LAST WEEK’S Arab League summit conference, hosted by Jordan’s King Abdullah on the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, provided no drama and produced a set of resolutions that carried little weight. This came as no surprise. After all, Arab summits reflect regional realities, and the primary locus of power in the Middle East is located in the non-Arab regional powers – Turkey, Iran and Israel. Moreover, the high hopes generated by the “Second Arab Awakening” of 2011 have long since dissipated, as civil wars, foreign military intervention, the reassertion of strong authoritarian regimes, the exacerbation of sectarian fissures and the emergence of a new and virulent strain of jihadist terrorism combined to exact a horrific human toll. Arab populations are now even worse off than before on every measurable index of human development and well-being – whether it be health, access to clean water, education, employment, basic security, or human rights.

Nor are Arab states in agreement on how to address the multiple issues on their collective agenda: the raging myriad conflicts in their countries – in Syria, Iraq, Libya and Yemen; the meshing of Iranian power projection and militant Shi’ite Islam; combating Sunni jihadist terrorism, embodied by Islamic State and al-Qaida; Kurdish ethno-nationalism; Turkey’s neo-Ottoman pretension and policies; and the long-festering Palestinian issue; as well as the social, economic and political shortcomings of their regimes, which lie at the root of their individual and collective weakness.

Nonetheless, the summit provided some insight into the state of play in the Arab region. No less than fifteen heads of state attended the 22-nation conference, indicating their belief in the meeting’s importance. As its host, King Abdullah was keen on the summit displaying as broad a consensus as possible regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the Syrian civil war, particularly toward the Trump administration, whose special envoy attended as an observer and held a number of meetings with Arab leaders. To be sure, the summit’s final statement broke no new ground on the Israeli-Palestinian issue, while reiterating a commitment “to find a peaceful solution that preserves the unity of the country, its sovereignty and independence and ends the presence of terrorist groups.”

IRAN’S EXPANDING reach continued to loom large. To the chagrin of Lebanon’s Hezbollah-supported President Michel Aoun, five former Lebanese leaders issued a stinging memorandum criticizing Hezbollah’s, and, by extension, Iran’s domination of their country. Yemen’s President Abd Rabbu Mansour al-Hadi devoted much of his summit speech to rebuking Iran’s meddling in his country, and the summit’s final statement condemned Iranian interference in the Arab world, albeit not by name (thereby enabling Lebanon and Iraq to accede to it).

Arab commentators and Twitter devotees were understandably cynical about the entire proceedings. Former Jordanian foreign minister Marwan Mouasher published a what-if alternative closing statement that emphasized the leaders’ commitment to addressing the real needs of their citizens. In contrast, a Nasserite Egyptian commentator berated Arab leaders for their continued “surrender” to Israel, declaring, “May God protect you, O Palestine, from the Arab summits and their people.” And the blogosphere was ablaze with photos of the “Arab Siesta”: Arab leaders slumped in their chairs sleeping during the proceedings, proving, at least to many, that a picture is worth a thousand words.

The author is a professor in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History, and a senior research fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University