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WEEKLY SUMMARY 3 Mar 78

## EGYPT-PALESTINIANS

The Egyptian Government is allowing anti-Palestinian feeling in Egypt to run its course in the wake of the assassination by Palestinian extremists of Egyptian editor Yusuf Sibai in Cyprus in late February. Egypt's semicontrolled press has even suggested that the government would be justified in abandoning the Palestinian cause altogether, but President Sadat is unlikely to go that far. The only specific reprisal taken so far by Sadat's government was to announce that resident Palestinians will no longer be granted special rights but will henceforth be treated the same as other alien Arab nationals living in Egypt.

Egypt's angry reaction to Palestinian involvement in the Sibai killing includes the suggestion that Cairo is reviewing its recognition of Yasir Arafat as leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization and its acceptance of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians. The press is careful to emphasize that Egypt will not abandon its pan-Arab commitments—meaning the Palestinian cause—but it distinguishes between the "agent leadership" of the Palestinians and those "steadfast people" living in the occupied territories.

Although the government has done nothing to dampen the popular outcry against Palestinians, President Sadat probably is not prepared to translate these hints of retaliation into action at this time. He cannot abandon the Palestinian cause without giving up his claim to leadership of the Arab world. He would probably

have abandoned the troublesome Arafat and the PLO long ago if valid alternative Palestinian spokesmen were available. Palestinians of stature living on the West Bank support the PLO, and Jordan, a possible alternative spokesman, would need a wider mandate than Egypt's before it would speak for the Palestinians.

PLO officials have responded in kind to Egypt's anti-Palestinian campaign. Yasir Arafat reportedly accused Sadat of fomenting the campaign in order to prepare for Egypt's disassociation from the Palestinian cause and of joining the US in attempting to force the Arabs to capitulate in a Middle East settlement.

The semiofficial Jordanian press has also been sharply critical of Egypt's reaction against the Palestinians. One editorial accused Egypt of losing its nerve and recalled the muted Jordanian response when Palestinians assassinated a Jordanian prime minister in Cairo five years ago and the Egyptians freed the terrorists after a show trial.

These attacks come at a time when Jordanian relations with the PLO seem to be improving. They may be intended in part as a signal to President Sadat that Jordan will not join any attempt to downgrade the PLO and promote an alternative Palestinian leadership.



PLO leader Arafat