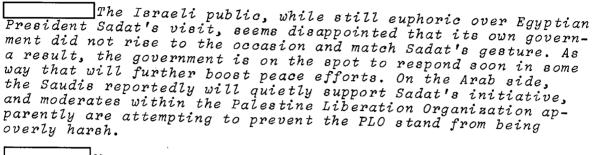
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MIDDLE EAST: Further Reactions



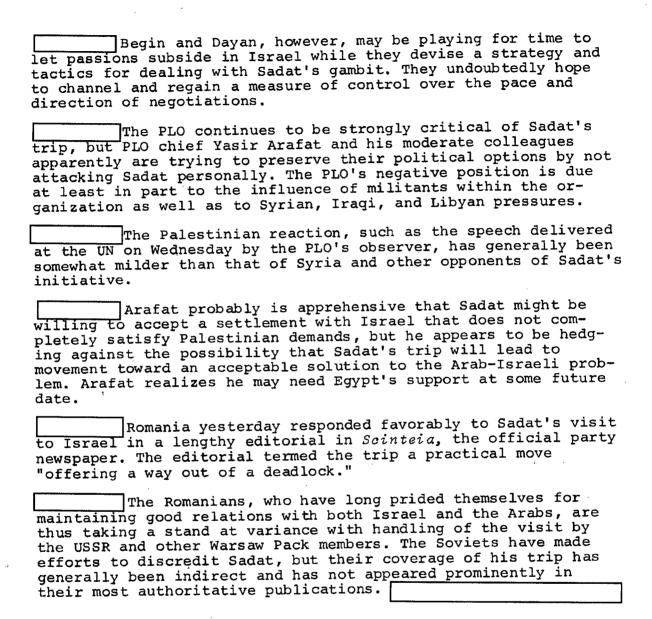
Most Israelis agree that it is their move, but they appear uncertain and divided over what Prime Minister Begin could have given Sadat before the Egyptian President departed. It is generally conceded that Begin could not have suddenly changed his hard-line position on substantive matters, but his performance has raised doubts anew about his capacity to overcome past ideological convictions and deal with the new situation.

A cleavage may already be developing between hardliners, on the one hand, and most of the public, the Israeli press, the opposition Labor Party, and even some moderates within the governing coalition on the other over the direction Israel should take. The moderates are urging the government to make some appropriate concession that will give new momentum to reconvening the Geneva conference.

The hard-liners, however, seem even less convinced of the value of a Middle East peace conference. While Israeli hawks are now convinced that Sadat desires peace, the reaction of Syria, the Palestinians, and other Arabs to the visit has reconfirmed the view of many hard-liners that—apart from Egypt—none of the other Arabs are ready to accept Israel and make real peace. As a result, they believe Begin should concentrate on bilateral negotiations with Egypt.

We do not know what Sadat and Begin discussed privately, nor do we have any clues as to how the Begin government intends to react. Foreign Minister Dayan, presumably with Begin's approval, has stressed the need for Israel to reexamine its negotiating position. But he has also interjected a note of caution against expecting a quick solution.

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