

Arab unity as solid as desert sand

Arab heads of state held an emergency summit meeting this week in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, that was designed to underline their alarm over massive immigration of Soviet Jews to Israel and the clearly lethal effects this will have on already floundering Mideast peace efforts.

It was to have been a show of strength and a strong message of alarm to the Bush-Gorbachev summit in Washington. Instead, the Baghdad summit showed just how pitifully weak, inept and disorganized the Arab states really are.

Leaders of five of the 21 members of the Arab League didn't even show up for the Baghdad meeting. Chief among the no-shows was the Syrian leader, Hafez Assad.

Syria, with its powerful armed forces, is a key player in the confrontation with neighboring Israel. But Assad defests Iraq's strongman, Saddam Hussein, even more than he hates the Israelis. Both leaders have been trying to overthrow each other for a decade. Syria also backed Iran in its long war against Iraq, an act which many Arabs considered treason. Iran, which is not an Arab nation, was invited but refused to come.

Interestingly, in spite of fevered anti-Israeli rhetoric by Tehran, there is growing evidence that Iran and Israel are deeply in cahoots in all sorts of mysterious arms deals and intelligence transactions.

The PLO's Yasser Arafat did show up, of course, but he looked pretty lame. Arafat's efforts to make some sort of peace have been contemptuously spurned by Israel's Old Testament government. This has left Arafat vulnerable to Libyan-backed PLO radicals who on Wednesday staged a stupid, botched attack on Tel Aviv's beachfront that gave the Israelis a major propaganda coup — which was fur-

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ther magnified by Col. Moammar Khadafy's ludicrous threat to turn Palestine into the "graveyard of the Jews." Expect an Israeli attack on Libya shortly.

Not surprisingly, the U.S. was roundly blasted at the summit by Arab militants who blame the Americans for Israel's repression of the Palestinians and its plans to settle up to one million Soviet Jews in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Congress gives Israel about \$5 billion annually in aid and just voted another \$500 million loan to build housing in Israel for Soviet Jews.

"Moderate" Saudi Arabia and Egypt tried hard to calm down anti-U.S. rhetoric. The Saudi royal family relies on U.S. military support for its very existence. Egypt would starve without \$2 billion a year in American food aid.

Congress, which pretty much takes its orders from Israel on matters dealing with the Mideast, controls the flow of aid to Egypt and arms to the Saudis. As a result, Egypt is not only under the thumb of the U.S. but, ironically, of Israel, as well. The Saudis get only the types of U.S. arms that Israel allows. So while Israel continues to bash the Palestinians and settle Soviet Jews, all the Arabs can do is put out more hot air.

Militarily, the Arab states are no match for Israel, with its mighty armed forces and nuclear arsenal. The Arabs, in fact, live in absolute terror of an attack by Israel.

Even if they could miraculously unite in a war to "liberate" Palestine, they would be trounced in short order.

Iraq's recent threats to "burn half of Israel" with chemical weapons if Israel attacked is typical Arab bombast. Saddam Hussein knows full well that if he shot one chemical missile at Israel, Baghdad would be vaporized in minutes by Israeli nuclear strikes. But the Arabs, with unrelenting self-delusion, actually seem to believe Iraq's empty threats are going to cow the flinty Israelis.

At least Saddam Hussein talks tough. Many of the Arab states do no more than whine and whimper about injuries being done to the Palestinians. In fact, most don't give a hoot about the Palestinians and wish they would disappear into the sands.

To placate angry Arab public opinion, however, Arab leaders continue to give handouts of cash to the PLO and lots of pats on the back while trying very hard not to get the Israelis really angry. Most Arab leaders are more worried about Islamic fundamentalists in their own backyard than independence for Palestine.

Behind all of this is the sorry plight of the Arab world. As the rest of mankind progresses into the 21st century, the Arabs seem to be sliding backwards.

Most of their regimes are dictatorships that run on corruption, nepotism and fear. In the last 20 years, the Arab states have produced absolutely nothing in the way of technology, science or medicine. Their populations are surging out of control. Food and water are running out.

Arab unity remains a myth while the Arab states, rightly termed "tribes with flags" squabble with each other. They are not going to "liberate" Palestine until they liberate themselves — and that won't happen any time soon.