

PUBLIC OPINION AND CAMP DAVID

The most over-rated industry in America is the public relations/advertising industry, when it comes to shaping social or political attitudes.

The industry is not effective in persuading; it is only effective in "calling attention." That is good enough for commercial products. People do not become convinced that one toothpaste is better than another; but they may recognize one brand name over another when they go into a store. Or certain objective facts about a product may have been called to their attention, such as price.

Political candidates are much like toothpaste. From the mass media, they get name recognition; and people can learn how the candidates stand on certain issues. But people do not primarily take stands on the issues themselves because of the urgings of public relations/advertising/mass media.

The mass media did not do a very sharp job of evaluating the results of Camp David. Their editorial comments were often off the mark. But they did their main job well: reporting the objective fact that Israel and Egypt had come to an initial compromise peace agreement which the top American officials felt was very much in our national interest. That's all that counts. On that basis, the American people are in enthusiastic support of that agreement, whatever it may be, and are much more optimistic about the chances for peace.

The operative "agreement," of course, has to do with a separate peace between Egypt and Israel. The rest of it, relating to Israel's Eastern front and the Palestinian Arabs, is there mainly to enable Sadat to sign a separate peace treaty with some dignity.

Earl Raab  
"Public Opinion and Camp David"  
page 2

The potential significance is rather monumental in modern Middle East history. Very simply, without Egypt there can be no major war launched against Israel. The complex problems of Israel's Eastern front were not seriously engaged at Camp David. They can be engaged, under the possible new circumstances, without the spectre of an instant Middle East War. And those may be the only circumstances under which some resolution of those problems can gradually be reached, step by step.

That was always the wisdom of not trying to insist on a total, comprehensive, instant resolution of all problems in the Middle East. The multiplicity and nature of Israel's adversaries would have made such a resolution impossible. And, of no little significance: Camp David represents the American government's own move away from the insistence on a comprehensive peace, all at once. Some people in the State Department must be unhappy.

There can be another great significance, if all this works out: Egypt and Israel can form the kind of contra-Soviet collective security base the U.S. has been looking for in the Middle East, for these many years. Libya, Iraq and perhaps Syria will become a Soviet tier, but they are the less consequential nations in that area. Saudi will eventually not have much choice as to the direction in which it must drift, in such a crystallized situation. Jordan and poor Lebanon will be in the nut-cracker.

But, as far as current public relations in America are concerned, the dice have been cast. American public opinion will look with great disfavor on anyone who opposes or interferes with the projected Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement. If Israel does not handle the issue of the Sinai settlements, or if Egypt pulls back from any of its

Earl Raab  
"Public Opinion and Camp David"  
page 3

agreements, or if the hard-line Arab nations are obstructive, no amount of public relations or interpretation or misplaced editorial comment will alter negative American public reaction to those nations. And vice versa. The objective fact will prevail.

Despite myths to the contrary, and except in totalitarian societies, objective substance will triumph over attempted image-making in the formation of public opinion.