

2

Camp David accords denounced

At 3:30 a.m. Havana time, on Sept. 9—36 hours past the scheduled conclusion of the Sixth Summit of Non-aligned Nations—a slightly breathless Lisandro Otero, the official press spokesman for the summit, called a press conference to brief the international press on the breaking results of an all-night debate on the question of Egypt and the Camp David accords.

Otero announced to a packed newsroom that the summit had passed a special resolution “energetically condemning all partial agreements and separate treaties . . . as a flagrant violation of the Arab nations’ cause, the U.N. Charter, and the principles of the Organization of African Unity,” since only a global settlement can guarantee peace in the Middle East. The conference, Otero continued, viewed the Camp David accords as such a separate treaty, and therefore condemned Egypt for “acts of complicity” with Zionist expansionism in the Middle East. Furthermore, Otero told the stunned newsmen, Nonaligned founding member Egypt’s suspension from the movement was considered by the heads of state, and referred to an Ad Hoc Committee which would study the matter and report back to the Nonaligned Foreign Ministers meeting scheduled for New Delhi in 1981.

Otero then turned the press conference over to a spokesman for the Palestine Liberation Organization, who announced that “we consider this resolution to be an international referendum against Camp David, against its parties, and against the policies of these parties. Egypt no longer has a strong position in our movement . . . It is completely isolated, rejected.”

With these announcements, what was probably the most dramatic story of the entire Havana Summit was concluded: Egypt received the most devastating barrage of universal opprobrium ever visited on a Nonaligned member state; Zionist attempts to pull all or part of the PLO into the Camp David negotiating framework were given the final coup de grace; and Egypt came within

a hair’s breadth of being the first country ever to be expelled or suspended from the Nonaligned.

The particular drama of these conclusions lay in the fact that, up to 12 hours before their adoption, virtually every journalist present at the summit, *and* the majority of its participants, expected a relatively mild criticism of Camp David to emerge as the movement’s consensus. How did the turnaround occur?

Arab moderation

The Cuban draft Political Declaration circulated to the delegations in the weeks before the summit (and excerpted below), called for “the condemnation of the policy of ‘partial solutions and agreements’ which the United States is trying to impose in the region . . . and condemnation of the Camp David accords.” The draft further charged Egypt with “distancing itself from the policy of the Nonaligned Movement, as well as disregarding the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.” But beyond this criticism of Egypt, the Cuban draft carefully avoided calling for either the suspension or expulsion of Egypt from the Nonaligned.

This approach was reiterated by Fidel Castro in his inaugural speech: “The Movement of Nonaligned Countries should roundly denounce the Camp David agreement. Moral censure, at least, is essential.”

Castro’s inclusion of the phrase “at least” was an indication that Cuba and its Arab allies—in particular, Iraq, Syria, and Algeria—themselves favored some kind of suspension, but felt that such a move wasn’t politically feasible. Castro evidently had made a clear decision *not* to force the suspension issue, since an unnecessary split within the movement’s ranks might have resulted. Libya is known to have thought otherwise, and throughout pushed strongly for Egypt’s suspension.

The “moderate” evaluation was reflected in the speeches delivered on Sept. 4, the second day of the summit, by Arab leaders Saddam Hussein (President of Iraq), Hafez Assad (President of Syria), and Yasser Arafat (head of the PLO). To the conference’s surprise, all three leaders, while attacking Egypt strongly for sabotaging a global solution, held back from calling in any way for that country’s suspension.

Ghali hangs himself

In a way, the most effective arguments against the Egyptian position were provided by the Egyptians themselves. For starters, Egyptian President Sadat had the incredible “chutzpah” of meeting with Israel’s Begin in Haifa while the Havana summit was going on. On top of that, Egyptian Foreign Minister Butros Ghali demonstrated throughout the conference a tremendous consistency in committing one tactical blunder after another.

Ghali’s first mistake came within hours of the inaugural ceremony, when he loudly demanded time to respond to the charges in Castro’s inaugural speech—

an unprecedented procedure. Castro, sensing the opportunity of the moment, overrode Libyan and other objections and *insisted* that Egypt be granted the right to respond.

This proved to be Castro's first master move of the summit, because Ghali proceeded to give a pathetic, self-discrediting defense of the Egyptian position—including claiming that what they were really trying to do was split the Zionists, and that the arms the U.S. was giving them as part of the Camp David accords would be used for the Palestinian and African liberation struggles. Ghali also foolishly peppered his remarks with sharp attacks on Castro and Cuba's role as chairman.

When he finished, six different delegations took the floor to one-by-one defend Castro and thoroughly revile Egypt's role in the Middle East. Mozambique President Samora Machel took particular pleasure in asking Egypt why it was that, if their new arms were actually meant for the PLO, the PLO itself had repudiated Camp David and charged Egypt with treason to the Arab cause.

Stalemate in the political committee

During the ensuing week-long deliberations of the Political Committee, the central debate was over the Egyptian question. Egypt's strategy was to organize the African states (by far the most numerous representation at the summit) to make sure they didn't bloc with the Arab moves. The Egyptian delegation—backed primarily by Yugoslavia, Singapore, and the Sinophile nations—played on latent hostility among the impoverished African nations toward OPEC for raising oil prices. The Francophone nations of Africa—by and large a reactionary, anti-Cuban lot—were told that defending Egypt was the best way to foil Castro's plans to take over the movement. And the more radical, Portuguese-speaking states (such as Angola and Mozambique) were hit with the argument that Egypt is a comember of theirs in the Organization of African Unity, and that any moves toward suspension of an African nation from the Nonaligned would set a dangerous precedent.

For a period of time, this strategy proved quite successful. Angolan delegates told this press service that they would oppose moves toward suspension on the grounds of "African solidarity." And by Friday, the Political Committee was reduced to quibbling over whether mention should be made of Egypt's name, of Camp David, or of nothing specific at all.

With no consensus in sight, all attention began to be focused on the key swing factor in Africa, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, a political moderate who had earlier delivered greetings to the inaugural session on behalf of all Africa. Conference insiders report that on late Saturday afternoon representatives of the Cuban delegation talked to President Kaunda and told him that, since no agreement on the question of Egypt could be reached, they deferred to whatever decision *he* made on the matter, so long as the Egyptian-Yugoslav side was willing to do the same. In the early evening, Kaunda got their approval as well; they undoubtedly expected a compromise favorable to Egypt.

At 8 p.m. that night, Conference Chairman Castro convened the conference's first closed-door session, and read Kaunda's decision: Egypt and Camp David were both sharply condemned, and an Ad Hoc Committee to study Egypt's suspension was established.

Egypt and its allies reacted instantly, according to informed observers. The Foreign Minister of Senegal took the floor and delivered the summit's most rabid and personal attack on Castro: the Cubans had rigged the proceedings, he charged; the Soviets were running the entire affair; and Castro had behaved like a dictatorial chairman.

Bedlam ensued. Within two minutes, twelve different delegations asked to speak, and for the next seven hours speaker after speaker stood up to defend Fidel Castro and to denounce Egypt in the most strident terms.

Kaunda himself was first. After announcing that he was speaking not only for Zambia, but on behalf of Tanzania and Mozambique as well, Kaunda proceeded to berate the Senegalese Foreign Minister for daring to speak in such terms to heads of state who, unlike mere Foreign Ministers, were empowered to change their minds and their policies as they saw fit. Mozambique's Samora Machel then took the floor and reportedly called the Senegalese spokesman an alcoholic, a drug addict, and a rat. One delegate subsequently told this press service that the entire scene was like a public trouncing of Egypt, whose impact and public notoriety was actually magnified by the absence of the press at the time.

Over seven hours later, at 3:30 a.m., the PLO representative delivered the summary sentence cited above: "We consider this resolution to be an international referendum against Camp David."

—Dennis Small
Latin America Editor