

**Memorandum of Conversation between US President Jimmy Carter, US Secretary of State
Cyrus Vance, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and Israeli Foreign Minister
Moshe Dayan at Camp David
(16 September 1978)**

Israel State Archives: MFA/6913/2



**Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and US President Jimmy Carter at Camp David
National Archives: 181067**

During the penultimate day of the Camp David negotiations, President Carter enumerated to Prime Minister Menachem Begin the progress that had been made in the trilateral negotiations. With some adjustments to the almost completed agreements, Israel's prospects for peace and security with Egypt were at hand. Begin praised Carter for his "work for peace" and acknowledged that several issues had not yet been resolved, including Israeli settlements in the Sinai Peninsula. Begin agreed to submit the question of Sinai settlements to a vote in the Israeli parliament, affirming that as Prime Minister, he would not require his party members to vote a certain way. Begin refused to give Egyptian President Anwar Sadat any say on the future of other settlements, remarking at one point that the West Bank "is not his business." In this meeting, the contents of which have not been released by the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) but are available from the Israel State Archives (ISA), Begin clearly committed that "perhaps one military settlement" in the Jordan Valley would be established during the three months of the treaty negotiations. As to a complete freeze on new settlements, Begin said, "That's out of the question." Carter asked Begin for a letter stating, "After the signing of the [framework] agreement during the negotiations, no new Israeli settlements will be established in the area, unless otherwise agreed." Ultimately, Begin did not send Carter such a letter. And yet, Carter insisted publicly from the day after the accords were signed throughout his post-presidency that Begin had promised to freeze settlements for five years. The extraordinarily contentious public dispute on the settlements would mar the diplomatic victory of the Camp David Accords and add tension to the already fraught Carter-Begin relationship.

20 August 2018, Ken Stein / Jacob Zack

Carter: We thank you very much for coming and for the progress that's been made. There are still important decisions that must be made, on Jerusalem and other issues; but it is a good idea, to "take stock" of what we've done and to note the good that will result if Camp David succeeds. If it fails, all the advantages will be lost. If we succeed, it will be to Israel's advantage.

1. Full peace with Egypt. This peace will include recognition, international relations, and open borders. Sadat said that if there is an agreement on the first withdrawal from Sinai, all of this will take place.
2. Security with Egypt based on this agreement, whose significance is the reduction in Sinai by one division on the eastern side of the Suez Canal. Perhaps even less than a division – a brigade, and including a buffer zone in which there are police and UN forces. Sadat was generous, for there will be [only] a symbolic buffer zone [on the Israeli side] of 1 to 3 kilometers.
3. A promise of safe passage in all the adjacent waters: Suez, the Gulf of Suez and the Tiran Straits. Any wording we want will be acceptable, and the UN will remain in Sharm-el-Sheikh.
4. You will have an agreement with the Arabs on Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip for five years and beyond. There will be a military presence, as you wish. You will declare what you want and need.
5. In the creation of [Palestinian] self-government you will have the right of veto on any arrangement. This is based on your very constructive proposal. I assume that what will be decided will be very close to your proposal, and any changes will have to receive your approval.
6. You will be involved in the negotiations on the final status. If the Palestinian Arabs are pleased with the existing situation, there is a good chance that the issue of borders will remain as it is.
7. There will be a new relationship between you and the Arabs.
8. Many of the things that worried you have been removed. We did not include proposals you didn't want, such as minor modifications of the borders. We tried not to characterize the settlements in Judea and Samaria as illegal, and we have succeeded in removing the issue of 'inadmissibility' from the text. There is no wording on 'self- determination', although we hope that you will give them that in a generous measure.

If we succeed here, there will be a new era in relations between the US and Israel. We have tried to fulfill your needs. We have never purposely harmed you, in arms and financial aid. This improvement in relations with us and with the Arabs will result in a greater acceptance of Israel among the family of nations. You will be able to end the military occupation. I am familiar with the Jewish character in the world, and I know how you have suffered from foreign occupation, and I think that it will be a great relief for you if the occupation [is ended].

There is still great doubt and a lack of faith in the Arab world. We will be able to remove part of that. For the first time, since last night, Sadat feels that Israel is prepared to reach an agreement. The reason he changed his mind was that Israel presented good proposals. I searched for you yesterday in order to tell you. I know that you must be careful, and I thank you greatly for that. We will not be able to continue [beyond tomorrow]. I am prepared to work the entire day in the hope that we will reach an agreement. In comparison with the American proposals, the differences between us compared with Egypt are small. We will begin with the Sinai document.

Begin: We thank you for your initiative. We have seen your work for peace; it is unprecedented. Our efforts under all the prevailing circumstances were not in vain. I will say so publicly. In my opinion, there is no reason why we won't achieve a signed framework.

There are problems, but they are soluble. More work and effort are required, and we will find solutions for them. Perhaps today or tomorrow we will arrive at the happy moment when we can announce to the world that we have reached an agreement. The framework agreement will constitute a base, and that will enable the parties to create peace agreements. This will be a revolutionary change in the Middle East; an event of historical proportions. Barak has worked like a donkey. On the issue of Sinai, we want to succeed. When Sadat requested that we sign a commitment to remove the settlements that was intransigent since we had presented a reasonable proposal. We have a problem and we can't solve it at present. Let's submit it for negotiations. We will promise to conduct negotiations within three months. In any event, the settlements cannot be removed, even within the coming years. If the settlements issue is removed, we can solve the rest of the problems – some logical, others not and sign the document. We will, in fact, not want even to [include?] remove the settlements. We are bound by a parliamentary decision, and we are a parliamentary democracy. We will sign the Framework, and on our return home within two weeks, we will convene the Knesset. There we will present the settlements issue for a decision. I will propose to the cabinet that there be a free vote in the Knesset, and whatever the outcome is, that's what will be. I will not make it a non-confidence motion.

Carter: That's fair. I wrote my impressions of the positions of the two countries at the end of the document. Sadat approved the phrasing, where it concerned him.

Begin: I prefer that we say that we will conduct negotiations within the three months of peace negotiations. If not, then the Knesset will decide.

Carter: You can phrase Israel's position in any way you prefer. (Reads out Egypt's position)

Begin: In my opinion the phrasing should be 'the issue of the settlers shall be decided by negotiations'. (Carter reads the text.)

Begin: At first glance, it seems that we'll have to begin working on it tonight. The change is that we won't agree to more than an Egyptian administration, before a peace agreement. Of course, I'll give him El Arish or Santa [Katerina] in exchange for the settlements issue.

Carter: My intention was that the airfield would be under their administration.

Dayan: We'll make facilities available to them.

Carter: What did the interim agreement say?

Dayan: Under the UN flag.

Begin: About the airfields, we will want an agreement with you about the matter of building the airfields.

Carter: Yes. It will be spoken about with Vance.

Begin: The withdrawal costs a lot of money, and we will speak with you about that.

Carter: Yes.

Begin: Sadat declared that the Tiran Straits are an international waterway.

Carter: Sadat agrees.

Begin: We wouldn't want the road [between Sinai and Jordan, whose construction was proposed in the agreement] to be extra-territorial. Agree that it be called 'a highway'.

Carter: All right.

Dayan: It can be added that the highway will be open for free passage.

Carter: Similar to the Suez Canal.

Begin: As for the matter on page 3, A: mechanized or infantry.

Vance: I don't know whether he'll agree.

Dayan: That's their intention.

Begin: I thought that in this zone, on our side, there would be observers.

Carter: Sadat spoke of reciprocity.

Dayan: We agree to reciprocity, and no UN forces would be present, only supervision.

Begin: Sadat agreed with me on two conditions for the arrangement [on the UN force]:

1. An agreement between the two countries, and then
2. '[Not] To be removed unless'

Carter: Now he does not agree. He does not agree to include "with the agreement of both sides".

I believe you. You can send Moshe or Ezer.

Begin: I'll go myself.

Carter: "And [forces] will not be removed unless there is a unanimous decision".

Dayan: This should apply to all UN [...]. This will make it easier for Sadat.

Carter: He does not agree to make the other parts conditional. If you commit yourselves to removing settlements, I assume that he will agree to reinforcing those he believes will not be returned to him. He also claims that Dayan told him that the settlements would be removed. I believe you. As for the UN issue, he may be likely to agree, perhaps in another few months.

Begin: That's true. We never spoke about these two conditions regarding other periods of time, except for Sharm el Sheikh.

Carter: We'll add at the end, "including a unanimous vote by the 5 [Security Council].

Dayan: What does "Permanently" mean for the settlements issue?

Carter: I'm not sure that he'll agree to permanently in this section.

Dayan: In Jerusalem I told Sadat that the settlements would not be an obstacle to peace. I didn't say that we would remove them. That was after the talk with Tuhami and the settlements were [mentioned] there.

Carter: As for Sharm el Sheikh, I agree to the matter of a veto. Speak to him about an addition. As for the settlements, I will argue with him about 'permanently'.

Barak: In my opinion, 'permanently' does not add a thing, and only detracts from the places in which it does not appear.

Begin: That's right, but it has a moral significance. On the issue of the settlements, I propose "The issue of the Israeli settlers will be discussed and decided during the negotiations between [the Israeli and Egyptian governments]". If not, then let there be nothing [written]. We will declare to you and to Sadat that the Knesset will make the decision.

Carter: Do you oppose that the proposals of the two countries will be included in a section on page 4 of the preamble, with the Egyptian position included?

Begin: Normal relations should begin with the signing of the agreement, not with the withdrawal. That will take some time, 8 to 11 months.

Carter: He is prepared to announce it immediately and to cancel the boycott immediately. But not the diplomatic relations.

Begin: We'll talk about that with Sadat. I propose "discriminatory measures".

Carter: Talk with Sadat about the important issues.

Dayan: We're signing the [word missing in the original] on the Sinai issue. What's next?

Begin: We've now written the two positions. We won't go to the Knesset [...] and there will be a negotiation. We're not [...] to the Knesset.

Dayan: During the negotiations [...] that the proposal is to remove after 10 years.

Begin: Let's assume that we begin negotiations with Egypt [on peace] and the Knesset decides to remove [them], and afterwards the negotiations fail. Why should there be a decision by the Knesset?

Vance: In my opinion, without a decision by the Knesset, negotiations will not begin.

Carter: Egypt agrees to the text.

Barak: Yes, but Egypt did not say that they would not negotiate.

Carter: Sadat will prefer the option of the Knesset.

Begin: If I write a letter to you and to Sadat, then the question will be 'If all the issues are solved, and the only issue is the question of settlers'.

Carter: That's fair.

Dayan: I propose that you, Mr. President, write about the positions of the two sides, and then Begin will reply to you that he will take the issue to the Knesset.

Carter: I agree. The negotiations will not begin until after the Knesset makes a decision.

Begin: No, the negotiations will begin immediately. The matter of the settlements [should be dealt with] in the future. We'll return to Israel on Friday.

Carter: That won't work.

Dayan: In practical terms, the negotiations will not begin immediately.

Carter: Just so we all understand, we have a basic difference of opinion about the settlements. Sadat wants [missing words] to know if the Knesset will decide to remove the settlements. If so, the rest will be resolved.

Begin: The Knesset may decide to decide when it sees results.

Carter: In view of your flexible approach, the negotiations and the talks, we've almost concluded everything, except for the settlements. If we agree on the rest, the Knesset will see that except for lines on the map, the agreement already exists.

Dayan: I propose that in your talk with Sadat, that he agree that if the Knesset decides to remove [the settlements], then the matter of the UN in the north will be permanent like in Sharm el Sheikh, so that there is a buffer zone.

Carter: I will try. It's important from your point of view that we discuss it this evening and I'll bring him your proposal, and I'll go to Sadat. We won't decide here about the settlements and there will be no letters; but rather, there will be a statement that if all the rest is decided, the Knesset will decide [about the settlements].

[We went over the document and agreed on all the changes].

[Editorial Note: the following text is from a telegram located in the Israel State Archives, File MFA/6913/2. The telegram was composed by Aharon Barak, and sent to Prime Minister Begin on September 20, 1978 after disagreements arose over what was said at this meeting. There are slight differences between the hand-written text and the telegram. These differences appear here in brackets.]

Begin: On the matter of the settlements, we will not do anything beyond what was planned. There is no prime minister in Israel who could accept a commitment to freeze settlements, but we understand the particular problem of the time when negotiations are proceeding. I have told you in the past that we would do it prudently. I will now tell you our intentions. During the three months of the negotiations we want to construct one 'Nahal' settlement on the Golan Heights, one 'Nahal' settlement in Israel itself, and perhaps we will want to construct one 'Nahal' settlement in the Jordan Valley. That's all. They are all settlements of 'Nahal' – the Fighting Pioneer Youth Movement. It is part of the army, and it's all right – even according to the Geneva Convention which, in our view, does not even apply.

Carter: These are army settlements?

Begin: These are army security settlements.

Carter: What will I tell Sadat? That there is no freeze?

Begin: What does Sadat have to do with a freeze on settlements in Judea and Samaria?

Carter: If your attitude is that Judea and Samaria are part of Israel, then Sadat really doesn't have anything to say, and there was no need for Camp David. But that is not the assumption.

Begin: As for Judea and Samaria, we have a right and a claim, as you know. As I said, we are only speaking of the possibility of constructing one 'Nahal' settlement.

Carter: The whole world heard what Sharon said. That is the government's position. Sharon

spoke of one hundred thousand people.

Begin: Do you want me to disavow my colleague? We don't even have one hundred thousand candidates.

Carter: You want to continue the existing policy.

Dayan: We have a number of issues here. The first question is whether the matter of settlements in Judea and Samaria should be part of the framework agreement. In my opinion, this issue should be removed from the framework [agreement] and be dealt with in another manner, such as letters.

Carter: Not a letter to me. Write directly to Sadat. Our position is that the settlements are illegal. Now it needs to come to a decision. If your wish is for new settlements and a thickening of existing settlements – continue. I can't continue with that. The Sinai issue was about to fail because of the settlements and now it'll happen on the West Bank.

Dayan: There is a second question as to the time period. We have two periods: the first is during negotiations for the beginning of the transitional period; and the second is the negotiations during the period of 5 years. As for the second period, the matter will be raised in the negotiations. There either will be an agreement or there won't be an agreement. This will naturally arise. What's worrying Sadat is what will happen between now and the end of the negotiations.

Vance: What do you mean by negotiations?

[**Barak:** In the agreement with Egypt about Sinai, a period of three months in which negotiations should be conducted for contracting a peace treaty was explicitly specified. In the agreement about Judea and Samaria no such parallel period was specified, but the intention is to conduct negotiations, at the end of which the transitional period of five years will begin. We even proposed fixing such a parallel period in the agreement on Judea and Samaria.]

Carter: Your intentions then, are that immediately after the end of that period, you will begin settlement.

Dayan: At present, we are not discussing what will happen during the five years. What we need to agree on now is what will happen until the agreement regarding that period. What I know is that there is no practical proposal on settlement during this period. We've written three months, like in the agreement with Egypt. But it may well take more time.

Vance: The negotiations whether now or during the three months, are not relevant to the settlements. The negotiations are about establishing the autonomy on the West Bank. Why, at the end of the three months, should the freeze not continue?

Dayan: I will propose to the Arabs that during the negotiations we will put on the table our proposal about the return of displaced person[s] during five years, and we will hear their

position and their wish for these people to enter the area. Is the proposal that we decide on this issue now, and not during the period of five years?

Vance: I did not mention the matter of three months.

Dayan: You didn't mention it, but you did say 'pending agreement'. It is one thing to speak of the first period, and quite another to speak of the second period.

Begin: In the meantime, we are speaking of negotiations for three months, and I give you my morally binding promise that one settlement in the Jordan Valley is involved. I will not write to Sadat about it; it is not his business.

Carter: This should be in writing. Egypt is the one conducting negotiations with you about the West Bank. Why does Egypt not have the right to speak of it?

Begin: On this matter there are differences of opinion between us, Israel and the US. Do we not have the right to have different opinions?

Carter: What is the obstacle to peace in Sinai? The settlements.

Begin: No. We can make peace even with the settlements. In July at a press conference, you said that adding people to existing settlements was easier to accept than constructing new settlements. Now we're speaking of an addition of several dozen, no more. And as for new settlements, we're speaking of perhaps one. But as for a freeze on [new] settlements, that's out of the question. I won't be able to return home.

Vance: I envisage negotiations for a peace treaty with Jordan, and that will take time.

Begin: And what if Jordan doesn't come in? I agree to write about three months of negotiations with Jordan.

Carter: The negotiations refer to the West Bank and Gaza. What will you want to do about the matter of limits on settlements?

Begin: I am prepared to write a letter that will say "You asked me whether we will continue building settlements on the West Bank. I am informing you that in the Gaza Strip we will do nothing. In the Jordan Valley, perhaps one military settlement. As for an addition of residents, we are planning on several hundred. That's the expression "thickening".

Barak: We can declare: No civilian settlements. Only 'Nahal'.

Carter: How many people do you have in all the settlements in Judea and Samaria and Gaza?

Begin: Approximately two thousand. Between 2000 and 3000 at the most. We will add several hundred.

Dayan: Let's not deceive ourselves. We will have an agreement with the Palestinian Arabs on five years, from the beginning of the five years. There will be supervision by the autonomy administration. I'm certain that the issue of the settlements will arise during the five years.

Carter: How do you propose to agree?

Dayan: We'll be able to agree. In our plans for the five years there are 15 to 20 settlements [in Judea and Samaria]. There is nothing in Gaza. The Arabs may not object. We may balance it with what they want to do. In each one of the settlements, there will be 50 – 80 people. This will be done during the transition period. There will be an agreement on this period. At present we are talking about the period between now and the beginning of the autonomy. Now we have to decide on this period. I believe that they will ask for the admission of a hundred thousand people [refugees]. And we will tell them 15 settlements. I assume we'll agree to that. Practically, we don't intend anything. Do you think we will be so stupid, as to ruin everything because of one settlement?

Carter: I don't know. I propose the following text:

After the signing of the framework [agreement] and during the negotiations, no new Israeli settlements will be established in the area, unless otherwise agreed. The issue of further Israeli settlements will be decided and agreed upon by the negotiating parties.

[**Begin:** This shouldn't appear on paper.]

Carter: Can you tell me this in writing?

Begin: I'll think about it, and tell you tomorrow.

Carter: The one settlement you want to establish – postpone it.

Begin: I'll write about it.

[Barak wrote in his telegram: "At this point my notes stopped, because we moved on to an argument about Clause (c).]

In negotiating the final treaty, the elected representatives [of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza] may join the Jordanians in the negotiations of the final treaty

Carter: When the Knesset decides on the issue of the settlements in Sinai, and you said there would be a free vote, does that mean that you will not take a stand?

Begin: I'll have to think about that.

Dayan: At the beginning Begin said that he would be silent. And then I told him that as prime minister he can't be silent. But you can refrain from applying any pressure, and accept any decision.

Carter: Does that mean that the members of the cabinet will be able to express their own opinion?

Begin: Yes.

Carter: Dayan, what will be your position?

Dayan: I have no party, whatever I say will be only my own opinion. Israel will submit to [the] Knesset, within two weeks: "If agreement is reached on other Sinai issues, will settlers be withdrawn?"