

# WORLDVIEW

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## EXCURSUS II

*Mark A. Bruzonsky on  
Assessing Camp David*

If, as planned at Camp David, a separate peace between Egypt and Israel is consummated by the end of this year, the achievement should be viewed only as a foundation for settling the gut issues that have alienated Jew and Arab through this century.

Whatever one's view of Camp David's outcome, it is hardly the comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement Carter loudly preached from inauguration day until the Sadat Jerusalem extravaganza one year ago. At best the Carter-inspired formula is an uneasy, unstable beginning to what might eventually become a firmer Middle East accommodation. At worst it is a collapsible gamble at a separate peace—one accomplished in exhausted desperation and one that, if aborted, might create an even more intolerable situation than existed before.

If the Egyptian-Israeli understanding should break down, there is little likelihood of shifting back to the comprehensive settlement approach. The psychological turmoil sure to accompany such a collapse could render peace as a concept a victim and discredit the entire process of reconciliation.

By choosing the Camp David framework, the actual and conceptual progress made toward an across-the-board settlement—à la the Brookings Report, as has been discussed in these pages during the past two years—has been negated in favor of a return to a Kissingerian step-by-step approach. Camp David was even more a triumph for Kissinger than for Carter.

Everyone chose to gamble big in the seclusion of the Cacotin Mountains. Sadat, by taking on himself the making of a separate deal—one disguised by rather transparent ambiguities regarding the crucial issues of the West Bank, the Palestinians, and Jerusalem, and one sure to result in a replay of the frustrating debate over the meaning of Resolution 242—has cast his fate with Washington and Israel. Neither economically nor politically will the Egyptian leader have much to show very soon for his decisiveness. Meanwhile, both Begin and Carter have been appointed to the committee guiding Egypt's destiny.

Carter is gambling that he can contain inter-Arab rivalries and that the feared collapse of the Camp David formula can be avoided. By sanctioning years of haggling over the key issues (rather than insisting on a clearer process for Palestinian self-determination and eventual Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank) he has extended the U.S. "full partnership" into the indefinite future. Washington is now sad-

dled with the unenviable responsibility of guiding a process that Camp David's confusing result renders highly dubious and problematical. American credibility is more on the line now than before.

Begin has risked least of all—in the short run. Israel is today militarily invincible, and even should the Egyptian-Israeli peace deteriorate, his political hand would remain strong. If the separate deal takes root, Begin is proclaimed hero. If it comes apart, he has defused the pressures that have mounted during the last two years for a settlement that would have tackled the intractable issues. Yet for Israel the gamble is also considerable. An amber light has been given to Palestinian self-expression in an atmosphere of confrontation. There is now a precedent for territorial withdrawal and dismantling settlements. And continuing Arab hostility creates for the Jewish state a schizophrenic condition of peace and war at the same time.

**Theoretically the Camp David formula** should be judged by an assessment of alternatives as well as risks. The principal alternative was, as during 1976 and 1977, to plan a Geneva conference in which Soviet concerns would have been considered and in which the willingness of other Arab parties (including Syria and the moderate wing of Al Fatah) to endorse some initial form of Arab-Israeli coexistence could have been exploited.

Politically, in view of Carter's domestic predicament, Begin's aggressive political instincts, and Sadat's relative impotence, the risks of the Camp David approach were apparently viewed by Jimmy Carter to be less than those of continuing to strive for more now.

Objectively, combining theory and politics, what emerged from Camp David is far less spectacular than generally thought—and only marginally encouraging. The test is what now follows and whether a stable Middle East framework protecting American interests and assuring Israel's acceptance can be fastened onto the Camp David skeleton.

For Israel the post-Camp David period should be a time of reassessment. The political victory of 1978 can be consolidated, not by unyielding determination to block further territorial withdrawal and Palestinian self-determination, but by an openness toward settling the formerly unresolvable issues. Israel would be well advised to remember how the post-1967 euphoria led to the 1973 collapse. The U.S. must now justify step-by-step diplomacy by creating conditions for a full Middle East peace over the next two to four years. For basic issues remain to be resolved—even after Camp David.