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ARAB SUMMIT

Iraq, whose dogmatic rejection of any negotiations with Israel has led to its isolation even from the hardline Arabs, is having some success pulling together an Arab summit conference in Baghdad to try to work out coordinated opposition to the Camp David agreements. Such a summit is fraught with difficulties: while Iraq hopes to work out a plan to undermine the accords, Egypt is insisting that any Arab summit be held in Cairo and focus initially on Lebanon; Syria agrees with Iraq's objectives on Camp David but opposes Baghdad's rejection of all peace negotiations and wants to retain its freedom to work out a comprehensive peace agreement; the influential Saudis, leary of all hardline positions, are concerned chiefly that the Arabs stop working at cross purposes and get together.

In spite of all these differences, at least 17 of the 22 members of the Arab League have already agreed to attend the summit, now set for 1 November. A preparatory meeting of foreign ministers, insisted upon by several countries, is set to begin on 20 October. South Yemen and Libya are trying to get a group of radical foreign ministers together in Aden before 20 October for a strategy session.

Several countries have attached difficult if not impossible conditions to their attendance. Some moderate countries have said they will not go unless Egypt participates. Egypt for its part says that, only if its conditions on the venue and the agenda are met, will it be prepared to explain its point of view on the Camp David agreements. In view of the diverse interests of the states involved, it is clear that the summit could easily come unraveled.

Iraq Motivation

Iraq's summit initiative is motivated in part by its desire to end its self-imposed isolation in the Arab world. Baghdad sees an opportunity to stake out a claim to a share of Arab leadership in the face of the floundering Arab attempts to devise a strategy to cope with Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations.

In issuing the summit proposal, Iraq took Egyptian President Sadat to task for accepting a solution at Camp David that is prejudicial to Arab interests, but Baghdad's tone was restrained as it urged Egypt to return to the Arab fold. As a sweetener, the Iraqis proposed that the Arab oil states set aside \$5 billion a year in economic aid to Egypt, along with \$4 billion a year to support the confrontation with Israel.

The Iraqis probably see a summit at least as a chance to stop further movement toward negotiations and a means of forcing Jordan's King Hussein and West Bank leaders to defer a decision on participating in talks on the future of the

West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as provided in the Camp David accords. Iraqi strongman Saddam Husayn probably does not in fact expect that President Sadat can be persuaded to abandon the accords.

Iraq also believes that a summit will give it an opportunity to resolve its recent bloody feud with the Palestine Liberation Organization—PLO leader Yasir Arafat has charged Baghdad with responsibility for the murders of several moderate PLO leaders over the last several months—and to repair its strained ties with Syria. In calling for the summit, Iraq omitted its standard demand that the Arabs reject altogether any peace negotiations with Israel—a demand that Syria has not been able to accept and that has prevented any Iraqi-Syrian reconciliation. The omission appears to be an indication of a significant policy switch, but it could be simply a tactical move by Iraq to give the summit proposal the widest possible appeal.

The Iraqis have also revived their plan for the establishment of a strengthened "northern front" against Israel and reiterated their desire to send forces to "the Syrian arena." They have appealed to Damascus to facilitate the movement of Iraqi units to the "front."

Syrian Response

Syria's willingness to attend a Baghdad meeting—its announced acceptance set no conditions—marks a significant improvement in bilateral relations. The decision seems to indicate that, at least for the moment, the two rival Baathist regimes have agreed to submerge their differences in order to cooperate in undermining the Camp David agreements.

Assad does not appear to be ready to renounce his commitment to a comprehensive Middle East peace agreement as the price for a reconciliation with Iraq. In fact, Assad reiterated his support for a comprehensive settlement during his recent talks in the USSR. He probably views the Iraqi summit as a means of isolating Egypt and of gaining Arab support for Syria's opposition to the Camp David accords.



King Hussein of Jordan

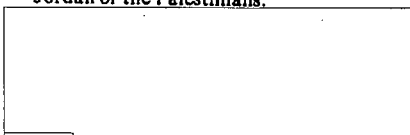
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Other Arabs

Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the small Persian Gulf states have all indicated a willingness to go to Baghdad. Most of the moderate Arabs probably signed on with little enthusiasm, however, and have grave doubts about the thicket they may be entering.

Pulling the Arab world together has long been a top Saudi Arabian goal, and Riyadh was seriously considering calling a summit even before the US Camp David initiative. Nonetheless, the Saudis are probably discomfited by the Iraqi sponsorship of the summit and will want to avoid association either with any public denunciation of the Camp David agreements or with the further isolation of Egyptian President Sadat. It may be harder for the Saudis and other moderate Arabs to resist pressure at a summit meeting for a tough line if the Egyptian-Israeli discussions in Washington fail to produce something on West Bank - Gaza issues acceptable to Jordan or the Palestinians.



Bahraini officials believe a foreign ministers' session is a possibility, but they are also doubtful about a heads-of-state meeting. The Kuwaitis have indicated that their objective will be to secure a unified Arab position. 