

Approved For Release 2007/03/07

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NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION

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ISRAEL: Begin's Knesset Speech

[redacted] Israeli Prime Minister Begin in his Knesset speech yesterday left open the possibility of an early resumption of the military talks in Cairo. Begin hinged Israeli approval of such a resumption on President Sadat putting an end to the "antisemitic" campaign in the Egyptian press. Egyptian Foreign Minister Kamil dismissed the charges of antisemitism, but suggested that both sides could "calmly redefine their stands" and may resume negotiations.

[redacted] Begin rehashed the course of negotiations leading up to last week's abrupt suspension of the political talks apparently in order to get on the record that he had not misled or deceived Sadat on the Israeli negotiating position. Begin then enumerated several antisemitic comments made recently in the Egyptian press, which he charged were intended to humiliate the Israelis. More in puzzlement than anger, Begin quoted President Sadat's recent characterization of the Israeli peace plan as "I want you to sleep so that I can murder you."

[redacted] Begin said these statements re-created the psychological barriers Sadat had sought to destroy. Begin maintained that the Egyptian general staff had reneged on Sadat's promise to the Israelis to demilitarize the Sinai east of the Mitla and Giddi passes.

[redacted] Begin also defended his position in an interview published yesterday in the West German magazine *Der Spiegel*. Begin said that Sadat had deceived himself in believing that the Israelis would yield to his demands and, when they did not, decided to produce a climate of tension to dramatize the impasse and bring pressure to bear on Israel. Begin said the ploy would not work.

[redacted] The debate in the Knesset ended with an endorsement of Begin's statement by a vote of 59 to 9; 19 members in the 120-seat chamber, including three from parties in the governing coalition, formally abstained.

[redacted] Most of the Israeli press has approved of the government's handling of the situation, including the postponement of the military talks to allow a "cooling-off period." Some doves in the National Religious Party, however, have criticized

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the decision and at least some moderate press commentators have criticized both Sadat and Begin for indulging in too much public rhetoric. The *Jerusalem Post*, for example, took issue with the cabinet's harsh criticism of Sadat's speech on Saturday, noting that it was anticlimactic and that efforts should be made to create a new, calmer atmosphere for negotiations.

[redacted] The US Embassy in Tel Aviv reported yesterday that as the Israelis reflect uneasily on the events of the past week and on what lies ahead, two themes are beginning to be heard:

- Settlements in the Rafah area should not be permitted to block progress toward peace.
- Begin's leadership is being questioned by more moderate elements within the coalition.

On the latter point, the Embassy noted that the "murmurs of discontent" are coming from the more flexible Democratic Movement for Change - Liberal grouping that is unhappy with Begin's hard-line stance on the settlements issue. The Embassy cautioned, however, that it sees no political threat to Begin nor anything approaching a revolt with the governing coalition.

[redacted] //After consulting Begin, Defense Minister Weizman announced last night that he is postponing his trip to the US that was planned for later this week. He said the Israeli Government must first decide whether to continue the military committee meetings with the Egyptians in Cairo. Weizman had earlier informed US Ambassador Lewis of the decision, and of the time for making it public. The Ambassador drew the inference that a public announcement would advance the prospects for reconvening the military talks and help balance any negative Egyptian reaction to Begin's speech in the Knesset.// [redacted]

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