

New Iraqi leader retains hard-line stance

Analysis by
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For the Emerald

According to a United Press International dispatch from Baghdad, General Saddam Hussein has succeeded Almad Hassan al-Bakr as president of Iraq and, "Little or no change is expected in Baghdad's hard-line stand against the United States and the Egyptian-Israeli peace."

Hussein had been the vice-president since 1968 and had shared power with al-Bakr since 1973.

The transfer of power may in fact represent a hardening of the Iraqi position. In late June, Saddam Hussein visited Jordan for two days of talks with King Hussein on the situation in the Middle East following the recent air battle between Israeli and Syrian jets over southern Lebanon.

According to the Arab News, printed in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, the results of the visit were described by Iraqi officials as "very good."

The discussions were seen as part of continuing inter-Arab diplomatic activity after the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

Shortly after his return to Iraq from Amman, the Jordanian capital, Saddam Hussein publicly announced that his country was moving toward confrontation with Israel. Arab News quoted him as saying, "Iraq is preparing itself in the economic, political, social, intellectual and military fields to liberate Jerusalem and all Palestine."

Some Arab observers dismiss Hussein's statement as political rhetoric aimed at satisfying violently anti-Israeli public opinion in Iraq. Others see it as part of a steady movement toward confrontation in the Middle East.

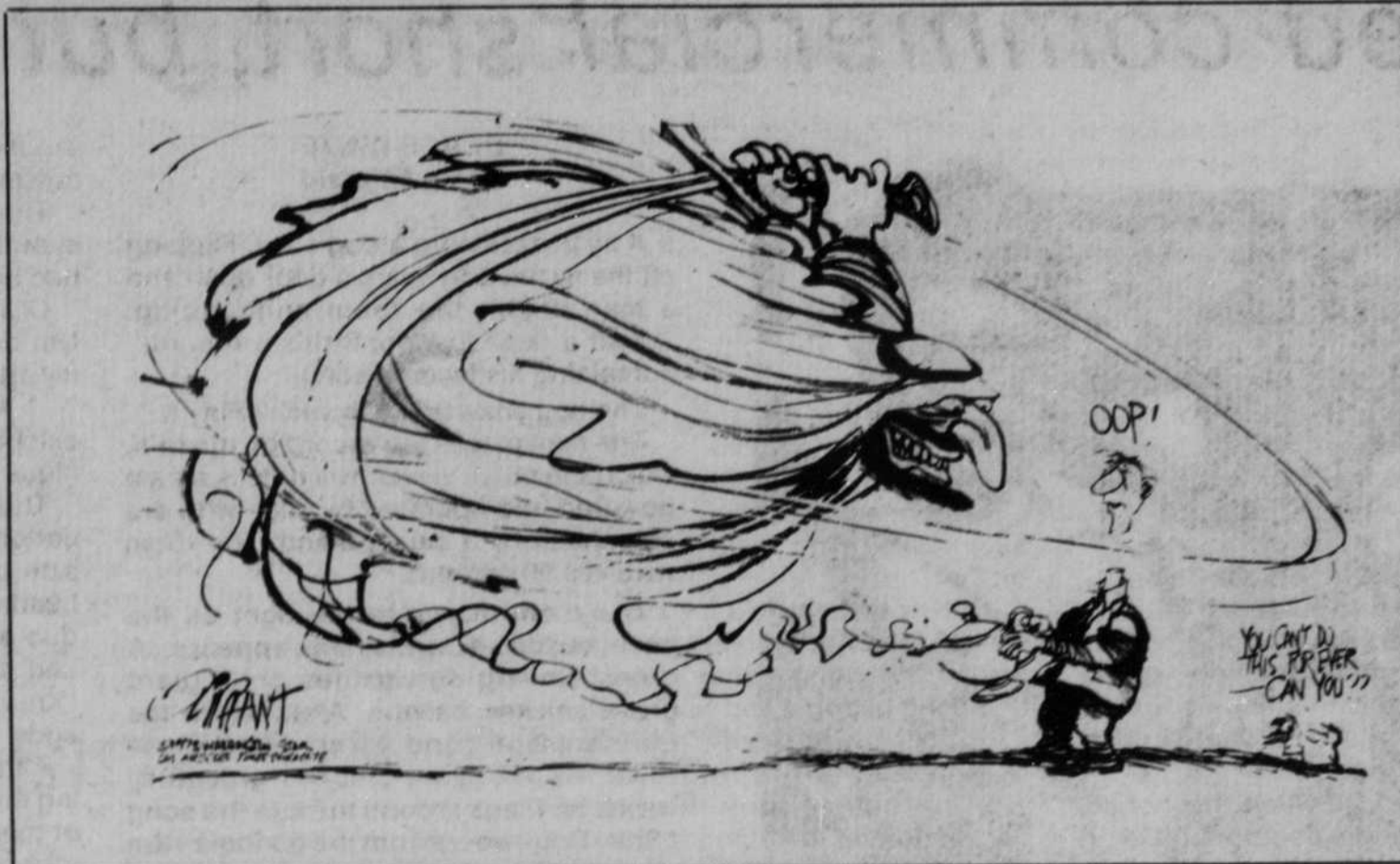
An Arab News editorial published July 10 called on the United States to recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization as an indispensable step toward peace in the region. American emissary Robert Strauss was criticized for his statement that the chances for American recognition of the PLO were "between slim and zero."

Strauss' statement aroused wide-spread anger in the Arab world, and Arab News commented that the "political lameness" of Pres. Carter was blocking all hope of peace, adding, "The slide to war has more momentum and weight behind it at present, and it is in the immediate as well as long term interests of the United States to stop that."

According to the Saudi Gazette, Strauss stated during the course of his visit to Saudi Arabia that the United States would not make concessions on the Palestinian question as a result of any Arab attempt to use the "oil weapon" to force the United States to change its policy.

The United States policy makes official contact with the PLO conditional on its acceptance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 and Israel's right to exist.

The PLO refuses to accept Resolution 242 because it refers to the Palestinians as a "refugee problem" rather than



as a national group with political rights.

PLO chief Yasser Arafat stated on July 4 that he expected a major Israeli offensive on Palestinian camps in Lebanon. Arafat made his remarks shortly after briefing Arab and Soviet bloc ambassadors on increased Israeli military activity.

Arab News quoted the Palestinian commando leader as saying, "I expect big military operations. We expect a long, hot summer. But we are not an easy nut to crack."

Arafat hinted that the PLO

might attempt to sink super-tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, thus blocking all oil traffic from the Persian Gulf to the West.

Referring to Israeli raids in Lebanon, Arafat said, "Israelis using sophisticated American-supplied weapons are following a scorched-earth policy blessed and approved by the United States."

On the diplomatic front, efforts are underway to establish Arab cooperation and a common front against Israel.

During the first week of July, Pres. Hafez Assad of Syria

travelled to Algiers to meet with Algerian president Chadli Benjedid to discuss the current situation in the Middle East.

Arab News emphasized that both Syria and Algeria are members of the Arab front opposed to the Egyptian-Israeli peace.

At the same time, Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi arrived in Riyadh on an official state visit to Saudi Arabia. Qaddafi was greeted at the airport by a welcoming delegation headed by King Khaled and Crown Prince Fahd.

A statement issued after the Saudi-Libyan talks said that the peace treaty ignored the Palestinian people's rights and violated the Arab League charter. Both sides called for the full implementation of political and economic sanctions against Egypt.

Iraq and Syria entered into a political union in October, and are attempting to establish a joint military command. The combined military forces of the two countries would include more than 4,000 tanks and 700 combat aircraft.

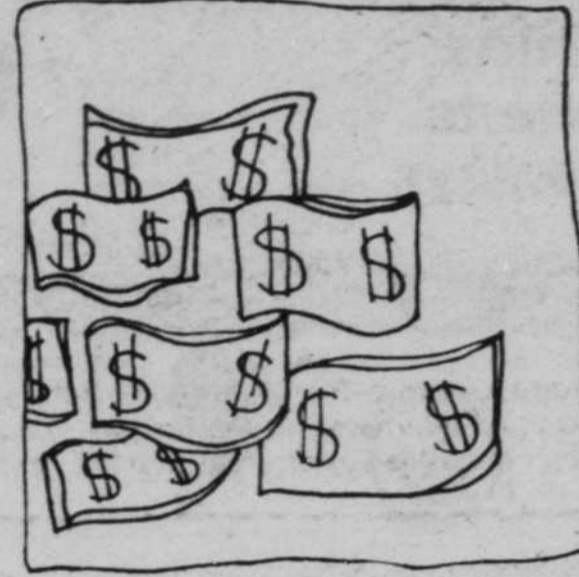
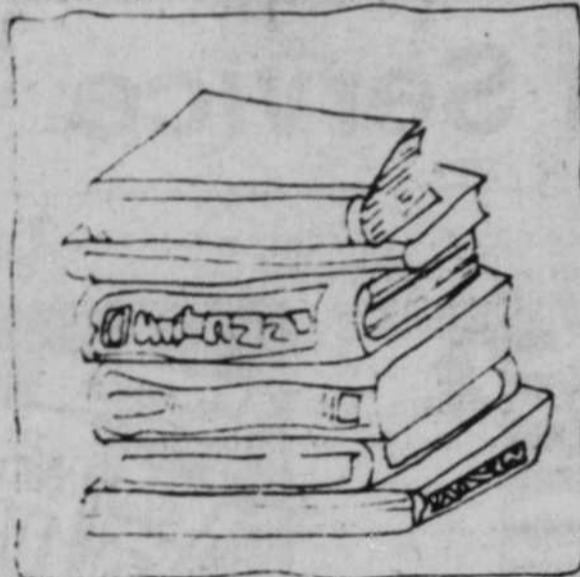
Efforts are underway to integrate Jordan, with 500 tanks and 75 aircraft, into the alliance (the International Institute of Strategic Studies calculates Israel's forces at 3,000 tanks and 540 aircraft).

In addition, the Arab countries, led by Saudi Arabia, are attempting to form a united front. Arab News reported that recent Saudi military maneuvers formed the backdrop for a summit conference. The conference was attended by King Khaled and the rulers of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Kuwait and North Yemen.

The conference was, in part, a response to rumors of possible American military intervention in the region to secure oil supplies.

Sheikh Zayed ibn Sultan, UAE President, told reporters that, "No state, whatever its size, is entitled to threaten the peace and security of the region."

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