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PS TO NO 10 DOWNING STREET

Egypt

FM CAIRO 101220Z SEP 81
TO IMMEDIATE FCO

TEL NO 504 OF 101220Z SEP 81
INFO ROUTINE AMMAN, JEDDA, DAMASCUS, BEIRUT, TEL AVIV, UKHISNEW YORK
WASHINGTON, MODUK(FOR D14)
SAVING ALL OTHER MIDDLE EAST POSTS.

MY TEL NO 500: SADAT'S CRACK DOWN

1. SADAT ANSWERED IN ENGLISH QUESTIONS FROM FOREIGN AND EGYPTIAN JOURNALISTS FOR 90 MINUTES YESTERDAY IN HIS VILLAGE OF MIT ABUL KUM. HE WAS FLANKED BY THE VICE-PRESIDENT AND MANSOUR HASSAN, ALL EGYPTIAN EDITORS-IN-CHIEF WERE IN ATTENDANCE. SADAT APPEARED TENSE, AND LOST HIS TEMPER AT LEAST ONCE. IN LINE WITH THE POLICY OF GIVING THE CRACK-DOWN FAIR COVERAGE IN THE DOMESTIC MEDIA, EGYPTIAN TELEVISION LAST NIGHT CARRIED A FULL RECORDING OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE, AND TODAY'S PAPERS PRINT FULL TRANSCRIPTS.

2. SADAT STUCK CLOSELY TO THE THEMES OF HIS 5 SEPTEMBER SPEECH, REPEATEDLY STRESSING THAT HIS PURPOSE WAS TO ELIMINATE SECTARIAN STRIFE, NOT TO CRACK DOWN ON HIS OPPONENTS, WHICH WAS HOW THE WORLD'S PRESS HAD MISTAKENLY AND PERVERSELY REPRESENTED HIS MEASURES. JUDGING FROM THIS AND SATURDAY'S SPEECH IT SEEMS THAT SADAT REALLY DOES BELIEVE THAT SECTARIAN STRIFE, THE RISE OF THE ISLAMIC GROUPS AND THE INCREASINGLY STRIDENT LEFTIST OPPOSITION ARE ALL PART OF THE SAME SYNDROME. YESTERDAY'S PERFORMANCE CONFIRMED BOTH THAT HIS EVIDENCE FOR A GENERAL CONSPIRACY TO PROMOTE SECTARIAN STRIFE REMAINS FLIMSY AND THAT HE ATTACHES ENORMOUS IMPORTANCE TO THE COVERAGE HE RECEIVES IN THE WESTERN PARTICULARLY AMERICAN MEDIA. BUT ONE HAS TO ADMIRE HIS COURAGE IN INVITING A FREE-FOR-ALL WITH WESTERN JOURNALISTS ON SUCH A SENSITIVE TOPIC.

3. SADAT MADE THE FOLLOWING POINTS OF INTEREST:
(A) EGYPT WAS STABLE, AND NOT TO BE COMPARED TO IRAN, NOR THE PRESIDENT TO THE SHAH. THE FACT THAT THE SHAH'S FUNERAL HAD TAKEN PLACE PUBLICLY IN CAIRO WITHOUT INCIDENT SHOWED THAT THE PEOPLE SUPPORTED SADAT.
(B) EGYPT HAD A STRONG GOVERNMENT, AND NOW NEEDED A STRONG OPPOSITION. SADAT WOULD SOON SUMMON A MEETING OF THE PEOPLE'S ASSEMBLY, SHURA COUNCIL, PROFESSIONAL SYNDICATES AND TRADES UNIONS TO PUT BEFORE THEM A CHARTER FOR POLITICAL OPPOSITION.

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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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