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Origins and reasons of the Gulf conflict of 1990/1991

The Gulf conflict of 1990/1991 was not an incidental event, but the climax in a long chain of events. The deeper causes have their historical, ideological, political, economic and psychological roots.

In general, the causes of the conflict could be classified as indirect and direct. Among the indirect ones should be mentioned:

- the ideological and organizational fundamentals of the Iraqi system of government;
- Arab unity ideas and Iraq's endeavour to assume Arab leadership and participate in regional as well as world affairs and decision-making on behalf of all Arabs;
- the personality characteristics of the Iraqi leadership;
- the consequences of the Iraq-Iran war (September 1980—August 1988);
- the crisis of Iraqi economy and currency.

The direct causes—in turn—include:

- the feeling of deception as the war with Iran was fought by means of Iraqi human and largely material resources in the ultimate benefit of Kuwait, Gulf Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and the West;
- huge Iraqi debts resulting from the war with Iran;
- the decline in oil prices in connection with Kuwait's and other Gulf Arab states disregard to OPEC oil export quotas;
- the problem of border demarcation between Iraq and Kuwait;
- the exploitation of oil wells on the border between these two countries;
- Kuwait's refusal to treat seriously Iraqi demands and threats.

The objectives of the Iraqi leadership were:

- solution of current economic and financial problems, in addition to gaining of a foothold on the Gulf (as a minimum, while as a maximum);
- possession and control of decisive quantities of petroleum reserves and output;

- capacity of exerting military and political pressure over Saudi Arabia and Iran, not to mention small Gulf states;
- the assumption of the role of Guardian of the Arab/Persian Gulf, or—in other words—regional leadership.

Dealing with all these themes in full detail would be rather impractical for the purposes of this short presentation. Here I would discuss only some of them more closely.

Since July 1968, Iraq had been ruled by the Arab Socialist Ba‘ṭ Party (not to mention a short-lived seizure of power by the same party between February and November 1963). This party was founded in the 1940’s (officially in April 1947) by Syrian and Lebanese Arab nationalist activists. During the 1950’s it attempted to establish branch organisations in other Arab countries. It is worthwhile here to present the basic ideas of the major Ba‘ṭ Party thinker and founder Michel ‘Aflaq, who in the ‘seventies and ‘eighties until his death in 1989-resided in Baghdad as the General Secretary of the Ba‘ṭ Pan-Arab Command. The political philosophy of this party is interesting for historians, because it is in fact a reinterpretation of the entire Arab history in accordance with new ideological categories.

The main goals of the Ba‘ṭ Party were declared to be: “unity, liberty, socialism”, which meant: the termination of foreign occupation of Arab countries, the fight against Zionism and the Israeli state, the solution of class and economic antagonisms in the spirit of the socialist pattern. The accomplishment of these requirements were regarded as a condition for bringing about Arab unity and foundation of a united free “Arab Homeland”.¹

The primary category of Michel ‘Aflaq’s thought is faith (īmān). He explains it in his colourful and sentimental style as follows: “The eternal fundamental of our action is faith, with optimism as one of its expressions. In all its dimensions, life is based upon faith, which is to lead the Ba‘ṭ Party and Arab nation towards the exploration of its own human identity. That faith is an integral part of every human being, of every Arab”.²

For ‘Aflaq “realistic idealism” means rejection of the actual reality as well as its understanding. The attainment of liberty, unity and socialism, of Arab renaissance requires above all from the young generation a positive fight for the cause of achieving the Arab upheaval or Arab transformation.³ This positive path is based upon the defence of every Arab cause with the Palestine question in the first place.

¹ Niḡāl al-Ba‘ṭ (“The Ba‘ṭ struggle”), vol. I-X, Dār at-Ṭalī‘a, Beirut 1972; Shibli-L-A’Ysami, *Le Parti Ba‘th. L’etape de sa fondation (1940-1949)*, Cooperativa Lavaratori Officine Grafiche Firenze, (Rome), 1977.

² Michel ‘Aflaq, *Fī sabīl al-ba‘ṭ* (“For the cause of the Ba‘ṭ”), Dār at-Ṭalī‘a, Beirut 1972, p. 15.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 30, 38, 40.

The resultant Arab renaissance movement emerges in confrontation with the undecidedness of Arab politicians, forces and political parties, governments, and also against “the conspiracy of imperialism and feudalism”.⁴

In the Arab resurgence movement, faith is linked with consciousness, because the aim is to give birth to a general intellectual and political movement of all Arabs, who—moreover—should be associated with a Pan-Arab organization. The political philosophy of the Ba‘t regarding itself as a national vanguard is to restore to the Arab nation its faith in itself and its own forces. “Our efforts are not limited to the expulsion of imperialists out of our lands or the limitation of internal exploitators, nor merely securing liberty and affluence to the nation. These altogether constitute means that lead to the emancipation of the nation’s genius in the direction of creative and constructive participation in human civilization”.⁵

The transformation movement undertakes responsibility for preparing the authentic instruments of change, whereas there is no difference between the goal and the instrument, since the latter is an integral part of the former and not merely a path leading towards it. Being the opposite of reformism and striving to carry out deep changes, the movement cannot ignore the factor of time, besides it must try to exercise control upon time and accelerate the rhythm of transformations.

Hence, ‘Aflaq postulates a selective return to Arab’s national tradition—not servitude towards the heritage, nor to weaken the spirit of inventiveness or modernity, but to “open our eyes on our harmful present, and to reveal the contradiction between our reality and our essence”.⁶ In consequence “we—as mandatories of the nation—will have to face responsibility for the nation’s salvation and the accomplishment of its historic message”⁷ inaugurated by Islam.

Islam brought about the transformation of Arabs life and psychology. They became transformed into a group instead of being merely a sum of individuals, while the will of destiny became the will of the Arabs themselves, whose field of activity and arena of new values became the entire world. The religion of Islam brings about permanent innovation of Arab nature and identity. “It was one of the Arabs, who delivered the Heavenly message and called people to its endorsement (...)”.⁸

Such was—in general terms—the ideological background of the Arab Socialist Ba‘t Party ruling in Iraq—as mentioned earlier—since 1968. Ho-

⁴ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸ Ibid., p. 131.

wever, the practice and theory of the Iraqi modification of Ba‘*ṭ* ideas had its specific traits. At the roots of this specificity lies the personality of Ṣaddām Ḥusayn, the “strong man” of Iraq in the period between 1968 and 1979, president of the state, chairman of the Revolutionary Command Council and the unquestionable source of power in the country since 1979.

Arab politics in the post-Second-World War period (and not only) had been focused around personalities: ‘Abd an-Nāṣir, Qāsim, Bumedien, Al-Qaḍḍāfi..., etc. In this sense history, ideology, official parties and organisations, state apparatus and ruling bodies became the instruments of the authoritarian individual. An extreme example is the case of the Iraqi leader. His image was during the years carefully developed into a personality cult, whereas every daily newspaper carried his picture on the first pages, his portrait was seen in every public building, his statues presented all over the country, in all towns. The magnified dimension of the president’s cult were emphasized to the effect that Ba‘*ṭ* Party foundation anniversaries in April each year became celebrated together with his own birthday. On such occasions, the press and other mass media lavishly publicized Ṣaddām’s alleged “creative contributions” to Ba‘*ṭ* ideology and practice.⁹ They were generous in granting him the most peculiar titles as “Ṣaddām the Great”, “Knight of the Arabs”, “Hero of the Arab Nation”..., etc.

Unconstrained megalomania showed itself also in the field of history interpretation. At first, during a speech held on the 13th of November 1973 at the Committees on the Study of Educational Affairs and Revision of Programmes, Ṣaddām Ḥusayn pointed out to the need for concentrating attention upon Arab-Islamic history, regarding Islamic history as an essentially Arab history and the message of Islam as a bright page of Arab civilization.¹⁰

He gave instructions on how to write history¹¹, and the need for showing interest in national heritage and history as important for the Ba‘*ṭ* Party and expressions of real-although specific-values.¹²

A radical change in this field was noted in Ṣaddām Ḥusayn’s speech on the rewriting of the Arab nation’s history delivered on the 19th of September 1977 to the Information Department of the ruling party. He stated with emphasis that up to now Arab history had not been written through a “national, scientific and critical” outlook. Some authors have written that history considering the emergence of Islam as the starting point, as if the Arab nation

⁹ “Aṭ-Ṭawra”, 27.10.1987 and 25.01.1988 (organ of the Iraqi Ba‘*ṭ* Party).

¹⁰ Muḩṭatafāt min ahādīṭ Ṣaddām Ḥusayn (“Excerpts from Ṣaddām Ḥusayn talks”), Dār at-Ṭalī‘a, Beirut 1980, pp. 164-165.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 166.

¹² Ibid.

would not have existed without Islam.¹³ He further emphasized “that the history of the Arab nation does not start with Islam, but extends back deep into antiquity”, that civilizations, which emerged in the Arab homeland, are expressions of the nation’s identity, and that the national history of Arabs is linked with great achievements for the benefit of humanity throughout various stages.¹⁴

The conclusion of the speaker was:

“We Arabs are—thereby—one nation, and the geography of our land covers the entire Arab Homeland. Such a decisive result deserves our attention, and therefore our reading of history should be in conformity with this truth”.¹⁵

The methodological directives were:

Firstly. “The multiplicity of schools, interpretations and great events in the chronicle of history, enables anybody to borrow what he wants from historical records to support the programme, in which he believes (...) and Arab history is not an exception to this reality.”¹⁶

Secondly: “We do not need to distort history or fabricate it in order to read it in a Ba‘ṭ manner, but we need only to acquire a Ba‘ṭ understanding of it.”¹⁷

Both explicitly and implicitly, the mentioned historical outlook attempted to prove that the Arab nation is undergoing a renewed process of national revival of ample dimensions—perhaps not less far-reaching than the emergence of Islam. It follows that a leadership role is to be fulfilled contemporarily by a particular leader and country; namely, by Ṣaddām Ḥusayn as the ruler of Iraq now and of all other Arab countries in the future.

In such an intellectual atmosphere and practical absence of any form of opposition, even within the framework of the Ba‘ṭ Party, objective historical events lost their significance in favour of ideological perception. History became treated selectively, while the science of history shaped into an instrument of current political and doctrinal requirements. In this way—to give some concrete examples—the unsuccessful outcome of the wars with Israel, and generally of the Palestine problem, had—in different periods—been interpreted and justified by the actions of colonialists, imperialists, traitors, feudals, capitalists, Western intelligence services, treason of communists

¹³ Amīr Iskandarī, Ṣaddām Ḥusayn (in Arabic), Hachette, Paris 1980, p. 149.

¹⁴ Aḥmad Sawṣa, Ḥaḍārat al-‘Arab wa-marāḥil taṭawwurihā (“Arab civilization and stages of its development”), Ministry of Information, Baghdad 1979, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵ Ṣaddām Ḥusayn, Ḥawla kitābat at-tārīḥ (“On writing history”), Ministry of Culture and Information, Baghdad 1978, p. 13.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 8.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 23. See also: Ṣaddām Ḥusayn’s interview to “Der Spiegel” published under the title *Siyāsatunā taḡṣīd li-ḥāḍir al-umma wa-mustaqbalihā* (“Our policy—an embodiment of the nation’s present and future”), Dār at-Ṭawra, Baghdad 1979.

and reactionaries, Soviet Union's refusal to deliver advanced types of weapons..., etc.

A further example: the war with Iran in fact a senseless war waged in an incompetent and nonsensical manner, but Iraqi official documents presented it as a chain of heroism and victories against an ancient enemy.¹⁸

Within the framework of Iraqi expansionist policies, the Arab Gulf waterway and oil wealth were high on the agenda since the British military withdrawal from the area "East of Suez" in late 1971. The British withdrawal paved the way for Iran under the Shah rule to undertake with U.S. assistance the role of regional power in the Gulf. Furthermore, in 1975 the Shah forced upon Iraq a vital concession in the form of Iraqi resignation of the eastern part of the border river *Šaṭṭ al-‘Arab*. The downfall of the Shah regime and seizure of power by Islamic fundamentalists did not avert the situation from the Iraqi viewpoint. Although now anti-American, Iran remained the regional power and had ambitions to become an Islamic superpower. However, the apparent weakness of the Islamic Revolution was tempting for the Iraqi leadership to defeat Iran in a surprise war, regain control over the whole of *Šaṭṭ al-‘Arab*, seize the oil-rich *Ahwāz/‘Arabistān* region and exert control over the Gulf. The war proved to be protracted and assumptions mistaken.

Iraq formulated its Arab Gulf and-even-Indian Ocean strategy since early 1970's¹⁹, and this was justified by a number of considerations, which also point out to some causes of the Gulf conflicts:

- Iraqi interest in oil production and reserves in Gulf countries;
- the weight of oil in world politics in the absence of any practical substitute;
- interest in the strategic weight of the Gulf and Indian Ocean in international trade and politics.²⁰

¹⁸ *Šaddām Ḥusayn*, Full text of the historic speech delivered by the President-Leader-Hero of National Liberation Field Marshall *Šaddām Ḥusayn* delivered at the Third Summit Conference of the Organisation of Islamic Countries in *Aṭ-Ṭā'if* on 25-28 January 1981 (in Arabic), Press Counsellor's Bureau, Beirut 1981.

¹⁹ Policy formulations of Gulf strategy, see: *Aḥmad Ḥasan al-Bakr*, speech delivered on 17 July 1975, "*Aṭ-Ṭawra*", 18.07.1975; *Ba'ṭ Regional Command Congresses' Reports*.

²⁰ *Barzān at-Tikrīfī, Aṣ-Širā' al-duwalī fī mantiqat Al-Ḥalīğ al-‘Arabī wa-āl-Muḥīt al-Hindī wa-ta'īruhu ‘alā aqṭār Al-Ḥalīğ al-‘Arabī* ("The international conflict in the Arab Gulf and Indian Ocean region and its impact upon Arab Gulf countries"), *Ad-Dār al-‘Arabiyya*, Baghdad 1982. The author of the mentioned book is *Šaddām Ḥusayn's* step-brother, who—at the time of the book's publication—was the head of the Iraqi intelligence service (at present he is the Iraqi representative at the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva). He wrote that since the emergence of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean, domination over the Arab Gulf had been closely linked with that wider region. Progress in science and technology had not changed

Having insecure access to Turkish ports (Turkish membership in NATO and close ties with the West), to Syrian and Lebanese ports (bad relations with the Syrian branch of the Ba'ṭ Party and Syrian government in general), Iraq had regarded the Arab) Persian Gulf as the strategic lifeline of the country. The expansion of the military port at Umm Qaṣr and construction of the off-shore oil port of Al-Bakr did not solve the strategic problem. On the other hand, Iraq's strive to gain footholds on such an important entrance to the Indian Ocean as the Strait of Bāb al-Mandab on the Red Sea) through the Yemens, Eritrea and the Sudan) ended with failure. The same could be said about the proposal of Iraq to exercise supremacy over the Gulf on behalf of the Arab states.²¹

The failure of Iraq's Gulf strategy should seem devastating, if we further take into consideration the results of the war with Iran, the American naval presence in the Gulf (having Iraqi approval during the final stages of that war) and the visible end of the bipolar world order with the perspective of the U.S. remaining as the sole superpower in the Arab Gulf and Middle East as a whole.

Proceeding to the more direct causes of the Gulf conflict of 1990/1991, it is worthwhile to note that contrary to Iraqi propaganda allegations—the war with Iran had its grave consequences. The main characteristics of the situation in Iraq in the aftermath of the 1980-1988 war were the following:

- hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed;
- hundreds of thousands of injured and invalid citizens;

that consideration (pp. 36-37). The Indian Ocean—he writes earlier—is the third ocean with respect to area; i.e. 77 mln sq. km. 35 states—including 12 Arab states—are situated on its shores, while the number of inhabitants of the region was estimated at approximately 1000 mln. The area is also rich of oil and many other significant minerals and riches: more than 90% of world's natural rubber output, zinc, jute and tea; 98% of diamonds; 60%—uranium; 40%—gold (p. 29).

In addition to mentioned advantages, the Indian Ocean links three continents, including the majority of non-aligned countries (Ibid.). “The Indian Ocean has four entrances, whose control secures political and strategic supremacy over that ocean and Arab Gulf. That control does not occur through the domination of the heart of continents, but only through these entrances.” (p.28).

They are named as:

1. the entrance linking the Indian Ocean with the Atlantic Ocean through the Cape of Good Hope;
2. the entrance situated between the Pacific and Indian Oceans through the Strait of Malakka (12-miles wide!);
3. the Mediterranean entrance through the Suez Canal, Red Sea and the Bāb al-Mandab Straits;
4. the fourth and important—from the economic and strategic view-point—entrance is the Arab Gulf. (p.29). Iraq—as the most advanced Arab country of the Gulf—bears special responsibilities in protecting this region in the face of imminent dangers and ambitions (p. 171).

²¹ The National Declaration delivered by Ṣ. Ḥusayn in Feb. 1980, *ibid.*, pp. 100-103.

- the emigration of hundreds of thousands of refugees, particularly among Kurds against whom chemical warfare was launched;
- activation of clandestine organisations and bomb explosions;
- purges among top military commanders;
- rivalries and clashes among the highest political circles, including the president's family.

To these we may add the difficult economic situation of the country and serious shortages on the market of basic consumer goods. To elaborate this point, we should bear in mind that the average monthly income of government employees amounted in the investigated period to 150 Iraqi dinars—i.e. about 500 dollars at official prices and less than 30 at black market prices.

The 40% annual rate of inflation (unnoted in Iraq before the war with Iran) aggravated the difficulties in the supply of basic consumption articles.

The Iraqi government decided upon the decentralisation and privatisation of the ruined state-directed economy. Many public textile, food-processing and other enterprises were privatised. However, there were no means nor people interested in the purchase of large hotels, big industries or the National Airlines Company. Among the other serious barriers were the absence of management capacities and lack of interest on the part Arab investors.²²

The picture of the economic situation would be incomplete without considering the high expenditures upon the considerably numerous Iraqi army, purchases of military equipment and upon the construction of a national armament industry. The army of Iraq counted one million well-trained soldiers and officers organised into 55 divisions (10 divisions in 1980); it had 500 airplanes and 5500 tanks (more than USA and the Federal Republic of Germany together).²³

The economy, which was already under maximum burden had to cope with a further burden of 70-80 billion dollars war-time debts. About 30 billion of that debt came from Kuwait. Meanwhile, Iraqi revenues from oil amounting to 25 bil. dol. in 1989 dropped to 7 bil. dol. in 1989, which more or less equalled interest rate for the 40 bil. dol. Western debts (among others, within the U.S. government guaranteed Credit Commodity Program).²⁴

²² "Financial Times", 29.09.1989.

²³ "Biuletyn Specjalny PAP" (Special Bulletin of the Polish Press Agency), 08.08.1990.

²⁴ For details on the determinants of the Gulf conflict, see: Pierre Salinger and Eric Laurent, *Kryzys w Zatoce Perskiej* (original title: *Guerre du Golfe. Le dossier secret*), Oficyna Literacka, Kraków 1991; Saddam Husajn. *Wojna w Zatoce* (original title: *Saddam Hussein and the crisis in the Gulf*), Supernowa Oficyna Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1991; *Wojna Saddama. Początki konfliktu kuwejckiego i reakcja międzynarodowa* (original title: *The Saddam War. The beginning of the Kuwaiti conflict and international reaction*), SAWW, Poznań 1991.

In these circumstances, the price of crude oil was steadily declining—a matter of extreme importance for the militarised Iraqi economy. Iraq accused Kuwait of overproduction and attempts to undermine the internal and external position of the country. Kuwait raised oil output and export, especially from the disputed Iraqi-Kuwaiti border oil fields of Rumayla, and in contravention to the OPEC quota agreements. So Kuwait exported 2,1 million barrels daily instead of the agreed 1,5 mln. Of course, other addressees of the Iraqi criticism were the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The bitterness of Iraqi reactions and their source in the second thoughts of that leadership that the war against Iran was waged with the objective of averting the fundamentalist danger from the Middle East, and above all from the Arab states of the Gulf and Saudi Arabia.

However, from the point of view of the latter, Iraq emerged from the war with Iran too strong militarily, and they had every cause to fear Iraqi intentions in view with Iraqi military involvement in Eritrea, South Sudan, on the Syrian border and in the Lebanese civil war. The Arab states of the Gulf decided upon the use of an effective instrument (well known by themselves) of increasing oil output and export, leading to the subsequent fall in prices to the low level of 17 dollars per barrel. The decline of one dollar per barrel led to the reduction of Iraqi oil revenues by one billion dollars annually.

This state of affairs was later described by Şaddām Ḥusayn during his talk with the American ambassador April Glaspie as economic warfare, the weakening of the Iraqi military power and tantamount to aggression.²⁵ Iraq expected Kuwait not only to cancel the loans, but to pay tens of billions of dollars to cover Iraqi financial deficit.

Moreover, in connection with Iraqi-American relations, in spite of the positive evaluation of the visit to Baghdad (February 12, 1990) of the Undersecretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs at the State Department and his meeting with Şaddām, the commentary broadcast on the 15th of February (i.e. three days later) on the “Voice of America” (as the opinion of the American government) describing the Iraqi leader as a notorious dictator, and also the publication on February 21 by the State Department of a report on human rights devoting 12 pages to Iraq, not to mention the resolution project of the Chamber of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee (February 21) condemning Iraq for human rights violations (vetoed by the President)—all these negative signs could have convinced the Iraqi ruler of the existence of a concerted plot to overthrow his government on the part of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, other Arab states of the Gulf, the United States of America, major Western countries and—of course—Israel.

²⁵ P. Salinger and E. Laurent, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

The Iraqi response came soon in late February and early March 1990. The Iraqi response was characteristic for the Iraqi leadership style of attacking before being attacked. The plan was seemingly based on calculations directed towards:

1. the annexation of Kuwait as a further province of Iraq as in Ottoman times (Iraq did not acknowledge Kuwaiti independence in 1961);
2. blocking Western and Israeli intervention by creating an anti-Western and anti-Israeli opinion in the Arab and possibly Islamic and Third World countries;
3. preventing official Arab interference in favour of Kuwait by forming a hostile Arab opinion towards rich Gulf states and ruling circles;
4. the continued existence of strong residues of the bipolar world order, capable to check Western military action; or
5. the eventual restoration of that order by creating a delicate situation for the Gorbachov leadership.

The sequence of events between the second half of February and 2nd of August (date of the invasion of Kuwait) did not alter the Iraqi vision, but only served as further proofs of its validity. Hence, on the 23rd of February Şaddām Ḥusayn, participating at a meeting of Arab heads of states held in the Jordanian capital Amman, declare to the Arab leaders that the weakening of the Soviet Union would lead during the next few years to an unprecedented freedom of manoeuvre of the United States in the Middle East. The U.S. shall become the decisive force in the region including the Gulf and no one shall be able to question its superpower role, while the price of oil shall be decided by that country. Şaddām requested the Arab countries to withdraw their deposits and assets from the West. He demanded the withdrawal of the American fleet from the Arab Gulf, because there was no need for its presence after the end of the Iraqi-Iranian war. If the countries situated on the Gulf, indeed, if the entire Arab nation would not keep vigilant, then region would be ruled in compliance with U.S. wishes. He then criticised the stance of the American administration about its refusal to settle the emigrating Soviet Jews in U.S.A. For many years the Americans exerted pressure on the U.S.S.R. to agree to Jewish emigration to the West. When that became possible the Americans strive to direct the Jews to Israel against Arab interests.²⁶

The next step in the scenario was the visit of the Jordanian monarch on behalf of the Iraqi president to Gulf Arab states (between February 26 and March 1). Iraqi demands of cancellation of 30 billion dollars debt, the leasing of Kuwaiti Bubiyan and Warba islands at the Gulf entrance to Iraq, bor-

²⁶ Jordanian and Iraqi radio broadcasts on 23-24.02.1990.

der changes (in favour of Iraq) and 10 billion dollars cash grant were rejected by Kuwaiti and other Gulf politicians without serious discussion.²⁷

In the spring of 1990 Iraqi-Western relations further deteriorated. In March 1990, the British (Iranian-born) journalist Ferhad Bazofi was executed in connection with his investigation on an explosion accident in a chemical plant at the town of Al-Ḥilla near Baghdad. Three weeks later his “confessions” were published as evidence of a conspiracy organised by the C.I.A., British Intelligence and Israeli Mosad—all interested in damaging the Iraqi missile and mass destruction weapons programme. On the 28th of March British customs authorities discovered an Iraqi attempt of an illegal transport through Great Britain of atomic bombs detonators. Two weeks later, they seized a transport of special steel pipes, believed to form elements of gigantic artillery cannons.

On April 2, Ṣaddām in an address to army commanders about the development by Iraqi scientists of a new type of chemical weapons states: “If Israel acts in any way against Iraq, we will cause the burning of one-half of that country.”

At the end of May an Arab Summit Conference was organised in Baghdad, officially to discuss the danger involved in the mass emigration of Jews from the U.S.S.R. estimated in the year 1990 to reach 150, 000; but the Iraqi leader had his own conference agenda. He attacked (at a closed meeting) Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates for dumping the oil market and deliberate keeping of low petroleum prices, he further accused them of aggression against Iraq. However, Iraqi demands for vast financial aid were met without commitment by Arab Gulf heads of states.²⁸

On the 17th of July, the anniversary of the Ba‘ṭ seizure of power, the president of Iraq gave his last public address before ordering his troops to occupy Kuwait in the early hours of August 2, 1990. “Thanks to our weapons—he said—the imperialists cannot initiate a military attack against us. That is why they chose economic warfare with the participation of imperialist agents, namely the leaders of Arab Gulf states.” He spoke further about military action: “If we would not be able to defend ourselves by means of words, we will have no other option but to undertake action aimed at averting the existing state of affairs and restoring our rights.”²⁹ On the same day, a column of Iraqi tanks was directed to the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border. This force was strengthened within the next two weeks, to amount 100,000 persons on the day of invasion.

The general trend towards an armed conflict was not averted by the meeting between the Iraqi president and American ambassador (Ṣaddām promi-

²⁷ Jordanian and Kuwaiti radio broadcasts on 26.02.-02.03.1990.

²⁸ P. Salinger and E. Laurent, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

sed not to attack Kuwait “as long as talks were proceeding”, while A. Glaspie understood the statement as a pledge not to go to war, but to solve the problem through negotiations³⁰, nor the Geneva O.P.E.C. ministerial meeting at the end of July, when and where oil quotas and higher oil prices at 21

²⁹ Iraqi radio broadcasts on 17-18.07.1990.

³⁰ A summary of the Şaddām-Glaspie conversation of July 25, 1990: The American ambassador was informed of the meeting only one hour before it took place, and so there was no question of being able to contact the State Department for instructions. Şaddām started his talk by giving it the high rank of a message directed to president Bush. He then made comments on the history of Iraqi-American diplomatic relations; that Iraq desired and decided to restore diplomatic relations with U.S.A. in 1980 before the outbreak of the war with Iran, but in order to avoid the probable misinterpretation of such a move it was thought to be better to carry it out after a short-lasting war with Iran. However, the war proved to be protracted, so—after asserting Iraq’s non-alignment—diplomatic relations were restored with the United States in 1984. Better relationships were expected, but the “Irangate” affair of 1986 and many other incidents did not facilitate mutual understanding.

“We do not need to return to the past—said Şaddām—unless present events make us suppose that old mistakes were not accidental.” There are grounds to suspect the U.S. of being unhappy about the favourable outcome for Iraq of the war with Iran. This suggestion does not involve the American President or Secretary of State, but there are circles thinking of who will take power in Iraq after Şaddām Ḥusayn. These have made contacts with Arab Gulf states in order to deter Iraq and convince Arab countries to withhold economic aid to it.

The Iraqi leader continued to say that—in connection with the war with Iran—his government was obliged to borrow a sum of 40 billion dollars, not to mention the sums borrowed from Arab countries. The latter should not be regarded as debts in the light of the Iraqi engagement in the fight for their benefit.

Furthermore, a policy of lowering oil prices was used against Iraq. Even during the war with Iran, Kuwait decided upon the expansion of its territory at the cost of Iraq. The American declaration, that the United States shall defend their friends, reflects—according to Ş. Ḥusayn—a hostile attitude towards his country, while similar statements encourage Kuwaiti and Arab emirates to ignore Iraqi rights.

“We will secure all rights”, he declared. “We understand that United States’ friendly relationships with Arab Gulf states are aimed at the attainment of bilateral benefits, but we cannot understand American support to certain countries, which strive to damage Iraqi interests”.

The American ambassador—having not much occasion to express her and her government’s views and position—informed the Iraqi president about the long tradition in American diplomacy of not interfering in disputes among Arab states, but—pointing out to the concentration of the Iraqi forces along the Kuwaiti border and in the light of American interests involved in the region—asked him about his intentions.

He responded that it would not be natural for U.S.A. as a superpower to stand idle when peace is in danger, but demanded not to formulate the American standpoint in a way, which might encourage the aggressor. Iraq strives for a just solution and at the same time desires to show that its patience is exhausting when the Iraqi nation is

dol. per barrel were agreed, or last-hour Jiddah negotiations ending on the 1st of August.

It seems that both Iraq and Kuwait desired to humiliate each other and force the other side to the acceptance of its own conditions of future relations. In the wider historical dimension, Iraq intended to present the issue as a conflict between itself and the West. Resemblance with the Suez conflict of 1956 was obvious, whereas Ṣaddām was playing the role the Egyptian leader ‘Abd an-Nāṣir, while Kuwait resembled the objective of the strike—the Suez Canal Company.

deprived of the rights for a decent life. “The war did not permit us to utilise many development opportunities, and the remaining Arab countries should in a proper way assess our contribution to their defence”. “In effect, we did for their defence more than the United States of America could do.” The pauperised Iraqi nation has to know, who was responsible for his situation. During the forthcoming consultations and talks with Kuwaiti representatives, undertaken through the mediation of the Egyptian President and Saudi King, there will be no risk of military confrontation. However, if these efforts should fail, Ṣaddām Ḥusayn regarded it as normal and logical—according to his words—not to leave the country (i.e. Iraq) die. (P. Salinger and E. Laurent, *op.cit.*, pp. 44-60.)

To sum up, April Glaspie was optimistic, while Ṣaddām understood her optimism and statements as a sign of American disintéressement in inter-Arab affairs, including eventual Iraqi annexation of Kuwait.