

WHY CARTER MUST COME OUT OF THE CAMP DAVID LOOKING LIKE A WINNER

WASHINGTON'S vacationing exiles this typically lazy August are probably not succeeding in clearing their minds together with their lungs. President Carter's just completed White Water rafting expedition was not likely an exception.

From U.S.-Soviet relations and Salt to dollar deterioration to the impending Camp David rescue summit, this is a capital increasingly unable to escape treacherous problems, gnawing responsibilities, lurking dangers, and often paralyzing self-doubt.

One returns, as I did two weeks ago, from a month-long tour of the Mid-east capital to be completely enveloped in a thick and inescapable blanket of cynicism, criticism and despair. There are murmurings, in respectable quarters, bordering on panic.

Not only is Jimmy Carter's public opinion rating setting historic records on the down side, but the level of abuse to which he is unrelentingly subjected in this ferociously political town is barely suffocating.

As one freshly out-of-government Mid-east expert informally put it the other day, "This town is full of sharks and when they smell blood in the water they all join in the eating." The avalanche of despair, it must be emphasized, is not over Jimmy Carter the person, but rather over Jimmy Carter the President.

What's happening in Washington is not a repeat of the Nixon nightmare, but rather a sense that we've got a good, decent man — one admittedly considerably brighter than his immediate predecessor — who's simple way over his head and who doesn't have a Kissinger.

Error

Carter's unforgivable failure to staff himself adequately is now beginning to be recognized as a monumental, possibly fatal error in judgment. The *Time* magazine recently drew attention to the White House "Kiddie Corps" — the junior (and a few senior) staff brought together when



CARTER — high-risk exercise.

Pre-summit Jitters in Washington

By MARK BRUZONSKY

House's poor performance," stressed one disenchanted insider talking to the *Time*.

The same article went on to conclude that "there is a mounting mood in Washington that the Carter presidency may be fundamentally flawed and that the chief executive may, despite his widely respected intelligence and dedication, be unable to lead the nation effectively."

Political commentator Richard *Esquire* magazine may have stuck in the deepest dagger yet. In an article titled "Will Carter Quit? It may be the only way to salvage his own image of superiority," Reeves advises the president that his hopes for another term are justifiable only if his main challengers are Washington outsiders who follow much the same campaign slogans as he did — people such as Jerry Brown and Pat Moynihan for instance.

This is because, Reeves pokes, "Carter's presidential performance has been characterized outside candidates

ment officials seem to have the general impression that Carter's extended period of on-the-job training is over and he's now up to the challenge.

Yet even this admirer admits that "Camp David may be the undoing of us all," while another State Department Mid-east hand adds, half-jokingly, "all the people in NEA (that's short for Near East Affairs Bureau) have respiratory illness because they are so often holding their breath."

The tie-in between presidential competence and Camp David was, of course, totally unavoidable in this atmosphere: however unfortunate. For everyone knows that the pressure is extreme on Carter for a public relations success if nothing else and even if

TABLE "A"

Approval rating at time of entering office	Approval rating 16 months later	% of entering office	%
Carter	71	66	44
Ford	66	46	46
Nixon	60	55	55

only temporary. And everyone also knows that foreign policy image-building efforts are a part of the Washington game.

Carter simply must come out of Camp David looking sophisticated — having exercised the proper combination of thoughtful mediation and forceful advocacy. Failure or deadlock — immediate or delayed — must be blamed elsewhere.

Omnipresent

It may not be too much to actually say that the crisis in Jimmy Carter's public image at home will be as much a backdrop to Camp David as the Mid-east quagmire itself.

The general level of scepticism in Washington, even among most government officials, is considerably more omnipresent than the restrained faith of the loyal left.

At best Carter is seen by most professional foreign policy community as somewhere between tolerable and average.

As for the public at large, Gallup poll results last month tell much of the story.

Carter's approval rating was actually at its highest — 3 to 1 — in March 1977. But it has continued to seriously erode even since reaching 44 this May.

Today only one in four citizens approve of Carter's handling of the presidency.

Furthermore, Democratic Party voters prefer Senator Edward Kennedy by more than two to one (49 per cent to 21 per cent) if the nominating convention were to be held now. Among independent voters the preference for Kennedy is 33 to 20.

Even Jerry Brown, Governor of California, is only 2 per cent behind Carter among Democrats (19 to 21). And among independents, Brown is ahead 26 to 20. Probably most damaging of all is that of those voters who elected Carter, with their ballots just two years ago, only half even want him to run again in 1980.

Whether Carter can ever regain even a majority approval rating seems doubtful at this point. Privately, for instance, publisher George Gallup has told I needs, according to the *New Times* magazine, "that unlike Harry Truman, Jimmy Carter cannot recover politically because he lacks any

nostalgia for Richard Nixon as a president who knew how to handle foreign affairs — specially with the Russians and Chinese."

While "Jimmy the Greek" — America's best-known odd-maker is giving two to one against Carter even seeking re-election (and two to one also against his winning if he does) columnist Joseph Kraft is writing that "Carter's fall in the polls is different from any thing the country has recently experienced... Carter's drop has been unconnected with seriously adverse events... The president "can do little to turn his fortunes around," Kraft adds, "except luck out."

Serious

The feeling in Washington is much the same about Camp David — may be Carter will "luck out," but it's not very likely. "I just don't see any way we can leave Camp David without making either Sadat or Begin very upset," one Mid-east expert recently confided.

There's a little doubt that Carter is preparing to "offer" Americans suggestions to the serious consequences "given the serious consequences of failure in the Mid-east summit talks are you prepared to introduce a compromise formula to attempt to break the deadlock?" Carter responded, "Of course, the United States would play a major role there. Both leaders want us to, and that's a legitimate role for us to play."

And from the way Menuchem Begin's been acting of late, he believes Carter is serious at least about this. But just as surely, Carter's lovers over the parties is hardly satisfactory to apply much "Arm-twisting" with much leverage — specially with 1 president's credibility rating nearly low as his job-performance score.

Reporting on the mood in Israel, *U.S. News and World Report* magazine noted last week "Begin draws ever greater support from Israelis for his argument that his government's policy of standing firm has paid off. Prime Minister and his advisers so certain that Carter will not and cannot pressure Israel into making a compromise." One official insisted that "Ca-

'Washington



CARTER — high-risk exercise.

By MARK BRUZONSKY

...east capital to be tooth long tour of it... on, alertly enveloped in a thick and inescapable blanket of cynicism, criticism and despair. There are no murmurings, in respectable quarters, bordering on panic.

Not only is Jimmy Carter's public opinion rating setting historic records on the down side, but the level of abuse to which he is unrelentingly subjected in this lecherously political town is nearly suffocating.

As one freshly out-of-government Mid-east expert informally put it the other day, "this town is full of sharks and when they smell blood in the water they all join in the eating."

The avalanche of despair, it must be emphasized, is not over Jimmy Carter the person, but rather over Jimmy Carter the President.

What's happening in Washington is one of a repeat of the Nixon nightmare, at least a sense that we've got a good, decent man — one admittedly considerably brighter than his immediate predecessor — who's simply way over his head and who doesn't have a Kasinger.

ERROR

Carter's unarguable failure to rate himself adequately is now being recognized as a monumental, possibly fatal error in judgment. The *Times* magazine recently drew attention to the White House "Kidde Korps" — the junior (and a few senior) staff brought together when Carter was "Jimmy who?" which one morning found itself running the world by and in some cases the world.

Carter's approach to stalling is responsible for "much of the White

House's poor performance" stressed one disenchanted insider talking to *the Times*.

The same article went on to conclude that "there is a mounting mood in Washington that the Carter presidency may be fundamentally flawed and that the chief executive may, despite his widely respected intelligence and dedication, be unable to lead the nation effectively."

Political commentator Richard Reeves in the current issue of the *Esquire* magazine may have stuck in the deepest dagger yet. In an article titled "Will Carter Quit? It may be the only way to salvage his own image of superiority," Reeves advises the president that his hopes for another term are justifiable only if his main challenger are Washington outsiders who follow much the same campaign dogmas as he did — people such as Jerry Brown and Pat Moynihan for instance.

This is because, Reeves pokes, "Carter's presidential performance has so discredited outside candidates that it will be a long while before American voters take another chance on the unknown."

In the past few weeks, in private

conversations with "a half dozen White House types," Reeves further castigated, "all so readily conceded, off the record, that the Carter presidency, their presidency, was an absolute disaster."

Dislike

"My own sense," Reeves assesses, "is that many people are crossing the line into an active dislike of Jimmy Carter. He, after all, raised their expectations, which Ford never did, and then embarrassedly disappointed them. I like the line I heard from a prominent Wyoming Democrat: 'Yeah, we hate Carter. After a while, even a dog knows the difference between being tripped over and being kicked.'"

Not everyone, of course, is prophesying that Carter's on-the-rocks marriage with Washington is heading toward certain divorce. One State Department official, closely involved in the Mid-east negotiations believes Carter will eventually be proven an excellent president who has taken on serious problems and made considerable headway.

He and at least a few other depart-

ment officials seem to have the general impression that Carter's extended period of on-the-job training is over and he's now up to the challenge.

Yet even this admirer admits that "Camp David may be the undoing of us all," while another State Department Mid-east hand adds, half-jokingly, "all the people in NEA (that's short for Near East Affairs Bureau) have respiratory illness because they are so often holding their breaths."

The tie-in between presidential competence and Camp David was, of course, totally unavoidable in this atmosphere; however unfortunate. For everyone knows that the pressure is extreme on Carter for a public relations success if nothing else and even if

only temporary.

And everyone also knows that foreign policy image-building efforts are a part of the Washington game.

Carter simply must come out of Camp David looking sophisticated — as having exercised the proper combination of thoughtful mediation and forceful advocacy. Failure or deadlock — immediate or delayed — must be blamed elsewhere.

Omnipresent

It may not be too much to actually say that the crisis in Jimmy Carter's public image at home will be as much a backdrop to Camp David as the Mid-east quagmire itself.

The general level of scepticism in Washington, even among most government officials, is considerably more omnipresent than the restrained faith of the loyal few.

At best Carter is seen by most of the professional foreign policy community as somewhere between tolerable and average.

As for the public at large, Gallup poll results last month tell much of the story.

The table "A" compares Carter's approval rating after 16 months as president with those of his six post-World War II predecessors:

TABLE "A"

	Approval rating at time of entering office	Approval rating 16 months later	%
Carter	71	44	62
Ford	66	46	69
Nixon	60	55	92
Johnson	79	70	88
Kennedy	72	66	91
Eisenhower	67	75	110
Truman	87	32	37

Serious

The feeling in Washington is much the same about Camp David — maybe Carter will "look out," but I'm not very likely. "I just don't see anyway we can leave Camp David without making either Sadat or Begin's cry 'con-'

Mid east expert recently concluded: "There's little doubt that Carter is preparing to 'offer' American suggestions and advice. Asked on August 9, 'given the serious consequences of 'given in the Mid-east summit talks, are you prepared to introduce a compromise formula to attempt to break the deadlock?' Carter responded, 'of course, the United States would play a major role there. Both leaders want me to, and that's a legitimate role for us to play.'"

And from the way Menemchem Begin's been acting, I'd believe Carter is serious at least about this. But just as surely, Carter's leverage over the parties is hardly satisfactory to apply much Arm-twisting with the much leverage — especially with the president's credibility rating nearly as low as his job-performance score.

Reporting on the mood in Israel, the *U.S. News and World Report* magazine noted last week, "Begin draws even greater support from Israelis for his argument that his government's policy of standing firm has paid off. The prime minister and his advisers seem certain that Carter will not and cannot pressure Israel into making more compromises."

One official insisted that "Carter is so weak at home that he cannot afford more trouble from the American Jews."