

The Arab Summit

Although the emergency Arab summit held in Amman, November 8-11th, did not literally adopt the entire program of the reactionary regimes, its outcome signals preparations for a new phase of Camp David. This was most obvious in the decision to let Arab states resume relations with the Egyptian regime.

For the first time since 1982, all 21 members of the Arab League sent representatives to an Arab summit. For the first time whatsoever, the sumiteers made no pretense that the main concern was the Arab-Israeli conflict, much less its core, the Palestinian question. The latter was only put on the agenda after concerted protest by the PLO, backed by Syria, Libya, Algeria, Iraq and Democratic Yemen.

Instead, one decade after Sadat's historical trip to occupied Jerusalem, a major concession was offered to the Camp David model of political settlement, which relegated the Palestinian cause to the sidelines in favor of a US-sponsored Egyptian-Israeli deal. Deciding that «diplomatic relations between any Arab League member state and the Arab Republic of Egypt is a sovereign matter to be decided by each state in accordance with its constitution and laws,» the summit lifted the boycott on the Egyptian regime, which had been imposed by the 1979 Baghdad Summit. That Egypt was not outright readmitted to the Arab League was only due to the adamant objections of Syria and Libya.

The summit, which the Jordanian hosts proudly trumpeted as an «extraordinary» one, was held in the name of Arab solidarity which the final declaration termed «the prime concern of the Arab leaders.» There is no doubt of the need for Arab solidarity. It is a permanent requirement for resisting Zionist and imperialist aggression in the area. In the current situation, it is imperative for uniting around the campaign for an international peace conference on the Middle East, especially in order to thwart the US-Israeli attempts to distort the concept of such a conference. But the question remains as always: What kind of solidarity and to what aim? In this case, Arab officialdom united around opposition to Iran and support to Iraq in the Gulf war. The resolutions

adopted were the strongest yet Arab stand against Iran though, due to the objections of Syria, they did not reach the point of boycotting the Islamic Republic, as Saudi Arabia and others had originally pushed for. Most seriously, in expressing «support to Kuwait in all the measures it adopted to protect its territories and water...» the summit's final declaration tacitly legitimized the US and NATO military presence in the Gulf.

BOWING TO PRESSURE

True, the resolutions of the Arab summits of the past decade have been marked by steady decline, as compared to earlier ones. Even in this context, however, the resolutions of this summit have brought the stands of Arab officialdom to an all-time low. The kings, princes and presidents who convened in Amman, aimed at arriving at a unified Arab stand on the Iran-Iraq war, and means for making Iran respect the international consensus by accepting UN Security Council resolution 598. In the process, they adopted several dangerous resolutions, especially the one on Egypt, which gives tacit approval of the Camp David trend and the policies of bilateral deals as advocated by Washington and Tel Aviv.

The summit prepared the way for a new era wherein the Egyptian regime will return to its leading position in the Arab arena, but still tied by the strings of Camp David. The record quickness with which Arab regimes restored diplomatic relations strengthens the Egyptian regime's political role and its efforts to advance the US-sponsored settlement process. In less than a week, nine Arab states restored relations with Cairo (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, Iraq, North Yemen, United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Mauritania). Added to the three that never broke relations (Oman, Somalia and Sudan), and the two that have restored relations in the interim (Jordan

in 1984 and Djibouti in 1986), this gives a clear majority of Arab League members. The trend is obviously for restoring Egypt to the Arab League at the upcoming ordinary summit, to be held in Riyadh at an unspecified date.

It is no wonder that both the US and Israeli governments voiced praise for the results of the Arab summit in Amman. The resolutions appeared as a direct response to US-Israeli pressure and the coordination that preceded the summit, especially Schultz's October trip where he met the Israeli leadership and then King Hussein in London. Though Jordan officially rejected the US proposal for joint US-Soviet sponsorship of direct talks between 'Israel' and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, the summit indicates that Arab reaction's differences with the US-Zionist settlement model are dwindling.

The summit did adopt support to «the convocation of an international peace conference, under the sponsorship of the United Nations and with the participation of all parties concerned, including the PLO, on equal footing, as well as the permanent members of the Security Council, regarding it as the only suitable means for a peaceful, just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict» (final statement). The summit resolutions moreover rejected any Arab country's involvement in a bilateral solution. However, in view of the upgrading of Egypt's status and the downgrading of the Palestinian question, this support to an international conference seems more a formality than a question of substance.

The Jordanian delegation worked hard to have removed the phrase on the PLO's being represented on an equal footing at the international conference. While this effort was not successful, the Jordanians united with other delegations to have the phrase «an independent Palestinian state» removed from the ritual reiteration of support to the Palestinian people's inalienable rights. In general, the Palestinian issue was dealt with separately from the Arab-Israeli conflict, despite their common roots, in an obvious prelude to separate deals. Having hosted such a 'successful' summit and in view of the summit's laxity on all questions of principle, King Hussein will be able to pursue with renewed vigor the policy of normalizing relations with the Zionist state, prior to signing an agreement.