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Middle East

ARAB SUMMIT

The Arab world beyond Egypt is still reverberating from the impact of the Camp David accords and the prospect of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Late this week, Arab heads of state began meeting in Iraq—with Egypt unrepresented—to formulate a joint stand toward the accords and toward Egyptian President Sadat.

The summit talks follow a four-day meeting of Arab foreign ministers, also in Baghdad, at which the ministers debated a comprehensive working plan that is to serve as the agenda for the heads of state. Based on preliminary reports, the working paper apparently stresses the centrality of the Palestinian issue to any Middle East peace settlement, rejects the Camp David accords as inadequate, and criticizes Sadat's willingness to conclude a separate peace with Israel. It also urges greater financial support for the confrontation states from the oil producers. It does not, however, call for any meaningful sanctions against Egypt.

The foreign ministers' paper represents a compromise between the position of Arab radicals—like Iraq and Libya—who wanted firm sanctions imposed on Sadat and the moderates—led by Saudi Arabia—who do not want to see Sadat isolated in the Arab world. The final communique of the Baghdad summit will most likely be another compromise—implicitly criticizing Egypt but not taking any substantive moves against it. The summit will probably also reaffirm support for the Palestine Liberation Organization as spokesman for the Palestinian cause, and it may move Arab League headquarters from Cairo to another Arab capital.

Syria-Iraq

The Baghdad summit is the first major Arab conclave held in Iraq in many years. It follows moves to end the bitter feud between the rival Baathist regimes in Iraq and Syria. Last week, Syrian President Assad made the first public visit by a Syrian head of state to Iraq since 1963; he joined with Iraqi President Bakr in a declaration committing the two sides to a "qualitative improvement" in their bilateral relations.

The Iraqi-Syrian reconciliation reflects a fear in both Baghdad and Damascus that continued enmity between the two strongest Arab hardline regimes would under-

mine their efforts to oppose the Camp David accords. Both sides seem willing to paper over their differences for now in order to work against the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks and to dissuade moderates like Jordan's King Hussein from joining the negotiations.

Since Assad's trip to Baghdad, several Syrian ministerial delegations have visited Iraq to discuss bilateral economic issues. Although trade relations have been resumed, the Syrians and Iraqis have not announced major progress on other issues—such as Syria's desire to have Iraqi oil flowing again through the pipeline that crosses Syria. The two countries have also held discussions to coordinate policy toward the Arab summit talks.

There are no indications, however, that the two sides have altered their incongruent attitudes on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Just this week, for example, Assad reiterated Syria's support for a comprehensive peace based on UN resolutions. Iraq rejects any peace agreement with Israel.

Signs of significant military cooperation between Iraq and Syria are also lacking. Although they both promised, during Assad's talks in Baghdad, to coordinate military policy, there is no indication that substantial numbers of Iraqi troops are preparing to enter Syria.

The Syrians doubtless remain suspi-

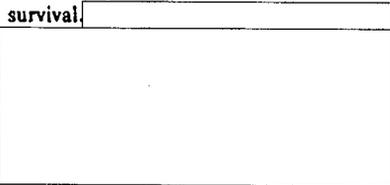


The first round of official talks: between Iraqi President Bakr (4th from l) and Syrian President Assad (3rd from r) in Baghdad

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cious of the Iraqis and Assad probably fears that large numbers of Iraqi troops in his country would be a threat to his survival.

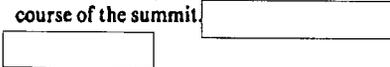


Sadat's Reaction

The Egyptian media have denounced the Baghdad summit talks. Sadat seems angered by the lack of public support for his policy from Saudi Arabia and Jordan and by the strong condemnations from Syria and the Arab radicals. Sadat has done little, however, to help the moderates develop a position from which they can stave off measures at Baghdad that will further impede efforts at broadening the peace negotiations.

The Egyptian President has been in contact with Saudi leaders and Sudanese President Numayri. Sadat has studiously ignored King Hussein, however, and the relationship between the two men is now deeply troubled.

Sadat's disdainful attitude toward the summit conveys an unrealistic notion that Egypt is invulnerable to Arab criticism. Sadat may simply be trying to hide the fact that he is powerless to influence the course of the summit.

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