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An SCP delegation headed by Khalid Bakdash, and including both his supporter Yusuf Feisal and "dissident" leaders Daniel Nimeh, Zahir 'Abd al Samad, Murad Yusuf and Riad Turk, was invited to Moscow July 21-25 for talks with Soviet officials (including Andrei Kirilenko and Boris Ponomarev) aimed at ending the personal and ideological differences that have rent the SCP in recent months. Although details of the agreement worked out during the visit have not been made public, a joint SCP-CP/USSR communique published by TASS on July 27 indicated that efforts were made at Moscow to "strengthen the SCP's ideological, political and organizational unity." Informed speculation has it that these efforts involved Russian recommendations that SCP should (a) reinstate all members of Party committees elected at the Third SCP Congress in November 1967, (b) withdraw accusations of "deviationism" and hostility toward the USSR levelled by Bakdash against the dissident wing in recent months, (c) dissolve all committees formed by either faction since last April, when the conflict between them widened into an open breach, and (d) form a four-member "reconciliation" committee to examine the causes of the split and recommend further measures to prevent its recurrence.

Although the SCP Central Committee expressed complete satisfaction over the results of the delegation's "historic" visit to Moscow and asserted its confidence in the maintenance of future Party unity, we are somewhat skeptical about the degree to which the Party's serious organizational and ideological differences (the latter, as noted REFPAIR, involve radically different views on such subjects as Arab unity, Arab nationalism, a peaceful settlement of the ME conflict, and the existence of Israel) have really been overcome. In our view, these differences are so deeply-rooted that it may only be a question of time before they surface again, perhaps in more acute form.

In any event, the Soviets appear to have pressed SCP leaders hard in Moscow to accept the unity plan, perhaps motivated by the fear that continued Syrian Communist feuding -- added to the repercussions of Russia's latest troubles in Egypt -- could harm Soviet relations with Asad and/or further damage the role of the SCP in the Syrian body politic. (Asad may already have been displeased by Bakdash warning him against imitating Sadat's expulsion of Soviet advisers and perhaps against joining the Egyptian-Libyan merger.) In so doing, the Soviets may have risked antagonizing Asad anyhow, since the latter in his August 10 interview with Beirut's al Anwar (summarized in Beirut 8604) made clear that his dealings with the SCP are internal matters in which the USSR should not interfere. Asked about Soviet efforts to reconcile the warring factions within the SCP, Asad replied: "I have no knowledge of that. It is not Russia's business to interfere in the affairs of any Syrian party. Such interference, when it occurs, is not consistent with our friendship for Russia."

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