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**Official Friendship Visit by the General Secretary of
the Central Committee of the SED and Chairman of
the State Council of the GDR, Erich Honecker, in the
Syrian Arab Republic (11 to 14 October 1982)**

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Official Friendship Visit by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED and Chairman of the State Council of the GDR, Erich Honecker, in the Syrian Arab Republic (11 to 14 October 1982)

I.

During the visit in the Syrian Arab Republic [SAR] Comrade E. Honecker made himself familiar with the achievements of the Syrian people in various areas of social, economic, and cultural development. He honored the martyrs of the Syrian revolution with a wreath ceremony. At the occasion of a visit with a unit of the Syrian Air Force, Comrade Honecker informed himself about the combat readiness and the level of training of the Syrian armed forces.

Extensive official talks were held between the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the SED and Chairman of the State Council of the GDR, Erich Honecker, and the General Secretary of the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party (ASBP) and the President of the SAR, Hafez al-Assad (Appendix 1). They addressed the further development of relations between the GDR and the SAR, as well as fundamental questions of the international development both in the presence of both delegations and through a couple of personal meetings not scheduled in the program. All the talks were cordial, open, and frank, as well as constructive. They affirmed congruent opinions on both sides regarding basic questions of the international development as well as pertaining to the main directions of the further design of bilateral relations. The visit contributed towards the further increase of the reputation of the GDR in Syria as well as in the Middle East region. The importance Hafez al-Assad attributed to the meetings became evident, among else, in the broad composition of the Syrian delegation. The latter was comprised of representatives of the Ba'ath leadership and Ministers, as well as of an official of the National Front.

During the stay in Damascus, Comrade Erich Honecker also received the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party (SCP), Comrade Khalid Bakdash, for a meeting. Comrade Bakdash explained the positions of the SCP on issues of international developments and informed Comrade Honecker about the current situation in the SAR and the region of the Middle East. He advocated for a further strengthening of internationalist relations between the GDR and the SCP.

II.

During the course of the official talks with both delegations, as well as in personal meetings, E. Honecker informed H. al-Assad about the development in the GDR. He referred to how the decisions of the [SED] X Party Congress [held from 11 to 16 April 1981 in Berlin] and its social-political program are getting fulfilled. Additional burdens exist for the GDR due to the consequences of the imperialist policy of confrontation, the boycott, and the arms race. Nonetheless, the demanding programs and all obligations towards Syria are fulfilled.

In his remarks on the international situation, E. Honecker underlined the dangerousness of the confrontation and arms race policy by the most aggressive imperialist circles. This policy is aimed at destroying the approximate military-strategic balance between the Warsaw Treaty and NATO and wants to achieve military superiority for the imperialist states. E. Honecker referred to the close linkage between the struggle for the securing of world peace, the struggle against the arms race, and for detente, as well as for the elimination of the conflict spot in the Middle East.

The need was emphasized for an active cooperation by all anti-imperialist and peace-loving forces to avert the looming threat of war.

E. Honecker extensively discussed with H. al-Assad the situation in the Middle East with special regard for the consequences of Israel's aggression in Lebanon. E. Honecker characterized the recent aggravation of the situation in the Middle East as a direct result of the imperialist policy of confrontation.

He affirmed the active solidarity of the GDR with the Syrians, the Lebanese, and especially the Palestinian people, as well as with all forces confronting the Israeli policy of aggression.

E. Honecker emphasized the necessity to support the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization] also in the future by all means and to guarantee its unity.

E. Honecker informed H. al-Assad that the problems of the Middle East, as well as the situation existing as a consequence of the Israeli aggression, had played an according role during the Crimea meeting^[1]. In his meeting with L. Brezhnev in Crimea, where as is well known also the Comrades [Andrei] Gromyko and [Konstantin] Chernenko had participated, the bravery of the Arab armed forces was praised and simultaneously the full solidarity with Syria and the PLO under the leadership of Y. Arafat stated.

E. Honecker expressed towards H. al-Assad the support of the GDR for the proposals towards a comprehensive and just resolution of the Middle East conflict, as submitted by the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU and Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev.

E. Honecker informed about the position of the GDR regarding the conflict between Iraq and Iran, the situation in the Gulf, in Indochina and in Latin America, as well as concerning the ongoing imperialist interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, and pertaining to the Non-Aligned Movement.

E. Honecker praised the continuous development of bilateral relations in various areas. He expressed the interest of the GDR in a long-term design of continuous strengthening and deepening of cooperation based on the signed, respectively still to be drafted, treaties and agreements. Good preconditions do exist in this regard due to long-lasting traditions, especially in the economic area.

H. al-Assad acknowledged the visit of E. Honecker as an expression of the solidarity of the GDR with the SAR. He emphasized that the visit, especially under the current conditions of the renewed aggressive acts and crimes by Israel against the SAR, the Palestinian, and the Lebanese people, does represent an effective support for their just struggle.

H. al-Assad assessed the success by the people of the GDR in building up socialism as an important contribution towards the strengthening of all forces of progress in the world. Furthermore, he emphasized the contribution by the GDR towards securing world peace. He especially acknowledged the efforts of E. Honecker concerning the well-being of the people of the GDR as well as the forces of progress. He emphasized the eminent merits of E. Honecker for the strengthening and deepening of relations between the GDR and the SAR. H. al-Assad expressed his appreciation for the high level of cooperation between the GDR and the SAR. He voiced his support for the proposals of E. Honecker regarding the main directions of further development of relations. He affirmed the interest of the GDR in a further expansion of economic and scientific-technological cooperation.

H. al-Assad provided an assessment of the current situation in the SAR and the Middle East region, also he informed about the domestic and foreign policy of the Syrian Arab Republic. He emphasized the congruence in positions between the GDR and the SAR on basic issues of international developments. He fully agreed with the statements of E. Honecker concerning the need for a joint active struggle by all peace-loving forces regarding the securing of world peace.

In his statements, H. al-Assad focused especially on assessing the recent Israeli aggression in Lebanon as well as Syria's efforts to find a resolution of the Middle East conflict. Here H. al-Assad informed in detail about the negotiations held with the United States, especially with [Philip] Habib, during the Israeli aggression against Lebanon - [negotiations that] had not been coordinated with any Arab state, and also not with the PLO.

H. al-Assad confirmed his rejection of the separate policy of Camp David [an agreement between the United States, Israel, and Egypt from September 1978]. He defined the recent USSR proposal of 6 principles, as well as the declaration by the summit conference of the Arab in Fez [in October 1982], as a appropriate foundation for political negotiations towards such a resolution.

In his statements on the Palestine question there was a certain skepticism pertaining to the Soviet arms, what Comrade E. Honecker refuted by referring to the need for thorough training. At the same time, the critical and dysfunctional relationship [of H. al-Assad] with Y. Arafat became evident.

III.

The General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Syrian Communist Party,

Khalid Bakdash, called the visit by E. Honecker to the SAR an important contribution towards the struggle for the preservation of world peace and a support for the fight of the peoples of the Middle East against the Israeli-American policy of aggression.

A serious problem for the Syrian Communist Party is currently the growing danger of a split of the PLO. This process, which is furthered by Syria, has resulted in an increase of tensions between the ruling Ba'athist forces in Syria and the forces of the PLO leadership standing with Y. Arafat. K. Bakdash asked the SED for its support in overcoming the problems existing between Syria and the PLO.

Kh. Bakdash described the domestic situation in Syria as extremely complicated. It is characterized by a worsening of social conditions for workers and the limitations to democratic liberties for the progressive forces and the people's masses. The Syrian Communist Party is afraid that the serious domestic political issues will also have repercussions for the future foreign policy of the SAR.

IV.

As a result of the state visit, the following documents were signed in the economic area:

- Program between the Government of the GDR and the Government of the SAR regarding the future development of economic, industrial, and scientific-technological cooperation until 1990
- The Agreed Protocol on Development and Deepening of Economic Cooperation between the GDR and the SAR
- The Protocol between the GDR and the SAR regarding the trade of goods in 1983
- The Agreement over the Cooperation between the State Planning Commission of the GDR and the State Planning Commission of the SAR
- The Agreement between the Ministry for Foreign Trade of the GDR and the Ministry of Industry of the SAR over a Counter Trade

With those documents, foundations were laid for the future expansion of economic, industrial, and scientific-technological cooperation between both states.

The "Program" is stipulating to further expand the economic relations, in particular in the fields of industry, electricity, transport and communication, as well as in agriculture and food production, for the period until 1990.

With the "Agreed Protocol", concrete projects were fixed regarding economic and industrial cooperation as well as work steps determined pertaining to its implementation in the interests of deepening cooperation between both countries.

For the first time during the long-standing trade relations with Syria an "Agreement over a Counter Trade" was signed (export of tractors and agricultural machines and textile equipment for purchases of cotton yarn and finished textile products). Thus instant payment is guaranteed for the agreed export volume of the GDR.

During the state visit, agreements were signed on exports from the GDR to Syria over a volume of overall 72 million VM [Valutamark, or 'hard', convertible West German currency)].

The Syrian side was asking for granting them a new government credit, as well as for the extension of utilization of the commercial special credit by the GDR until 1987 in order to fund focus projects of further economic cooperation. With reference to the negative consequences for the GDR resulting from economic warfare and credit boycott by imperialist circles, this [Syrian] request was not granted.

With the agreements achieved concerning the reduction in utilization of commercial special credits to a few selected focus projects, conditions have been created for the continuation and expansion of trade relations based in particular on normal and international common conditions.

It was suggested to the Syrian side to apply still stronger the mutually beneficial goods vs. goods [barter] agreements in order to expand the trade relations.

In order to implement the tasks resulting from the agreed documents on the side of [GDR] organs in charge, a plans of measures is to be drafted and to be submitted to the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the SED for confirmation.

During the visit, both in the talks but also during the trip to the Euphrates Dam and Palmyra, as well as by the echo in the media, the Syrian interest became evident to

use this visit for the strengthening of the position of H. al-Assad in Syria itself, but especially so for the restoration of Syria's reputation in the Middle East. This became obvious because all issues were subordinated to the political results and the visit was defined primarily by its political importance. During the talks issues like such were discussed:

- justification for the Syrian conduct in the Lebanon conflict;
- the continuation of Syrian-Soviet relations with the consideration of further military strengthening of Syria;
- the Syrian intention to improve relations with the United States and the so far achieved status in the talks with Habib;
- the tense relations of Syria with the PLO, especially with Y. Arafat.

During the visit it became evident how the Syrian leadership does attempt - starting from the interests of the Syrian bourgeoisie - to improve Syria's standing in the Middle East after it got damaged as a result of its conduct during the Lebanon aggression. It is also attempting to play a more independent role and to embark on a path of preparation for "security agreements" with the United States and Israel, thus pursuing a policy that is not coordinated with other Arab states and the PLO.

H. al-Assad asked E. Honecker in his private conversation to tell Comrade Brezhnev and the party leadership of the CPSU that Syria is willing to fulfill its tasks in the Middle East. He [H. al-Assad] is hoping that Syria will be equipped with military technology through aid from the Soviet Union and the other socialist states to such a degree that the superiority of the Syrian armed forces vis-a-vis Israel is secured. The firm friendship with the Soviet Union, al-Assad said, is a cornerstone of his policy.

VI. [sic]

As a result of the visit, the following documents were signed:

- Joint Declaration
- Agreement over the Cooperation between the SED and the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party in the years 1983 and 1984
- Program regarding the future development of economic, industrial, and scientific-technological cooperation until 1990
- The Agreed Protocol (concerning the results of the economic negotiations)
- Working plans concerning cooperation in the fields of health care and social care in the years 1983 and 1984.

Both sides rated the visit as a highlight in their bilateral relations and as a starting point for the successful further development of mutually beneficial collaboration.

The wide echo in the press underlined the importance attributed to the visit.

[1] Translator's note: a meeting between Honecker and Brezhnev in early August 1982.