

SECRET

EGYPT-USSR: WITHDRAWAL SYMPTONS

1, 3 On 24 July, President Sadat made clear that his call for the withdrawal of Soviet forces marked the end of a phase of expanding Soviet military involvement in Egypt and the beginning of an uncertain new era in relations with Moscow.

1, 2 The USSR, anxious to limit the damage to its prestige and to discourage potential emulators of Sadat's action, is portraying the withdrawal as a joint decision taken after thorough consultations. The Israelis see Sadat's move as a diversionary tactic to damp down domestic frustrations by demonstrating Egypt's independence from its superpower ally.

Sadat's Explanation

1, 2 President Sadat this week gave a further version of events leading to the scaling down of the Soviet presence in Egypt. In a lengthy foreign policy statement to the Arab Socialist Union national congress on Monday, Sadat laid the blame for the current state of Egyptian-Soviet relations on Moscow's failure to honor commitments to Egypt. He tried to soothe Soviet feelings, however, by saddling the US with the responsibility for the Middle East impasse.

1, 2 Sadat said differences of view became apparent during his Moscow talks in March 1971, but he thought these were disagreements that could be resolved between friends. According to

25X1



SECRET

SECRET

Sadat, the Soviets, during President Podgorny's trip to Cairo in May 1971 to sign the treaty of friendship, promised to bridge the differences within a week. The Egyptian President complained, however, that a year passed—his self-proclaimed "year of decision"—and the disagreements continued feeding his frustrations, culminating in his move against the Soviets.

President Sadat did not specify the exact nature of the differences; to do so, he said, would play into the hands of enemies. But they clearly had to do with the provision of Soviet military equipment and its use. The speech was replete with references to pledges of US military, political, and economic aid to Israel, which he said have been implemented "automatically, enthusiastically, and violently," in obvious contrast to Soviet aid to Cairo.

#### The Soviet Reaction

Once Sadat asked for the Soviet withdrawal, Soviet propaganda quickly sought to put the best possible face on a humiliating situation. Though probably taken a bit by surprise and obviously miffed, the Soviets have adopted a generally conciliatory tone in an effort to minimize the damage to their prestige and to salvage what they can. Still, there have been barbed references to "reactionary forces" in Egypt seeking to disrupt Soviet-Egyptian friendship.

Moscow has been anxious to limit the impact of Sadat's dramatic decision in other Arab countries. Although the Soviets probably have been alarmed by rumors that Damascus and Baghdad would expel their Russian advisers, so far neither has moved to follow Egypt's example. Indeed, Iraqi Foreign Minister Al-Baqi arrived in Moscow the day after Sadat's speech for the exchange of documents bringing the Soviet-Iraqi Friendship Treaty into effect. The Soviet Union cannot, of course, be confident that its woes in the Arab world have peaked, and attempts to shore up the Soviet position with other Arab governments will be forthcoming.

#### Tel Aviv's View

Prime Minister Golda Meir, speaking to the Knesset on 26 July, reiterated Israeli willingness to negotiate on the cease-fire lines. She made it clear, however, that a complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, demanded by the Egyptians, remains out of the question. The prime minister indicated she would welcome interim moves, such as the Egyptian proposal of February 1971 for the reopening of the Suez Canal, but that Israel would regard such a settlement as temporary—a step toward peace. In her speech, Mrs. Meir called for direct negotiations, which the Egyptians have consistently rejected. Israel will probably attempt to minimize the importance of the changes occurring in Egypt in an effort to sustain domestic vigilance and foreign support.

25X1

SECRET