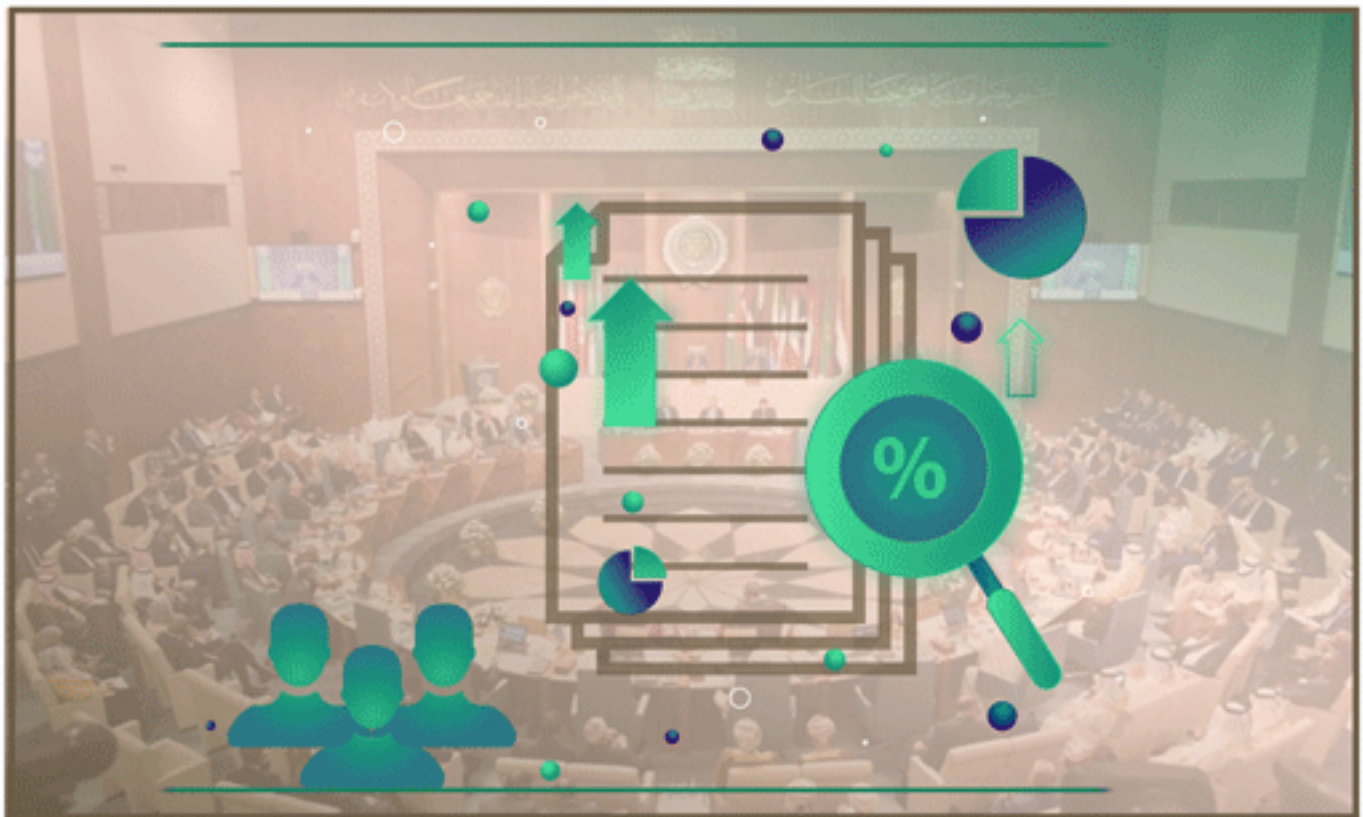




The Quantitative Approach in Evaluating Summits



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The Quantitative Approach in Evaluating Summits

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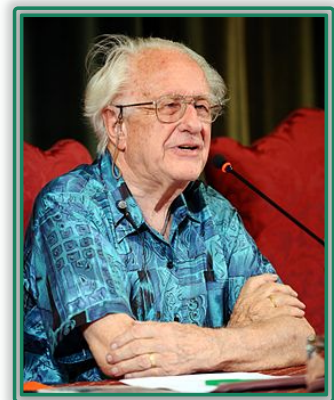
Introduction

Opinions often differ when assessing a particular political event, and since political phenomenon is the most tempting to be normatively assessed, political research tended gradually towards the behavioral approach in analyzing, evaluating and even predicting political phenomena. Behavioral approach supports the qualitative method by quantifying phenomena and using mathematical and statistical analyses, consequently, the descriptive, comparative or historical methods...become a measurement model to monitor the size of quantitative change of the phenomenon. The macrophenomena would be divided into sub-indicators, which would be measured either over time or by comparing them with each other.



Although each method has its drawbacks, the trend is increasingly inclining towards the quantitative approach, and this is due to the penetration of the behavioral school and the pressure of Futures Studies. As a result, objectivity in analyzing phenomena has increased, moving relatively away from impressionism and ideological bias.

The phenomena of summits—a term used since British Prime Minister Winston Churchill introduced it in 1950—is one of the applied phenomena of political and diplomatic activity. Perhaps Johan Galtung’s study is a pioneer in this field, where he sees that states as moral entities only deal with each other through individuals, and this would make these individuals the unit of analysis, not in their individual capacity, but in their representative capacity. For there is a difference in the powers of the president, prime minister and foreign minister, and when an international conference is studied, it is necessary to determine the political position of the individual participating in political activity and the country that he/she represents. Galtung considered “a ‘summit meeting’ *any ad hoc meeting of head of state, heads of government and/or foreign ministers where at least two of the big*



Johan Galtung



powers are represented.” He applied this concept in a study analyzing summits held in the 1941–1961 period.²

The definitions of summits differ from one researcher to another in some aspects, where during and after World War II, the meaning was confined to the meeting of leaders of the great powers, which was advocated by Winston Churchill. Also, the level of representation was confined to the first echelon of the country’s leadership, i.e., the top ruler or prime minister, it depends on the structure of the political system. Here, problems arose in defining the meaning of the summits, with the emergence of some discussions about the extent to which the Crown Prince, for example, was included in the list of the summit or not? Or the vice president or the personal representative of the president.

As for the role of summits, opinions differ in this regard. Some believe that a major phenomenon like globalization has increased the pace of summit diplomacy. In the past, local affairs occupied most of the ruler’s agenda, then due to the expansion of international trade and the economic and technical overlapping... interdependence between countries increased, and regional affairs became part of the summits’ agenda. As globalization has increased, global affairs have been competing with local and regional ones. A study indicates that the number of summit meetings that the US presidents had attended, has continuously risen over the years 1945–2007, where the monthly mean of summits increased from 0.59 to 6.53.³ If we look at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summits, we will find that during the period 1949–1990, it held 10 summits, i.e., about one per four years, while during the 1991–2008 period, it held 11, i.e., 1.6 annually. This means that the pace of holding NATO summits has nearly doubled. It confirms the notion that the role of summit diplomacy has increased.⁴



There are other studies that see that the growing role of public opinion and local, regional and international civil society organizations, and the development of the communication means are having an impact on the summits, where this diplomacy has become less effective. For summits that are only restricted to leaders, discuss a variety of topics in which they may not have sufficient expertise to understand their dimensions, especially in light of the enormous complexity of the international community.⁵ Other researchers believe that summit meetings have positive and negative aspects; sometimes they may build trust, but other times, they may be harmful to interstate relations, particularly when some politicians lack professional diplomatic skills. Also, the expectations of the public, at home, play a role in the success or failure of the summit.⁶



Here, the issue varies according to the political system; in democratic countries, failure or success is one of the factors supporting the position of the president, particularly in the upcoming elections, whereas it is not the same case in single-party states or hereditary monarchies.

The Role of Summit Diplomacy in International Relations

Although many regional or global summits end up with non-tangible results, some consider them that they fulfil an important symbolic role, provide a fundamental space for international dialogue, and are a peaceful way in managing of international relations. Exchanging views—even when no agreement is reached—builds trust and helps countries in their understanding of one another. Proponents of this opinion give the example of the Soviet-US summits during the Cold War, despite their grave differences. However, some believe that summits can be harmful to interstate relations if no tangible outcomes are reached, such as:⁷



- ▶ 1. Negative perceptions of the summit diplomacy by the local, regional or international public. This can be seen in the expectations of the Arab public from the Arab summits.⁸
- ▶ 2. Undermining the position of the leaders who participated in the summits, where such perceived failure is frequently explained by politicians' lack of professional diplomatic skills, or lack of the knowledge, skills, and patience needed to discuss complex issues.
- ▶ 3. Leaders might be tempted to avoid making significant compromises, which state leaders perceive as a political risk.

Other researchers believe that the intertwining and complexity of international affairs and globalization made the understanding of any issue very complex. Consequently, leaders delegate technocrats to handle many issues of a technical nature. If technocrats fail, the ruler doesn't bear the sole responsibility of such failure.

Since countries are now members in dozens of international and regional organizations, and due to teleconferencing, summits have lost the characteristic of secret decisions, depriving negotiators of an effective tool, which was frequently used in international relations.



Quantitative Indicators to Analyze and Evaluate Summits

Given the breadth of this topic, we will focus on Arab summits, making use of the indicators and analytical methods of world summits. Bilateral or tripartite Arab summits preceding or following collective summits are disregarded.

During 1964–2001, Arab countries held 19 summits, an average of one summit every 1.9 years. Seven were held in Morocco, or 37%; Egypt held four; Jordan, Algeria and Iraq held two each; while Tunisia and Sudan held one and none were hosted by Gulf countries.⁹ These numbers are worth contemplating: why does Morocco have this great role, and why its percentage is more than three times that of Algeria or Iraq, and what does the non-hosting of any Arab summit in 36 years by the Gulf countries indicate?



As for 2001–2022, 18 summits were held, five by the Gulf states. What indications does this offer (in 37 years none was held by them, while in the next 20 years, they held five)? It is noticed that out of the five conferences, two were in KSA, two in Qatar and one in Kuwait; does this have any significance? Is it related to the Gulf rivalries and the Arab unrest from 2010 to present? If we add to these summits, emergency meetings, the number becomes six. Does this indicate that influence has shifted from the countries of revolutions to the rich countries?¹⁰

A study on Arab summits indicates that Arab disputes in summits revolve around six aspects: Who attends? What is the agenda? When is the conference held? Where is it held? Why should it be held? How the wherewithal to overcome their disagreements will be found?¹¹

It is normal for any country to try to claim the success of the summit it hosted, while the opponents would try to distort the image in general, and the results in particular. This prompted us to think of a way for accurate evaluation of Arab summits, away from instinct and without being impulsive, and to help the Arab political culture control the evaluation of each political phenomenon. We don't claim



here that the proposed approach is perfect, but we believe that it is much better than an impressionistic assessment based on hasty analysis.

In the case of quantitative measurement of the summits over a full period, we can monitor the “mega-trend” of the various indicators on which the measurement is based. Thus, we can present strategic visions more consistent with the results and the variables embodied within the phenomenon.



Suggested Measurement Model

Just like how growth, stability, democracy or corruption in a country are measured, we can set indicators that help us evaluate Arab summits. For this, we have identified indicators that can be quantitative, as follows:

► **1. The number of times of countries’ actual attendance compared to the total number:**

Attendance is an indication of respect for the host country and its leader, and the preliminary willingness to deal with the issues of the set agenda. Accordingly, we can calculate the ratio of attendees by the number of invitees and give it a value: high 3 points; medium 2 points; weak 1 point.



- **2. The level of representation at the summit for each country** (president, prime minister, foreign minister, or lower level): The presence of the head of state or the ruler himself is an indication of interest and a potential for making achievements. The jurisdiction of a government employee increases as he/ she moves up the decision-making ladder. Thus, the participation of the head of state has different powers from that of the prime minister, foreign minister or a lower level of representation. Often, a lower level of representation has been an indication of dissatisfaction with the conference or the policies of the host country, or because of the relationship with the president of the host country. It can be also a matter of reciprocity, where the ruler of a country might not attend a summit, if the ruler of the host country did not previously attend a summit hosted by the guest country, excluding cases of illness or sudden accidents.



Consequently, it is possible to calculate the number of heads of countries, for example 22 presidents or kings and princes in Arab countries, and calculate the percentage of presidents attending summits, the percentage of countries represented by the prime minister, crown prince or vice president, etc, and the percentage of countries represented by the foreign ministers or less than that.

- ▶ **3. The weight of the countries attending the summit:** In this aspect, it is possible to rely on international standards related to the status of countries among global powers, depending on hundreds of sub-indicators; political, economic, social, military and geo-political, etc. The more attendees from the less important countries, the more the negative the indicator. This also applies to the decisions we will refer to later, that is, what is the percentage of the central powers that supported the decision, and those which rejected or refrained from supporting it? Higher support from central powers indicates the higher possibilities of execution and the easier of actual implementation. In this regard, we can refer to the fact that the African Union granted Israel “observer” status, but Algeria was able to cancel this decision taking advantage of its diplomatic position in the African continent.¹²
- ▶ **4. The relationship between the number and level of attendance and the country hosting the conference:** The number and level of representation in the summit is an indication of the level of relationship between the host country and the rest of the countries. Here, it is necessary to calculate the correlation coefficient between the attendance of the president and the level of commercial, political, cultural and military relations between the host country and the guest country, unless there is a legal problem such as freezing a country’s membership, or if the charter stipulates some conditions not available at the moment of the summit. If the correlation coefficient shows a high, medium or low relationship between the level of representation and the size of the relations between the host country and the participating countries, this can be calculated mathematically, but if the correlation is weak, the calculation of this variable can be dropped.
- ▶ **5. The duration of the conference, the number of agenda items, and the importance of agenda items:** The agenda represents an important indicator of the evaluation of the summit, as the inclusion of 40 topics, for example, in a one-day summit with the participation of a large number of countries is a clear negative indicator. This is because it means that the time to discuss each topic will be very limited. Studies on the meetings of the Arab League indicate that they clearly have this problem, and sometimes topics are increased to



prevent long discussions of certain topics. Thus, the number of topics on the agenda, and the percentage of those of utmost importance, average importance, and those that are procedural and relatively unimportant, shall be counted.

- ▶ **6. Voting on decisions** (support–rejection–abstention–absenteeism–withdrawal): Achievement is fundamentally related to the decisions taken. Here, it is necessary to take into account the legal basis and validity of decision-making: is it unanimous or by majority, and is it absolute or relative or by two-thirds. Then, the number of countries that voted, abstained, were absent and have withdrawn should be calculated. All of this can be easily converted into percentages and then the strength of the decision can be determined, based on the strength of those approving or objecting, and their relative weights.

- ▶ **7. The importance of the decisions that have been endorsed:** Most international organizations put in their charters a classification of the issues and the decisions they take. There are formal or procedural issues such as the date and place of the summit, the election of certain committees, etc.. and there are the core issues such as the important political, economic, or military issues that affect national security or the supreme policies of the participating countries. The higher the number of important decisions, the higher the achievement is. Studies on fundamental decisions have analyzed these decisions: Are they general or with specific aspects; are they mere appeals; do they specify implementation steps, particular procedures, or time limit for implementation? The number of important decisions and their weight is calculated based on content analysis, particularly structural and conceptual analysis.



- ▶ **8. The number of decisions for which follow-up committees were formed:** It is possible to separate this point from what preceded. Forming follow-up committees to implement the decisions, and presenting periodic achievement reports indicate the seriousness of decisions taken and intentions of their implementation. The higher the number of decisions with follow-up committees indicates higher importance, while decisions devoid of any follow-up committees mean leaving the matter to the discretion of each country without any obligation.
- ▶ **9. The level of actual implementation:** This indicator can help evaluate the future of decisions. The level of implementation can be determined through sub-indicators, such as:



- a. Participating countries would form a committee or a body to implement decisions.
- b. Participating countries would approve allocating adequate funds or infrastructure to implement decisions.
- c. The proposed completion period, the state's commitment to the specified period and the submission of periodic reports.
- d. The distribution of tasks among states to implement decisions of a collective or sub-regional nature, such as the Maghreb, the Gulf or the Nile Basin, etc.

Assessment of Summits

It is necessary, as we have indicated, to rid political analysis of ideological bias before making strategic plans, in order to see matters as they really are. For the temptation of bias is highest in political and social phenomena. Since all Arab countries, without exception, fall into the category of political tyranny, their decisions depend on the stance of the “ruler,” whatever his description may be. Hence, summits are of clear importance in Arab diplomacy, which requires giving them more attention to know and identify their trends. For example, in early periods following the June 1967 war, the duration of Arab summits decreased from 1.9 days to one day. Among the last 17 Arab summits, only one conference lasted more than one day. This indicates a decline in the level and seriousness of summits. A one-day summit with 40 items on its agenda, and more than twenty countries participating in it, indicates that either those who participated in the discussion were very limited or the discussion of any topic did not last more than minutes. If there are 40 political, economic, social, military, local, regional and international items, and each delegate's speech takes five minutes, this means that the total discussions must last more than 73 hours, according to the following equation: $40 \text{ (topics)} \times 22 \text{ (leaders)} \times 5 \text{ (minutes for each topic)} = 73.3 \text{ hours}$. Remarkably, the total time for the last summit conference was about six hours only, excluding reception. If a period equal to the consultations of Arab foreign ministers was added, the period will be equal to about 16% of the required minimum.



This paper calls on Arab researchers to employ the quantitative approach in analyzing Arab summits, and then to employ these quantitative data to produce a qualitative analysis based on indicators and mega-trends in Arab diplomacy. Quantitative studies of summits or summit diplomacy have increased, especially to assess this diplomatic style.¹³

Conclusion and Recommendations

- ▶ 1. The role of summit diplomacy in managing international affairs is increasing, as evidenced by quantitative indicators.
- ▶ 2. Globalization, besides technical and commercial intertwining, have undermined the confidentiality of decisions and deliberations in summit diplomacy .
- ▶ 3. The quantitative analysis of summit diplomacy reduces impressionism, ideological bias, or regional intolerance.
- ▶ 4. Arab researchers are required to pay more attention to this methodology than to what is currently prevalent in the literature on Arab international relations.



Endnotes

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