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EGYPT: Sadat and His Arab Critics

[redacted] Egyptian President Sadat's speech on Thursday was short on substance but did leave the door open to additional direct talks with Israel. Sadat's statement should lay to rest recent speculation that a significant Arab reconciliation agreement was hammered out at the nonaligned meeting in Belgrade.

[redacted] //The speculation about reconciliation arose from the agreement of Arab foreign ministers to a Palestinian-sponsored plank dealing with the Middle East portions of the Belgrade conference's final communique. This does not translate into a reconciliation, however, because the issue between Sadat and his Arab critics centers primarily on tactics, rather than on peace terms. Syria and most other Arab countries opposed the unilateral nature of Sadat's initiative; they fear his goal is to recover only the Sinai by signing a separate peace with Israel.//

[redacted] Although Arab fears on this score have diminished in recent months, Syria's price for reconciliation remains Sadat's unconditional renunciation of further direct talks with Israel. Sadat, as is clear from his speech, is not yet ready to take this step, although his terms for new meetings with Israel have stiffened. [redacted]

[redacted] Sadat showed his continuing sensitivity to the "separate deal" charges by devoting nearly half of his speech to denying that his suggestion that Israel return Al Arish to Egypt was a formal proposal, as Israel has alleged. Sadat made the suggestion during his meeting with Israeli Defense Minister Weizman in Austria early this month.

[redacted] //A sidelight to Sadat's speech was his return to the idea of resigning if his Jerusalem initiative proves fruitless. Rather than suggesting voluntary resignation, however, he said on Thursday that he is prepared to step down "when the people demand this or when it is proved that any one of us has not performed his duty."// [redacted]