

The Draft Communique of the Arab Summit:

A Textual Analysis

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Brief Analysis

Yesterday, the text of a draft communiqué for the impending Arab summit, principally drafted by host Egypt, was leaked to the Beirut press. In an interview about this document, Egyptian foreign minister Amre Moussa indicated that this draft was accurate but preliminary. If this version emerges from the summit relatively unchanged, it would represent a stunning regression in Arab-Israeli relations and a major setback for the prospects of Middle East diplomacy.

Context This weekend's Arab summit represents the first such meeting in nearly five years. The last meeting was convened in Cairo from June 21-23, 1996, to discuss "the new situation in the region," i.e. the election of Benjamin Netanyahu as Israel's prime minister. Among other things, the 1996 summit reaffirmed the Arab decision for peace as a "strategic option" and demanded Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese and Syrian lands, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and that Israel sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT). Much of the 1996 document was also devoted to inter-Arab issues. In many ways, particularly in terms of structure, the 1996 communiqué serves as a model for the 2000 draft. In terms of substance and tone, however, the new document is a clear departure from its predecessor.

The Draft The 2000 draft communiqué could be categorized into two primary parts -- the "unsurprising" and the "unhelpful."

Unsurprising. In the first section, the document attributes the current level of high regional tension to Israel, which it says has come about due to Israel's "terrorist" practices and the "contempt" of Israel and many of its leaders toward the Islamic and Christian holy sites. The text condemns this Israeli behavior, particularly at a time when the region was "preparing itself for a just and comprehensive peace." Israel, according to the Arab leadership, is apparently not "predisposed to the choice of peace," and, as such, the leaders hold Israel "solely responsible" for the violence.

The draft resolution lists a number of actions to be taken by the member-states of the Arab League to address the situation on the ground. For example, the text stipulates that a fund will be established to provide assistance to a Palestinian economy suffering from Israeli closure. Additionally, the communiqué demands the establishment of an

international committee -- under the auspices of the United Nations -- to investigate and "apportion blame" for the last three weeks of violence. The 2000 draft also re-states a demand that Israel join NPT, a perennial Egyptian talking point.

Unhelpful. The draft resolution suggests a number of provocative Arab actions that have the potential to exacerbate an already tense Arab-Israeli situation. For example, it calls for the establishment of a special international tribunal to "prosecute" Israeli "war criminals" guilty of "perpetrating massacres against Palestinians and other Arabs in the occupied lands." Further, the document claims for Arab states the right to prosecute "all those responsible for savage Israeli actions" - a notion that may deter Israeli travel to even those Arab states with which Israel has peace treaties.

In an Arab nod of encouragement to Hizballah, the document cites Lebanon (along with Syria) as an occupied land -- because, it notes, Israel had not yet withdrawn to the "recognized international" border. This is a not-so-subtle reference to what is considered by the Arab states -- but not the United Nations -- to be continued Israeli occupation of Shabaa Farms, the disputed territory from which three Israeli soldiers were kidnapped by Hizballah.

The draft also includes a lengthy section on Arab affairs advocating strong Arab economic cooperation. While this issue was also in the 1996 communiqué, the 2000 draft calls for an end to United Nations (UN) sanctions on Iraq and the phased reintegration of Baghdad into the region.

The most portentous recommendation, however, is the call to freeze relations with Israel. Given the collapse of the peace process, Arab leaders, according to the draft communiqué, will commit to "resist Israeli efforts to infiltrate the Arab world." As such, the document recommends the cessation of all relations with Israel "established in the shadow of the peace process," a phrase usually meant to refer to post-Oslo developments. This could pressure Jordan to suspend or even sever ties, as well as encourage the termination of links with Morocco, Oman, Qatar, Mauritania, and Tunisia. Regional cooperation, according to the draft, is not possible in the absence of peace.

Palestinians and the Draft Resolution While the text is supportive of the Palestinian position, it seems likely that the Palestinian leadership may view the draft text as not hard-line enough. In fact, there are indications that Palestinians will push for a harsher resolution. In a statement published in the Palestinian daily *Al Hayat al Jadida* today, Fatah, the mainstream Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) faction headed by Palestinian Authority (PA) leader Yasir Arafat, called for resumption of the full Arab boycott and the severing of all Arab diplomatic and economic relations with Israel. Fatah also demanded that the Arab summit resolve to end the Iraqi sanctions and to start using oil as a weapon in the "battle to support Palestinian national rights." During a recent interview, PLO Political Department head Faruq Qaddumi echoed some of these points, and went one step further, calling for the introduction of an international force into "occupied Palestinian lands."

Unanswered Questions One day prior to the summit, it is unclear what relation this early draft will have to the final version. Given the environment in the Arab world, however, if this document is the starting point, the final communiqué will likely be more hard-line, not more conciliatory. Earlier this week, Libyan leader Mu'ammarr Qaddafi ridiculed the document on *Al Jazeera* television, suggesting that the draft was too soft on Israel. Now that the draft resolution has been leaked and widely circulated, it may become a source of embarrassment to Arab leaders and in turn push them toward an even more sharply worded text.

U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright spent the better part of the week in the region trying to ensure that a moderate final resolution is issued at the summit. White House damage-control diplomacy will undoubtedly continue throughout the summit, but the pressures on America's Arab allies -- both from their populace and their fellow Arab leaders -- could prove too difficult to resist. Despite best efforts of U.S. diplomacy, the summit could result in another UN-type resolution -- like last week's blaming of Israel for the crisis -- or even worse, a Khartoum-type resolution that sets back diplomacy, and Israel's regional integration, for years.

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