An Investigation Into the Causes // World Affairs. Vol. 139. No. 3. Winter 1976/77. P. 175–176.

⁴ *Alieva S.* The Palestinian Resistance Movement and the Arab States (1964–1976). Special Bulletin, 1986, no. 4, Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences; ed. by V.I. Nosenko. Moscow: Nauka, 1986, p. 153.

primarily in the Beqaa Valley with headquarters in Chtaura, and bases in the Rayak area near Zahle, in Hermel, and in Baalbek. Their backbone consisted of Syrian troops — about 25,000 out of a total force of 30,000. By 1979, when the mandate of the ADF was extended, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Sudan, and Libya had withdrawn their contingents altogether.

The end of the first stage of the Civil War was marked by its transformation into a broad intra-Lebanese confrontation. After the tragic events of the first two years, a critical stage of acute internal civil conflict began, accompanied by expanded participation of numerous external forces. At the beginning of 1978, the uncompromising stance of the Phalangists (the Kataeb Regulatory Forces) and the “right-wing liberals” (the Numur-al-Ahrar of the NLP) led to a sharp escalation of the situation. Supporters of Gemayel and Chamoun appeared ready to go all the way, even to the point of separating Christian regions of Lebanon into an independent state.

At the same time, Palestinian militants intensified their attacks on the occupied Palestinian lands from southern Lebanese territory. As an expected result, in March an Israeli military operation began on Lebanese territory, and from March to June 1978, Israeli forces maintained a presence in Lebanon.

Against this background, President Elias Sarkis, elected in 1976 after Suleiman Frangieh, attempted to resign. He struggled to maintain a hopeless balance between the warring forces operating on the country’s territory and in the neighborhoods of the capital: not only Lebanese militias from different parties, but also Palestinian fighters not always subordinate to the PLO leadership, Syrian units within the ADF, and UN “blue helmets” attempting to enforce Resolution No. 425 and ensure the withdrawal of Israeli occupying forces from southern Lebanon.

Much in that turbulent environment depended on ideology, which determined the essential nature of the war. After the initial stage of the Lebanese civil confrontation (directly linked to the presence of Palestinian armed groups in the country and therefore known as the “Palestinian” stage) the period of intensified intra-Lebanese struggle began. This struggle unfolded between supporters of what were conventionally termed “left-wing” and “right-wing” ideas. The Lebanese left included adherents of such diverse ideological currents as communism, Nasserism

(Arab socialism), Ba’athism (with its Arab nationalism, or Arabism), and Syrianism.

Paradoxically, the designation “left-wing” for these Arabs did not imply internationalism, nor reliance on the poorest strata of the population (still less on the working class). In essence, and even in terms of self-identification, they were nationalists (qawmiyyūn), but Arab nationalists (or “Syrian” nationalists, in the broadest interpretation of this historical concept). Importantly, the leftist character of these movements (with the exception of communism, which was the least widespread among Arabs) was manifested not in their internationalism but in their emphasis on social justice. It was precisely this idea that brought leftist currents close to the corresponding Muslim doctrine, embedded in Islamic Revelation and in the hadiths. Both presupposed a general orientation toward social regulation and redistribution of social assistance; both condemned ostentatious luxury and extreme poverty as social evils. Hence the practically unified camp of leftists and Muslims, which opposed proponents of other views – those who accepted both horizontal social competition along Western lines and systems of patronage (patron–client relations) in vertical social relations.

Such a model, sometimes coupled with claims of a special, “Phoenician” origin, was adhered to by the so-called Lebanese right. These were nationalists far removed from Arabism. Their traditionalism stemmed from a conservative belief in the historical rootedness and effectiveness of a kind of pyramidal system of social relations. The head of a local clan, endowed with virtually unlimited authority and the powers of a leader (qa’id, usually with a clearly confessional, typically Uniate, coloration), provided tangible social support, but only within his own clientele. He served as a political representative – usually of his party – at the state level and was counted among the important figures of the confessional community, yet in the full sense he was a guarantor only for those living under the patronage of his family. Party militias (milīshiyāt) were recruited from such supporters and fellow villagers. The obligatory attachment to a specific locus gave this system a resemblance to feudal relations – largely an external one.

As a rule, the leading families of such political forces were Maronite. However, it was by no means necessary that such clans belonged to the

Lebanese “right” that confronted opponents from the “leftist” coalition with their militias. For the year under consideration, the most telling exception was the Maronite Frangieh clan, which definitively broke with the Lebanese Front and joined the opposing camp, paying a high price for this decision (as discussed below).

The division became most clearly pronounced precisely from the beginning of 1978, which appears to have determined a fundamental change in the nature of the Lebanese Civil War. Even amid multilateral external intervention (the Syrian contingent; Saudi, Emirati, Sudanese, and other units within the Arab Deterrent Forces; and, of course, Palestinian groups subordinated to the PLO to very different degrees), the conflict in Lebanon had by then become a purely internal one. This makes the question of the participants at this stage (and the positions of the groups involved) particularly important.

In the commonly accepted simplified scheme of the Lebanese conflict, one sometimes speaks not merely of a “right-wing Christian” camp opposing Muslim groups of a leftist orientation, but specifically of the “Maronite” party militias. Meanwhile, many questions remain regarding the participation of other Christian communities, and above all the Orthodox. After all, their share in Lebanese society was significant. It is known that Orthodox Christians at that time made up about one-tenth of the total Lebanese population. Precise data were provided by the Lebanese-American scholar Joseph Chamie for 1956: 149,000 Orthodox out of a total Lebanese population of 1,408,000, that is, more than 10 percent⁵.

But was there a unified Orthodox position in the Lebanese conflict? Did an “Orthodox factor” exist in that civil confrontation? Some previously unpublished documents from that era make it possible to contribute to answering these questions, and this is what the article is devoted to. The somewhat one-sided nature of the documents (primarily declassified reports from Lebanon to the U.S. Department of State) is due to the collection available to the author, which finally deserves to be introduced into the corpus of sources.

⁵ Chamie J. The Lebanese... P. 174.



Palestinian militants in Lebanon
From open sources

The Orthodox in the Lebanese ideological mosaic

Just as it is impossible to characterize, in general terms, the political positions of, for example, Sunni Muslims or Maronite Christians at that time, it is equally impossible to generalize the position of Lebanese Orthodox Christians as a whole. Perhaps the diversity of their ideological preferences was even greater, since historically they were more diffusely distributed across Lebanese territory: from the far south to the north, from the coast to the Beqaa Valley. In addition to their main area of residence — the agrarian Lebanese *qadā'* of Koura with its center in Amioun — they lived in large numbers in cities throughout the country: in the capital, Tripoli, Sidon, Zahle, and others. The loyalty of Orthodox believers to a local strongman, a *qa'id*, was not practiced to anything approaching the degree characteristic of the Maronites. Orthodox Christians found themselves in very different political camps and parties; their choices were more individual in nature and less dictated by social environment or circumstances.

It is well known, in particular, that individuals from an Orthodox background participated in the leadership of such political organizations as the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), and the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) even during their formative periods. Later as well, Orthodox Christians continued to be among their leaders. Thus, from 1974 the SSNP was headed by the Or-

thodox Abdullah Saadeh, and at the 1984 elections to the Party's Supreme Council, Orthodox figures such as Daoud Baz, Hafiz Sayegh, Massad Hajjal, Wasim Saadeh, and Marwan Fares were elected, alongside representatives of other religious communities⁶. In the LCP in the second half of the 1970s, militantly inclined communists who embarked on the path of armed struggle rose to leadership positions. Among the party's top leadership were activists of various confessions, including the Orthodox Georges Hawi and Khalil ad-Dibs⁷.

In 1975, the United League of Popular Committees (*Tajammu' rawābiṭ al-lijān al-sha'biyya*) was established, a "leftist" organization that, ideologically, advocated Arabism, the secularization of the state, and the abolition of confessionalism, and in foreign policy supported broad contacts with Syria and Iraq, while actively backing the Palestinian struggle against Zionism. Among its founders were Sunnis as well, but representatives of the Orthodox community even predominated; these included Ma'an Bashur, Khalil Barakat, Habib Zughaib, and Bishara Murhidj⁸.

As for the Orthodox Patriarch Elias IV Mouawwad (1914–1979), head of the Patriarchate of Antioch from September 1970, he maintained good relations with the Russian Orthodox Church, visiting the Soviet Union in January 1972 and October 1974. For his ardent international support of the Palestinian cause in the mid-1970s, he earned the nickname "the Patriarch of the Arabs"⁹. The American resident in Beirut reported an interesting fact in June 1977:

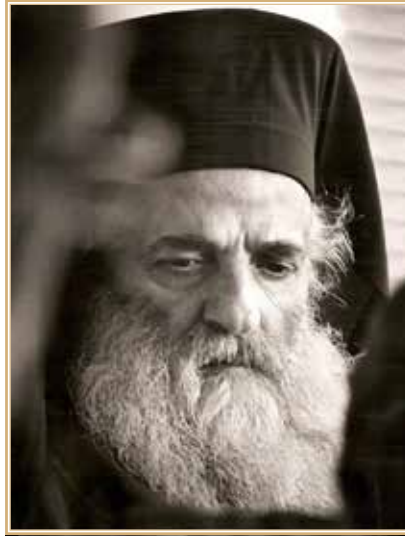
"A source familiar with this period [events from the mid- to late 1960s] informed an embassy officer that Elias, who was then the bishop of Aleppo, was one of the pro-Western bishops who played a leading role in opposing this group with the support of his friend Hafez al-Assad, then foreign minister. As a result, the overwhelming majority of church bishops today have become pro-Eastern. Patriarch Elias sympathizes with both pan-Syrian and Arab national aspirations and is critical of Lebanese

⁶ Rowayheb M.G. Lebanese Militias: A New Perspective // Middle Eastern Studies. Vol. 4. No. 2. Mar. 2006. P. 308–309.

⁷ Ibid. P. 306.

⁸ Ibid. P. 313.

⁹ *Abi Jaber D.* "Elijah IV", *Orthodox Encyclopedia*. URL: <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/389377.html?ysclid=llewjkrpio308305208> (accessed 21 June 2025).



Elias IV
From open sources

Christians who advocate separation. He maintains regular contacts with the Syrian Nationalist Party”¹⁰ (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

Orthodox figures, as individuals wielding considerable influence, also attracted the attention of Western residents. In the second year of the war, a report to the U.S. Department of State dated August 12, 1976 listed four “key Lebanese figures” from the Orthodox milieu and provided brief characterizations of them: Ghassan Tueni (from Beit Mary, publisher, minister of labor and social affairs, tourism, industry, and oil, close to Orthodox Archbishop Salibi); Elias Salibi (archbishop from Achrafieh); Dr. Charles Malik (from Rabieh, leading expert of the Kaslik-based expert group, a think tank); Dr. Abdullah Rassi (from Kfour, MP from Akkar, son-in-law of Frangieh, member of the parliamentary Committee on International Affairs)¹¹. What might their designation as “key” figures have meant? At the very least, it is evident that they represented significant channels of influence and, in that capacity, could be useful, from the American point of view, for steering the situation in a direction favorable to them.

¹⁰ US Department of State. Key Lebanese Personalities. 1977. June 2. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 4.05.2006).

¹¹ US Department of State. Biographic Data on Greek Orthodox Patriarch. 1976. August 12. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 22.05.2009).



Gabriel Salibi
From open sources

Ghassan Gebran Tueni (1926–2012) was at that time a highly influential journalist and politician, which alone could explain American interest in him. He took over the reins of the newspaper *An-Nahar* from his father and remained its editor-in-chief and publisher from 1947 almost continuously until his death. An MP from the age of twenty-five, by the time of the document cited he had already held such high state posts as deputy prime minister and head of several ministries, eventually becoming an adviser to the president of Lebanon¹². He was married to Nadia Hamadeh, from a well-known Druze family of Baakline. Nadia's father was a writer and diplomat, and her brother Marwan Hamadeh was a prominent journalist and later a minister.

His Eminence Elias Salibi (1881–1977), an Orthodox hierarch and Metropolitan of Beirut since 1936, initially maintained a very balanced position with regard to external influences. In particular, he had had extensive and varied contacts with the Russian Orthodox Church in the past and had visited Russia on several occasions. In keeping with the tradition of Lebanese Orthodox hierarchs, Metropolitan Salibi of Beirut maintained good relations not only with other Christian con-

¹² *Ghassan T.* American University of Beirut, Honorary Doctorates. URL: <https://www.aub.edu.lb/doctorates/recipients/Pages/tueni-profile.aspx> (accessed 15.07.2025).



Charles Malik
From open sources

fessions but also with Muslims of various denominations. However, in the mid-1960s an opposition emerged within the Orthodox episcopate of the Church of Antioch that broadly reflected the global ideological confrontation of that time. Metropolitan Salibi effectively became the driving force of a pro-Western group of hierarchs and opposed the “left-wing” camp. The opinion of this experienced Lebanese figure, who was initiated into many political subtleties and, moreover, was well disposed toward the Americans, could not but be significant for assessing the situation on the ground. In October 1977, however, he passed away, leaving as locum tenens — according to an old Byzantine tradition — his nephew, Bishop Gabriel Salibi.

It is therefore unsurprising that among the figures listed was such a prominent “right-wing” activist as Charles Malik (1906–1987), a co-founder of the Lebanese Front. This politician was a fierce anti-communist who, by the time of the civil war, had amassed an enormous political résumé, having served as Lebanon’s ambassador to the United States, Venezuela, and Cuba; as Lebanon’s representative at the Bandung Conference and at the United Nations; as president of the 13th session of the UN General Assembly; and as Lebanon’s minister of education (1955) and minister of foreign affairs (1956–1958). He believed that “the Orthodox must determine their place and that their interests are directly connected with the interests of Christians as a whole,

and above all with those of the Maronite Christians”¹³ (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

In Lebanese politics he was regarded as a supporter of Maronite activism; he was the right-hand man of President Camille Chamoun during the 1958 crisis and an ally of the leadership of the Kataeb Party. At the time relevant to our discussion, he was one of three co-authors (the other two being the Maronites Fouad Afram al-Boustani and Father Boulos an-Naaman) of the Party’s program of action following a conference held in January 1977 in the locality of Sayyidat al-Bir. It is telling that the core ideas of this program (or declaration) have remained unchanged among the Maronites to this day and have found expression in the reform project outlined in Hikmat Amal Abu-Zayd’s 2021 book, which has been translated and published in Russia¹⁴. The main points of the 1977 program were the preservation of Lebanon’s sovereignty and the protection of its independence, but above all it was the idea that the state required a fundamental reform. Any future political formula for Lebanon, it argued, should assume the country’s pluralistic character, either through decentralization or through federalization. It was especially emphasized that the socio-political rights of Christians in the course of future political reform should not be less than those of non-Christians. In Lebanon’s conditions, this was to be achieved by granting each “confessional group” autonomy in managing its culture, education, finances, and social affairs¹⁵.

In Charles Malik’s case (entirely in keeping with his credentials as a doctor of philosophy and a theologian), political approaches were framed by philosophical reflections. Here is one example of his ideas, which at one time attracted the interest of American intelligence agencies:

“Our freedom of thought, conscience, and decision is absolutely sacred. Through this freedom we participate in the eternal act of creation. Take this freedom away from a person, and he will immediately cease to

¹³ Extract from talk by Dr. Charles Malik, Minister of Lebanon in the United States: Concerning Communism: The Menace and the challenge. Confidential / CIA RDP80-01065A000100170042-3 (Declassified/Released 16.08.2001).

¹⁴ *Abu-Zeid H.A.* Institutional Revolution in Lebanon. Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2022.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* C. 312.



Kataeb fighters
From open sources

be human. [...] It is not the human person who exists for society and the state — on the contrary, society and the state exist for the sake of the human person. There is nothing futile in history, and we cannot begin everything anew. There exists a genuine positive tradition accumulated over the course of four millennia. This tradition of truth and being is the most precious thing in the world”¹⁶ (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

The fighting wing of the Lebanese Front, the Lebanese Forces, was also far from being composed exclusively of Maronites. At the moment of the creation of the LF, this alliance of “right-wing Christian” militias was headed by an Orthodox Christian, William Hawi (1908–1976), who at that time led the militia of the Kataeb Party. He was born into the family of a Lebanese emigrant in New York, but the family re-emigrated to Beirut two years later. Hawi was close to the ideas of Lebanese nationalism, and already in the early years of the Kataeb’s existence, he became one of its commanders. By the period of the civil war, he was a figure with vast experience in leading the struggle for the “purity” of Lebanon. He was shot by a sniper during the fighting for the Tel al-Za’atar camp in Beirut on July 13, 1976, and was succeeded as head of the Lebanese Forces by the notorious Maronite leader Bachir Gemayel, who managed to place under his rigid control a whole array of different “right-wing” militias.

¹⁶ Extract from talk by Dr. Charles Malik...

As for the scholar and politician Abdullah Rassi (1929–1994), who worked as a physician in Saudi Arabia in the 1960s, his high political career began with the election of his father-in-law, Suleiman Frangieh, as president of Lebanon in 1972¹⁷. Dr. Rassi was elected to parliament and remained a deputy for twenty-two years, until his death. In the 1980s he served as minister of the interior in the cabinet of Rashid Karami and even survived an assassination attempt that cost the prime minister his life.

There were other figures in high politics representing the Orthodox community. One of them was Fouad Boutros (1917–2016), a lawyer by training, a graduate of Saint Joseph Jesuit University in Beirut, who headed a number of ministries under Fouad Chehab and who, under President Sarkis, re-entered the government as minister of foreign affairs and deputy prime minister.

Another influential politician, Michel Murr (1931–2021), was a highly successful businessman who began his political career with his election to parliament as early as 1960. He graduated from the same Beirut university (as Fouad Boutros) and later earned a law degree at Paris II. In the 1960s he founded a successful construction company and continued his business in Beirut. The unfinished high-rise he built in West Beirut (the “Murr Tower”) constantly appeared in reports of urban fighting during the first stage of the Lebanese Civil War. He sympathized with the Syrian Social Nationalist Party and later supported the Kataeb, initially opposing the “pro-Syrian” wing led by Karim Pakradouni, and later siding with the Lebanese Forces commander Elie Hobeika, who was linked to the Syrians. During the period under consideration, the Americans characterized him, like Boutros, in one of their reports as a “supporter [of President] Sarkis”¹⁸. He served several times as minister of telecommunications. Through his daughter Myrna, he became related by marriage to the Tueni family (she married the legendary journalist Gebran Tueni). In the parliamentary elections before the war, Michel Murr narrowly lost to his rival for the “Orthodox” quota, and at that time one of the five deputies

¹⁷ In 1966, Abdullah Rassi married Sonia Frangieh.

¹⁸ US Department of State. Capsule Biographies of the Members of the New Lebanese Cabinet. 1979. July 25. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).



Pierre Gemayel
From open sources

from the Metn district was Albert Moukheiber (from the Maronites in Metn, Amine Gemayel was also elected)¹⁹.

Albert Moukheiber (1912–2002) first became a deputy as early as 1957 and later held posts as minister, deputy prime minister, and deputy speaker of parliament. He was regarded as a supporter of Camille Chamoun and his National Liberal Party. In the 1972 elections, Moukheiber was helped to victory by politicians from another Maronite family, the Lahouds.

Another important figure mentioned in the cited documents was Michel Maalouli (Ma'luli) (1931–2004), a member of parliament since 1972. He was a prominent Lebanese political figure; his memoirs, *Events and Situations* (Eng.: *Events and Opinions*), were published relatively recently²⁰. In April 1978, he was a member of the parliamentary group known as the “Committee of Thirteen,” which produced a profound programmatic declaration.

¹⁹ Elections 1972 and the Amendments (Replacements/Appointments) of 1991. The Thirteenth Parliament, Mount Lebanon Province / Liban-Vote.com. URL: <http://libanvote.com/lebanese9296/election1972/Mountl/EL%20-%20METN.html> (accessed 11.10.2006).

²⁰ *Maalouli M. Ahdas wa Mawakif* (Events and Situations). Nofal, 2017. (In Arabic)

Was there Orthodox activism?

Thus, 1978 began with an intensification of activity by the Lebanese Front and with efforts to consolidate the ranks of the Lebanese Forces — the alliance of “right-wing Christian” militias. Their tactical successes in the capital’s districts against the “leftists” led to the necessity of intervention by the Arab Deterrent Forces (ADF), in which the Syrians played the leading role. Direct armed clashes in February 1978 in fact took place between the Lebanese Forces (primarily the militias of the Kataeb and the National Liberal Party) and the Syrian contingent. Fighting spread into the neighborhoods of East Beirut, which were conventionally considered “Christian”, yet the ferocity of the Lebanese Forces did not diminish.

In turn, Palestinian units became more active in the south; their actions were in no way coordinated with the ADF and threatened to provoke a military response from Israel. This is precisely what occurred. The pretext for the Israeli invasion of Lebanon was a provocative attack by Fatah militants on Israeli civilian buses on March 11. This audacious Palestinian commando operation, involving hostage-taking, resulted in the deaths of many dozens of people. The terrorist attack was linked to Egypt’s movement toward concluding peace with Israel: already on November 19, 1977, President Anwar Sadat had traveled to Jerusalem for this purpose, and the PLO may well have sought to inflame the situation in order to derail the negotiation process and prevent any agreements.

When, on March 14, the Israeli army launched its invasion of southern Lebanon (known as Operation Litani) the ADF, and above all the Syrians, were faced with the necessity of responding directly. A report from the American resident dated March 17, 1978 stated:

“...The Palestinians have placed Syria in an extremely difficult position... The Palestinians justify themselves by saying that the world needed to be reminded of the PLO’s role in any peace negotiations. Opinions differ as to what should be done now”²¹. The same report cites the view of a certain Orthodox Bishop Gibran: he “meets periodically with Assad’s security adviser General Al-Khuli and believes that the best and fastest solution is

²¹ US Department of State. Syrians Irritated with PLO, 1978. March 17. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in the south. He believes that the Lebanese army cannot be prepared quickly enough to ensure a prompt withdrawal of the Israelis...”²² (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

At that time, the Syrians were not drawn into a war with Israel. On March 19, UN Security Council Resolution 425 was adopted, calling for an end to aggression, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon, and the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the south of the country. Apparently, this was a solution desirable for the Syrians in their delicate position, a solution whose essence had been articulated by the Orthodox bishop several days before its adoption. On March 22, Israel formally announced the end of Operation Litani, but withdrew the bulk of its forces only in June.

In the spring of 1978, Orthodox activity in high politics was especially evident during discussions over the composition of a new cabinet following the resignation of Salim Al-Huss’s government on April 19. Two projects were discussed: a large government (cabinet) of twenty-four ministers (sixteen ministers with portfolios and eight ministers of state), which would also include young politicians not drawn from among members of parliament, and a small cabinet of only six members (proposed by Camille Chamoun), representing the main confessions. Both projects envisaged the mandatory participation of the Orthodox Fouad Boutros, at least as minister of foreign affairs. In the first project — the large cabinet — the candidacy of Michel Murr was also proposed. His candidacy as a member of the government was also put forward by the chairman of the Higher Islamic Council, the Sunni politician Shafik Wazzan, who believed that the future cabinet should be composed not of Lebanese political heavyweights, but of younger politicians of the next generation, for example, and Amine Gemayel, and of those connected with leading militias but not part of their leadership, for example, M. Murr, who enjoyed authority among the Phalangists²³.

Moreover, the American resident cited the opinion of Shafik Wazzan that the dismissal of the government by Salim Al-Huss “was caused by

²² Ibid.

²³ US Department of State. Aftermath of Government Resignation, Part Two. 1978. April 21. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

a series of disagreements with Foreign Minister Fouad Boutros, the last of which concerned Ain el-Rammaneh: Boutros advocated using state funds to compensate for damage caused by the clashes in Ain el-Rammaneh, but Hoss opposed such expenditure”²⁴. It was also reported that F. Boutros was very reluctant for Huss’s government to resign due to the “risk of a politically disjointed cabinet as a consequence”²⁵ (back translation from Russian — *Editor*) (Huss’s previous government had been formed back in 1976 as a “technocratic” cabinet).

In order to fill the vacuum of executive power under the conditions of the Israeli occupation, a parliamentary committee of 13 deputies representing various confessional groups was formed the day after the government’s resignation, on April 20, and by April 23 it adopted a resolution on the current situation. The discussions were difficult, and the main disagreements concerned the formulation of the position regarding Palestinian actions and the disarmament of militias. One member of the “Committee of Thirteen” was the Orthodox Christian Michel Maalouli alongside politicians such as Parliament Speaker Kamel Asaad, former Prime Minister Saeb Salam, Maronite “Sheikh” Pierre Gemayel, and others. Importantly, the committee also included Sunni and Shiite deputies, and they supported consensus formulations concerning not only, of course, the “withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Lebanese territory”, but also the cessation of Palestinian and any other armed actions throughout Lebanon, and the prohibition of any armed presence except for the forces of the legitimate Lebanese authorities, and the application of Lebanese decrees and laws to all Lebanese citizens and all persons on Lebanese territory without exception”²⁶.

The next important episode of 1978 was the so-called “Ehden massacre”, the killing on June 13 of Suleiman Frangieh’s son Tony and his family. This was a horrific manifestation of enmity within the Lebanese Front, primarily between the Maronite clan militias of the Kataeb and Marada. The immediate cause of the incident was the refusal of the Phalangists to limit their presence in the northern Lebanese territory of the Frangieh

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ US Department of State. The Committee of Thirteen. 1978. April 24. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

clan in the Zgharta district and the killing of the local Kataeb commander by the Marada militants. It is believed that the Kataeb's hostility toward the Frangieh clan arose from the latter's rapprochement with the Syrians and its intention to leave the Lebanese Front. However, some also saw Israeli interest in such a high-profile event as a way to delay the program of reforming the Lebanese army and redeploying it to southern Lebanon (generally in line with the declaration of the “Committee of Thirteen”) instead of relying on the puppet South Lebanon Army (SLA). At that time, the American resident reported that this was intended to divert the attention of the Lebanese government and Syria, to prevent the deployment of the Lebanese army to the south. This would allow the Israelis to continue controlling the security zone through their trusted proxies, the Maronite militias [SLA]²⁷.

This was the opinion of senior representatives of Syrian intelligence, Muhammad Khuli and Muhammad Nassif, as reported by a Lebanese bishop residing in Damascus, apparently the aforementioned Bishop Gibran. His personal views are also presented, including on the position of the Orthodox community, which tended to support the pro-Syrian Frangieh clan and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP), which was regaining strength. The resident reported:

“According to him, practically all major northern politicians rely on traditional supporters rather than parties. They are outraged by the Kataeb, who masquerade as a modern party but are seen by them as no more than a means of strengthening the Gemayel family. It has always been known that the Kataeb wanted to dominate Lebanon, and they will all lose if the Kataeb manage to extend their influence further north. Thus, the Frangieh could count on the support of the majority of Orthodox Christians in the neighboring Koura region, including the well-known al-Ghosn family and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party [SSNP], which was restoring its positions there with the help of the Syrians. The bishop also believes that Father Charbel Kassis²⁸ owes his primary loyalty to

²⁷ US Department of State. Syrian Support for Frangieh, 1978. June 21. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

²⁸ A highly influential figure, a general of the Lebanese Maronite Order, one of the leaders of the Maronite League, believed to have provided assistance to the Tanzim militia, which was part of the Lebanese Forces.

the Frangieh. Under these circumstances, it is entirely possible that the Frangieh will turn to Palestine for help and receive it. Traditional Muslim rivals in Tripoli and Akkar have joined forces with the Frangieh to block the Kataeb”²⁹ (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

Bishop Gibran also predicted that acts of revenge by the Marada were inevitable, and that the sooner they occurred, the easier it would be for the country. The Syrians, despite their genuine anger, were expected not to intervene directly, but to support the Frangieh covertly³⁰.

Another example of the diversity of political leanings among Lebanese Orthodox Christians was the deputy from Aley, Mounir Abou Fadel, a supporter of the PSP and political ally of the young Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, as well as his press secretary, the deputy from the Chouf district, Bahij Taqieddin. Thanks to Abou Fadel’s involvement and peace-making, a meeting took place to resolve relations between the residents of Chouf and Aley:

“According to Abou Fadel himself, topics that were not made public included the removal of PSP militias from certain areas of Chouf, and Walid Jumblatt, in turn, committed to restrain his followers from squatting near Christian homes in the Aley area. Abou Fadel even hopes that a future meeting might bring him and Walid Jumblatt together with Camille Chamoun and Pierre Gemayel”³¹ (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

In a report dated July 10, Deputy Abou Fadel was mentioned among three individuals (the other two being former Prime Ministers Abdallah Yafi and Rashid Solh) who appealed to President Sarkis not to resign³².

Another Orthodox figure, deputy and former minister Albert Moukheiber, expressed concern (apparently as a supporter of Chamoun) about the overly harsh actions of the Lebanese Forces toward the population of East Beirut and even suggested deploying army units to rein in the overzealous militias. The LF leadership responded at the time that

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ US Department of State. Lebanese Situation: June 30, 1978. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

³² US Department of State. Lebanese Situation: July 10, 1978. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).



Female fighters of the Lebanese Christian militia
From open sources

“any militiaman who commits illegal actions will be dismissed”³³. Clearly, Moukheiber understood that the actions of LF fighters were undermining trust in the Lebanese Front and alarming Christians who did not belong to the Maronite community.

In August, he expressed concern about the possibility of Syrian withdrawal from Lebanon, fearing that a “massacre of Christians by Christians” might begin: Frangieh supporters were eager for revenge, and after the Syrians left, their attacks (according to him) could target not only the homeland of the Gemayels in Bikfaya but also Achrafieh (East Beirut), where the Kataeb and Al-Nimur militias terrorized residents and looted homes. He estimated that support for this alliance among the population had fallen from 20% in the fall of 1977 to 5% by August 1978³⁴.

When the Syrians continued shelling the Christian neighborhoods of East Beirut in an effort to drive out the Kataeb and Al-Nimur militias (the Phalangists of the Gemayels and the Ahrar of Chamoun), Orthodox Christian figures again acted as peacemakers. In particular, Syrian

³³ US Department of State. Lebanese Situation: July 25, 1978. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

³⁴ US Department of State. Conversation with Albert Moukheiber, 1978. August 21. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

President Hafez Assad held meetings with F. Boutros as a representative of the Orthodox community (with Jumblatt representing the Druze and Asaad representing the Shiites), as well as with Orthodox Patriarch Elias IV Mouawwad³⁵, to discuss the fate of Christians in these areas. Soon, the Orthodox deputy Michel Maalouli visited Damascus as part of a delegation of deputies from the Beqaa Valley, a coalition orchestrated by the Syrians against the militant clans of the Gemayels and Chamouns, which, in addition to socialists, Nasserists, and others, was supposed to include the progressive Druze and the “Syrianists” (SSNP) with a Christian majority in their ranks³⁶.

Meanwhile, the situation in East Beirut, the stronghold of the Lebanese Forces, worsened. Important information was provided to the Americans by Orthodox Bishop Gabriel Salibi, who was acting as locum tenens of the Metropolitan of Beirut following the death of Metropolitan Elias Salibi. In September, he cited the following figures: of approximately 6,000 Orthodox families living in Achrafieh, 2,500 had left, while 3,500 remained. “Those who left mostly went to the mountains, where they had homes or relatives. Very few of them (a few hundred) lived in monasteries or schools. Of the 15–16,000 Maronites, probably 80% left the area”³⁷ (back translation from Russian — *Editor*).

Bishop Gabriel further reported, as conveyed by the resident, that “the situation of the Orthodox community is becoming increasingly difficult due to economic stagnation and worsening security. People from respectable families, who previously lived under comfortable conditions, came and asked for money for bread. The Orthodox Church currently has very little income, but significant expenditures, particularly associated with the Orthodox hospital, which has a monthly deficit of 300–400,000 Lebanese pounds. They were spending their savings to maintain the budget, but soon had to cut on hospital staff. <...> He told

³⁵ US Department of State. Assad's Dilemma, 1978. July 14. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

³⁶ US Department of State. Assad's Dilemma, 1978. July 14. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

³⁷ US Department of State. Situation in Lebanon: Conversation with Greek Orthodox Bishop Ghofril Saleeby, 1978. Sept. 12. Telegram (cable). Confidential (Declassified/Released 20.03.2014).

Gemayel and Chamoun that their tactics threaten the survival of the Orthodox community, but they ignored this. Pierre Gemayel explained that the Maronites were fighting for the salvation of Lebanon. He apparently did not care about what would happen to the Orthodox. Salibi said that the Orthodox do not want to fight, like many Maronites. <...> He said, unfortunately, that other Arabs do not distinguish Maronites from other Lebanese Christians. Lebanon today survives on remittances sent by Lebanese Christians working in the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia, many of whom are Orthodox. He feared that as the situation worsens, Arab governments might decide to expel all Lebanese Christians – both Orthodox and Maronites”³⁸ (back translation from Russian – *Editor*).

All the episodes mentioned involving Orthodox figures demonstrate, first, the extraordinary diversity of their political leanings, and second, their constructive approach to coexistence of all confessional communities – especially, of course, the Orthodox – within a single, indivisible Lebanon. They were characterized by comparatively high civic activity, but not activism in the sense of pursuing political gains for their community at any cost.

Conclusions

The information drawn from documentary sources allows several conclusions regarding the position of the Lebanese Orthodox in the pivotal year of 1978 during the Civil War.

First, it is clear that the participation of Orthodox figures at various, including the highest, levels of Lebanese politics confirms the existence of an “Orthodox factor” in the country. However, it was not unified: like other communities, the Orthodox did not act from a single position or as a single front.

Second, the defense of their rights by Orthodox Christians did not mean positioning their community as the most deserving or the most vulnerable; this was not a narrowly confessional view of priorities, but

³⁸ Ibid.

was mainly aligned with a civic understanding of the common good for the country while preserving the integrity of its society and territory.

Third, the fact that the Lebanese Orthodox were involved in a wide range of parties and adhered to a spectrum of ideologies shows a similarity with members of other Lebanese confessions. This applies both to foreign influence and particularly to the Syrian factor, which was the most sensitive at the time. Just as some Maronite or Druze figures in the Beqaa Valley or Sunni Muslims cooperated with the Syrians while others did not, among the Orthodox there were those who sympathized with the “pro-Western Christian” camp and opposed the Syrians, and those who deemed Syrian involvement in Lebanon as part of the MFO (Multinational Force in Lebanon) mission expedient.

These conclusions also call into question the effectiveness of the oft-cited concept of “political confessionalism” in Lebanon. In 1978, intra-community contradictions and even clashes became particularly acute. A wave of killings and revenge retaliations was triggered by a split among Maronites after the Marada’s maneuver; Lebanese Sunnis often stood on opposing sides; within a few years, a deep rift in inter-Shiite relations would also appear. Thus, if political confessionalism is understood as the actions of political representatives and community leaders from unified positions (primarily in the interests of their communities), the numerous examples demonstrate the absence of such unity, even to the point of intra-community conflict over ideological reasons. Lebanese Orthodox were no exception in terms of ideological diversity, ranging from extremely “right-wing”, nationalist positions to “leftist” (Syrianist, pan-Arab, internationalist) views.

Perhaps consulting declassified documents and studying them in detail will continue to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the somewhat formulaic concept of “political confessionalism”. For Lebanon today, this is particularly relevant: there is a growing demand to move away from a clan-based political structure toward democratization of governance within Lebanese society. Similarly, the entire Arab East is undergoing, before our eyes, a broad restructuring of traditional societies.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no relevant conflict of interests.

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