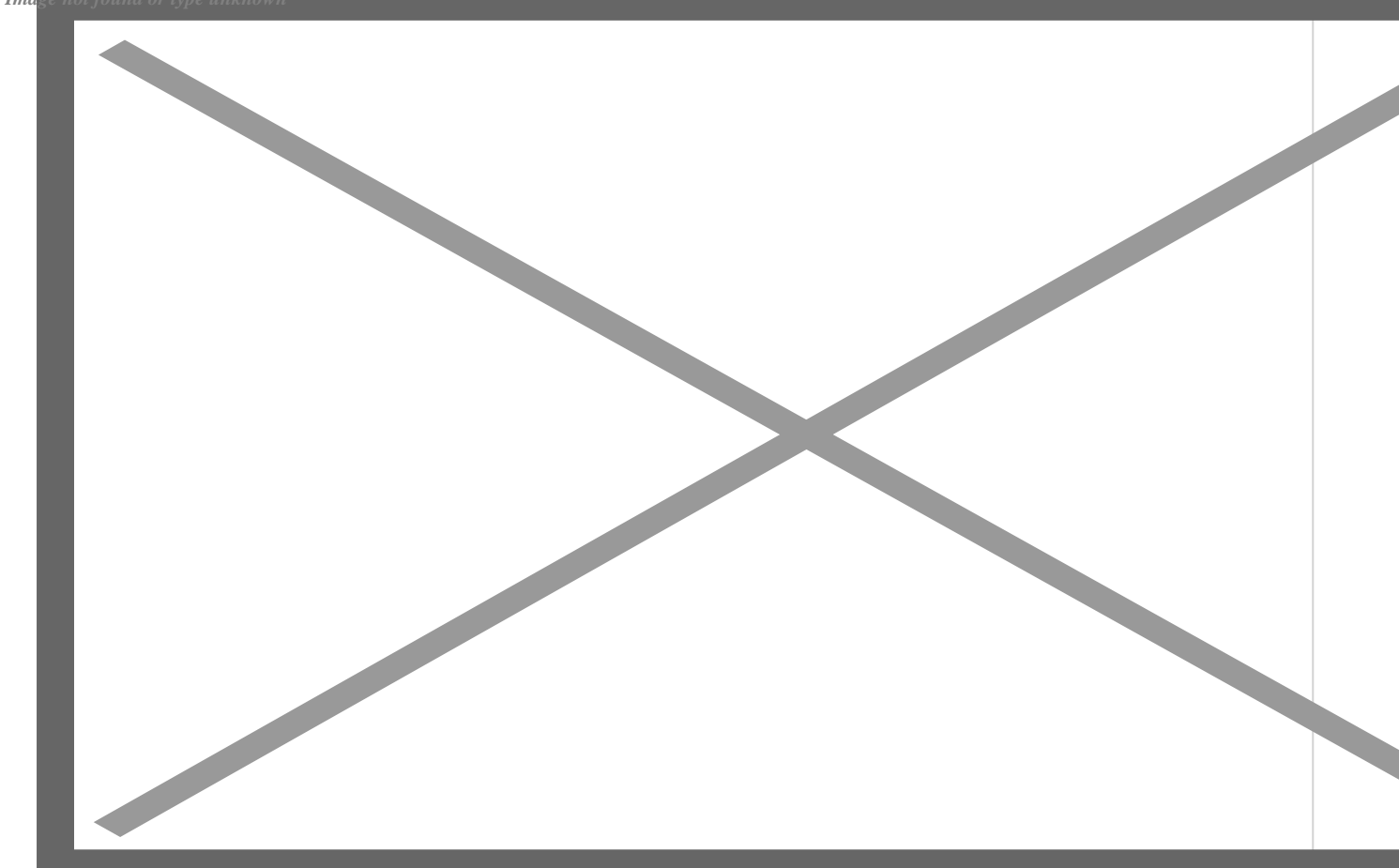


Arab League agrees Palestinian cause is central

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Algiers, November 2 (RHC)-- Arab leaders have closed their first summit meeting in two years by reiterating the centrality of the Palestinian cause, albeit avoiding to address their own splits over normalising ties with Israel.

The final declaration that brought an end to the two days of the Arab League summit in Algiers on Wednesday highlighted the bloc's continued support for Palestinian statehood, the protection of sites in Jerusalem against Israeli violations and condemnation of Israel's use of violence and its blockade of Gaza.

Al Jazeera's Zeina Khodr, reporting from Algiers, said the Arab League had purposefully issued a "carefully crafted" communique. "This is a regional organisation that is deeply divided and polarised, so they were very careful with the words that they used," Khodr said. "We heard leaders express support for the Palestinians and their right to statehood, but no condemnation of Israel."

In his opening remarks on Tuesday, Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune had pledged to put forth considerable efforts to reaffirm support for Palestinians as the Arab and international communities' attention shifts to other conflicts and crises.

"Our main and first cause, the mother of all causes, the Palestinian issue, will be at the heart of our concerns and our main priority," Tebboune said.

The Arab League was created in 1945 to promote unity, but in recent years, it has been marred by increasing divisions. For decades, the group has been committed to establishing Palestine as an independent state, but its response has been fractured by issues including Iran's influence, the civil war in Syria and the decision by some to normalise ties with Israel.

Since the last Arab League summit in 2019, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan have agreed to normalise diplomatic relations with Israel. Other Gulf states that maintain relations with Israel, such as Oman and Qatar, have declined to follow suit in formalising their ties.

The final declaration made no new proposals for advancing Palestinian statehood or rights, as former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu looked set on Wednesday to return to power in one of the most right-wing coalitions in Israel's history. There was no formal mention of Israel's election during the many speeches at the summit that spoke of Palestinian rights.

The splits among Arab states over peace with Israel and how to advance the Palestinian cause were not publicly aired during the meeting. On the issue of interference by non-Arab actors in the region, the final communique also avoided any direct mention of Iran and Turkey.

The summit's discussions also focused on the food and energy crises aggravated by Russia's war in Ukraine, which has had devastating consequences for Arab countries, including Yemen, which imported 40 percent of its grain from the Eastern European country before Russia's invasion.

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