



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

Arab and Muslim leaders showed full solidarity with Palestine but also sharp divisions regarding the future of the region



The joint summit of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in Riyadh brought the expected strong condemnation of the Israeli operation in Gaza and the divisions within the 2 blocs regarding specific actions.

The original plan to host 2 separate summits was revised to a joint summit of Arab and Muslim leaders due to divisions and the need for a compromise.

Saudi Arabia, the chairman of both organisations, contributed to some kind of consensus of AL and OIC leaders to leave Riyadh, even though the final agreed positions for many participants were below expectations.

Arab and Muslim leaders have gathered in emergency summits because of the situation in Gaza, and that in itself was their strong response to the crisis that has been ongoing for 5 weeks.

However, the differences in views expressed in the preparatory ministerial meetings of the Arab League made the 2 large gatherings merge into one to mitigate the disagreement.

Addressing the UN Security Council in vain

In the final declaration, the leaders rejected Israel's claims that it acted in self-defence in Gaza. They demanded an immediate end to the action and the sending of humanitarian aid.

The UN Security Council was asked to pass "a decisive and binding resolution" on stopping Israeli "aggression" and the International Criminal Court to prosecute crimes attributed to Israel.

Even though this bloc of states is the second largest after the UN, its appeal to the Security Council to stop the Israeli operation in Gaza will not have much effect, given that there is an unbridgeable gap in the principal body of the UN regarding the conflict in the Middle East.

The UN Security Council has not shown effectiveness so far, both in the case of Israel's war against Hamas and before that regarding the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Hence, the address of the Arab and Islamic leaders to the World Organisation, even though it was one of the more specific demands from the joint declaration made last Saturday, was barren and practically unenforceable.

Numerous dividing lines

Some much more radical proposals with which the leaders gathered in Riyadh should respond more strongly to Israel were not part of the consensus. Some of them, for example, Algeria and Lebanon, proposed to cut oil supplies to Israel, but also to the allies who support it in the action in Gaza.

Also, the initiatives (Bashar al-Assad) for the Arab states (those that have thawed relations with it in recent years and established cooperation, such as the UAE and Bahrain) to distance themselves from Israel have not passed.

Consensus was reached regarding not allowing the admission of Palestinian refugees to the countries of the region. "There is a consensus among the members of the Arab League in their complete rejection of the idea of displacing the Palestinians", said Hossam Zaki, Assistant Secretary General of the Arab League, during the summit.

The line of disagreement between the participants of the double summit in Riyadh has been drawn between countries that want to build future relations in the region in partnership with the US (like the host Saudi Arabia, for example) and those close to Iran.

Iran, with its regional allies, advocated the harshest rhetoric. It acted as the factor on which the spill over of the conflict from Gaza to the rest of the region depended.

As the principal sponsor of Hamas, Hezbollah

and the Houthi movement in Yemen, Iran represents a destabilising factor in the region. This, however, is the development that Arab states want to avoid, so this difference essentially caused all the divisions that emerged at the Riyadh summit.

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Pragmatism of the host

The participation of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was the first visit of an Iranian leader to Saudi Arabia in the last 15 years. His meeting with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman was the first since the normalisation of diplomatic relations last March, with the mediation of China.

However, even though significant for both countries, this meeting will not reflect to a great extent on the situation in the region due to their fundamental differences regarding the relationship towards Israel, and particularly the US.

"They (Saudi Arabia) know Iranian cooperation is needed to prevent the conflict from spreading and, perhaps, even in navigating an endgame with Hamas", said Kristin Diwan from the Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, to The Wall Street Journal, assessing the Kingdom's contacts with Iran as a "demonstration of pragmatism".

Even though it fully shares the support of the Arab and Muslim world for the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia leaves scope to continue negotiations on the normalisation of relations with Israel after the end of the conflict, under the mediation of the US.

In this triangle, the Kingdom sees a way to implement its strategic interests for strengthening its role as a regional power through American support in the security area, and the development of a civilian nuclear programme.

The emergency summit it presided over in Riyadh showed that this is the first-rate interest of Saudi Arabia, for the realisation of which it is crucial to prevent the escalation of