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*The art of remote personality assessment
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PERSONALITY PROFILES IN SUPPORT OF THE CAMP DAVID SUMMIT

Jerrold Post, M.D.

Among the briefing materials President Carter carried to Camp David for his historic meetings with President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin in September 1978 were a personality profile on each of the two Middle Eastern leaders and a third profile comparing their personalities and negotiating style. Following his diplomatic triumph, the President conveyed his appreciation to the Central Intelligence Agency for the intelligence support provided him and singled out the personality profiles for special praise: "After spending 13 days with the two principals," he said, "I wouldn't change a word."

The history of studies relating personality and political behavior predates the founding of the Central Intelligence Agency, but controversy over the validity of such studies is as strong today as when Walter Langer and his associates probed the psyche of Adolf Hitler for the OSS. Much of the current controversy is over causality: was a particular political occurrence caused by a leader's psyche, or did it result from the action of political, historical and cultural forces? This, I submit, is an unnecessary focus of contention, for we believe, along with most historians, that most leadership decisions are multiply determined, and it is when a leader's psychological and political needs are congruent that there is a particularly strong drive toward action. Even the most diehard critic would probably agree that if there is any occasion on which personality features weigh heavily in political proceedings, it is during unstructured negotiations among world leaders from different cultures with different perceptions, values, attitudes and styles. Such was the case at Camp David.

On a visit to the Agency in August 1978, President Carter interrupted a briefing to ask the assembled analysts and intelligence production managers how they could help him before the forthcoming summit meeting, which had only recently been announced. He particularly indicated that he wanted to be "steeped in the personalities of Begin and Sadat."

The presidential request sent a spasm through the National Foreign Assessment Center. The Office of Regional and Political Analysis (ORPA) was tasked with preparing political profiles which emphasized the political perspectives of the two main actors; the Office of Central Reference (OCR) was tasked with preparing updated biographic profiles which emphasized personality features; and the Center for the Analysis of Personality and Political Behavior (CAPPB) in the Office of Scientific Intelligence was tasked with updating the studies of the personality and political behavior of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin which had been produced in 1977.

In short order, the several components produced the required material. CAPPB's contribution consisted of three pieces: an updated personality profile of Begin, which called attention to the increasing trend of oppositionism and rigidity in his personality; an updated profile of Sadat entitled "Sadat's Nobel Prize Complex," which stressed his increasing preoccupation with his role in history and the leverage this could provide in negotiations; and a paper which discussed the implications for negotiations of the contrasting intellectual styles of Begin and Sadat. To eliminate redundancy, the OCR and CAPPB profiles were integrated, emphasizing personality features of the leaders apt to become of particular significance during the negotiations. The two integrated personality profiles and the discussion of Begin's and Sadat's contrasting intellectual styles were the personality materials forwarded to support the Camp David negotiations.

It is important to emphasize that the ability of all components to respond effectively in the brief time available rested upon a foundation of significant background research as well as continuing monitoring of the target leaders. In the balance of this discussion, some of the research efforts employed to clarify the personality and political behavior of President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin will be described.

A recurring difficulty in analyzing the personality of world leaders is that the necessary data, although ultimately obtainable, has not been systematically recorded. Requests for "instant magic" are not uncommon when a coup, assassination—or in more civilized countries, election—leads to a change of leadership. In order to anticipate the needs of the intelligence community, over the years CAPPB has regularly surveyed key intelligence consumers to identify leaders of special interest, including emerging leaders, and establish research priorities. In developing this priority list, State/INR, Defense/ISA, the National Security Council, and the National Intelligence Officers are surveyed. Parenthetically, these survey results have always impressed the authors with the vigorous diversity of interests among the key consumers. Indeed, prior to the survey of the summer of 1976 no single highest priority candidate had ever been unanimously identified by all components. But that survey revealed across-the-board highest priority interest in one world leader, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt.

In developing personality studies several kinds of data are reviewed. In addition to drawing on all classified reporting, a thorough review of the open literature is conducted. Official and unofficial biographies have often provided key background material and insights, as have television, newspaper and magazine profiles. When there are significant holes in the data, requirements are sent to the field to attempt to develop the missing information. But the data which is particularly rich and especially helpful in developing a solid feeling for the complexities of the personality of a leader is derived from debriefings of senior government and military officials and individuals from the private sector who have had significant personal contact with the object of the study. Official reporting has often been so heavily slanted toward current political concerns that a wealth of astute observations concerning perceptions, attitudes, and negotiating styles of the actors has never been recorded. These perceptions and observations can be lost during the transition from one administration to another, especially if the observations were made during the course of extremely sensitive negotiations, the details of which were necessarily closely held.

The strategic importance of the Middle East, the relative imperviousness of the Near Eastern mind to Western perceptions, and the highly personalized leadership styles of its rulers have had the effect of focusing a disproportionate share of CAPPB's efforts on the personalities of Near Eastern leaders. In the process of developing studies of such leaders as King Hussein of Jordan, Yitzak Rabin of Israel, and Hafiz al-Asad of Syria, we had regularly debriefed key officials whose concern was the Middle East, including participants in the shuttle diplomacy of the Kissinger era. So when we began research for our study of Sadat in the winter of 1977, we had some material already on hand and were able to reinterview those who had had significant contact with Sadat.

Several themes emerged as we collated interview impressions. Sadat's concern with his role in history and his preoccupation with "the big picture," coupled with his abhorrence of details, were regularly mentioned. By appealing to Sadat's long-range goals, Secretary Kissinger was often able to overcome negotiating impasses over technical details.

Ambassador Eilts related one amusing and charming anecdote which epitomized this quality. The occasion was a luncheon hosted by President Sadat just after a breakthrough in negotiations. Present were President Sadat, Madame Sadat, Secretary of State Kissinger, and Ambassador Eilts. "Your Excellency," said Secretary Kissinger, raising his glass, "without your broad vision of history and your refusal to be bogged down by petty detail, we never could have come to this day," "No, Henry," replied President Sadat, "it was your negotiating skill which brought us to this day." "Oh no, Your Excellency," replied Kissinger, "it was your ability to think in strategic terms that" At this point, Madame Sadat interrupted with a loud sigh to Ambassador Eilts, "Oh no, here we go again."

A major conclusion of this study addressed the manner in which Sadat's special view of himself and this "big picture mentality" interacted. "Sadat's self-confidence and special view of himself has been instrumental in development of his innovative foreign policy, as have his flexibility and his capacity for moving out of the cultural insularity of the Arab world. He sees himself as a grand strategist and will make tactical concessions if he is persuaded that his over-all goals will be achieved. . . . His self-confidence has permitted him to make bold initiatives, often overriding his advisors' objections."

A finished study was disseminated in April 1977, on the eve of Sadat's state visit to the United States. Israeli politics were in acute disarray at the time. Yitzak Rabin was forced to step aside as Labor Party leader in part because of revelations of his wife's financial activities, and the controversial Shimon Peres became leader with the elections of the Knesset only a month away. On reading the study of Sadat on a Friday, President Carter requested for his reading the next Monday a similar study of Shimon Peres, who, it was widely assumed—despite the Labor Party's difficulties—would be the next prime minister of Israel. (There has been an assumption that we maintain such studies as "shelf items" on all leaders of significance.) Modestly disavowing superhuman abilities, we indicated we would immediately begin research on a personality study on Peres, and returned to debrief again the shuttle diplomatists.

We were in the midst of the first draft when the stunning election upset occurred which brought Menachem Begin to power. With retrospective wisdom, most analysts

have attributed Peres' loss to Labor Party complacency and widespread voter disgust with allegations of corruption by the Labor government.*

With the election of Menachem Begin, the material on Peres was put aside for another day, and research was immediately commenced on the new prime minister. In contrast to Peres, who was well known to a number of U.S. Government officials, there had been little official contact with Begin. But there was a rich source of information in the open literature, for in two autobiographic works, the "White Nights" and "The Revolt," Begin had revealed a great deal of the experience which had honed his attitude. His preoccupation with legal precision and his inability to restrain himself from clarifying imprecision was well illustrated by his arguing with his Russian jailers about details of the Soviet legal code. Furthermore, in analyzing the form as well as the content of his writing, it was possible to understand some of the complexities of his cognitive style. Later, Ambassador Lewis provided particularly illuminating personal observations of the new prime minister's personality. The CAPPB study was disseminated in July 1977, in time for Begin's first visit with President Carter.

Once a personality study is completed, with a thorough analysis of the basic personality structure, it forms a basis for continued monitoring of the subject. This is particularly important for an individual like Begin, who had not coped with national leadership before. A major question raised but unanswered by the initial study was whether this leader, who had spent his lifetime in opposition, could function as a leader for all the people, utilizing skills of compromise and developing consensus.

The creative diplomacy of November and December of 1977, highlighted by Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem, placed even greater emphasis on the personalities of the two key actors. A particularly interesting aspect of this visit, and something probably insufficiently attended to, was the impact of the media upon political behavior and the conduct of negotiations. Sadat's already special view of himself was given a new boost. We initially characterized this personality reaction "the Barbara Walter syndrome," but by summer of 1978, as it grew exponentially, designated it as Sadat's Nobel Prize complex. As we followed his political behavior particularly closely over the next several months, one of the most interesting changes had to do with the sharp increase in the first person singular. The frequency of the word "I" increased dramatically in Sadat's statements. There were accounts suggesting that Sadat would not accept reports indicating that his goals for Egypt and himself were in trouble.

*This is not the first occasion when the request for a personality study appeared to precipitate the downfall of a leader. The publication of a study of King Idris preceded the takeover of Libya by Qadhafi in a coup by two weeks. A principal conclusion of the study of Rene Barrientos of Bolivia was that "because of a strong need to prove himself as a man, Barrientos would likely burn himself out before his time." Barrientos died shortly after publication, having piloted his helicopter into a high-tension wire. Just in the past year, the program was having a remarkable record. Prime Minister Vorster of South Africa resigned because of poor health shortly after the publication of the personality study on the very day a major analysis of the decision-making structure in the Vorster government was disseminated. The succession problem in the Soviet Union was thrown into disarray by the death of Kulakov, one of the prime contenders to succeed Brezhnev. His unexpected death by a heart attack followed by two weeks initiation of research on his study. Our study of Boumediene of Algeria was being drafted when Boumediene suffered an incapacitating and ultimately fatal cerebellar hemorrhage. An attempt to assassinate Prime Minister-elect Ohira of Japan was made on the very day our draft study was submitted for editing. Most recently, the initiation of a major research study on Ugandan leader Idi Amin Dada was followed almost immediately by a Tanzanian counterattack on Uganda, and on the day the study was disseminated Tanzanian troops were reported in the streets of Kampala. Although this pattern appears to transcend coincidence, it is not true that initiation of a CAPPB personality study is being used as an alternative to covert action.

There was a consequent shrinkage of the leadership circle around Sadat to those who would support his optimism.

In parallel, Prime Minister Begin demonstrated a continuing facility for statements of a provocative nature, often precipitated by reporter's questions. A member of our center traveled to Israel to update the earlier study of Begin and focused extensively on some of the growing oppositional properties in Begin's personality.

The prominence of these personality features led to a proposal that one of the dinner seminars hosted periodically by the Director of Central Intelligence be devoted to the topic of "The role of personality in the Middle East conflict." The dinner was held in the spring of 1978, attended by a number of those who had been intimately involved in Middle East negotiations, including Ambassador-at-large Alfred Atherton, Ambassador to Egypt Herman Eilts, Assistant Secretary for Near East Affairs Harold Saunders, and Dr. William Quandt, the NSC's senior Near Eastern specialist.

In pulling together materials for this meeting we focused particularly on matters of form, entirely apart from political substance, and addressed such issues as Sadat's abhorrence of detail contrasted with Begin's predilection for precision and legalism. This precipitated a lively discussion among the participants on just how different Begin and Sadat were as personalities, and the problems these differences made when they were being dealt with in concert. One senior official advanced the notion that the personality differences were so profound that the two leaders should never be brought together in the same room. The task of preparing for the dinner discussions and distilling and analyzing the proceedings led us to sharpen the focus of our analysis on the stylistic differences between Begin and Sadat, and helped pave the way for the focused personality materials produced in support of the Camp David summit.

In focusing on the differences, there was an explicit analysis of the problems in simultaneous negotiation which these differences would produce, with some recommendations for dealing with these diverse personalities. The special circumstances of Camp David temporarily narrowed the differences between these two extraordinary individuals and made possible the Camp David accords. Needless to say, the gap persists. Above and beyond the massive political problems which must be overcome to reach a settlement, the fundamentally differing personalities of the two key actors remain a major source of tension in this historic drama, and will require continued observation and evaluation by the intelligence community.

(This entire article is classified SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM.)