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Egypt

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YORK, WASHINGTON, MODUK (FOR D14.)  
SAVING ALL OTHER MIDDLE EAST POSTS.

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MIPT : SADAT'S SPEECH ON SECTARIAN STRIFE.

1. SADAT'S PROFESSED AIM IN TAKING THE MEASURES ANNOUNCED IN HIS SPEECH, AND IN ARRESTING OVER 1500 PEOPLE, WAS TO PUT AN END TO SECTARIAN STRIFE IN EGYPT ONCE AND FOR ALL. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT HE WILL SUCCEED, TEMPORARILY AT LEAST, IN CURBING THE ACTIVITIES ON OF THE BROTHERHOOD AND THE ISLAMIC GROUPS, ON AND OFF THE CAMPUSAS AND IN FRIGHTENING THE COPTS, AT LEAST INSIDE EGYPT, INTO REFRAINING FROM PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE PRESIDENT. BUT BY HIS OWN ADMISSION THE INCIDENTS AT ZAWIA AL HAMRA WERE CONFINED TO ONE POOR SUBURB OF CAIRO, AND INVOLVED AT MOST SEVERAL HUNDRED PEOPLE. APART FROM A BOMB EXPLOSION AT A COPTIC WEDDING (MY TELNO 320), THERE HAS BEEN NO FURTHER TROUBLE. YET HE HAS BROUGHT THE ISSUE OF SECTARIAN STRIFE TO THE CENTRE OF THE STAGE, CREATING AN ATMOSPHERE OF NATIONAL CRISES, AND USED IT TO JUSTIFY THE MOST SWEEPING ARRESTS SINCE NASSER AND A SERIES OF DRACONIAN MEASURES INCLUDING THE SACKING OF THE COPTIC POPE.

2. THE EXPLANATION FOR THIS LAST MEASURE CAN ONLY LIE IN SADAT'S NEED TO BALANCE HIS CRACK-DOWN ON ISLAMIC RADICALS WITH A MOVE AGAINST THE CHRISTIANS, AND IN HIS PERSONAL ANTI-PATHY TO SHENOUDA'S CONFRONTATIONAL STYLE OF LEADERSHIP. BUT SHENOUDA HAS GIVEN SADAT LITTLE OR NO CAUSE FOR COMPLAINT SINCE SADAT'S SPEECH OF MAY LAST YEAR (MY TELEGRAM NUMBER 318 OF 1980). THIS MOVE WILL MOREOVER HAVE OFFENDED MANY COPTS WHO, WHILE HAVING PRIVATE DOUBTS ABOUT SHENOUDA, WILL REGARD SADAT'S OVER-TURNING OF GODS' WILL BELIEVED TO BE INHERENT IN THE ELECTION OF THE COPTIC POPE AS CLOSE TO BLASPHEMY.

3. THE MAIN AIM OF THIS PURGE MUST THEREFORE BE TO ELIMINATE OPPOSITION TO TO THE REGIME FROM THE ISLAMIC RADICALS AND THE LEFT. AGAIN AND IN HIS SPEECH SADAT ASSERTED THAT HE WAS NOT STRIKING AT THE OPPOSITION FOR ITS OWN SAKE, BUT BECAUSE IT HAD INCITED SECTARIAN STRIFE. HE SIGNALLY FAILED TO ESTABLISH THIS CHARGE. (THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR IS BUSY RECTIFYING HIS OMISSION BY PUBLISHING FURTHER DETAILS). NOR DOES THE APPOINTMENT OF RELIGIOUS ADVISERS BY THE TWO LEFTIST PARTIES, AND VISITS BY ONE OR TWO LEFTISTS TO MOSQUES, AMOUNT TO PROOF OF A NATION-WIDE CONSPIRACY. PROBABLY SADAT HIMSELF DOES NOT MAKE THE DISTINCTION, AND REGARDS ALL WHO ARE NOT WITH HIM AS AGAINST HIM. HE WILL HAVE PERSUADED HIMSELF THAT THE RIOTS COULD NOT HAVE TAKEN PLACE UNLESS THEY HAD BEEN INSTIGATED FROM POLITICAL MOTIVES.

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4. MOST EGYPTIANS, INCLUDING COPTS, WILL BE PLEASED THAT SADAT HAS FINALLY DECIDED TO ACT AGAINST THE RISING TIDE OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE UNIVERSITIES AND ELSEWHERE. HIS APPEAL TO PARENTS TO PROTECT THEIR CHILDREN FROM THE CLUTCHES OF THE "PRINCES" WILL HAVE STRUCK A CHORD IN MANY FAMILIES. FURTHER REACTION WILL DEPEND ON HOW THE FOLLOW-UP MEASURES ARE CARRIED OUT. EVEN IF MOST OF THE DETAINEES ARE SOON RELEASED, THE SCALE AND MANNER OF THE ARRESTS WILL LEAVE SCARS, PARTICULARLY AMONG THE INTELLIGENTSIA. THE ISLAMIC RADICALS WILL NO DOUBT SEEK TO CONTINUE THEIR ACTIVITIES UNDERGROUND. ON THE OTHER HAND, THOUGH BOTH LEFT AND RIGHT MAY NOW HAVE A GREATER INCENTIVE TO ESTABLISH THE LINKS THAT SADAT ALLEGES ALREADY EXIST, THE SECURITY FORCES SHOULD HAVE LITTLE DIFFICULTY IN KEEPING ON TOP OF THEM. ONE SHOULD ALSO REMEMBER THAT ON PAST FORM SADAT CAN REASONABLY CLAIM TO KNOW HIS PEOPLE BETTER THAN US ARMCHAIR CRITICS ( OR THAN THE SHAH KNEW HIS). I THINK WE SHOULD BEWARE OF JUMPING TO HASTY CONCLUSIONS ABOUT HIS PERSONAL FUTURE OR EGYPT'S LONG-TERM STABILITY.

FCO PSE PASS ALL OTHER MIDDLE EAST POSTS.

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[REPEATED AS REQUESTED]

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