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20 September 1973
OCI No. 2338/73

MEMORANDUM

CIA/OCI/IM 2338/73

SUBJECT: The Cairo Summit and its Repercussions

The reconciliation effected between President Sadat and King Husayn at the 10-12 September summit conference will have little immediate, tangible effect on the Middle East power equation. In a less tangible, psychological sense, however, the rapprochement can have a significant impact. This memorandum will address the questions of (a) what the reconciliation does to, or for, Sadat's negotiating base, and (b) how it will affect the Palestinians. Neither question can be considered in isolation from the other; the Palestinians' situation, and Sadat's attitude toward them, are major elements in the strength or weakness of his negotiating position. Even more important for Sadat's negotiating position, of course, are the Israeli perception of what has occurred and Tel Aviv's response. So far, this last has been negative.

Sadat's Motivation

Sadat undertook his overtures toward Husayn specifically to strengthen his own bargaining position, and incidentally that of the Arab cause in general, against Israel. His move is part of a larger campaign, to some extent encouraged and facilitated by Saudi Arabia, to generate a greater degree of inter-Arab cooperation. The new feature of this campaign is that it aims not at rhetoric-ridden, all-inclusive Arab unity but tries selectively to inspire pragmatic collaboration from which each participant has something to gain. King Husayn--the "eastern front"--is for Sadat a key element in the equation, less from a military or even political than from a psychological standpoint.

Sadat has come to believe that the US and Israel are joined in psychological warfare against the Arabs, designed to demoralize them and ultimately to force a surrender to Israeli mastery. He has put heavy emphasis on this in his public and private remarks; he clearly fears that this US-Israeli strategy is succeeding.

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Sadat's recent moves to build a stronger Arab community and, internationally, to portray Israel and the US as standing alone in face of the good opinion of mankind constitute his psychological counter strategy. Without a working relationship and normal diplomatic ties with Husayn, also a leader of a "confrontation" state, Sadat could hardly claim to be building the Arabs' strength. In this context, the overt estrangement between Syria and Jordan also hurts Sadat's policy, and he will undoubtedly maintain what pressure he can on President Asad to follow Egypt's example in dealing "normally" with Husayn.

The Fedayeen Position

This kind of campaign leaves the fedayeen outside. They have nothing to gain and nothing to contribute; they can only lose. Immediately, they have lost a key propaganda vehicle with the closure of the fedayeen radio station at Dara in Syria, and their freedom of expression over Cairo Radio is likely to be curbed further. Most important, however, is the psychological factor: the fact that the most influential Arab state, Egypt, is willing to reach a rapprochement with Husayn, the fedayeen's chief nemesis, increases the likelihood that others will follow suit.

These consequences should not be exaggerated. The fedayeen remain the only serious spokesmen for the Palestinians; their freedom of movement is only somewhat more restricted; and their ability to conduct international terrorist operations is not impaired, although they may need to rely more heavily on a Libyan base. What the reconciliation does, however, is to confirm indications that Sadat, and other Arab leaders as well, feel fewer constraints about openly pursuing their own interests at the expense of the Palestinians, and particularly in disregard of the fedayeen leadership.

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Sadat has been hinting at this for some months. [REDACTED]

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summer's UN Middle East debate, Foreign Minister Zayyat, in mentioning the establishment of a Palestinian state, again signaled Egypt's readiness to separate the two issues.*

Since the UN debate the Egyptians have emphasized repeatedly--in words designed to mollify the fedayeen--that only the Palestinians can speak for the Palestinian cause. Sadat will continue to vow publicly, as he often has in the past, that "there can be no bargaining over Palestinian rights." But what this evidently implies is that Sadat will not speak or bargain for the Palestinians--they are on their own, at least for this phase of the struggle with Israel. The decision to reestablish relations with Jordan, viewed in this light, signifies that an arrangement with Jordan is more important now than championing the fedayeen cause by keeping Husayn in purgatory. The message has not been lost on the fedayeen.

Their initial reaction has been to condemn the Cairo summit and Husayn's subsequent amnesty. Some of the less militant fedayeen leaders might see in the Egyptian-Jordanian reconciliation--as they did in the Bourguiba-Zayyat proposals for a Palestinian state--an inevitable move toward a Middle East settlement which they have no choice but to accept. But it is out of the question for any fedayeen to accept openly any moves toward a settlement, however inevitable one might seem. The strength of the ultras will keep the fatalists quiet. The resulting coffee-house debates nevertheless will heighten already existing divisions in the Palestinian movement.

*The message--that the Egyptians hoped to facilitate settlement efforts by disengaging themselves from responsibility for a question that has been a major hindrance to progress--was lost in the confusion over Zayyat's maladroit presentation. The statement was widely misinterpreted as advocating--as Tunisian President Bourguiba's similar proposal had done intentionally--the dismemberment of Jordan, and efforts to pursue the topic were hindered by the need to reassure Amman.

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Where Does Sadat Come Out?

What ultimately comes out of Sadat's efforts to strengthen his negotiating base and enlarge his freedom to maneuver through essentially psychological moves will depend mainly on external factors--especially Israeli perceptions--over which he will have little if any control. The Israelis have missed or chosen to miss earlier indications of Egypt's desire to rid itself of responsibility for the Palestinian problem, and they will only see signs of progress in this latest development if other factors--apprehension over diplomatic isolation or fear that US support for the Israeli position is weakening--combine to make them desire movement toward a settlement. The Israelis will not negotiate until they are ready, and whatever minor success Sadat has had in promoting misgivings in Tel Aviv about a revival of the eastern front or a new degree of military cooperation is not at this point great enough to persuade the Israelis that the moment for serious movement on their part has arrived.

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