

Earl Raab

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PRESIDENT CARTER'S \_\_\_\_\_.

One can only stand in awe at <sup>The</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ <sup>y</sup> which our President displayed in calling together the Camp David meeting with Begin and Sadat. (Everyone will want to fill in the blank with his or her own word to describe the quality that he or she thinks Carter is displaying in this situation. However, no prizes will be awarded for the most appropriate word until the Camp David meeting has ended.)

With all the talk about the participants being "locked in," it begins to sound like an encounter session, which might best be held at the Esalen Institute at Monterey, or by the leaders of EST. If, as in the EST sessions, the Camp David participants are not allowed to go to the rest-rooms, perhaps they will hammer out an agreement with some new sense of urgency.

But that theory is based on the fallacy propagated by the mass media lately: that a Middle East agreement is mainly stymied by the pesky personalities of Messrs. Begin and Sadat. That is the over-simplification of the century, although it thereby lends itself well to newspaper headlines and instant TV punditries.

Take a step back. The modern history of Arab-Jewish conflict began with the break-up of the Ottoman Empire after World War I. "Palestine" stretched from the Mediterranean to the Arabian desert, and was considered part of Syria, all under Turkish control. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, a kind of colonialist feast, carved up the Ottoman's Middle East. Iraq was turned over to the British. What we now know as Syria was turned over to the French. The Arabs were allowed independence in the inland territories, none being that prescient about oil: the Saudi on the Arabian peninsula, and the Hashemites in a new area carved out of Palestine to be called Jordan. What was left as "Palestine" was put under British mandate. When this

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agreement was implemented, after World War I, there were about a half million Arabs in that Palestine, and upwards of 100 thousand Jews.

Meanwhile there were two nationalist movements on collision course. Many Jews, of course, had formally decided in the late 19th century that Europe was going to be forevermore hostile to Jewish life. They felt they had no choice -- and were proven right -- but to return to the ancestral homeland. The Palestinian Arab movement began formally when the Ottoman rule collapsed. In early 1919 an All-Palestinian (Arab) conference demanded that Palestine be included as part of an independent Syria. By mid-year the demand was for an independent Palestinian state.

Now in that "Palestine" there is an Israel with a very dominant Jewish population; and an administered territory on the "West Bank" with a very dominant Arab population. If the administered territory were incorporated into Israel, as things stand, there would be a massive population shift and Israel would have trouble maintaining itself as a Jewish state. If the administered territory were completely severed from Israel, as things stand, Israel would have trouble protecting itself from assault.

Israel has offered an accommodation to avoid either of those impossible eventualities, e.g.: immediate Arab self-government in the administered territory, and further negotiations in five years. But Egypt has backed away from such accommodation -- and no surprise. Egypt has received virtually everything it needs from Israel on the Egypt-Israel front. Now, it is negotiating for other Arab parties, on matters relating to Israel's other front, that administered territory. Egypt really has no license to negotiate for other Arab parties about territory which has not been Egyptian -- and the other Arab parties refuse to negotiate. That's a Levantine shell game.

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No, the personalities of Begin and Sadat are not the main issues at Camp David. There is an historic accumulation of head-on conflicts, contradictions, dilemmas and political maneuvering. Perhaps the word history will use to describe President Carter's quality will be most favorable if he neither turns Camp David into an encounter session, nor tries to solve all the problems at one gulp. Just press Egypt to make its own peace, on its own front. Then he can press Israel's other neighbors to negotiate on their front. Surely he will have the help of Saudi Arabia, whose friendship he has just won with the jet sale?