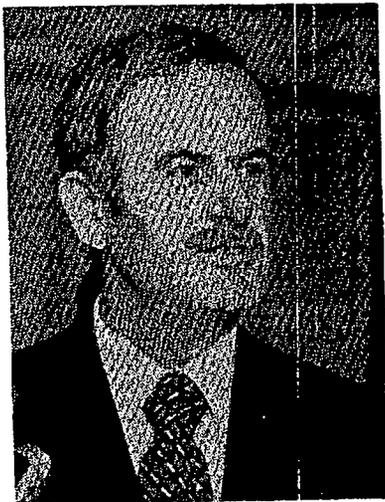




EGYPT-ISRAEL

Egypt's President Sadat caps his diplomatic campaign to rally international support for Egypt's position in peace negotiations by visiting the US and five European countries over the next 10 days. Private and public opinion in Egypt is pessimistic that this largely public diplomacy will produce a substantive breakthrough. The adjournment of the recently resumed Egyptian-Israeli military committee talks after only two meetings and the cautious statements of participants in behind-the-scenes efforts to narrow the gap over a declaration of principles on a comprehensive peace settlement have added to the general feeling of pessimism.

Egypt is maintaining the stance it took when it broke off the political committee talks in Jerusalem on 18 January—no progress in negotiations is possible until Israel accepts self-determination for the Palestinians and agrees to withdraw from occupied territories. Egyptian officials have emphasized these points in recent



President Asad

meetings with foreign diplomats, and emissaries have taken the message to many foreign leaders. Sadat presumably intends to repeat the same line in his talks with foreign leaders.

In going public, Sadat is attempting to exploit the only significant negotiating leverage he has—the desire of most interested parties that his peace initiative not collapse.

Sadat's main target, of course, is the US. On the eve of his trip to Washington, Egyptian officials made it clear that Cairo expects the US not only to take a stand in favor of Egypt's position, but also to press Israel to make concessions.

Although the withdrawal issue—specifically a dispute over the future of Israeli settlements in the Sinai—precipitated largely Egypt's rupture of political talks last month, Sadat and Egypt's media now appear to place primary emphasis on the need for a declaration of principles and for progress on the issue of self-determination for Palestinians. Sadat told reporters on 31 January, before the military committee talks resumed, that he thought the problem of Israeli settlements in the Sinai would be resolved; "the real difficulty," he said, "is the Palestinians."

The Egyptian shift in emphasis may be intended in part to protect Sadat's political flank. Even the temporary resumption of the military committee talks—which deal with bilateral matters—in the absence of progress on a declaration of principles increased Egypt's vulnerability to charges it was pursuing a separate agreement with Israel. If Sadat's peace initiative does indeed fail, he would like to be able to argue with fellow Arabs that it did so because Cairo staunchly defended Arab interests, not because a bilateral settlement with Israel proved impossible to attain.

Arab Hard-liners

Sadat's hard-line Arab critics are still active, but having their problems. Algerian President Boumediene, who has been pushing hard for a second summit conference of Arab opponents of Sadat's initiative—they met in Tripoli in early December—finally got his way, and the talks

began on 2 February in Algiers. But, apart from Boumediene, the only chief of state on hand was Syrian President Asad. Libya and South Yemen sent lower ranking officials and Iraq none at all. Palestine Liberation Organization chief Yasir Arafat attended.

The announcement by the Iraqis on 28 January that they would not participate in the summit suggested that Baghdad had been unsuccessful in getting the other members of the anti-Sadat group to agree with its extreme position. Iraq insists on outright rejection of any negotiations with Israel, the establishment of a common military front, the unification of the various Palestinian groups, and possibly the adoption of anti-Sadat measures with teeth in them.

Iraq's boycott of the Algiers conference apparently has ended, at least for now. Boumediene's effort to arrange a reconciliation between the rival Baathist regimes in Damascus and Baghdad.



President Sadat

SECRET

~~SECRET~~

been singled out for special treatment—
against speaking on behalf of the
Palestinians.

A delegation from the countries represented at the summit—minus Syria—soon will travel to Baghdad in another effort to iron out differences between Iraq and Syria, according to Bouteflika. Iraq shows no sign of softening its position; in fact, Baghdad is increasing its output of anti-Syrian propaganda. Articles in Iraq's official Baath Party newspaper this week again made it clear that the Iraqis would make no military and economic commitments to Damascus unless it rejected the peace process, removed all restraints on Palestinians and leftist Lebanese in southern Lebanon, and agreed to a deployment of troops to the "Syrian front." [redacted]

ARAB STATES

The summit meeting of hard-line Arab states in Algiers late last week produced no public evidence that the participants—Algeria, Libya, Syria, South Yemen, and the Palestine Liberation Organization—came up with an effective way to challenge seriously Egyptian President Sadat's peace initiative. The conference spokesman, Algerian Foreign Minister Bouteflika, implied that secret resolutions were adopted, however.

The final communique generally reflected Syrian President Asad's views of the Arab-Israeli question, not those of Arabs—notably the Iraqis—who reject the very idea of negotiations with Israel. Iraq boycotted the conference when it could not get a guarantee in advance that a rejectionist line would be adopted.

Bouteflika's comments suggested that the strengthening of the Palestine resistance movement and improving relations between Syria and the PLO were the major topics of the summit. PLO chief Arafat's positive comments about Syria at the final session lend credence to that interpretation, although other reporting indicates Asad rejected Arafat's plea for a Syrian troop withdrawal from southern Lebanon. In what may have been a warning to Jordan to avoid participating in peace talks, the summit enjoined any Arab government—Egypt had already

~~SECRET~~