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## Camp David: The Consequences of Failure

What is failure?

The Camp David talks will have failed if:

1. The US is unable to persuade both Sadat and Begin to continue the present negotiating process after the Camp David sessions have ended; or
2. A breakdown at Camp David does not at least set in motion forces in Israel that could either cause Begin to moderate his position or lead to the collapse of his government and thus the prospect of different negotiations.

Concerning the first point, Begin has much more flexibility as to whether the talks will continue beyond the end of Camp David than has Sadat:

- In the absence of substantive agreement or compromise at the summit, Begin will quite happily agree to further negotiations because he will not want to appear intransigent and thus cause an erosion of support for Israel in the US.
- Sadat, on the other hand, believes he needs a tangible gain from Camp David -- either an explicit commitment from Israel on the principle of territorial withdrawal or a unilateral and public US statement endorsing Egypt's position on withdrawal and Palestinian self-determination. It will be very hard to persuade Sadat to continue negotiating if he gets neither of these things.

In regard to the second category of failure, the Camp David meetings could be considered a partial success even in the absence of an agreement to continue negotiating, if the summit sessions ended in such a way as to lead a majority of the Israeli public to view Begin as personally responsible for the collapse of the talks.

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- It would be necessary that the Israeli public see Begin's behavior as harmful rather than beneficial to the nation.
- But given Begin's present strong support in Israel, it is exceedingly difficult to foresee a situation in which this would happen.

The Consequences of Failure

In general, the failure of the ~~Camp David summit~~ will not have a dire impact immediately on Israel and the Arab world. Neither the Israelis nor the Arabs have high expectations for the summit and their lack of optimism suggests that if there is a collapse, there will not be a "shock effect" that would prompt either side to react precipitously and irrationally.

In short, we do not expect a failed summit to immediately trigger a new Arab-Israeli war, to prompt the Saudis to unleash the oil weapon, or to precipitate the resignation of President Sadat. These are some of the potentially dangerous consequences of an irrevocable breakdown. The more likely immediate outcomes of a failure at Camp David are a change in the Arab and Israeli perceptions of your role in the peace process and an examination by both sides of their remaining options, some of which could heighten tensions in the near term.

Changed Perceptions of the US:

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They will surely mount a propaganda campaign aimed at preventing any erosion of their support in Congress and US opinion.

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- For the US, the most damaging outcome of Camp David would be for Sadat to become totally disillusioned with our willingness to help fashion a settlement in the Middle East. Public expression of that view by Sadat would undermine the US position in Egypt and much of the Arab world, erode the position of moderate leaders in the region, and provide an opening for greater Soviet influence.

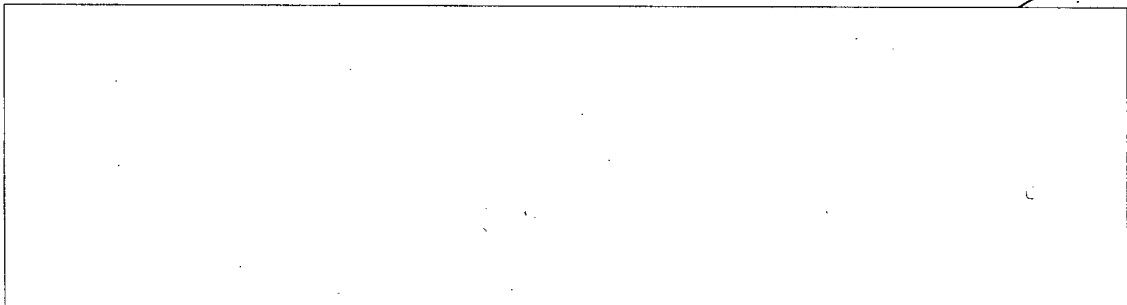
Options Available to Egypt and Israel:

Egypt: Regardless of the frustration Sadat might feel if the summit fails, he probably will not abandon his goal of a comprehensive settlement.

He has the immediate option of seeking reconciliation with the other moderate Arabs and will be heavily pressed by Saudi Arabia to do so. Reconciliation would protect him from his domestic and Arab critics and would be the prelude to developing other strategies ranging from preparing a coordinated Arab negotiating position to planning for war.

In addition, Sadat has [REDACTED] been arranging for other options that he could exercise with or without an Arab reconciliation:

- Egyptians in the Presidential office reportedly have been looking into the pros and cons of various other negotiating forums such as Geneva or taking up Secretary General Waldheim's December 1977 offer to hold a pre-Geneva preparatory conference.
- General Jamasi has been in touch with General Siilasvuo to ask about removing the UN Emergency Force in the Sinai. We must assume that non-renewal of the UN mandate in October is a live option for Sadat and that the modalities have already been worked out by the Egyptians.

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-- Finally, Sadat has some military options despite Egypt's military weakness. He could choose to order violations of the limited armaments zone on the east bank of the Suez canal, or move troops into "defensive" positions with the purpose of forcing the US to intervene and hopefully impose a settlement on Israel. The less provocative moves would be more attractive to Sadat since they might cause Israel to mobilize some of its forces -- with consequent economic and social disruption -- without substantial risk of Israeli preemption.

Sadat could also take various domestic moves to shore up his position. He might even offer to resign in order to elicit a popular demand that he stay on. He could also call for a new presidential election this fall. An election need not request approval on any specific policy, yet would be Sadat's mandate to continue to shape Egyptian policies.

Israel: Begin's reaction to a failure at Camp David would be governed by the response of the US and Egypt. Begin would probably be able to persuade most Israelis that Sadat was mainly to blame. If, however, Begin were perceived by the Israeli public to be responsible for a breakdown at the summit, he might be vulnerable to a challenge by Defense Minister Weizman that could lead to a split in his cabinet.

Were Sadat to carry through his threat not to renew the UNEF's mandate in October and demand its withdrawal, the Israelis would try to exploit such an opening to destroy Sadat's credibility as a peacemaker. Any Egyptian military move could similarly play into Begin's hands politically although in that case the Begin government would feel under pressure to order at least a partial mobilization that would put some strains on the Israeli economy. An escalation of tensions in the Sinai could also rapidly lead to a dangerous situation where miscalculations by either side might trigger preemptive military action by Israel.

Some Israeli hard-liners might advocate a preemptive attack even with no provocation by Egypt, to derail any future mediation efforts and knock out the Arabs' war-making capacity for several years.

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We doubt, however, that Begin and most of the cabinet would favor initiating large-scale hostilities without provocation. They know it would undercut their own professions of peaceful intent, weaken their supporters in the US and possibly endanger the flow of American aid.

Regional Consequences: The most immediate danger in the Middle East following a breakdown at the Camp David summit would be a major escalation of the fighting between Christians and Syrians in Lebanon that might draw Israel into a war with Syria. Israel has urged the Christian militants in Lebanon to exercise restraint at least until the summit ends. A new round of serious fighting began on 25 August, however. Israel is likely to attempt to avoid involvement in the fighting but if the summit ends in failure, the Israelis may abandon attempts to restrain the Christians and in fact may become more directly involved. The Christians, for their part, may interpret failure at the summit as the green light for provoking a crisis.

Another possible immediate danger following the summit is an increase in Palestinian terrorist attacks against Israeli and Egyptian targets. The more rejectionist Palestinian groups might also attempt some attacks against US installations or personnel.

Politically, the most important consequences will be for Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan. The Saudi reaction to a breakdown at Camp David will be particularly critical [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Saudis can be expected to pursue immediately a reconciliation among Egypt, Syria, Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization with two aims in mind:

- To develop a joint strategy that would enable the Arabs to bargain with Israel from a position of strength.
- To protect Sadat from his opponents by reducing his isolation in the Arab world.

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The Saudis would still want initially to pursue a comprehensive settlement that would satisfy their demands for Israeli withdrawal and Palestinian self-determination. They believe failure to achieve a settlement would mean another war, an increase in Soviet influence, and a resurgence of leftist strength that would ultimately threaten their own security. Equally, they are eager to dissuade Sadat from taking any unilateral actions that might lead to his overthrow because they believe their security also depends on the preservation of a moderate leadership in Egypt.

The Saudi reaction to developments also is critical because of the oil weapon. The failure of Egypt to secure Israeli concessions at Camp David would again raise the spectre of Riyadh's wielding the oil/financial weapon in an effort to force the US to impose a settlement on Israel. The Arabs may well conclude that this course would be more effective and less costly to themselves than going to war with Israel to achieve their political objectives.

In any decision to use oil leverage the Saudis would take account of the following potential costs:

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-- The economy of Western Europe, to which the Saudi economy is tied, could be severely damaged.

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Still, the Saudis could well attempt to signal their disappointment with us through gradual measures such as reducing current oil production rates even further. Such moves need not bring immediate untoward consequences, but would convey their message.

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The Syrians probably expect that Sadat will attempt a reconciliation with them following Camp David. They would accept a rapprochement with Egypt if Sadat agreed to end all unilateral talks with Israel.

Jordan almost certainly would be willing to participate in any efforts to work toward achieving a unified Arab position on the course of future negotiations. When asked about the consequences of a failure at Camp David in a recent interview, King Hussein commented that the logical step for the Arabs would be to take their case to the UN Security Council and push for a reconvening of Geneva. We believe this is in fact Hussein's position and reflects his desire to see the negotiating process continue.

#### Conclusion

On balance, if Camp David fails, we believe the Arabs will continue to seek some means to revive the negotiating momentum, after making an effort to fashion a joint strategy. The Israeli policy will be more reactive than innovative and the Israelis can be expected to be particularly sensitive to any indications of renewed Arab militancy. Tensions in the area would be heightened considerably if Sadat allowed the UN mandate to lapse in October.

We cannot predict, however, how long the Arabs would seek some means to restore the negotiating process. Over the longer term, we have to assume that a high degree of disillusionment would propel them again toward the view that military action, or use of their oil leverage, is necessary to achieve their political and security aims.

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