

from those of Baghdad. It is not surprising that they expressed reservations, and refrained from expressing unconditional support to Iraq. Moreover, due to their regional considerations and interests, neither Egypt nor Saudi Arabia was eager to provoke the Syrian government or to cut lines of communication with it. In relation to the international scene, both prefer to avoid any confrontation with the US, which would have been inevitable if they had joined in the wholehearted support to Iraq.

For all these reasons, Cairo and Riyadh tried to resolve the dilemma of where to hold the summit, and exerted direct and indirect efforts to mediate between Baghdad and Damascus. Meanwhile, they postponed announcing their intentions to attend the summit. However, in the end these reasons were insufficient to keep them away. They were forced to attend the summit, choosing to bypass the obstacle of the place and its connotations in favor of fighting the political battle at the summit.

The political discourse

The summit was dominated by two major political currents. The first, the current of «moderation,» was led by Egypt and supported by the Gulf states and other traditionally moderate Arab governments. Iraq headed the other current, the «hardline» one, with strong support from the PLO and Libya.

The moderates regurgitated the usual political positions; the speech of Husni Mubarak encompassed all the positions of this group. It stressed the «strategy of peace» which, according to him, stems from «our values, heritage and concern about our interests. In brief, it is the option that conforms with our principles and truly expresses our masses' aspirations... Arab traditions, especially after Islam, have been based on applying reason before taking up the sword... The Arabs have surpassed the world community in this domain.»

Up to this point Mubarak's speech might have seemed okay. But as he continued, the fine line which separates peace from surrender was broken. So was the fine line which sepa-

rates upholding the legitimate, natural rights of the Arab nation with dignity, from stooping to accept any solution and the humiliation of carving out a place for oneself at the price of abandoning all these rights.

The moderates began to shiver and shake from the mere possibility of having to resort to the sword if the resort to reason failed. They began giving advice about how the Arab discourse should be «human and reasonable» in accordance with the values of the times. But they had no answer as to what should be done in the case when pursuing the course of reason only leads to more Israeli intransigence and expansion, more expulsion of Palestinians, further absorption of new immigrants and threats to attack Iraq, and Pakistan if need be, as has been the Israeli response to peace overtures. What should be done if such logic only results in the US administration's continued massive support to the Shamir government? What if the fears of Jordan become a reality, and Israel does occupy more Arab territory, specifically that from the Jordan River and possibly extending to Amman? What if Israel tries to attain what it considers to be its natural borders? These borders are engraved on an Israeli coin showing a Jewish state including all of Palestine, all of Jordan and parts of Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and even Saudi Arabia. What would happen if Israel were to achieve these things, or at least begin working on them? How then would the Arabs deal with this situation? Are we to wait until it is too late and all is lost?

These questions and more were asked by the «hardliners,» but there was no answer because those who have dropped the military option from their calculations, and considered the 1973 war as the last one, are committed only to «peace» and do not want the Arab discourse to include any mention of force. True, the «hardliners» did not pose the military option as the preferable one. True, our experience with Arab summits and their rhetoric is not encouraging, and the Palestinians have paid the price for this in the loss of their land and rights. Yet it is also true that, due to US-Israeli intransigence, the advocates of «moderation» have

nothing to show for all their moderation, in order to convince others of its usefulness. This is especially true in the current situation which is full of tension and even signs of war.

King Hussein's speech at the summit shed light on the reality of the situation. He tolled a bell of warning and pointed to the possibility that Jordan would become the target of an Israeli attack, the battlefield of the coming Arab-Israeli war and the destination chosen by the Israelis for the Palestinians who are to be «transferred.» This option is becoming more and more possible as Shamir seeks to form an ultraright government wherein he himself would appear as a «dove» in contrast to hawks like Sharon, Eitan, etc.

Some Arab leaders viewed the king's speech as willful exaggeration aimed at obtaining more financial support to Jordan which is suffering a serious economic crisis. But the majority were convinced by the speech and conscious of the pending dangers.

Amidst this atmosphere which was not at all pleasing to Cairo, Mubarak's speech sounded like an old, worn-out tune. He had two choices -either to retreat and accept a secondary role, letting the «hardliners» set the pace; or try to force the summit to adopt the direction of recent summits which have marked the decline of official Arab policy. Mubarak yearns for Egypt to regain the leading role it enjoyed in the 50s and the 60s, by virtue of its pan-Arab nationalist line, but this time on the basis of being the leader of «moderation,» moving in the sphere of the Camp David accords and the Baker plan. Realizing his intentions required putting a brake on the line of escalation under consideration in Baghdad.

In this context, it is worth noting the recent cooling-off in the PLO-Egyptian relations, due to Mubarak's insistence on maintaining a super-moderate line. The Egyptian regime's ambitions to lead the Arab world can only be realized when moderation prevails or rather when the Arabs officially adopt a policy of surrender. Egypt wants to maintain a strong regional role for this would give it weight in the international arena. Here it is relevant to note that the US administ-