

Peres-Mubarak talks are in the works

by Thierry Lalevée

Sometime during the first weeks of August, a summit meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is expected to take place. Though the encounter may be delayed a bit further, it will come as a direct consequence of the new framework established in the region by the July 22 summit in Ifrane, Morocco, between Peres and Morocco's King Hassan.

As the days that followed Ifrane brought more details and insight into what King Hassan and Shimon Peres actually discussed, skeptics have been forced to realize that the summit achieved its aims. In the words of Mulla Ahmed Alawi, Moroccan minister of state, in interviews to the Israeli press on July 27: "In the long run, it was a success."

Negatively, this has been underlined by the disarray among the ranks of the perennial radicals. Of course, the usual verbal threats were delivered. "Revolutionary" Iran, the terrorist band that goes under the name of Abu Nidal, and others menaced King Hassan "with the same fate as President Sadat," the Egyptian leader assassinated in 1981. However, Syria's decision to break diplomatic relations with Morocco has not been followed.

Strikingly, even Libya's Qaddafi failed to follow the Syrian example by breaking the August 1984 Oujda Treaty of Union between Libya and Morocco. While King Hassan took the decision to resign from the chairmanship of the Arab League, to allow Secretary General Klibi to organize an upcoming Arab Summit, no one has dared to take any steps to remove King Hassan from the chairmanship of the "Organization of Islamic Countries."

Of course, Syria's frustration and outburst of anger cannot be simply pushed aside as irrelevant. Syria and its Soviet allies have repeatedly proven their ability to steer the Mediterranean region into chaos. The stage was set as on July 24 a top Soviet official (the No. 2 man behind Vladimir Polyakov, the director of the Middle East department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry) arrived in Damascus to meet with Palestinian terrorist leader George Habash, to discuss the "dramatic consequences" of Ifrane. This coincided with a large Soviet delegation in South Yemen, including Third World trouble-shooter Karen Brutents. At the same time, Libya's decision to deliver 22 Scud-B surface-to-surface missiles to Iran, indicated that Moscow had given the go-ahead for a blow-up

in the Gulf, timed with Iranian threats to stage anti-American demonstrations during the August pilgrimage to Mecca.

Syria was on the agenda

Syrian anger is furthermore understandable as Syria ranked as a major topic of discussion in Ifrane. According to diplomatic sources, the Ifrane summit was set into motion not only to offer the Israeli leaders a chance to change their positions and begin negotiations, but also to establish a rival and moderate Middle Eastern axis against the raving antics of Syria. "Syrian policy has become unbearable" were the words used by some diplomats, as they expressed a political consensus from Morocco and Egypt, but the Gulf countries and Saudi Arabia as well. The Saudi capital of Riyadh has adopted a policy of "no comment," but it broadcast in full King Hassan's speech on July 23, which included the sharpest denunciation of Syria, ever. "Arabs, stop disinformation! Among you, are traitors, who are carrying weapons against fellow Arabs, for a non-Arab cause," declared Hassan. Despite its new closeness to Syria, Jordan's embarrassment was underlined on July 28 when after his fourth summit meeting with Hafez al Assad, King Hussein refused to put out a joint communiqué denouncing the Ifrane initiative.

The next obvious step in the "Ifrane Process," will be Egypt. Egyptian sources have underlined the coordination between Morocco and Egypt, stressing that Cairo's inability to take such an initiative itself, was to be blamed on the International Monetary Fund and the U.S. administration for having economically squeezed Egypt in the last few months. However, Hassan's gesture has created the framework allowing Mubarak to go further, especially as Mubarak's recent emergency tour of Europe was finally confirmed as a success. Visiting Paris, London, Rome, and Bonn, Mubarak managed to convince the European leaders to increase their financial and food aid to Egypt, as well as to warn Washington against further pressures on his country. In an interview with the German weekly *Der Spiegel* on July 28, Mubarak displayed his full anger as he denounced the IMF for "not understanding one bit" about social affairs. "If I were to implement their demands, chaos would break out," he continued, and contrasted the comprehension he had received in Europe to that in Washington.

Though Egypt's economic predicaments are far from solved, Cairo has received some breathing room which it badly needed. As Israeli and Egyptian sources have indicated, a Mubarak-Peres summit will tackle the fundamental issues of the region. On the agenda will be not only the political side of the regional crisis, but the economic side, too. Peres's proposal for a "Marshall Plan" for the Middle East, and the Egyptian "Meguid Proposal," named for the foreign minister, will be prominent items. During his European tour, Mubarak reactivated both issues, receiving confirmation of European support. When that happens, the ball will roll into the American court.