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ISRAEL: Knesset Debate on Accords

Although Prime Minister Begin probably will easily win Knesset approval for the agreements he negotiated at Camp David, the margin may not be as large as first expected. There is uneasiness in almost all parties over the implications of the accords; much of the concern is focused on the agreement to dismantle the Sinai settlements. Questions raised during the Knesset debate will probably stiffen Israel's position during subsequent West Bank - Gaza negotiations.

The decision of the opposition Labor Party to back Begin makes it virtually certain that the Prime Minister will win handily in the Knesset. According to the US Embassy in Tel Aviv, however, restiveness is growing both in the ruling coalition and among opposition parties. Within Begin's Likud bloc, his own Herut faction is divided; many members are troubled by what they see as the Prime Minister's abandonment of deeply held principles. The La'am faction of Likud is also split, and its two cabinet ministers have threatened to vote against the agreements.

The National Religious Party, a key coalition member with 12 Knesset seats, met yesterday to decide its stance. According to press reports, Minister of Education Zevulun Hammer, a leader of the party's dominant youth wing, has declared that he will vote for the agreement and then resign from the government. Other leaders of the party appear to be leaning toward endorsing the accords.

The uneasiness in the Knesset stems from concern among some Knesset members and other Israelis:

- That the agreement to dismantle the Sinai settlements could be used as a precedent when the negotiating process turns to the West Bank and Gaza.
- That returning all of the Sinai could set a dangerous precedent for any future negotiations with the Syrians over the Golan Heights.
- That the Sinai agreement violates the long-held Zionist principle that land, once settled, is never abandoned.
- That the provisions in the accords for "full autonomy" for the West Bank and Gaza contain the basis for a Palestinian state.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Begin appears confident of the Knesset vote but is disturbed by the members' lack of enthusiasm for the accords. He is reportedly planning to impose bloc discipline on coalition members in order to get the largest possible vote. [REDACTED]

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