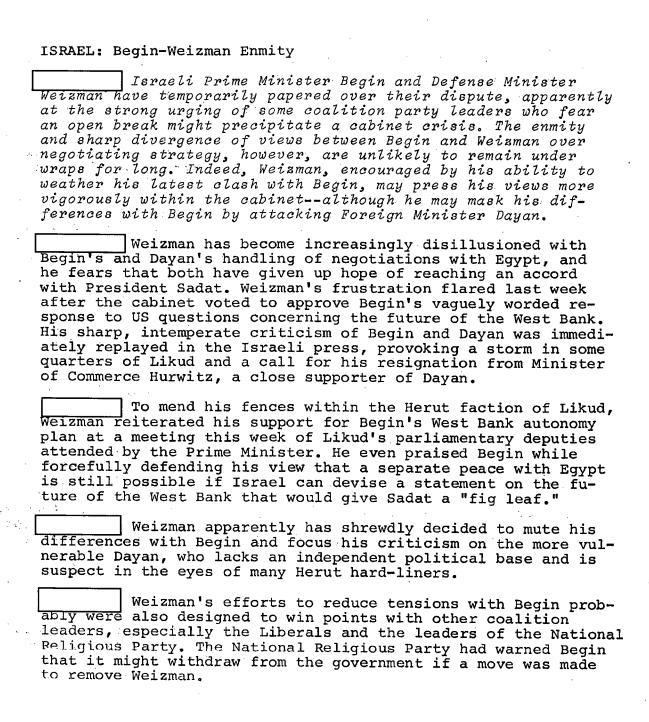
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The situation is complicated by the uncertain state of Begin's health. Despite the denials of his doctor that he is seriously ill, both coalition and Labor Party leaders are already jockeying for position in the succession sweepstakes. Finance Minister Ehrlich has cautiously sought to improve his prospects and Dayan's followers are urging him to take steps to establish a formal political base.
Labor Party leader Peres, in turn, hopes to capitalize on the divisions within the government to represent his party as a credible alternative to Begin. Peres has been claiming increasingly that Labor would have less difficulty making peace with Sadat and could have prevented the serious erosion in US-Israeli relations. Public opinion polls, however, indicate that the Labor Party has not been able to win back a significant percentage of the voters it lost in the last election.
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