

# The Arab League summit

*A \$60 billion economic development plan was approved, and Middle East diplomatic initiatives were outlined.*

The Arab League heads of state summit concluded its meeting last week in Amman, Jordan by forging a comprehensive 20-year economic development strategy described in the final communiqué as “a historical turning point in Arab economic progress.” Despite the efforts of Syria, Libya, and their allies to undermine the Amman summit by boycotting it, the meeting not only went ahead as scheduled but was a forceful reaffirmation of the recently consolidated Iraq-Saudi-Jordan axis, which, much to the chagrin of Syria, has taken over the leadership of the Arab world.

According to Arab sources, the summit agreed to establish two funds: one valued at \$5 billion for low-interest financing for special development projects, and the other capitalized at \$60 billion for a 10-year program known as the Arab Development Decade. The \$60-billion joint development proposal was shaped along the lines of specific recommendations made at the summit by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein. The main components of the fund include \$19 billion for infrastructure, \$18 billion for scientific research and technology transfer, \$15 billion for agriculture and rural development, and \$10 billion for industrialization.

The beneficiaries of the 10-year development program will be limited to the poorer, non-oil-producing Arab states. Egypt, which was expelled from the Arab League because of its alliance with Israel under the Camp David accords, is to be excluded as a beneficiary. In the recent period, offers have been made to Egypt by the Arabs of a 10-year \$50-billion investment package for reviving the Egyptian economy—proposals that President Sadat has repeatedly refused.

The development program drafted at the summit is being worked out in cooperation with Europe and especially France, which has already signed extensive contracts with Iraq emphasizing technology transfer and nuclear energy development. Close political and economic ties to Europe are viewed by the summit participants as indispensable to overall Arab objectives.

Jordan's Foreign Minister Adnan Abu Odeh said before the summit that such ties will be strengthened by “continuing the dialogue” between the Arab League and Europe. The summit communiqué stressed this point by

underscoring “the Arab states' determination to encourage efforts on behalf of the Arab-European dialogue so as to serve mutual interests and achieve more understanding of the just Arab demands, especially with regard to the Palestinian question.”

## Securing the oil fields

To ensure their economic development plans, the Arab leaders devoted considerable attention to the questions of international stability. Obtaining such conditions is the objective of a newly proposed Arab Security Force, a major topic of discussion at the summit. Saudi Prime Minister and First Crown Prince Fahd put the finishing touches on the plan during the summit. The force is to be supported by troops and weapons from Iraq, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, and will be cemented by a series of bilateral agreements between Saudi Arabia and the six Arab oil-producing states of the Persian Gulf.

An Arab security force is viewed by the Arabs as providing a safety factor for Arab oil fields, which have long been threatened by the possibility of superpower intervention.

However, the decision to expedite plans for a Gulf security alliance was sparked not so much by the superpower threat as the Khomeini takeover in Iran and the deterioration of Arab security in general brought on by the war between Iran and Iraq. It was in response to such pressures that Saudi Arabia and Iraq formed a mutual defense pact earlier this year.

## Decision to dump Khomeini, Assad

According to high-level Jordanian intelligence sources, the Khomeini problem was a focus of attention at the summit by the Saudi, Jordanian, and Iraqi leaders, who resolved to get rid of Khomeini and eliminate Muslim Brotherhood fundamentalism in the region.

It was also resolved, according to the same sources, to do whatever is necessary to remove from power Khomeini's ally President Hafez Assad of Syria.

Assad has grown increasingly isolated and weak inside Syria as a result of his shortsighted pact with Iran

and Libya, and is reported to be highly vulnerable to being undermined by Syrian opposition groups, including divergent tendencies within the Muslim Brotherhood, which the Iraqi-Saudi-Jordanian axis is prepared to exploit, according to Jordanian sources.

The sources also noted that the economic development program agreed upon at the summit constitutes the first step toward concretizing the overall economic development commitment of the Iraq-Jordan-Saudi bloc, in cooperation with Europe and, hopefully, the United States. King Hussein, the sources added, "is fully aware of the Bernard Lewis plan to balkanize the Middle East, and is committed to stopping it."

### **Appeal to Reagan**

As part of his effort to prevent the disintegration of the region, King Hussein is making a direct appeal for cooperation with the incoming Reagan administration. In a press conference after the summit, King Hussein urged President-elect Reagan to act on his "tremendous national mandate" by opening "a new American-Arab dialogue" to forge a general Middle East peace agreement.

"The United States now has the opportunity to avoid being captives of previous policies. . . . I'll advise and hope, in view of the tremendous national mandate received by Mr. Reagan, that there will be a new look at all aspects from every viewpoint and interest. If we approach the future with such determination, I believe there are meaningful opportunities on a very wide level; this gives us lasting hope in the future of American-Arab dialogue."

Hussein's gesture of friendship toward Reagan is aimed at convincing the President-elect to break with the unsuccessful Camp David treaty negotiated by the Carter administration. Since its signing in 1978, the treaty has incurred the outspoken opposition of Hussein and other leading Arabs, who see it as a major obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

In an interview with *An Nahar* just before the summit, Hussein warned that allowing the Middle East crisis to go unresolved would heighten the prospects for a superpower showdown. He stressed that a stable Middle East, in which the Arabs can economically develop and provide their own independent security for oil flows, is the greatest contribution to world peace.

### **The Palestinian issue**

The dialogue that the Arab world is initiating with Reagan portends an unprecedented opening into U.S. policy considerations and a place in Middle East peace negotiations for the Palestine Liberation Organization. But this is precluded as long as the PLO allies with Syria in an open challenge to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq.

Throughout the summit, Hussein repeatedly rebut-

ted accusations from the radical pro-Iran factions of the PLO associated with Abu Iyad, the number-two man in the PLO, that Hussein is vying to speak for the Palestinians in future talks in place of the PLO. Following his election, Reagan named Hussein as the first head of state with whom he wished to meet. Last week, Hussein agreed to the meeting.

European sources report that PLO chief Yasser Arafat had made a secret agreement with Hussein before the summit that the PLO would participate in future Middle East talks as part of a Jordanian delegation.

To ensure that the PLO does not abandon its alliance with Syria and Libya, Iran's speaker of the Parliament Ayatollah Rafsanjani arrived in Beirut Nov. 27 to discuss "strengthening relations between the Iranian and Palestinian revolutions."

In response to the summit and the firming up of the Jordan-Saudi-Iraq triangle, Iran stepped up its bombing raids on Iraq, especially the Iraqi oil fields in the northern part of the country. Syria also launched a full military mobilization, massing its troops on the Syria-Jordan border in preparation for a war move into Jordan.

King Hussein denounced Syria for its war provocations, while Iraq mobilized an international diplomatic offensive against Assad.

## **From the communiqué**

*The following are excerpts from the final communiqué issued Nov. 27 at the close of the eleventh Arab League summit conference in Amman, Jordan.*

In the economic field the conference pinpointed the challenges facing the Arab nation, and stressed that confronting these challenges can only take place with effective joint effort within a wider pan-Arab perspective.

In this respect the conference approved a document on the strategy of joint Arab economic action until the year 2000. The document is a historical turning point in Arab economic progress because it sets unity, development, liberation, and integration as its objectives, pursues the policy of pan-Arab planning of the economic sector, and considers integrating development and production as the means for reorganizing, developing, and utilizing Arab sources in the joint economic development sector.

The conference expressed the conviction that pan-Arab security calls for the establishment of a solid economic basis, which can only be achieved through comprehensive pan-Arab development, and pan-Arab security can only be guaranteed through a protective shield of Arab economic achievements.

Out of its belief that the Arab human being is the main objective and instrument of economic development, the conference has given priority to the humanitarian aspect in the Arab economic strategy. This is in order to increase the economic productivity of the Arab human being, to develop his experiences and skills, and to enable him to acquire technological knowhow and at the same time preserve the cultural identity and heritage of the Arab homeland.

The conference expresses the belief that Arab economic integration has become a pressing national objective necessitated by the current phase and the recent developments in the Arab homeland.

Within the framework of this strategy the council adopted a draft contract for joint Arab development to speed up development in the less-developed Arab countries, to reduce the differences in development among the various parts of the Arab homeland, and to achieve continued development to improve individual income. The conference declared the 1980s as the first decade for joint Arab development. For this purpose the conference allotted the sum of \$5 billion for the next 10 years, subject to increase in light of needs and capabilities.

The draft contract has as its objective the financing of development projects in the less-developed Arab countries and gives priority to major projects that contribute to strengthening relations among Arab countries and achieving Arab economic integration in addition to raising the Arab people's economic and social standards.

The conference decided that financing shall be easy to obtain and at low interest rates. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar committed themselves to allocation of the above-mentioned sum. The door will remain open to the other Arab countries that are capable of participating in this contract in the future in light of their pan-Arab commitment.

The conference attached special importance to the role of deposits and Arab revenues and their sound channeling toward integrated investment fields. For this reason the conference adopted the unified agreement on the investment of Arab capital in Arab countries. This agreement represents the main instrument encouraging the private sector's participation in financing Arab development projects and programs on the basis of a sound and accurate balance between the interests of parties concerned in the investment relations and their responsibilities. The agreement also guarantees the continuation of the Arab joint economic action, supports and protects it from transient political crises. The conference adopted the pan-Arab economic action charter with a commitment to the principles of pan-Arab economic integration and to Arab preferential treatment, to keep joint Arab economic action out of politics, and provide a solid platform for the development of the Arab economy and firm steps with confidence in light of higher interests.



## Syria's Assad backs himself into a corner

by Robert Dreyfuss

Syrian President Hafez Assad's order this week to mobilize his armed forces for a confrontation with neighboring Jordan marks the final stage of the process of the isolation of Syria.

Despite his reputation for highly astute political maneuver—a necessary trait for someone who has ruled volatile Syria since 1970, longer than any other Syrian head of state—Assad has now backed himself into a situation of near desperation. According to informed Arab sources, Assad probably will not survive through 1981.

In effect, the Assad regime has been defeated by its long-time rival, the Iraqi government of President Saddam Hussein.

The internal crisis in Syria results chiefly from Assad's stubborn refusal to cooperate with neighboring Iraq, which, under Saddam Hussein's leadership, has become the leader of a moderate, nationalist bloc of countries including Jordan and Saudi Arabia. While the Syrian economy has spiraled down into crisis, nearby Iraq has achieved a position enabling it to enter the phase of industrialization.

As a result, Assad has lost the support of the Syrian middle class, merchants, nationalist political leaders, and the traditional religious establishment. Since 1979 his political base has become increasingly narrow, and he now depends exclusively on the Syrian army and internal security forces to maintain power.

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*Hafez Assad at a bunker on the Golan Heights.*