

National

Haig comments on assassination

Sadat's death hurts US

United Press International
WASHINGTON — The assassination of Egyptian President

Anwar Sadat Tuesday cost the United States its closest Arab ally, threatened the Camp David

peace process and raised the specter of a new Middle East war. Secretary of State Alexander Haig pledged continued U.S. support during what could be a period of political turmoil and urged continuation of Sadat's policies.

"During this difficult transition period the United States will stand firmly by Egypt. We are confident that the Egyptian people and the constitutional process will prevail, but this terrible event must not disrupt the promise of Anwar Sadat's historic achievements," Haig said late Tuesday after a meeting with President Reagan and a group of senators.

Middle East experts said Sadat's immediate successor, Vice President Hosni Mubarak, will be placed under increasing pressure from Arab hardliners to withdraw from the U.S.-sponsored direct negotiations with Israel.

At the same time they said there is likely to be a move by some Israeli politicians to halt their withdrawal from the Sinai at least until the situation becomes clearer.

This will force the Reagan administration which has not yet forged a comprehensive Middle East policy to make a series of decisions that could prove crucial for the area.

The experts said the United States will have to trend a narrow line between showing support for

Mubarak and not trying to shelter him so much that he can be called an American puppet.

"If there is a Libyan connection with the shooting there will be an Egyptian-Libyan war," William Quandt, a former National Security Council staff member now with the Brookings Institution, told United Press International.

"In that case" he said "we, the United States, will be called on to make some decisions — and very suddenly."

Dr. Yahya Sadowski, a Middle East expert at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, said one of the problems is the administration's lack of a coherent Middle East policy.

So far, he said, all the administration has come up with is a series of ideas such as its proposed anti-Soviet "strategic consensus" that do not deal with the core issues of the region.

The uncertainties arising from the assassination fueled congressional opposition to the administration's proposed sale of sophisticated AWACS radar to Saudi Arabia, thus threatening to complicate relations with another key Arab ally.

Sadat was a strong backer of the sale even though he complained that the Saudis "have been abusing me."

Sadowski predicted that at the very least there now will be some movement by the Arab states — particularly in the Persian Gulf — to bring Egypt back into the Arab mainstream which means moving away from the Camp David process that produced the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.

In that case the experts agreed the United States will have to be able to demonstrate that continued Egyptian participation in the talks with Israel will produce something tangible.

Given the makeup of the current Israeli government that may be difficult to do.

Israeli ambassador Ephraim Evron said in an interview on ABC-TV that Mubarak was involved in the whole Camp David process. "He is obviously in full agreement with what President Sadat has done. The great majority of the Egyptian people support the peace treaty."



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