

EGYPT-JORDAN: Sadat, Husayn Statement

[ ] Egyptian President Sadat and Jordanian King Husayn issued a joint statement over the weekend calling for a Palestinian state with strong ties to Jordan and for resumption of Geneva peace talks with the Palestine Liberation Organization participating as an equal, independent party.

[ ] The statement appears designed primarily to underscore current Arab solidarity and to maintain pressure on Israel and the US to move toward serious Middle East negotiations later this year. By enlisting Husayn's support, Sadat hopes to discourage Israeli leaders from believing they can split the Arab camp on the issue of PLO participation in negotiations.

[ ] At the same time, Sadat has again suggested the possibility of a compromise that would facilitate the establishment of a Palestinian state, at least on the West Bank, and still satisfy the Israeli demand that the Palestinian question be resolved within a Jordanian context. At a minimum, Sadat probably hopes to play up a positive, peace-seeking image for the Arabs and thus put the onus on the Israelis should no progress be made toward negotiations.

[ ] Sadat has also clearly stepped up pressure on the PLO to accept both a compromise solution and the idea of a truncated Palestinian state. The PLO thus far has not rejected either possibility. Over the weekend, a PLO spokesman in fact endorsed the idea of closer relations with Jordan.

[ ] This moderate stance probably reflects the perception of PLO leaders that they have no alternative at this point but to follow the lead taken by the major Arab leaders.

[ ] Husayn, for his part, has probably gone along with Sadat for similar reasons, fearing that to oppose Egypt now would leave Jordan isolated in the Arab world. Sadat may have given him some vague reassurances of support to assuage his apprehensions about the PLO's aims. Husayn, moreover, may privately believe that the proposal for a Jordanian-Palestinian compromise will never really get off the ground. [ ]