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Saddam and His Inner Circle Discussing Relations with Various Arab States, Russia, China, and the United States

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Summary:

Transcript of a meeting between President Saddam Hussein and Iraqi officials, taking place sometime between 4-20 November 1979. Saddam discusses relations with Europe, Russia, China, the Gulf countries, and the United States. Iraqi officials criticize Libya and Syria for their support to Iran. Another official criticizes the Egyptian President Anwar Al-Sadat for his attitudes in making peace agreement with Israel. Saddam accuses the Americans of playing a central role in overthrowing the Shah of Iran.

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“Saddam and His Inner Circle Discussing Relations with Various Arab States, Russia, China, and the United States”



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Key: Translator comments, clarifications, and additions are italicized in brackets.

Saddam Hussein: [*The tape begins in the middle of an ongoing conversation.*] However, we should not rule out the importance of our strategy of persistence, thorough patience, and seriousness in the pursuit of isolating the European policy from the American policy. Strategically, this issue is linked to the unity of our nation, which relates to the unity of our nation and our vision of developing this unity and the role of nation. It is in our interest that Europe, even if it is an entity, is important and that this entity not be associated with the American one. The more the number of big entities increases, the greater is our flexibility [*inaudible*]. Take for example China, regardless of our friendship with the Soviets, and despite the fact that sometimes the positions of China seem to be very poor and naïve. This means that others are only considering the Soviets' policies and it seems that they mirror image their positions and they do not have any other interpretations. Be careful not to [*inaudible*] the state. If they [*the Soviets*] are against the Egyptians, they [*countries allied with the Soviets*] are also against the Egyptians. If they are against the Somalis, they are against the Somalis. If they are against Numayri [*President Ja'far al-Numayri, the former President of Sudan*], they are also against Numayri. They both have the same philosophy that seems fine on the outside, but this is not really a good philosophy. This superficial philosophy is related to the Soviet Union and their siege on China, because the Russian hegemony will lead to an end of China's independence in the long run; therefore, influencing it ideologically. Formally, this is true, but if one looks at it from the political perspective, it is very bad when it comes to dealing with human beings, because there is a party now that started to [*inaudible*] the Chinese [*inaudible*] without being involved in this matter. Meaning that China has [*inaudible*] until another non-Russian party appears, as long as the Soviets do not support this solution. Despite this poor treatment, we should not write off the influence of China as a major power. [*Time Stamp: 02:43*]

It is true that we still have a long period of time to become modern and really effective on the world scene and to have an important role [*in world politics*]. Without becoming modern, [*inaudible*] will not happen. Our influence is not only because we have money, and it is not only because of the policies that we adopt. What I mean with politics here is politics in the full political meaning. I mean the main factor here is what others see on the horizon for us. Others believe Iraq has a bright future, and based on this critical point they will decide their strategic relationship with us. Some of these aspects concern the ongoing modernization that is taking place in our country. If our country is a backward one, look at Saudi Arabia. They have more money than us. It is true that Saudi Arabia has influence; however, its influence in the third world countries is different than the influence of Iraq. Iraq has a leading and honorable influence, and people are very proud of the friendly relationship they enjoy with Iraq. The nationalistic movements in third world countries emphasize their nationalistic aspirations, and they talk about the support of Iraq to these movements, etc. Even with these movements, we must not ignore our relationships, and we must take these relationships into consideration in order to strengthen our independence as Iraqis [*inaudible*] Ba'athist, and at the same time, provide the requirements of Arab unity for our nation. Arab unity will not be achieved through foreign will; however, it will not be achieved without taking the foreign will into consideration, whether through positive or negative effects, silence or [*inaudible*]. Comrade Latif.

[*Time stamp: 05:17*]

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Comrade Latif: Mr. President, perhaps my statement will sound repetitive of what Comrade Barzan had mentioned, however, it is in a different format and context. Our relationship with the Gulf Countries has passed through two stages: the first stage is the beginning of the Iranian movement toward the Gulf, which I believe was true based on the Iranian statements. It did not just come from people who did not have any relation to the Iranian regime. They did not have the capability to make decisions. The policy was real and it will remain that way toward the Gulf. We noticed that the Gulf region has become—although we do not wish that—a scary one, and it transformed to a region that is seeking different types and forms of rescue and security—whether through movements, media or any relation with the revolution and with Iraq. It seems that the Iranian regime has discovered this technical point where Iraq started weighing and playing a big role, a protecting role in-- *[Interrupted]*

Saddam Hussein: Describe this to the Syrian Counselor.

Comrade Latif: He did not come to me.

Saddam Hussein: *[Inaudible]* I mean Hafiz al-Assad.

Comrade Latif: This technical discovery, as it seems that the Iranians have discovered, they realize it is going to give Iraq a big influence and a strategic role in the Gulf region. There has been coordination, in addition to information that I have received, a coordination that took place following the visit of the Iranian Deputy Prime Minister to Lebanon and to Syria in a prior visit, and the Gulf tour that was designed to comfort the Gulf States to show that there is no real or intrinsic threat from Iran toward this region, and consequently, it is not necessary to side with Iraq. This pushed the Gulf States to complain to the point of holding the Taif Agreement without Iraq's presence. This is a new and dangerous initiative if I may add in the Gulf politics, and must be mentioned carefully. The Gulf people must be warned that the Iranian policy will remain that way whether their regime has changed quickly, or if it stayed over another year. The Iranian policies will remain based on the above principle and doctrine. The other point that made me view policies in the Arab region in a different way is what is happening in Algeria, and after that, what happened in Libya, and also the meeting of some Arab leaders, and the current ongoing coordination and exchange visits between them regarding this issue. In my view, this matter has three classifications: the first classification is the Palestinian cause and the Camp David Agreement; the second point is Lebanon; and the third point is to disrupt any relation or any connection of Iraq with the Gulf, a relation that spread in this region, and the relation of the region with the American strategic influences. These are my quick observations, or if I may say, the three central points that were intended as a result of meetings. Whether it is the Qaddhafi or the Syrian regime and Gulf states in the last period, I believe they are seeking to isolate Iraq from the world. Second, they desire that Iraq would have limited political effects, adding to this that the new Iranian policies aim at making the Arabs believe that Iran does not have any problems with the Gulf or the Arab region, and that Iran's problem is only with Iraq. This is a matter of borders and Iraq has seriously and decisively intervened in the events of northern and southern Iran and Iraq has new issues with Iran. Additionally, the Iranian media and some western media started talking about Iraq's share to snatch a leading role, and that Iraq is restless and is pursuing a role outside its boundaries, and that it is pursuing other political weight and influence and wishes to project its own policies in the Gulf region. *[Time Stamp: 10:08]*

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This plan did not seem to be planned randomly, but in a well studied and coordinated manner, and each one of these countries has a role, either to agree or feel pressured. Al-Assad [*Hafiz al-Assad, late President of Syria*] visits Iran. Mediations of other parties so that Qaddhafi can visit Iran, and the mutual visits that recently took place between the Gulf states and their stand-alone positions. I would like to come up with a conclusion in that regard, which is what is the solution—what is the methodology that Your Excellency has emphasized? In my view, this methodology could be laborious but I believe that it will pay off and they will join in the Baghdad Summit, because the correct methodology will bring correct results. But what I really aspire and hope for is that our talks with the Arabs are not complimentary. We should acknowledge the real danger in every volatile region now or in every volatile political situation, whether it is related to the Palestinian cause, the Lebanese issue, the Gulf issue, the events in Iran, or the impact of the situation of Iran. Every movement now is isolated from each other. I mean the media is isolated from the political movement and each political movement has its own media, echo, and external approach. Even the media that Yassir `Arafat is adopting now, the media in the form of [*inaudible*]. Imperialism, the Americans, reactionism, Europe and others etc., bless the new politics and the wise approach of Yassir `Arafat that led Yassir `Arafat to start mediating and intervening for the sake of releasing the American hostages detained in Iran. To which level is he going to take this methodology? Palestine is going to mock him. The Palestinian problem will end up being meaningless, just ink on paper, and after depleting it from all of its strong influences, it will be transformed into another animal, to another animal deprived from its power to dance, move or kick back.

So this is what I believe to be the critical and decisive methodology and immunity to our people. Through extensive mass mobilization at this stage, these are the factors of real victory and I have no doubt that the future will be [*inaudible*]. If the Tunisia Conference is convened, we have to talk with the Gulf people, whether on a one-on-one basis—and I prefer the one-on-one meetings better than group meetings—because we do not want them to come out of fear, and fear will follow you. [*Inaudible*] The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister in one of the conferences—the Agricultural conference—was crying of fear because he was afraid of Iran's activities. He said that he heard the news of Iran and its intentions and called the brothers for a meeting to brainstorm and find out what we can do to cope with Iran's threat. The same Foreign Minister Your Excellency had spoken to firmly in Algeria said, “How is your relationship with Iran, did it improve?” I said, “Your Excellency, how would you like this relationship to be?” Yesterday, they were [*inaudible*], and today the relationship with Iran became objective and we have to improve our intentions and develop this relationship! I support that the campaign against Iran is to be at its fullest scale, whether it is related to dispute, [*inaudible*], or the sharp media approach and implementing of changes in the outside activities, as Your Excellency has stated. Just do not forget that the entire movement is the result of Iraq's politics, where people started believing that [*inaudible*], and that Iraq now started playing a leading role. Iraq now wants to be the successor of ‘Abd-al-Nassir [*reference to Jamal `Abdal-Nassir, the late Pan-Arab Leader and President of Egypt*], and that Iraq is doing so and so. All of this falls under the psychological factor—a psychological situation aiming at destroying rulers and break their unity and making them surrender. That is why our path and methodology must be stern and sharp. We should not be lenient with them and we should tell them, “This [*inaudible*] is going to backfire on you tomorrow.”

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*[Time Stamp: 15:43]***Saddam:** Mr. Yahya.

Mr. Yahya: Mr. President, a follow-up on our foreign policy: we are like an uncivilized society. The basic policy upon which the Iraqi foreign policy is based is unfamiliar to the international community. I follow foreign news through the radio, or when you hear the news about the *[inaudible]* conference, you see that the media took a position against Iraq's position toward the Sahara issue. The *[inaudible]* issue, a country that we enjoy close relations with at the party level and at the personal level. Another country, with whom our relations *[inaudible]* with Morocco, which sided by Anwar al-Sadat, has a poor position, and this is why Iraq takes such a known position in relation to the Sahara issue. That is why the strategic studies of Iraq's foreign policy are to support Algeria one hundred percent, Mr. President, but we get surprised with an issue like this. Another issue, which is that the policies are strange according to the view of the international community, is the issue of America. Our interests prove that it is important for us to be with the Soviet Union, and the Socialist countries should take a different position than the one adopted against Iraq. Let us *[inaudible]* when we see our progress *[inaudible]* at a lower level than what expected. Even if we feel little influence, we must continue with the methodology of our foreign policy that is capable of allowing Iraq to take a leading role, whether it is related to the non-aligned countries or *[inaudible]*.

[Time Stamp: 17:43]

Saddam Hussein: It is not a shame for Iraqis to explore influences outside their borders, but it is a shame for them to rush the matter. Rushing is not correct and imagining the role without objective and accurate calculations is not correct either. We are not going to repeat the same mistakes that 'Abd-al-Nassir and Bumadian have made *[reference to Jamal `Abd-al-Nassir the late Egyptian President and to the late President of Algeria Hawari Bumadian]*. We are not going to fall into the same trap, even though the conflict with Israel continues. As for the subject of our relationship with Iran, Iran has shown animosity toward us since the beginning, as if the main aspect of change that took place in Iran was designed with the intentions to be against the interests of Iraq. We were patient with them, and we have treated them in a kind of manner that they deserve. We have to include a key point in our calculation. The slogans that we raised are not bargaining slogans with Iran. If we want to bargain, tomorrow the Iranians will send their highest ranked official to Baghdad, sign an agreement, and *[inaudible]* in the name of the regime. We do not bargain... We do not bargain when we extend our hands toward the people of any nation. Now the Kurds fight in the north and the Arabs fight in the south, this issue... these two issues are not related to any possible bargaining. Regarding this issue, we will continue to support them until a self-governing body is achieved in Arabistan and in Kurdistan, Iran. But if the people of Arabistan want to lay down the rifle and *[inaudible]*, this is an expected matter. Kurdish people lay down the rifle and want to form whatever they want, and this is an expected matter. We do not have any obligations. You see, until now we did not commit to any issue regarding the Kurds or the Arabs. We told them from the beginning, "Do not ask for any specific request from us, period. We do whatever we can for you without commitment, and now you might imagine in a polite way that we encourage you and therefore, you must do something. This matter is up to you." They came to us and we did not go to them—

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not the Arabs and not the Kurds. Both the Arabs and the Kurds are revolting now and they must achieve self-governance. It is in our planning that they achieve self-governance. This is a matter that we have not rejected because we have implemented it. Had we not believed in it, we would not have implemented it. Someone might say this happened in 1974 for the [inaudible] emphasize it. This is a matter that we are fully convinced with in principle and that is why we will continue pursuing it in our approach. As long it continues in our approach Iraq [inaudible] in its approach. The matter has two sides, of course. Now the Arabs in the Gulf, the Gulf Arabs, they did not change. God help us, they are the Arabs of corruption, the Arabs of shame—Arabs whose values contradict all the values known in heaven and on earth that we believe in. If the land and people were not Arabs, we would not have been the first ones to realize their corruption! If Khomeni had the least possible sense of honor and true patriotism he would not have given them the chance to survive! It is in his planning to give them a chance to survive. Slaughtering them is a sacrificial blessing—a great deed. Slaughtering them will prove to be beneficial it will get rid of corruption and decay. All the decay on earth and all the decay you can imagine is found in the Gulf Arab States. [Time Stamp: 23:00]

But what we can do, the Ba'ath Party, is to face these challenges for years! The Party wants North Yemen, its land and people, to be Arab even though we know that `Ali `Abdallah [President of Yemen `Ali `Abdallah Salih] is not worth a dime. That is why we see the reaction and attempts of the Democratic Yemen to transform Northern Yemen into a communist country. This means that it will be severed from Arab unity completely, this is what it means. Against that, Iran fiddles in Bahrain's affairs, and who can stop the rulers of Bahrain from [inaudible] of the nationalistic party? This is [inaudible] if they have it, from the Strait of Hormuz to the Gulf people, and to all the Arabian Peninsula, and the two Yemens. But we, I mean the Iraqi policies here, it states that we support anyone who wants to get rid of the ruler of Kuwait; but if one overthrows the ruler of Kuwait, he must be liberal and, at the same time, able to safeguard the Pan-Arabism of his land and people. If we do not have these plans, then we are against anyone who wants to carry out the change. We are against anyone who tries to overthrow the sovereignty of Arab land and people. This is the analysis of the Iraqi policies. Brethren this is it, it is complicated and unique, and that is why even when they want us to be with them, hand in hand, this is the way they are [inaudible] when an enemy attacks them. But they cannot do without us because the policy of balances has moved all the international balances to the Arab world. Everyone is evaluated according to his weight and placed accordingly, the fixed and the added. They cannot change the fixed weight of Iraq anymore; this is fixed, while the added is variable. One time a [inaudible] is added. and ten kilos are added at once some other time. We should not be under the illusion of the added weight. When ten kilos are added, we think that we have gained ten kilos, which is added to our fixed weight. No, this is an added ten kilos and we should keep in mind our fixed and added weight. We must move our policies based on these two principles. But to be under the illusion that the added weight is a permanently fixed weight, we will meet the same fate as `Abd-al-Nassir did and the same fate as Bumadian. We have been on our guard regarding this policy for years. [Inaudible] so they cannot go past us or say anything to us, they cannot. They will conspire against us but will not be able to overcome us, and like the popular proverb says, "We have gotten over the incubation [preliminary] phase." And now another phase has started. This is a matter of patience. The last conspiracy they attempted did not succeed, and they will try again one way or another. The core of the equation here is that Kuwait is afraid that in the event Iraq turned out to be communist, how would they survive? What would they do? At the time, communists could care less about the fate of

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Kuwait. It will not matter to them whether Kuwait becomes Arab or non-Arab, you see. Saudi Arabia wants to balance us out with Iran, and balance us with Syria and balance us with Jordan. And Jordan wants to balance us with Syria, and wants to balance us with Saudi Arabia. We are now a priority weight balance over all, especially in the Middle East. Northern Yemen wants to balance us with regards to Saudi Arabia and Southern Yemen, and Southern Yemen wants to balance with Saudi Arabia and other countries. Anyone who wants to add value to his status would use Iraq as an important balance, and once he uses Iraq his stocks gained in the stock market, [inaudible] added some kilos to his balance. [Time Stamp: 28:07]

So, the answer to whether they can delete our weight or not is that they cannot because we now have a fixed weight and they can play with the variable weight. And this is practically a complicated process that needs cunning, meaning that we have to be clever, even though cunning is not our main attribute as the Syrians believe. Popularity is the main and only positive attribute of the Syrian regime. Its calculation is [inaudible], as we see in the Al-Hamidiyyah market [a reference to cleverness of push-cart merchants in the Al-Hamidiyyah Market in Damascus, Syria]. We do not have this feature. We are cunning in the strategic sense, and this is not a joke. Things are good when we have a collective discussion because we can plan for the long-term, and we can plan for the future to a large extent. Those at the upcoming Arab Summit say Iraq is there, but has no role. All of them do not care for Iraq to have a role because they do not care. It is in their calculation that they do not care about the real weight. Considering the status, they have many considerations. But they want to get rid of this feeling they have because they are horrified of something called Baghdad. They are getting annoyed by this name and everything that has to do with the Baghdad conference. The media talks about the Baghdad conference and they say, "If they want to reconcile, they cannot." Some of them give an opinion sometimes. They want to get rid of the Baghdad Conference and get to something called the Conference of Tunisia. This is going to take place, of course. They are going to try to impose an obligatory atmosphere, but they cannot make obligatory decisions. I mean, frankly stated, they cannot retract from any agreed-upon decisions that have taken place during the Baghdad Conference, meaning amending article such and such to become such and such. They will not be able to do that, but they can claim that just because there is a lack of unanimity with regards to the decisions of the Baghdad Summit Conference, this in fact has made ground for generating additional decisions which should enhance the decisions of the Baghdad Summit Conference. For as long as this does not occur, a retraction on the decisions of the Baghdad Summit Conference will take place. This will produce an environment that produces individual fatwas. This means that Yassir `Arafat can be creative in such an environment, Hafiz al-Assad can be creative in such an environment, King Hussein can be creative, Saudi Arabia can be creative, and Tunisia can be creative. I am talking about expanding the base for creativity in opinions. [Time Stamp: 31:17]

When the Baghdad Summit took place, it did serve as an outlet for them to express their frustrations or to get rid of this personal complex. This is where some people started feeling they are being chased in Baghdad, and that we do not work on having a solution. Some of them felt that they were dragged in a position they should never accept. So they wanted to fix that. Now are they going to be successful? Yes, they will, but to what extent they will succeed? We have, of course, our vision. We have a project that we will present. It will be studied by the [inaudible]. The project was presented; however, the base of the decision of the Baghdad Summit Conference was at a developed stage. As for the Libyans, they organize conferences,

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lobby in hallways, and walk through the hallways, but who is talking? Their contents are meaningless and futile. The Gulf countries feel that what made them be in this position was the lack of the appropriate communications to reach a unified position at the Summit of Baghdad. This is what made them take this position at the Summit of Baghdad: the position of Iraq as genuine, courageous, and making sacrifices. This is what made others agree to this position before they arrived in Baghdad. But what can they do? This was a popular uprising and people were hit really hard. They were beaten on their heads due to the Camp David Accords and the humiliation of that accords. The Arab people have spoken and rulers must act. There was no room for maneuvering because it had to be done. We were strong and we could have threatened them and told them that our president views this matter as a black and white issue. There is a white line and there is a black line, but there is no line in between. But we should not be under any illusion that the same formulas that worked out in the Summit of Baghdad can work out in the Summit of Tunisia, because the spirit that was present at the Baghdad Summit is and will be absent at the Summit of Tunisia. We have to reach the same spirit as the Baghdad Summit in formulas different than the previous ones, and in a different approach than before. [Time Stamp: 34:48]

Have you noticed how disturbed the Americans are? They became very nervous. At first, one might ask, "Why are they this nervous to the point where they started lying in their statements, saying that there are Cuban forces in Iraq?" They were involved in the events of Iran, including the removal of the Shah [*reference to Shah Muhammad Rida Pahlavi*], and the removal of the Shah was a complete American decision. This is the will of Iranian people, a genuine will. It is impossible for people to [*inaudible*], there is no such a thing. But there are technical circles that will assume their role in the reform when a conflict arises between the planning of these technical circles and the determination of these people. They raise the Strait of Hormuz issue so that [*inaudible*] what Iraq did, and then thwart it. They agree with the Iranians in scaring the people of the Gulf states and then having an excuse to intervene in the region, and then telling the Gulf people, "We are afraid of Iraq and no one would help us. That is why we were forced to bring the Americans to protect us." They became very nervous. They wanted to change the Iranian regime according to their plan, and they want to intervene in the Gulf region, arrange their position, and re-organize the Gulf region according to their established laid out plan, which includes the role of the Iranian events. But whenever we do something, they send international forces to the region. If they have international forces for anything like this, therefore, you—the Arabs of the Gulf—need to watch out for them and do not let them get involved. And now the new [*inaudible*], the Iranians hold American hostages, America is a major and a leading power that has an excuse. Iran warns America, "If you do not extradite the Shah, we will continue to hold your hostages." After two days of waiting, they [*the Americans*] sent a doctor to treat the Shah. [*The Americans*] are really caring, and after two days they captured the hostages. All of this is a soap opera series. We know all of this, but what really bothers me the most is that the same plan took place with the Ahwaz Arabs, [*inaudible*]. If the Ahwaz Arabs need weapons, money, media propaganda, films, or politics, we are here to help. But it is up to you whether you want to revolt or not. You disseminate these slogans and it is up to you. But as long as you came from us and you are looking for support from us, we do not bargain, and this is what we can offer you. You want the Kurds, but we are here in the middle. What a disaster! At the end, all that they want is bargaining in this situation! Fine, we are an existing party and we do not bargain. We do not care about America as a major power, and whoever wants to visit us, he is welcome. [Time Stamp: 38:27]

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[*Inaudible*] they never had this. They have organized technical circles that can act to a certain extent, so that they can modify the policies in Tehran according to their plans. They will also modify their endorsements of the region according to their plans. We are talking about American deployment and airdrops, in order to magnify and reinstate the dignity of the clerics. The influence of religious clerics has diminished. We talk about the American occupation: the Americans came, the Americans went, [*inaudible*], they wanted to embarrass the Iraqi position, [*inaudible*]. For this reason, we have to be a competent government that looks after the interests of its people just as Comrade Latif has stated. But that power should not be centralized in one person, system, entity, or state. Therefore, it will be like [*inaudible*]. [*Inaudible*] when the movement of society and state is going [*inaudible*]. When all Ministers are revolutionaries—I mean real field revolutionaries—lead, deduce, analyze, and supervise, they formulate regulations, solve problems, and establish fairness. When we establish fairness, human beings will not be [*inaudible*] in the Office of the Minister and will not get oppressed by the heads of institutions. When you praise the Iraqi for his great experience, he would turn into an atomic bomb. I mean he can kill while he is in Baghdad, at thousands of miles away from Baghdad. This is the red leaflet that was kept away from you, per my instructions. You are going to read complaints about me in this leaflet, or listen to the analysis of others and what they are saying about comrade Tariq `Aziz, or what they are saying about Taha al-Jizrawi or what they are saying about so and so. Whenever you receive that, you will say we have acknowledged receiving that document, and it will go up the chain, creating a psychologically conflicted state in the most sensitive circles of the state. You can do something useful, like listening to the international news. At least you will learn something useful. Based on this, [*inaudible*] and was circulated. It is not possible that a youth comes to me complaining about articles written by such newspapers, regarding a disagreement between the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Culture and Information, because the Minister of Justice is enacting laws characterized by forward undertones, and the Minister of Culture and Information wants laws contradictory to that. If I give you something to read and tell you to come back after ten days, you will only retain one percent of what you have read. By this I mean that the Minister of Justice is more liberal than the Minister of Information, or that there is a conflict over power among Prime Ministers Deputies, in the sense that the responsibilities of Taha al-Jizrawi are larger than the responsibilities of Tariq `Aziz, etc. And slowly you will have the impression that it is [*inaudible*]. Just accept the international news as it is, as news. As far as the poisoned media and false interpretation of our regime, the concerned parties, the Minister of Information, or the Head of State should be informed about it so that they know what others think of us. Thank you. [END OF RECORDING]