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NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE DAILY CABLE

Wednesday 29 March 1978 CG NIDC 78/073C

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ISRAEL: Rallying Knesset Support

[] Israeli Prime Minister Begin is likely to give an impassioned defense of his peace proposals before the Knesset today in an effort to orchestrate another show of coalition solidarity in the face of sharp differences with the US. Begin has already had some success in rallying public support and blaming the US for the "failure" of his talks in Washington.

[] Since Sunday's demonstration of unity by the cabinet, coalition members have largely closed ranks behind the Prime Minister and defended his negotiating position. Begin's hand has been strengthened further by press reports--apparently planted by the Israeli Foreign Ministry--suggesting that the US hopes to engineer his downfall.

[] As a result, Defense Minister Weizman's challenge to Begin has fizzled and left Weizman at least temporarily isolated. Coalition moderates regard Weizman's power play as premature and embarrassingly inept. They are in no mood to challenge Begin and other hard-liners in the midst of a serious disagreement with the US.

[] Deputy Prime Minister Yadin, the head of the moderate Democratic Movement for Change, strongly defended Begin's negotiating position at a party meeting on Monday and accused President Carter of going out of his way not to reach agreement with Begin. Some party doves are urging the Democratic Movement to break with the government unless it modifies its peace proposals, but Amnon Rubinstein, a prominent dove and influential faction leader, argued against such a move and urged the party to continue to work within the government to change its policies.

[] The opposition Labor Party has largely ignored Weizman's bid for a national peace government. Rather than rallying behind the government this time, it is making a feeble effort to put Begin on the defensive. Party leaders reportedly have dropped their plans to submit a no-confidence motion. Instead they will put forward a resolution during the parliamentary debate today to emphasize their differences with Begin over the application of UN Security Council Resolution 242 to the West Bank.

[] The Labor-oriented press and the respected independent *Haaretz* also have criticized Begin. *Haaretz* is calling for a national debate; it maintains that the government's claim of a national consensus favoring Begin's position is inaccurate.

[redacted] On balance, however, the press thus far has blamed the US more than Begin for the current impasse. Even the moderate *Jerusalem Post*, while characterizing the Prime Minister as obturate and obtuse, argues that Begin deserves support for resisting Washington's "wrong-headed" approach. [redacted]

