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Middle East

AFTER CAMP DAVID

Reaction in the Middle East this week to the announcements following the Camp David summit ranged from optimism in Israel and Egypt to outrage among the Palestinians. Most leaders in the area, however, have been notably cautious in their initial responses.

Most Israelis are pleased with the outcome. Several leading figures in Prime Minister Begin's ruling Likud bloc have expressed cautious optimism, and some of Begin's most outspoken critics in the "Peace Now" movement and opposition parties are supporting him. The agreement has been sharply criticized only by a vocal minority on the right who have expressed strong opposition to the removal of any of Israel's Sinai settlements. According to a survey by an Israeli polling organization, however, about 60 percent of the Israeli public approves abandoning Israel's Sinai settlements as part of a peace agreement with Egypt.

An informal count this week of about 70 Knesset deputies showed that two-thirds support the Camp David accords. Barring a major Israeli-Egyptian dispute over

interpretation, [redacted] as many as 100 of the 120 Knesset members will approve the agreements.

In Egypt, too, the early reaction to the agreements has been favorable. [redacted] The [redacted] segment of the population, which forms an important part of President Sadat's power base, believes the policy of reliance on the US has been vindicated and is so far not particularly worried about what other Arabs think. Some [redacted] Egyptians, however, are concerned that real problems lie ahead in Egypt's relations with other Arab states.

The Saudis, while describing the Camp David framework for a settlement as an "unacceptable formula for a definitive peace," have taken a less negative attitude toward Sadat's effort to regain the Sinai. Riyadh announced before Secretary Vance's arrival on 21 September that as long as Arab higher interests are not contradicted, Saudi Arabia does not believe it has the right to interfere with an Arab country's efforts to regain its lost territory through military or peaceful means. The Saudis, as they have in the past, stressed their interest in Israeli withdrawal from Jerusalem, and the need for new efforts toward Arab unity.

Jordan's King Hussein has been holding

his cards closely. In a statement just before Secretary Vance's visit he announced that Jordan would not be bound by the Camp David agreements but he did not flatly rule out a Jordanian role in a West Bank - Gaza arrangement. He called for a comprehensive settlement involving total Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, and recognition of the right of the Palestinian people to determine their own destiny.

Hardline Arabs

The hardline Arabs have made no secret of their distaste for the Camp David results. At a meeting in Damascus, leaders of Syria, Algeria, Libya, South Yemen, and the Palestine Liberation Organization—members of the "Steadfastness Front" formed last December to oppose the Egyptian peace initiative—condemned Sadat for betraying the Arab cause by making a separate peace with Israel.

In his public remarks to the Front, Syrian President Assad charged Sadat with abandoning the Arab cause by agreeing to a separate peace with Israel. Assad has always feared that a bilateral Egyptian-Israeli deal would permit Israel to remain intransigent on the Palestinian question and the Golan Heights. Many Syrians are particularly unhappy that the Camp David accords do not mention the Golan issue.

The Syrians were clearly encouraged by the Jordanian and Saudi statements. Assad apparently hopes to develop an Arab consensus of hardliners and moderates to isolate Sadat. At the same time, Assad wants to maintain his image of being favorable to a comprehensive peace agreement; his willingness to meet with Secretary Vance is intended in part to serve this end.

Some of the strongest criticism has come from the leaders of the PLO. The group's Executive Committee termed the Camp David agreements a "complete capitulation" by Sadat and called on Palestinians everywhere to strike and demonstrate against "the conspiracy," and urged Egyptians to rise in defense of their national dignity. The committee threatened "fair punishment" to those who declare their support for the accords.



President Sadat (l) and Prime Minister Begin respond to applause at the Joint Session of Congress after the Camp David summit meeting

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