

The Winding Road to the Peace Summit

Carter Ready at Helm to Guide Israel, Egypt

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By Kenneth W. Stein

Convocation of this week's Middle Eastern summit puts the 20-year-old Arab-Israeli controversy on an unprecedented diplomatic plateau.

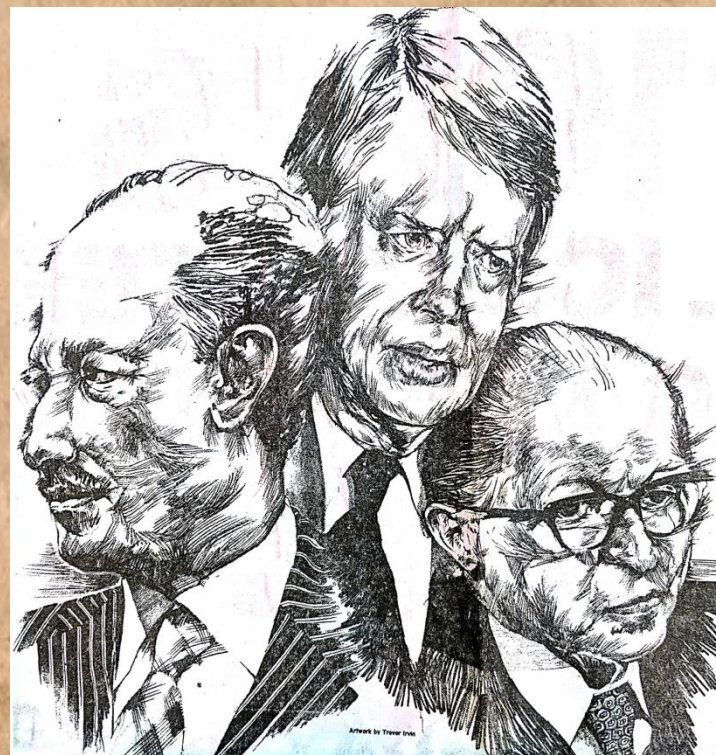
For the sake of enduring United States interests in the Middle East, President Carter has chosen to navigate the difficult course between Israeli and Egyptian interests. The choice of Camp David in the secluded Maryland mountains suggests

a keen desire to reduce the public rhetoric, impolitic remarks and impulsive actions which have characterized the negotiations so far. Since failure of this summit could precipitously endanger the political longevity of all three participants, there is every likelihood that at least a framework for a continuing dialogue will be agreed upon.

In the nine months since Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's historic trip to Jerusalem, however, the diplomatic process encouraged by the United States has been uneven. Now, by lending the prestige and authority of the American presidency to the discussions,

President Carter hopes to encourage a process which, more than has been previously recognized, he personally nurtured.

The president's involvement in the complicated series of events which has led to this week's summit has been carefully de-emphasized, while the world spotlight has been on Sadat since his dramatic announcement last year that he would go to Israel. But a close analysis of the steps leading to Camp David shows a deep American and Israeli involvement, beginning well before Sadat's Jerusalem trip.



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When Sadat stated in the Egyptian People's Assembly last Nov 9 that, "I am ready to go to their house, to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) to talk to them." Most hardened cynics dismissed Sadat's statement as rhetoric. After his visit to Jerusalem official Washington remained skeptical of this bold initiative: the Carter administration had spent its first year in office concentrating on a reconvened Geneva Middle East Peace conference. Public endorsement of Sadat's venture was slow in coming from either the White House or State Department.

Middle East policymakers adopted the same careful restraint

characteristic of other moderate Arab states such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. If the outcome of Sadat's trip was to be a success, Saudi Arabia, in particular, had to at least not publicly attack the Egyptian president for breaking Arab ranks. Washington's hesitancy dispelled any notion that the trip was overtly American sponsored, Israeli inspired, and intended to splinter the Arab world. Restrained U.S. sanction of the visit gave the appearance that the Sadat initiative was his alone.

But United States diplomacy and Carter were partially responsible for the Sadat initiative.

During and after the October 1973 war, Secretary of State Kissinger successfully established a working rapport with Sadat. Furthermore, Sadat trusted Kissinger, a personal trust that Carter understood as essential if Egypt was ever to make peace with Israel. During Kissinger's tenure, the Geneva Middle East Peace conference was convened and two disengagement accords were signed between Israel and Egypt. Diplomacy rather than war prevailed. Sadat also realized that the United States could assist Egypt's staggering economy and weakened military.

After the food riots of Cairo in January 1977, Carter without hesitation provided Egypt with \$500 million dollars worth of wheat. As a result, Sadat believed that he could trust Jimmy Carter.

Carter's efforts toward a Geneva conference exemplified one of the hallmarks of his early administration: seeking comprehensive solutions to complex problems, such as energy and health care. But if there was to be a comprehensive solution in the Middle East, Syria and the PLO had to accept Israel's legitimacy.

An Arab summit conference in 1974 stipulated that the PLO was sole legitimate representative of the

Palestinian people. Israel for her part refused negotiation with the PLO because of its avowed attempt to dismantle the state of Israel. From 1974 to 1977, Syria became the foremost vocal Arab supporter for the PLO. Yet, both refused to change their attitudes toward Israel despite U.S. efforts to modify their position.

From April to August of 1977 Carter and his aides sought to overcome procedural problems involved in reconvening a Geneva conference. The sticking point was PLO or other Palestinian representation. The PLO continued to refuse acceptance of U.N. Resolution 242 of November 1967,

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which called for recognition of all states of the area (meaning Israel) but also spoke of a solution to the refugee problem. The PLO did not want a humanitarian solution; it wanted a political one based on the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Israel opposed separate Palestinian representation at Geneva, and it adamantly opposed the establishment of a Palestinian political infrastructure which could endanger Israel's survival. Ultimately, by the end of September 1977, Israel accepted the concept of Palestinian representation in a unified Arab delegation at Geneva. After the opening session at Geneva, bilateral talks between Israel and each of her contiguous

neighbors were to take place. How the Palestinian question was to be resolved remained an outstanding issue.

When Israeli Foreign Minister Dayan came to Washington in late September he brought with him concepts and ideas which were later part of Israel's 26-point autonomy plan for the West Bank and Gaza. According to Israeli newspaper accounts and other reliable Israeli sources, Dayan's visit to Washington was interrupted by a secret visit to Morocco where he met a high-ranking Egyptian diplomat. After that meeting on the 18th or 19th of September, Dayan unexpectedly

returned to Jerusalem to confer with Prime Minister Begin. It was perhaps at this Morocco meeting that Israel received its first inkling of Sadat's intent to do something extraordinary.

Whether Dayan revealed the contents of his secret meeting to Washington officials is unclear, but procedural wranglings made Sadat impatient.

His impatience stemmed in part from Syria's endorsement and then rejection of a unified Arab delegation. In addition, he was disappointed because the U.S.-Israeli working paper for Geneva had only dealt with procedure and not the substance of

the controversy: Israeli withdrawal and international borders.

The Palestinian question was important to Sadat, but of greater need was Egypt's mired economic situation, uncontrollable population increases, financial indebtedness, and a military desperately in need of equipment and supplies. Having committed more than 10 billion dollars to the struggle against Israel, Sadat believed that Egypt had shouldered more than its portion for the Palestinians. Sadat was not willing to remove the Palestinian question from the Egyptian agenda, but wanted to give priority to his own country's interest.

The U.S.-Israeli working paper intentionally granted Sadat the procedural opportunity to negotiate for the Palestinians. The working paper negotiated between Vance, Carter, Dayan and Egyptian diplomats permitted Israel, Egypt, Jordan, and Palestinians the right to discuss the problems of the West Bank and Gaza. Syria and the PLO continued in their hard line toward Israel and spurned U.S. moderation efforts and were therefore not mentioned in the working paper.

Meanwhile, Sadat continued to have his trust in Carter reaffirmed. On September 30, 1977 the United States advanced to

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Egypt 78 million dollars for power and electricity projects. The following day, as part of a U.S. effort to reconvene the Geneva conference, the U.S. and Russia issued a joint declaration of commonly agreed-upon principles. Most of the terminology about territorial integrity and sovereignty mentioned in Resolution 242 was included in this declaration. The PLO was not mentioned, nor was Israeli withdrawal from all territories. But the term "legitimate rights of the Palestinians" was endorsed, and Carter used the same term in his U.N. speech of Oct. 4, 1977.

In order to quicken the negotiating pace Sadat originally wanted to invite

Britain, France, China, Russia and the United States to a five-power summit in Jerusalem to resolve outstanding issues. But in mid-October, both Begin and Sadat exchanged several personal letters with Carter, and the five-power summit was dismissed as unworkable.

Sadat traveled to Rumania in the last days of October and spoke with Rumanian President Ceausescu. According to Sadat's own admission in a Cairo radio interview of December 27, 1977, Ceausescu assured Sadat that Begin really wanted peace, had the ability to make peace, and his decisions carried weight with the Israeli people.

It is possible that during the first nine days of November Sadat kept the idea of the Knesset visit entirely to himself. However, in that period of time he held personal consultations with the Shah of Iran, the president of the United Arab Emirates, Jordan's King Hussein, numerous Saudi leaders, and PLO leader Yasir Arafat.

A unifying thread in many of his public remarks to newsmen in this period was the need to make proper preparations before going to Geneva: to Sadat this meant ensuring Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the right of the Palestinians to form a

state.

Sadat did not hide this interpretation of Palestinian rights, while the Israelis continued to quiver at the possible establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Sadat's method was to confront Israelis face to face.

It is difficult to assess the exact nature of the Jerusalem, Cairo, Washington connection prior to Sadat's announced plan to go to Jerusalem. Regardless, the fact that a dialogue with the United States had begun between Sadat, U.S. diplomats and Carter gave the Egyptian president the belief that he and his initiative would not end in political

obscurity.

On the contrary, the Sadat visit was a media extravaganza. Israelis were mesmerized with euphoria during Sadat's 38-hour stay, giving him an unexpected welcome which he interpreted as Israeli willingness to trade territory for legitimacy. But the euphoria had dissipated by January 1978, and Sadat realized that his one-man diplomatic effort would require United States urging of Israel to accept his position. Though Carter has walked closely with the Egyptian president since, Israel has not been denied economic and military aid. In fact, one of Vice-President Mondale's

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purposes in going to Jerusalem in early July was to mollify Israeli fears of such an eventuality.

Israeli leaders had for years demanded face-to-face negotiations. Sadat gave it to them. In return the Begin government offered Sadat complete or virtually complete withdrawal from Sinai and acceptance of his autonomy plan for the West Bank and Gaza. Begin, who was ideologically committed to all of the West Bank as part of historic Israel, compromised on his deeply held beliefs when his autonomy plan noted that future West Bank sovereignty would be determined after five years. Even Sadat recognized the generosity of Begin's

position when he said in an interview in OCTOBER magazine of Jan. 1, 1978, "Begin came and brought a complete plan on withdrawal from the occupied territories . . . Therefore, it is not true that we did not agree on anything or that I did not obtain any specific thing. Begin and I cannot ignore public opinion in Israel . . . If we disagree, we must sit together in order to reach an agreement. This is how things were throughout history and between enemies of yesterday."

What then soured Sadat on the Israeli negotiating position? Foremost it was the question of the Israeli settlements and Israeli airfields in Sinai. Begin's

public displays of territorial affection angered Sadat to the point where the Jerusalem political committee talks in mid-January were broken off.

The sudden halt in the Jerusalem talks in January took the United States by surprise. At hand were not just differences on substantive issues but a fundamental difference over the concept of negotiations. The Israelis interpret negotiations as give-and-take, meeting at a halfway point. Sadat and King Hussein believe that they have already granted Israel her legitimacy or right to a portion of Palestine; therefore, in their opinion, Israel does not possess

the right to negotiate for an additional portions of Palestinian territories occupied in the 1967 war. At the foreign ministers' conference at Leeds Castle in July, Egypt once again was unwilling to consider the concept of territorial compromise, or a functional division of the West Bank offered Foreign Minister Dayan.

Vance was embarrassed because at the Leeds Castle talks he had said that further meetings were likely. His trip to Cairo and Jerusalem during the first week of August confirmed that only presidential summitry would bring the parties together once again. It would appear that

differences over the future of the occupied territories and the question of Palestinian participation remain sticking points. Yet there are sufficient areas of agreement worked out in the last nine months to suggest that something more than just a process for continuing the dialogue will be an outcome of Camp David.

Both sides are fairly close to agreement on a declaration of intent or principles which will guide future negotiations, and a provisional agreement may be initiated. The points of general agreement are:

- Establishment of peaceful relations in accordance with a peace

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treaty within secure, defined and recognized borders based upon U.N. Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

- A statement of Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in 1967 with acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area.

- A formulation for Palestinian participation in deliberations in which they will determine their own future.

- An undertaking of great power guarantees for a settlement which might include limited force zones, demilitarized areas, and permanent peace-keeping arrangements. These could

include U.S. naval facilities in Egypt and Israel, U.S.-manned early warning stations on the West Bank, and in the Sinai airfields.

- President Carter can act as an arbiter, mediator, or honest broker since both sides enjoy an extensive economic and political connection with the U.S. Maintaining a dialogue increases the possibility for agreement while reducing the influence of those in the Arab world and elsewhere who prefer to see the peace process fail.

Whatever is decided at Camp David, Carter deserves considerable credit for unfolding the Sadat initiative.

Additional trust, patience and mutual respect are required if the residues of war and animosity are to evaporate. A unique historical opportunity is at hand.