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The Middle East in the Aftermath of Camp David

The achievements of the Camp David summit surprised the Arab and Israeli publics and have caused considerable confusion and a mixture of negative and positive reactions. Our preliminary readings of the Egyptian and Israeli publics indicates that majorities support what their leaders have achieved; thus the prospect of either President Sadat or Prime Minister Begin facing an immediate domestic crisis seems highly remote. Begin has received praise from some of his most vociferous critics and general endorsements from an array of key political parties. Traditional rightwing leaders have strongly criticized Prime Minister Begin, but it does not appear that these objections will effect the vote in the Knesset scheduled for next week on the issue of removing the Israeli settlements in the Sinai.

Reactions in Egypt have thus far been supportive but muted. The greatly improved prospects for peace, although

uppermost in the minds of most Egyptians, have been linked with the more immediate prospect of strong Arab criticism and a possible deepening of Egypt's isolation. The resignation of Foreign Minister Kamel is also keeping alive the question of how much Sadat "compromised" Arab principle. We view these initial, generally positive Egyptian reactions very tentatively; they could be altered in important ways over the next several weeks by developments in Israel and in the Arab world.

Despite the many unknowns regarding the particulars of the summit and its fruits, there seems to be a clear recognition among other principal parties to the Middle East dispute that the Camp David agreements represent a crucial turning point not only in peace negotiations but in the region's power equation. Jordan's cautious response to US appeals that it join the negotiating process and Syria's agreement to receive Secretary Vance--the first meeting of high level Syrian and US officials since December--seem to have set the tone for a very deliberate approach.

The negative characterizations of the summit accords by Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria no doubt accurately

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reflect those governments' disappointment with Sadat's achievements and their concern about continued Israeli intransigence on issues considered vital to reuniting the Arab camp. Nevertheless, these reactions were probably deemed necessary as an initial public posture and as a first step in the next round of bargaining. None of the statements issued by the other parties seem to preclude completely the possibility of widening the negotiations.

The summit of Arab "steadfast" leaders in Damascus will no doubt produce positions that will complicate the immediate prospects for enlarging peace talks, but Syria--the key to the summit's effectiveness--seems determined to make its own decisions.

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