

**WHERE CREDIT IS DUE:
RECLAIMING BEGIN'S CONTRIBUTION TO MAKING PEACE**

GERALD M. STEINBERG

Director, Program on Conflict Management and Negotiation

Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan

steing@mail.biu.ac.il

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Preface:

The Camp David research project of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center was initiated in 2001 with the objective of presenting a comprehensive analysis of the events leading to the 1979 Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt. While many books and articles have been published on this topic, much of the analysis is highly speculative, reflecting in part the limited access to the protocols and documents from this intense period of diplomatic activity. As Prime Minister Begin did not publish any memoirs and gave few interviews, and central Israeli documents from his government remain classified, the Israeli perspective on these events has been largely unknown and unexplored. Thus, this project is designed to fill an important gap in our understanding.

The following monograph is the “first fruit” of this project, and according to Jewish tradition, it is appropriate to recite the blessing of “shehechyanu” in thanks for being able to reach this important milestone. Our focus is on one of the most complex and crucial dimensions of these negotiations – the relationship between Prime Minister Begin and President Carter, and their respective contributions to the outcome. As will be seen in the text, the evidence uncovered and the resulting analysis lead to new and quite different perspectives.

Reflecting the vast volume of material that has been and continues to be gathered by the research team of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, this monograph is necessarily limited in scope. We do not claim to have delved into all of the complex issues of these negotiations, or to have written the last word. On the contrary, this is only the first publication in the series, and our hope is to be able to present additional analyses dealing with the other key dimensions.

This publication and research project have benefited immensely from the dedication and cooperation of many people. The inspiration and resources are provided by the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, led by Herzi Makloff, Harry Hurwitz, and Yechiel Kadishai, as well as the academic program staff – Moshe Fuksman and Ziv Rabinovitz. In the course of the research, important contributions were also made by Shaul Weisband, Shlomit Stern, Amir Rom, Sari Ishai, Sharon Hurwitz, Achav Ben-David, Yochai Einav, and by our summer interns - Hindy Poupko, Atara Schmutter, Chumi Diamond, Rachel Glaser, and Noah Liben. Thanks also to Prof. Kenneth Stein, Ambassador Samuel Lewis, the late Hanan Bar-on, Dr. Jonathan Rynhold, Meir Rosen, Yehuda Avner, Eric Silver, and many others for their insightful comments and suggestions at various stages of this project. However, the responsibility for the presentation of material and the resulting conclusions in this publication remain entirely my own.

Gerald Steinberg

Biographical note:

Gerald Steinberg is a Professor of Political Studies at Bar Ilan University, directs the Program on Conflict Management and Negotiation, and is a member of the BESA Center for Strategic Studies. He is also a consultant to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and National Security Council, directs the Camp David project of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center, and is a fellow of the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. He received his doctorate in international relations from Cornell University, and specializes in Middle East diplomatic and security issues, the U.S.-Israeli relationship and analysis of approaches to conflict management. His articles and analyses have appeared in *Survival*, *Comparative Politics*, *Israel Affairs*, *Journal of Church and State* and other academic publications.

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The signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty in 1979 and its subsequent implementation remains the most important achievement in decades of otherwise largely barren negotiations and diplomatic activity. These events ended thirty years of bitter and costly warfare, and reflected the skills of Menachem Begin, Anwar Sadat, and Jimmy Carter as well as their commitment to transforming the conflict between their nations. Begin's willingness to accept the risks and uncertainties inherent in relinquishing territory occupied in the 1967 war and bitterly fought over just six years later, and his decision to remove Israeli settlements and strategic air-force bases in exchange for what his critics derided as "a piece of paper", was an outstanding and highly unusual act of statesmanship. In parallel, Sadat's perseverance in breaking the wall of Arab rejectionism, and to realize that the path to peace that Egypt needed in order to recover from decades of devastating warfare began in Jerusalem through direct dialogue with Israel, remains unparalleled. The treaty that was negotiated with U.S. mediation, and the intense involvement of President Jimmy Carter, in particular, put an end to the series of major wars between Israel and Egypt, keeping the armies off the battlefield for 25 years, despite periods of very cold relations.

The negotiation process was by no means straightforward, and for students of diplomacy and international relations, the efforts to understand and explain the events continue. While many personal memoirs were written by participants, and a number of more distant analysis have been published, numerous ambiguities remain and different interpretations persist. In addition, as often happens, some of the broadly accepted explanations and analyses have turned out, under more detailed examination, to be inconsistent with the evidence, or embellished with the passage of time. Questionable analyses have led to some basic misunderstandings of the negotiation in what has come to be known as the "Camp David model", and these have very costly implications for efforts to apply this experience elsewhere. The most notable, but by no means only example, is the July 2000 effort by the Clinton Administration to broker a permanent status agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

A prominent dimension of this distortion portrays Jimmy Carter as the grand architect and essential mediator, Anwar Sadat as a uniquely creative if somewhat

eccentric statesman, while Menachem Begin is often relegated to a recalcitrant participant. The U.S. and Carter provided an essential element in the process, particularly in mediating the differences and shouldering the multi-billion costs of relocating Israeli bases and other requirements. But at the same time, Begin's intense activities, passionate convictions, and leadership skills, paving the way for and initiating the process that led to Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and the eventual peace agreement, have been marginalized in these histories, and replaced in many versions by Carter's often hostile image of Begin as "an insurmountable obstacle to further progress"¹. Brzezinski writes about Carter's "high esteem for Sadat", after he had "gone out on a limb in order to promote peace in the region", while "Begin was busily sawing the limb off."²

In contrast, as a detailed examination of the record clearly demonstrates, without Begin's political proficiency and determination to achieve a successful outcome, Sadat would probably never have come to Jerusalem; and after Sadat's visit, the initiative would have ended quickly, and the Camp David summit could never have taken place. Moshe Arens, who had fundamental differences with Begin's policies and voted against ratification of the Peace Treaty, acknowledges that "It was Begin who entered the Prime Minister's office determined to find a way to arrive at a peace settlement with Egypt. Begin went to Romania, talked to Ceaucescu and to everyone he could corner to somehow get this process going. I think without that determination, without that quest on his part, that the peace process would not have taken off."³

Nevertheless, the distortions and the negative portrayals of Begin's role continue, particularly in Carter's public activities and media appearances, including a conference at the Woodrow Wilson Institute in Washington DC marking the 25th anniversary of the Camp David talks. In contrast, Menachem Begin left office in 1983, exhausted, ill and burdened by the Lebanon war, and until his death in 1992, he failed to record his version of events onto the public record. Instead of recognizing Begin's central role, the Israeli contribution to peace making is often credited to Moshe Dayan, who served as Foreign Minister, and Ezer Weizmann, who was the Defense Minister during this period.⁴ Both enjoyed close relations with the media, and were active from the beginning in proclaiming (and embellishing) their contributions in this unique peace process. As a result, the detailed accounts of the negotiation process written by Israeli journalists were heavily influenced by these accounts.⁵

However, a careful and thorough examination of the evidence reveals a far more complex and significantly different picture. As the following analysis will

demonstrate, the successes of the 1977-1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace process were also characterized by fundamental errors and fundamental shortcomings and errors on the part of the Carter Administration and the course of the American intervention and mediation efforts. Indeed, the evidence indicates that this process began when Begin and Sadat agreed on the necessity of detouring around the Carter Administration's entirely unrealistic attempts to impose a comprehensive peace package as highlighted by joint U.S.-Soviet sponsorship of an unworkable Geneva conference.⁶

Later, as the American role was reasserted, Carter's strong differences with Begin, reflecting contrasting interests, as well as conflicting historical and moral perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the inability of the American administration to understand the democratic framework of Israeli politics, greatly complicated the negotiations, and almost led to their failure. Carter and his aides had great difficulty comprehending the complex interaction between principled ideological commitment and careful pragmatic calculation of the Israeli national interest that were the core elements in Begin's leadership. On a number of occasions, following intense discussions with Begin, Carter entirely misrepresented Begin's carefully chosen words, either deliberately or due to gross misunderstanding. This occurred most infamously in the discussion of a proposed "freeze on settlement construction" during the final late-night session of the Camp David summit. Carter's claim that the late Israeli Prime Minister had lied⁷ is unsupported by the evidence, which, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis, leads to the conclusion that, in addition to the impact of vast cultural and other differences between the leaders, Carter bears primary responsibility for the conflict with Begin.

A second distortion, which in many ways is a consequence of the first, claims that the fundamental Israeli concessions that made the peace agreement possible – both respect to full withdrawal from the Sinai, including the dismantling of settlements and military bases, and on Palestinian autonomy – were essentially achieved behind Begin's back. In this version of history, Dayan, Weizmann, and Attorney General Aharon Barak are credited with negotiating the fundamental terms of the Camp David framework agreement, and their further development in the final stage of negotiations that took place in the six months that followed.⁸ In contrast, in many of the accounts Begin at Camp David (and after) is portrayed as out of touch, isolated, "under siege" (*b'matzor* in Hebrew, as used in the title of journalist Uzi Benziman's book⁹) sulking, and defiant.¹⁰ At the time, Carter and his aides, as well as most analysts, claimed and continue to assert that the personal antipathy between Begin and Sadat required (or justified) the adoption of a strategy in which direct discussions with Begin were

largely avoided.

Instead, the record shows that Begin's role was central and indispensable at each of the critical junctures in the negotiations. As Prime Minister, he demonstrated the extraordinary range of leadership capabilities necessary to lead Israel in very delicate and complex situations.¹¹ The evidence, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis, clearly does not support the image of Begin as a secondary figure, only marginally involved in negotiations and peace making. Instead, throughout this process, it was Begin who grappled with the very difficult decisions, weighing options and their implications, from his intense efforts to open a direct channel to Sadat through the painful order to dismantle the Israeli settlements in the Sinai.

From this perspective, Israeli decision making, led by Begin, will be shown to generally follow the rational decision making model (despite flaws and exceptions) developed by academics such as Schelling, Ury and Fisher, Raiffa, etc.¹² This model, based on assessment of perceptions of both national and domestic political interests and environments, on the part of Begin, Sadat, and Carter, provides the most convincing framework for explaining the process and outcome of these negotiations. As Janice Gross Stein, Shibley Telhami, and other analysts have shown, these factors, particularly the economic, social and political costs of the 1973 war, and the resulting threat of instability (specifically for the Egyptian regime), were instrumental in creating the framework in which the exploration of the change in relations began.¹³

Furthermore, the mythology of Egyptian-Israeli peace making includes claims that when Begin negotiated and accepted the terms of the two Camp David frameworks and the March 1979 Peace Treaty, he was abandoning his long-held principles and essentially renouncing the positions he had taken as head of the opposition for many years. In some versions of this claim, Begin capitulated to the pressures from Dayan, Weizman, and Barak, in close coordination with Carter.¹⁴ In other versions, Begin accepted and adapted to the realities of the responsibility of the office of Prime Minister of Israel, as well as the constraints of both the external and domestic environments. (In the academic theories of negotiation process, skills needed to maneuver carefully between the complex domestic and external political constraints are developed in Putnam's "two level bargaining game".¹⁵)

However, as we shall demonstrate in the following analysis, Begin's positions regarding core issues and the Israeli national interest did not change. First as a member of the 1967-1970 national emergency and unity governments under Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir, and then as head of the opposition through 1977, Begin demanded that any territorial withdrawal from Sinai or the Golan Heights be based on

a full-fledged peace treaty, and not on partial non-belligerency agreements that were considered by Labor Party governments. At the same time, in contrast to Israeli control of the Sinai and Golan Heights, which were negotiable within Begin's specified requirements, Judea and Samaria embodied the "inalienable historic rights of the Jewish people", and not negotiable. On the basis of these principles, Begin accepted the cabinet decision based on the exchange of "land for peace" following the June 1967 war.¹⁶ He did not alter these positions in negotiations with Sadat, as can be seen in the core elements of the 1978 Camp David framework agreement and the 1979 peace treaty.

1) CARTER AND BEGIN –CONFLICTING INTERESTS AND DISTORTED IMAGES

The tense and often conflictual relations between President Jimmy Carter and Prime Minister Menachem Begin can be traced, in the first instance, to the substantive clashes between Washington and Jerusalem beginning with Carter's election, when the Labor Party held power in Israel, and Yitzhak Rabin was Prime Minister. In this early stage, in addition to repeating the pledges that the U.S. would continue to ensure Israel's ability to defend itself, Carter's frequent declarations of sympathy with Palestinian suffering¹⁷, (often followed by damage-limiting efforts to balance this impact with a routine pledge of American support for Israel's security and survival) created tensions with Israel. Carter's extreme propensity for detailed but poorly informed public outbursts on sensitive issues, combined with a lack of understanding of important details added more danger signs.¹⁸ In addition, his blatant effort to court the more radical and tyrannical Arab regimes in Syria and Saudi Arabia, and his one-sided arms control policies blocking some Israeli military sales while continuing U.S. sales of advanced weapons to Arab countries contributed to the tensions between Jerusalem and Washington.¹⁹ Following the close (if not always harmonious) working relationship with Kissinger, the combination of substantive, cultural, and personality differences between Rabin and Carter was "disastrous", and Carter and his administration were seen as inexperienced, incompetent, and pro-Palestinian.²⁰

Into this already difficult relationship, Begin's and the Likud's "surprise" election victory on May 17 1977 added yet another level of complexity, for which Carter and his administration were largely unprepared. This marked the first time in 29 years of Israeli independence that a party other than Labor (in various forms) led the government. Begin and Likud replaced familiar figures such as Golda Meir, Allon, Rabin, and Eban. Despite Begin's important role during the emergency and unity governments formed from 1967 through 1970, and his subsequent impact as

head of the opposition afterwards, he was clearly unknown to the State Department and to officials of the Carter Administration, and visa versa. Begin's decision to appoint Moshe Dayan as Foreign Minister was designed, in part, to insure continuity and provide experience, but on key issues, the U.S. still had to deal directly with Begin, as was demonstrated repeatedly throughout the negotiations in the following two years.

As Steven Spiegel (author of *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*) reports, Washington "had not anticipated his victory in the May elections."²¹ In his memoirs, Carter wrote that following the elections, "Israeli citizens, the American Jewish community and I were shocked. None of us knew what to expect".²² This response demonstrates the degree to which Carter and America's foreign policy officials were poorly informed regarding Israeli domestic politics. Although the signs of a possible change in government were visible, in the form of a steady decline in support for Labor following the 1973 Yom Kippur War and corruption scandals, as well as the rising power of the Sephardi population, which strongly supported Begin and Likud, all of this was missed by Middle East policy makers and analysts in the U.S.

Whatever limited knowledge they had regarding Begin and Herut was based largely on the often distorted and hostile images presented by his political and ideological opponents in Israel. Thus, from the beginning, interactions between the Begin and Carter administrations were (dis)colored by terms such as "extremist" and "terrorist". Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (from Hebrew University) observes that Begin's domestic opponents "habitually maligned him as irresponsible and lacking political understanding, and persistently warned that his coming to power would entail war and bloodshed."²³ Many years later, Carter's images have not changed, and he continues to refer to Begin "as a right wing radical leader".²⁴

In sharp contrast to the highly politicized portrayal of Begin as a "war monger" and "extreme nationalist", in reality, as soon as he became Prime Minister, Begin placed the objective of securing a stable peace with Egypt at the top of his agenda.²⁵ Yehuda Avner reports that from his first day in office, "Begin spent his every waking hour transmitting hush-hush feelers to Arab rulers and elaborating a plan for peace", based on his own hand-written "Framework for the Peace-Making Process".²⁶ The decision to appoint Moshe Dayan as Foreign Minister was designed to expedite and highlight this goal²⁷, and from the beginning, Begin took a number of highly visible steps designed to open up direct channels to Sadat and to signal a serious interest in negotiating a full peace agreement. In the aftermath of the 1973 war, Sadat had demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to negotiate limited agreements with Israel, based on indirect discussions conducted through Kissinger and the U.S.

government.²⁸ Begin had always insisted on face-to-face negotiations based on publicly acknowledged mutual acceptance, the principle of equality, and formal treaties, and these objectives formed the core of his policy as Prime Minister. At the end of August, following insistent invitations from Rumania with hints of links to Sadat, Begin went to check for himself, and dispatched Dayan (and other security officials) to New Delhi, Teheran, London (for a meeting with Jordan's King Hussein)²⁹, and to Morocco (for meetings with King Hassan) to explore peace options. However, these actions and declarations, including Begin's detailed statement on this strategy in the Knesset upon presenting his government on June 20³⁰, apparently went unheard and unnoticed in Washington.³¹

From the Israeli perspective, the Carter Administration was clearly and increasingly problematic. Jimmy Carter – a former governor of Georgia – won the 1976 nomination and election in large part as a Washington outsider to remove all traces of the Watergate scandal and the Vietnam War that had dominated the Nixon years. Carter, and most of his closest political aides were neophytes in the realm of international politics, and had very little understanding or experience in the Middle East³², but the new President was obsessed with resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. According to Ambassador Samuel Lewis, “He came to office with the idea that achieving peace in the Middle East was going to be his highest goal, and he set out the day after he took office to try to reach it.”³³ Carter's Baptist background and his commitment to civil rights in the U.S. were expressed in a “missionary effort to bring peace to the Holy Land”³⁴.

Carter's support for “the legitimate needs of the Palestinians” and the adoption of the framework published in the Brookings report redefined the U.S. task as providing an even-handed approach to negotiations, in contrast to being the primary guarantor of Israel's survival. (These two goals were viewed as consistent in Washington, but for many Israeli policy makers and analysts, American “even handedness” left Israel without any allies.) In March 1977, shortly after he was elected, he told a local political gathering in Massachusetts that he endorsed a “homeland for the Palestinian refugees”, essentially putting the PLO and the issue of Palestinian independence squarely onto the U.S. agenda, and without any consultations with Israel or with Jordan on this fundamental change in policy.³⁵ (In December 1973, and again in an MOU linked to the second Sinai disengagement agreement, Kissinger pledged that as long as the PLO rejected UN Security Council Resolution 242 and Israel's right to exist, the U.S. government would refuse to recognize or talk to the PLO.³⁶) In addition, the Carter administration had a strong ideological dislike to the use force to promote diplomatic objectives³⁷ and sought to

promote disarmament at different levels. On this basis, in February 1977, Secretary of State Vance stunned Prime Minister Rabin during their first meeting by announcing that the new administration had decided to renege unilaterally on the agreement to sell cluster bombs to Israel. In Rabin's view, "if it is cluster bombs today, tomorrow it will be something else."³⁸ In contrast to Kissinger's studied step-by-step approach³⁹, that produced two disengagement agreements with Egypt and the first such accord with Syria, the Carter Administration returned to the previous (and unsuccessful) efforts to broker a comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As Touval notes, such attempts, from Bernadotte through Jarring, were "overambitious".⁴⁰ But Carter and his advisors did not share this analysis, and their Middle East policy sought to resolve all the issues, based on the assumption that Palestinian self-determination was the key to peace, stability, and insuring American interests. This messianic approach was taken "almost verbatim"⁴¹ from the plan published by the Brookings Institution (a think tank closely affiliated with the Democratic Party), in which Brzezinski played a central role.⁴² Indeed, it would not be an exaggeration to conclude that the Carter administration was obsessed with these issues, and, as Spiegel notes, saw Middle East peace as the equivalent of world peace.⁴³

These positions were reinforced by Carter's extreme concern about the prospects of another war and Arab oil boycott, which had greatly disrupted the U.S. economy, and whose aftershocks were still being felt. Avoiding such a boycott became a primary goal, or even obsession in the Carter White House, and Arab-Israeli peace, to be gained primarily through pressure on Israel and full cooperation with the Saudis, was perceived as the best way to achieve this.⁴⁴ As Jonathan Rynhold (Bar Ilan University) notes, the Carter administration sought to improve America's standing in the Arab world and Israel was viewed as a strategic liability to the US. "The main aim of US policy was to pressure Israel into making territorial concessions in order to facilitate peace under US auspices. That way, the US would get the credit for such compromises in the Arab world. This 'Arabist' approach saw the resolution of the Palestinian problem as central to America's interest in regional stability."⁴⁵

Thus, when the administration assumed office in January 1977, it moved to implement these goals through acceleration and expansion of the measures that had been started by Henry Kissinger following the 1973 war. Kissinger developed the concept of the loosely knit Geneva conference at an earlier stage as a means of creating a single platform (at least symbolically) in which the Arab countries could sit and jointly discuss issues with Israel, thus providing at least de facto recognition, while at the same time avoiding the syndrome of allowing the most radical element to

veto progress in each bilateral relationship. In December 1973, Kissinger's Geneva conference efforts were upset when the Syrian chose to stay home, but Carter resurrected this framework and made it the cornerstone of his Middle East and foreign policy⁴⁶, including increased cooperation with the Soviet Union as a full, and perhaps even equal partner. Under these conditions, from Israel's perspective, Carter's proposed Geneva conference would bring the Soviets back in, after Kissinger had worked hard and successfully to keep Moscow out of the process. (In contrast to Kissinger, who talked about superpower cooperation and manipulated the symbols, while acting in the opposite manner⁴⁷, the new administration took such language seriously.) In addition, the Carter approach to Geneva would also allow the most radical Arab states (specifically Syria) to determine an Arab consensus, and force Israel to accept a direct role for the PLO terrorists, which, in turn would lead to a PLO-led state controlled by Yassir Arafat.⁴⁸

The preliminary discussions on these issues during the first few months of the Carter administration were held with Prime Minister Rabin and the Labor government in Israel. Already in this stage, bilateral relations were tepid, at best, and at times, extremely difficult. And this shaky foundation was rattled further following Begin's victory in the Israeli elections of May 1977. Yet, before any knowledge of the new government could be gathered, and before a strategy could be carefully conceived in Washington, the Carter Administration sought to define the policy parameters unilaterally. In June, the State Department sought to preempt discussions by declaring that all territories, "including the West Bank" are to be included in forthcoming negotiations.⁴⁹ This intense dispute on core objectives did not provide an auspicious beginning in the relationship between Begin and Carter.

As noted above, Begin entered office with his own carefully considered concepts of how to proceed towards a peace process that would provide long-term stability and security for Israel. Begin immediately tasked Dayan with preparing a memorandum analyzing likely developments and conditions "considered essential for a just and lasting peace". Dayan's June 24 outline presented options for a staged process, with parallel tracks on each front, with major territorial concessions in the Sinai, in a peace agreement with Egypt, and on the Golan Heights with respect to Syria. In Judea and Samaria, in contrast, Dayan's memo did not envision or advocate any diminution of Israeli military and political control.⁵⁰ However, as Defense Minister following the 1967 war, Dayan advocated and implemented a combination of functionalist cooperative frameworks with the Palestinians and with Jordan, and Begin was fully cognizant of this approach.

Begin's concept differed fundamentally from Carter's assumption that Israeli

withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines was the key to peace, (with the possibility perhaps of minor territorial adjustments, and some different arrangements for Jerusalem). In the Carter Administration version, the time frame was somewhat flexible, and could last for up to five years, or, in some versions, even longer, but the principle of withdrawal and dismantling of settlements was not negotiable. The Palestinians would receive a homeland and self-determination, with the issue of sovereignty or perhaps federation with Jordan left open for negotiation.

For Begin, in contrast, most of this package was fundamentally unacceptable, and rather than leading to peace, would increase the threats to Israel's survival. As noted above, Begin and the sector of the Israeli public that he represented, (the majority, based on the election results and his selection as Prime Minister), was committed to maintaining the Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria (Gaza was of lesser importance, but not readily separable). These areas that were seen as vital to Israeli security and survival, encompassed the Biblical heartland of the Jewish people, and were not negotiable, regardless of the stakes involved. On this basis, Begin's policies can be understood as fully consistent with the commitment to pursue the Israeli interest in a peace treaty with Egypt, but not at any price.

As had become customary over the years, new Israeli Prime Ministers went to Washington shortly after entering office, and on July 19, Begin met with Carter and other officials in the new administration. Yehuda Avner, a diplomat who served as an aide to both Prime Minister Rabin in 1976-7, and continued in this position under Begin, has written a detailed account of this critical meeting, and it bears repeating in detail because so much of the Begin-Carter relationship over the following three years was presaged to a major degree in this initial interaction. The encounter began with a highly unusual (for Carter) emphasis on pomp and circumstance in the form of a "flamboyant ceremony fit for a king, replete with a 19-gun salute, a march-past of all the armed services, and a choreographed parade of the Army Old Guard Fife and Drum Corps in the white livery of the Revolutionary War..."⁵¹ Former U.S. Ambassador Samuel Lewis observed, "The president was persuaded that in dealing with Begin honey would get him a lot further than vinegar."

As should have been understood from the beginning, Carter's manipulative flattery and patronizing approach did not prevent Begin from holding his ground, and presenting a passionate statement on the "inalienable rights of the Jewish people to Eretz Yisrael." Begin prepared for this meeting with great intensity, reportedly believing that "once Carter understood that the Land of Israel had been liberated, he would understand."⁵² Avner observed that "This being the first summit between a Likud premier and an American president, Menachem Begin was determined that

Jimmy Carter hear first-hand what he stood for. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, an unruffled man as a rule, became quite agitated upon hearing that Judea, Samaria, and the Gaza Strip were not to be relinquished. He contended that this would put pay to any plan for a Geneva peace conference." Carter, replied "Mr. Prime Minister, my impression is that your insistence on your rights over the West Bank and Gaza would be regarded as an indication of bad faith. It would be a signal of your apparent intention to make the military occupation of these areas permanent. It would be incompatible with my responsibilities as President of the United States if I did not put this to you as bluntly and as candidly as I possibly can."⁵³

The tension between Carter and Begin was exacerbated by the simplistic transfer of the experience from the US civil rights struggle to the Middle East conflict and Palestinian suffering. Carter's general emphasis on human rights in foreign policy led him to stress what he defined as "the deprivation of Palestinian rights, which was contrary to the basic moral and ethical principles of both our countries." Carrying the analogy further, Carter and many of his aides, (including UN Ambassador Andrew Young), saw the key to peace in the form of civil rights for Palestinians, including "the right to assemble and to debate the issues that affected their lives..."⁵⁴

Begin's image was totally reversed. He had dedicated his entire life, decades before he became Prime Minister, to bringing an end to Jewish suffering, and insuring that the generations of discrimination, hatred, genocide, and now, Arab terror would not be allowed to prevail. Begin was convinced that Carter, a man of deep religious conviction and moral passion, would quickly understand the vulnerability of the Jewish nation and the moral justice reflected in Israel's responses. For Begin, it was not Arab suffering that Carter should be addressing, but that of the Jewish people and Israel.

Thus, Begin waited and began his reply slowly. "...What you have just heard about the Jewish people's inherent rights to the Land of Israel may seem academic to you.... But not to my generation. To my generation of Jews these eternal bonds are indisputable and incontrovertible truths, as old as recorded time. They touch upon the very core of our national being. For we are an ancient homecoming nation. Ours is an almost biblical generation of suffering and courage. Ours is the generation of Destruction and Redemption. Ours is the generation that rose up from the bottomless pit of Hell..... We lost a third of our people in one generation - mine. One-and-a-half million of them were children - ours. No one came to our rescue. We suffered and died alone. We could do nothing about it. But now we can. Now we can defend ourselves."⁵⁵

Begin then unfolded a detailed map to explain the reasons why withdrawal to the 1949 armistice ("Green") line would be suicidal. "Gentlemen, there is no going back to those lines. No nation in our merciless and unforgiving neighborhood can be rendered so vulnerable and survive....Sir, I take an oath before you in the name of the Jewish people - this will never ever happen again." Avner reports that Begin's lips began to tremble. "Unseeingly, he stared at the map, struggling to blink back the tears. He clenched his fists and pressed them so tightly against the tabletop, his knuckles went white. He stood there, head bent, heart broke, dignified. A hush, as silent as a vault, settled on the room. Seized by his private, infernal Shoa reverie, he peered past Jimmy Carter with a strange reserve in his eyes, a remote stare."

Having placed his entire personal and political framework before Carter, Begin then sought to avoid an immediate conflict, declaring a willingness to participate in the proposed Geneva peace conference, under very clear conditions. Consistent with his long-standing opposition to partial agreements, any further transfer of territory could only be in the framework of a "true, contractual and effective peace" treaty. Negotiations must be direct, and no outside power could impose a framework.⁵⁶ To prevent further talk of a "Palestinian homeland" or withdrawal from Judea and Samaria, Begin presented the Americans with a model of autonomy for the "Arabs of Judea, Samaria and Gaza", that would stop far short of sovereignty.⁵⁷

This encounter, which was by no means atypical, highlighted the substantive conflicts between the two leaders, compounded by fundamental personal psychological differences that greatly impeded understanding. Carter's mix of Southern Baptist upbringing and engineering approach to complex political and ideological issues had little in common with Begin's Eastern Europe-based Revisionist Zionist background, steeled in the Holocaust. (In the academic literature on the impact of culture on international negotiations, such differences are analyzed in detail.⁵⁸ While Raymond Cohen has examined the "dialogue of the deaf" between the Israeli and Egyptian leaders⁵⁹, the communication and cultural gap between Carter and Begin was no less important in determining the negotiation process. Ultimately, however, both forms of cultural misperception and miscommunication were overcome by the centrality of the common interests in reaching agreement.)

Upon his return, Begin addressed the Knesset to report on his visit, including his response to the Geneva Conference "to be convened by the two chairmen: the US and the USSR, in accordance with clause 3 of Resolution 338..."⁶⁰ Begin indicated that Israel was prepared to go forward in this mode, but only if the terms were consistent with his long-stated requirements. Thus, he informed the Knesset, the Americans had been told that Israeli participation was conditional on an

agreement that the Arab states “will not submit any prior conditions for their participation...”, such as Israeli withdrawal or guarantees regarding the outcome. The work of the conference would take place through three “mixed committees” -- Egypt-Israel, Syria-Israel, and Jordan-Israel.”⁶¹

After this meeting, and through Camp David and beyond, Carter and his aides, including Vance, Brzezinski, Quandt, etc., consistently steered discussions on the Geneva conference, including the role for the Palestinians, towards Dayan, and later, via Weizman, and tried to avoid dealing with Begin. Much of the American effort during this period was focused on gaining Syrian participation (after Assad had left Kissinger waiting at the altar) as well as that of the PLO. In this process, the Carter administration dropped many of Kissinger’s pledges, and issued a torrent of public statements focusing almost exclusively on Israeli settlements as the main obstacle. In meetings designed to reduce the level of conflict, Dayan protested bitterly that the U.S. Administration looked at settlements as if they were the sole cause of the decades long conflict.⁶² The rancor that characterized these meetings was leaked on both sides, further souring the relationship. On October 1, when the U.S. and USSR released a joint statement on the Geneva conference, the tension reached a new level.⁶³ This agreement suddenly brought the Russians and their pro-Arab positions back into the center of Middle East diplomacy (after Kissinger and Sadat had managed to shut them out five years earlier) and included reference to the “legitimate rights of the Palestinian people”, without any prior notice or consultation with Israel (or even analysis by the State Department). This term, which was a major focus of statements by the PLO and Arab leaders, was viewed as code for support of Palestinian statehood, perhaps even more pointedly than in Carter’s call for a “homeland”, and as such was anathema to most of the Israeli political spectrum, including the opposition Labor Party. At this stage, Carter understood that important red lines had been crossed in the relationship with Israel, and Vance met with Dayan in a crisis atmosphere to resolve some of the core differences.⁶⁴

However, the damage was done, and both Begin and Sadat apparently recognized that the Geneva concept was unworkable, and that another path was necessary for them to reach their primary goals. The Geneva conference concept began to lose ground, and the efforts that had been made to find compromise resolutions for the many disputes became irrelevant.⁶⁵

Indeed, Begin and Sadat had already developed an alternative path, based on numerous back-channel communications and the secret meetings between Dayan and Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister Hassan el Tuhami in Morocco in September. After further exchanges, Sadat declared his readiness to come to Jerusalem and

Begin issued an immediate invitation, leading to the historic trip to Jerusalem on November 19 1977.

DETOURING AROUND CARTER

Sadat's unprecedented arrival in Jerusalem, and the carefully crafted speeches, discussions, and exchanges that took place, changed the environment entirely. For Begin, Sadat and Carter, this meant that old conceptions and approaches had to be rethought and new policies developed. Indeed, for the diplomats, leading politicians, military leaders, decision makers, and other members of the foreign policy community, and for the entire Israeli political structure, with its deep involvement in the war and peace issues, this was a major earthquake.

Sadat's decision to go to Jerusalem, to speak directly to Begin and to the Israeli people, and to announce that "we accept to live with you in permanent peace based on justice" and with "full security and safety" was undisputedly bold and heroic, as was also true for Begin's response. It would have been easy for Begin to hesitate, delay or impose conditions that could have led Sadat to reconsider and thus kill the initiative softly, but he did not take this path. Instead, rejecting the warnings of the IDF Chief of Staff and others, Begin welcomed Sadat's initiative without delay or hesitation.

At the same time, although Begin and Sadat exchanged views, staked out positions and repeated hopeful words of "no more war", nothing substantive had been resolved. As the Director General of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Efraim (Eppie) Evron observed, "He made his speech. Then what? He took everyone by surprise, and no one had the courage to say no to him 'But then what?'"⁶⁶ The visit was too short and took place too quickly to allow for anything more than a superficial exchange between the leaders of these two countries that had been at war for decades. Their speeches consisted of general statements of objectives and principles, but did not attempt to examine the details. (Although Begin and Sadat held a private discussion at the King David Hotel, in which details such as demilitarization of the Sinai were reportedly considered, it was far too early in the process to resolve anything.⁶⁷) And as became increasingly clear in the following months, the old images, lack of information, myths and misperceptions remained.

Sadat left Jerusalem to face some criticism at home, as well as deep anger and a political boycott in much of the Arab world, and many regimes broke off diplomatic relations with Egypt. In Washington, the Carter Administration scrambled to catch up with events, in order to avoid becoming irrelevant, and to lose any opportunity to pursue its primary foreign policy goals. The result was to refocus the objectives in order to maintain the momentum established by the breakthrough, help

Sadat to overcome the Arab isolation and rejection (and to avoid losing power at home), and recover lost American influence and control over the process.⁶⁸

Of the three leaders, Menachem Begin found himself in the most complex and difficult position. Once the euphoria from the first open visit by an Arab leader to Israel began to wear off, Begin was keenly aware of the pressures that he would face from many different directions -- both external and internal -- as a result of Sadat's grand gesture. Begin understood the potential benefits from this opening, but also knew that if it failed to result in a peace agreement, Israel would probably be blamed for failure. Having made the grand public gesture and taken a significant risk in terms of his position in the Arab world, Sadat could wait while Begin was pressed to provide a substantive response.

For Begin, this was far from a straightforward or simple matter. While Sadat had indeed broken the long-standing Arab taboos, reiterated in 1967 at the Khartoum summit, he had not given Israel the type of tangible assets that Begin was being pressed to provide in return, such as the immediate return of some territory in the Sinai. Three weeks after Sadat's visit, Carter called on Israel to "meet Sadat's request for a statement on withdrawal"⁶⁹ but Begin rejected what he viewed as a major gamble on Israel's future without a carefully considered plan of action.

Unlike Sadat, who, if not an independent actor, did not face a powerful and well organized domestic political opposition or free press, Begin had to deal with strong critics from both the Labor opposition and from his own party and faction in the Knesset, as well as a hostile press, and angry core constituents, particularly among the settlement community. This important political asymmetry, resulting from the nature of Israeli democracy, was often ignored by the Carter administration, which preferred to deal with both Begin and Sadat as "unitary actors" operating in a domestic political vacuum. Many of the conflicts that occurred during this process can be attributed to this fundamental failure in American understanding.

With Sadat's visit, Washington's role was reduced, at least temporarily, to a messenger service, delivering invitations and responses (still an important role), but without substantive input. The U.S. was out of the picture, and Middle East diplomacy -- the focus and indeed obsession of the Carter administration's foreign policy -- was moving independently. This was not only a major blow to Carter's waning prestige, but also a problem in substantive terms. From the American perspective, the combination of Sadat's Egypt-first approach and Begin's principles created the possibility that the Palestinian issue, which, to the Carter people, was the key and necessary ingredient to regional stability, would be relegated to a secondary or tertiary issue on the agenda. With Begin and Sadat talking directly, and in closed

rooms, the ability of Carter to play a leading role in guiding the peace process in the Middle East according to his objectives and perceptions was severely undercut.

But the displacement of the U.S. from the center of the action did not last long, and following Sadat's departure, the need to build on this breakthrough via institutionalized and focused negotiations quickly brought the Israelis and Egyptians back to Washington for assistance. Sadat's next grand concept was a full-scale "preparatory" conference, including Israel, but also Palestinians, Syrians, etc., at the Mena House in Cairo. This turned out, predictably, to be a flop, and Sadat was quickly scorned and demonized in the Arab world. Further bilateral discussions also revealed major difficulties (particularly when the Israeli-Egyptian Political Committee reached an impasse in January 1978). When Israel and Egypt turned back to the U.S. for assistance, the Carter administration was only too happy to get a chance to regain the influence lost during the previous months of failed and tone-deaf and culturally as well as politically blind diplomacy.

But there were also important substantive issues at stake, based on the understanding that once the effect of the Sadat visit had worn off, and the substantive negotiations began, the Israelis and Egyptians would have difficulty reaching agreement. The view from Washington was that while the bilateral issues between Israel and Egypt were relatively straight-forward and would be quickly resolved, it was necessary to link these developments to broader Middle East peace issues. In a memo to Carter, William Quandt, one of the senior Middle East policy makers, warned that "By striking out at Arab hard-liners, Sadat is paving the way for an Egyptian-Israeli separate agreement ..."⁷⁰, and this was not seen as stable or sufficient in Washington. Ambassador Lewis observed that "Washington feared that Sadat was going to give away the Palestinian cause" and abandon the goal of a comprehensive peace agreement,⁷¹ despite Sadat's declarations to the contrary in his Knesset speech and elsewhere. If this approach had succeeded, and Sadat had refused to sign a treaty without endorsement of other Arab regimes or perhaps waited for a comprehensive agreement, the entire peace process would probably have ended in failure.

However, Sadat's declarations and policies on this and other issues were marked by a high degree of inconsistency, and he talked about tying bilateral agreements between Egypt and Israel to a visible and significant gain for the Palestinians. Sadat often called for full Israeli withdrawal to the "June 4 1967 lines", and the dismantling of all settlements, but he also expressed a willingness to accept arrangements short of full independence for the Palestinians, and supported links to Jordan and limited self-determination.⁷² On this basis, the Americans began to seek

ways to use Sadat's visit as a springboard for pressing the effort to resolve the Palestinian dimension of the conflict. As noted, Carter and his advisors, including Brzezinski, Quandt, and, perhaps to a lesser degree, Vance, came into office with the view that the key to American interests in the Middle East was a resolution of the Palestinian problem, in the form of a "homeland" (widely understood as referring to a sovereign state, although this term was not used). While previous administrations had also expressed opposition to Israeli settlement policy, Carter went significantly further in emphasizing the Palestinian element.⁷³ After recovering from Sadat's shock and the rejection of the Geneva conference route, the Americans sought to use these developments to pursue their unchanged objectives.

When a quick achievement of a "Palestinian homeland" was understood to be unrealistic, the Carter Administration sought to move towards this objective by changing the status quo that had existed since the 1967 war, using the vehicle of a "transitional period". The process would involve "political autonomy", as called for in the Brookings study⁷⁴ for the Palestinians – a convenient term that was presented as consistent (at least in terminology) with Begin's own concepts of "personal autonomy". However, as will be seen below, the similarities were largely superficial, and the U.S. sought to achieve an objective that Begin would not, and, politically, probably could not deliver.

Despite the difficulties uncovered in their first meeting and deep distrust of Carter's objectives and capabilities, Begin and Dayan understood that to make progress following Sadat's visit, it would be necessary to re-involve the Americans in a central role. As the Mena House meeting that took place in December, Begin flew to Washington to meet Carter. In attempting to bridge the gap between his core interests and values, meaning maintaining Israeli sovereignty over Judea and Samaria, and preventing what he saw as the lethal danger of a Palestinian state, Begin had already begun to formulate a detailed framework for autonomy, beyond the outline discussed with Carter in July (as noted above).

As Prime Minister, Begin understood the need to present an alternative proposal to the unacceptable concept of Palestinian statehood in Judea and Samaria that had been adopted by the Carter administration.⁷⁵ For Begin, personal, cultural and limited political autonomy resolved the apparent contradiction between maintaining territorial control of while not being responsible for the Palestinian population. Immediately after he was elected and months before Sadat's visit, Begin developed the autonomy framework as an alternative to the Brookings plan and Carter's "Palestinian homeland" speech.⁷⁶ The outlines had been formed many years, or even decades before, and had been clearly enunciated during Begin's

period in the emergency and unity governments under Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir during and after the 1967 war.⁷⁷ During this period, he had vigorously rejected proposals by Dayan and others that supported autonomy, warning that “the concept of autonomy will lead to a Palestinian state”⁷⁸, which was, as noted, entirely unacceptable.⁷⁹ But, as Yechiel Kadishai has noted, Begin also was familiar with other models of autonomy that did not lead to statehood, and with Jabotinsky’s endorsement of this approach, so that, in time, it became more acceptable.⁸⁰ On this basis, Begin raised the autonomy option with Carter and again in discussions with Secretary of State Vance in August 1977.⁸¹

Thus, immediately after Sadat’s visit, Begin developed a detailed 21-point autonomy plan as an alternative to a joint American and Egyptian demand for full withdrawal back to the 1949-1967 armistice lines and from all of Judea and Samaria.⁸² The proposal included some of Dayan’s political dimensions, such as the establishment of an elected administrative council, ending the military government, the choice of Israeli or Jordanian citizenship, and freedom of movement, and did not assert Israeli sovereignty over these regions, but left the issue open.⁸³

CARTER ACCUSES BEGIN: ROUND 1

Begin presented the plan to Carter in Washington on December 16 and 17, in the hope of obtaining Washington’s support in gaining Sadat’s acceptance.⁸⁴ Begin’s autonomy was a far cry from the Brookings plan and Carter’s “Palestinian homeland” proposal, and to the Americans, this effort was interpreted as an attempt to avoid conceding the West Bank by focusing on Sinai and diverting attention “from the Geneva path”.⁸⁵ Despite the fundamental changes in the environment set off by Sadat’s visit, Carter Administration officials remained locked into the Geneva concept for months afterwards.⁸⁶ Brzezinski immediately concluded that Begin’s approach was “certainly not sufficient for Sadat”, and recommended using the plan as a foundation for Palestinian self-rule, “making it not the final point in negotiations but a place or step along a broader continuum that would lead to something closer to Palestinian self-determination.”⁸⁷ This was clearly the opposite of Begin’s intention.

Even prior to Begin’s arrival, the Americans had already decided that his autonomy framework was “disappointing”, and Carter declared that he was prepared to apply pressure on this issue.⁸⁸ A few days earlier, Vance had sent a cable summarizing his Middle East swing in which he noted that “Begin’s plan for the West Bank and Gaza would be very far from what Sadat wanted.”⁸⁹ According to Quandt, “Before Begin arrived in Washington, Carter and his advisors had agreed that they should not be seen as endorsing Begin’s proposals.”⁹⁰

Nevertheless, in his discussions with Begin, Carter responded enthusiastically to the Israeli proposal, terming it “constructive” and “a fair basis for negotiation”.⁹¹ Perhaps Carter sought to melt some of the ice that was created in his contentious first meeting with Begin,⁹² but the President’s behavior suggests that other factors and goals were also involved. At the end of the discussion, Carter phoned Sadat to suggest “that he take Begin’s proposal seriously, though it would not meet all his expectations about the Palestinians.”⁹³ This response may have reflected a basic misunderstanding of the details, or been designed to return the Americans to the center of the action, or maybe an effort to prepare Sadat and prevent what the Americans feared would be a major disagreement. (Carter also sought to avoid a situation in which an angry Begin would gain Congressional endorsement for this autonomy plan, thereby furthering weakening the bargaining power of the White House in this contest.⁹⁴)

Regardless of the intention, Carter’s endorsement and call to Sadat was followed by a bitter personal disagreement between the Americans and Israelis over the content and response of this discussion of autonomy. The conflict presaged the dispute at the Camp David summit in 1978 over Carter’s claims and accusations that Begin had reneged and regarding a freeze on settlement activity. According to Carter, the plan that Begin presented to Sadat one week later in Ismailiya on December 25 1977, was not the same as the one presented in Washington, and “was attenuated substantially”.⁹⁵ Carter’s accusation was not immediate, and after the Begin-Sadat meeting, he praised Begin’s “flexibility”.⁹⁶ A few days later, press reports claimed that Sadat was “unhappy with Carter’s stand”⁹⁷, and then the White House voiced its criticism directly and repeatedly.

Some analysts attribute the alleged changes to the results of an intense debate that took place during a seven-hour Israeli cabinet meeting on December 22, in which Cabinet ministers questioned the plan in detail, warning that “autonomy for the Arabs of Judea and Samaria” would lead to statehood.⁹⁸ To obtain approval on this still secret proposal, Begin agreed to some small modifications, including the introduction of a five-year review period, a statement that the question of sovereignty would remain open, exemption of the Israeli settlers from the authority of the administrative council, and explicit responsibility of the Israeli authorities for security and public order. Other changes reflected the American input, such as the introduction of an official role for Jordan in the form of participation in a joint committee to deal with refugee issues and legislation (Jordanian law was still being applied in Judea and Samaria.)⁹⁹

However, the differences between the two texts were minimal, with the later

version reflecting some clarifications that did not alter the substance, or explain Carter's quick switch from enthusiastic endorsement to angry denunciation. Begin's basic framework -- cultural and limited political autonomy, without a basis for Palestinian sovereignty, the removal of settlements, or an end to Israeli security control -- remained unchanged. Indeed, after the Cabinet meeting, Begin reaffirmed his support for the autonomy plan, declaring that although his belief in Jewish historic rights in Judea and Samaria had not changed, "certain realities" have to be taken into consideration.¹⁰⁰ After the meeting with Sadat, Begin made the full 26 point proposal public in a presentation to the Knesset, and following a difficult debate, in which the internal opposition from within Begin's own constituency was intense, Begin won endorsement by a massive majority.¹⁰¹

Israeli officials, such as the Director General of the Prime Minister's Office Eliyahu Ben-Elisar strongly rejected Carter's allegations, reiterating that no significant changes in the document regarding Judea and Samaria had been made.¹⁰² Similarly, William Quandt notes that "the proposals were not 'attenuated substantially' as Carter maintained. (It is possible that some of the issues that Begin might have indicated a willingness to consider during the discussions with Carter regarding the scope of authority for the Administrative Council were not incorporated in the version shown to Sadat.)"¹⁰³

Beyond the substantive disagreement, the allegations of changes in Begin's plan between the presentations to Carter and to Sadat ten days later became a major source of rancor in the personal and political relationships. Kenneth Stein argues that "Carter thought he had obtained something more forthcoming from Begin than he had given, and Begin thought he had received Carter's endorsement for his Palestinian self-rule proposals."¹⁰⁴ As a result, "Carter felt that Begin manipulated what he heard and what he did not hear for his own purposes..... This would not be the last time that Carter and the administration thought or claimed they heard Begin say one thing and found out later it meant something else."¹⁰⁵

This conflict and the role of cognitive dissonance in reinforcing previously held images, highlighted Carter's inexperience, as seen in his endorsement of Begin's proposal when it was first presented including the phone call to Sadat, followed by the frontal attack. After Begin had left, Carter and his advisors looked at the proposal's details and implications more carefully, particularly with respect to their own preferences for a political agreement based on Palestinian sovereignty. At this point, Carter might have realized that he had made an error in adopting the proposal without careful analysis, but rather than admitting this mistake, the administration blamed Begin for changing the program. Whatever the reason, this incident

damaged the relationship significantly, and Begin came back to this issue on a number of occasions. For example, a month later, in a meeting with Vance on January 16, before the opening of the meeting of the political committee, Begin quoted from the record of this meeting with Carter, to which Quandt adds “as if to imply that Carter had endorsed his proposals.”¹⁰⁶ As far as Begin was concerned, Carter had indeed endorsed his proposals, and then accused Begin of improper behavior in order to back away from this support. From Begin’s perspective, such personal conduct, particularly from the President of the United States, was clearly exceptional, unexpected, and a major violation of the basic rules of diplomacy.

CATER VS. BEGIN AT CAMP DAVID: ROUND TWO

The conflict and the distrust, in both the personal and the political dimensions, grew steadily during the rest of the negotiations until the treaty was finally signed in March 1979. The December 1977 conflict over the autonomy plan was repeated, with even greater consequences, in the final intense sessions of the Camp David summit in September 1978. This summit took place after months of talks between Israeli and Egyptian officials at different levels, and very difficult exchanges between Begin and Carter, including a session in Washington that took place in March 1978, in which many of the substantive, cultural and personality-based clashes were repeated.¹⁰⁷ Carter and his aides seemed to be unaware of the impact of events in Israel, including major PLO terror attacks and the intense policy debates that were taking place.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, the continued discussions and pressure from Washington led to a gradual closing of differences on arrangements in the Sinai (particularly during the Leeds Castle talks in the UK during July).

In pursuing the Camp David summit, the Carter Administration based its hopes on a successful outcome on a strategy in which Sadat would introduce a clearly unacceptable proposal that would be rejected by Begin, allowing Carter to enter as the “neutral” third party (or “full partner – a concept that was never accepted by Israel, which emphasized direct negotiations¹⁰⁹), imposing an agreement on both sides. (According to Brzezinski, “ we prepared an outline of what might be in such an Egyptian initiative, what elements of it would be deliberately exaggerated, and how the United States might then both ‘compel’ Egypt to compromise and apply maximum leverage on Israel to accommodate.”)¹¹⁰ But despite this secret strategy, the general perception in Jerusalem, Cairo¹¹¹ and Washington (with the exception of Carter) was that, at best, Camp David would result in a broad consensus framework that would become the basis for detailed negotiations on the two major tracks, as well as on the linkage between them. In a preparatory session a few days before the opening of the

summit, Quandt reports “none of us thought a full agreement would be worked out...Instead, we hoped that a few key principles could be developed.”¹¹²

For Sadat and for Begin, one central component was the competition for the support of the U.S. government, and while Begin feared that he and Israel would be blamed for failure, Sadat prepared for exploiting the expected rift between Jerusalem and Washington in which Cairo would be able to improve its standing. A close aide, Tahseen Bashir, stated that Egyptian ambassadors were prepared for a post-failure offensive that would “place the blame squarely on Israel”.¹¹³

Failure or even partial agreement was certainly not on Carter’s agenda. Before spending an unprecedented two weeks locked away at Camp David focusing exclusively on the negotiations, the U.S. president prepared intensely for this summit, including pouring over detailed psychological profiles of the main participants, prepared by the CIA. Carter’s propensity for “personal diplomacy”, based on the questionable belief that international relations, in general, and the outcome of negotiations, in particular, are the result of personal relations between leaders, rather than perceived national and political interests, was a central feature of his Camp David strategy.¹¹⁴ Quandt reports that “For Carter, the psychology of the meeting seemed to be more important than the issues or the strategy.”¹¹⁵ In this context, he had the CIA prepare “psychological portraits” of Sadat and Begin, which, as Jerrold Post reports, “significantly informed ... Carter's understanding of the protagonists and the strategy he developed for the conduct of the negotiations. Indeed, according to Carter, they were among the most important influences upon the strategy and tactics of his personal diplomacy with Begin and Sadat.”¹¹⁶

Expanding the approach developed previously, Carter kept Begin and Sadat apart, while relying on Dayan, Weizman and Barak to “deliver” the Israeli concessions. In justifying this tactic, American officials claimed that Sadat and Begin were unable to get along, and in his memoirs, Carter stated that Sadat was repelled by Begin’s behavior.¹¹⁷ But on this issue as well, the evidence is at best unclear. There were major substantive difference between the two leaders, but this is not the same as and may be unrelated to the nature of the personal relationship. (In rejecting Carter’s claims, Yehuda Avner notes that after Begin’s heart attack in 1980, Sadat began a 14-page handwritten complaint about Israel’s decision to annex Jerusalem with “a solicitous inquiry” regarding Begin’s health. “This was no mere flummery. Although the pairing of the two men had seemed an unlikely affair at the start, they had by now genuinely taken to each other.”¹¹⁸) The two leaders disagreed on many issues, but the evidence to support Carter’s oft-repeated assertion that this substantive disagreement prevented direct negotiations, or that the personal

relationship dictated respective negotiating positions, remains ambiguous.

Based on the separation approach, after the initial sessions and with the exception of the group excursion to the Gettysburg battlefield, "Begin and Sadat met occasionally on walksBut for the most part, except for the first few days..., Begin and Sadat did not spend prolonged periods of time together."¹¹⁹ Carter and the Americans also sought to avoid negotiations with Begin, and it is not surprising that Begin dismissed Carter's claims to be "honest and fair in my role as mediator and active negotiator".¹²⁰ In Carter's version it was Sadat who "was convinced that Begin did not want an agreement and would try to delay progress as much as possible", resulting in the decision to separate them, but another explanation is that Carter projected or attributed his own personal dislike of Begin to the Egyptian leader.¹²¹ (In sharp contrast, in their versions of this history, Carter and his aides fail to mention reports that Sadat came to Camp David with the expectation of a failed outcome for which Begin and Israel would be blamed.¹²²)

At the same time, by separating Begin and Sadat, Carter's role as mediator and go-between became critical to the outcome. Indeed, at Camp David (and in the months of negotiations that followed), Carter demonstrated his determination to broker compromises and maintain the momentum in the face of and despite the instances in which Sadat or Begin declared a readiness to "scrap the negotiations".¹²³

However, after 12 days of discussions and negotiations, 23 drafts¹²⁴, and various crises, the Camp David summit remained deadlocked over key issues on the Egyptian-Israeli and Palestinian autonomy tracks, as well as the linkage between them. While the less critical dimensions could be resolved at lower levels, involving ministers and advisors, Carter belatedly realized that the earlier strategy of isolating Begin had failed. Decisions on the major questions required Begin's full involvement, and at the end of the Jewish Sabbath, on Saturday night, September 16, Carter had no choice but to return to Begin for negotiations on the critical issues.

The leaders quickly agreed to disagree on some issues, such as Jerusalem and the use of terms such as West Bank or Judea and Samaria, through the exchange of letters in which each side could state its position. Begin reluctantly conceded in accepting the use of the "legitimate rights of the Palestinian people", as distinct from "Palestinian nation", claiming that such an ambiguous phrase was consistent with his concept of personal autonomy, and did not imply acceptance of statehood.¹²⁵ He also gained Carter's agreement to add "Administrative Council" after "self-governing authority", to distinguish this proposed body from a sovereign legislature. Similarly, Begin's other proposals for changes in the text were generally accepted by Carter, such as regarding interpretations of UNSCR 242 under the

mistaken assumption that these were of little significance in the long run. As Quandt notes, Carter claims to have belittled the importance of these linguistic changes at the time, apparently (mistakenly, again) assuming that Begin's words could be renegotiated or reinterpreted later.¹²⁶ (However, according to Jerrold Post, prior to Camp David, Carter had noted Begin's "preoccupation with language, names, and terms."¹²⁷)

At this stage, Begin accepted a very painful and difficult concession that had been hanging in the air since Dayan's initial discussions with Tuhami in Morocco, and Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, by agreeing to dismantle the Israeli settlements in Sinai. In both public statements and closed strategy meetings with his top advisors immediately before the summit meeting, Begin repeated the pledge to reject pressures to close the Israeli settlements¹²⁸, restating his promise to spend his retirement years in one of the Israeli villages in the Sinai. (One of the major shortcomings of the Begin government was the failure to prepare for key decisions, including Camp David, in a systematic manner by developing strategies based on likely scenarios and simulations.) Begin and Dayan sought to retain settlements under Egyptian sovereignty, particularly in the Rafiah area and along the coast, along with Israeli military protection for them. But they also came to the realization that for Sadat and the Egyptians, this was unthinkable and unacceptable.

Thus, after long and difficult negotiations, Begin agreed to relinquish the settlements and air bases in Sinai (to soften the blow, Begin insisted that the Knesset be allowed to consider this proposal, confident that it would be approved¹²⁹), and the U.S. pledged to finance the costs of replacement facilities in Israel. As Elyakim Rubenstein reports, Begin "simply decided that he could not forgo the opportunity", and was also aware of the criticism and pressure" if he was blamed for the failure of the negotiations.¹³⁰ In this way, Begin met Sadat's key demand for full restoration of sovereignty, and removal of all traces of Israeli presence in the Sinai following the 1967 war (except Taba, which was returned after arbitration). In this way, Sadat finally achieved the objective that he sought in initiating the 1973 Yom Kippur War. For Begin, this was very difficult, in part because it erased the penalties for Egypt's decisions to wage aggressive wars, and was thus seen as a dangerous precedent that undermined deterrence of future Arab attacks.

Not surprisingly, the final issue on the table was autonomy -- the future of the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians -- that, from the beginning, was far more central in the concerns of Carter and the Americans than to Sadat. In fact, in the final and most critical negotiation session, there were no Egyptians in the room, reflecting the reality that this dimension was primarily an American-Israeli issue.

Quandt, Stein, and many others note that Sadat achieved all of his goals with respect to Sinai, and was willing to accept Begin's "basic West Bank/Gaza position".¹³¹ Thus, once the issues related to Egypt were agreed, Carter became Begin's main negotiating adversary.

Carter's immediate goal, which was still based on the Brookings formula, was to press Begin to freeze all settlement activity during the autonomy negotiations and "to establish the institutions of self-government in the West Bank and Gaza".¹³² The Americans began the session by introducing a proposal to freeze all activity related to land and building, and as well as on the numbers of settlers, but this was a non-starter. Carter's next draft stated: "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 by the negotiating parties."¹³³ This was not much different, and Begin again rejected it, since an indefinite settlement freeze was tantamount to announcing the eventual abandonment of Israeli claims in Judea and Samaria.

Carter kept trying, even at 1:30 AM, and proposed different terms in the effort to achieve the same outcome. Despite the late hour and the exhaustive parrying, Begin stuck to the red lines he had presented in his first meeting with Carter over one year earlier. At last, Begin agreed to a three-month moratorium during the final negotiations with Egypt on the bilateral elements of the treaty, to provide the appearance of linkage. Carter kept pressing for more, and Begin said that he would consider his request. His answer would be included in a letter to be delivered to Carter the next day, and at this point, the meeting ended.¹³⁴

The next morning, Begin duly sent the letter, which included agreement to a three month freeze tied to the negotiations with Egypt. But Carter then claimed that Begin reneged on the agreement of the previous night. Quandt notes that "Five people—Carter, Vance, Begin, Dayan, and Barak—were direct participants in the meeting at which the settlements were discussed, and each has given his own version."¹³⁵ In Carter's version, the agreed text read: "After the signing of the framework and during the negotiations, no new Israeli settlements will be established in this area. The issue of future Israeli settlements will be decided and agreed among the negotiating parties. 'It is clear and obvious that the negotiations applied to the West Bank and Gaza."¹³⁶ Carter argued that since the discussions that evening focused on the autonomy negotiations, it was implicit that a freeze for the duration of the negotiations referred to these discussions, and not to the Egyptian-Israeli treaty.

However, Carter's claims are contradicted by all of the evidence. Having repeatedly and unequivocally rejected various formulations that would have

amounted to an indefinite halt to settlements, the claim that Begin had suddenly folded, and accepted Carter's demand, is not credible. (The next morning, when the Americans delivered the draft of their letter on Jerusalem, Begin also rejected that language, further demonstrating that on red-line issues, he had not and would not retreat.¹³⁷)

Even under extensive pressure to side with their boss – the President of the United States – Quandt, Vance, and others are, at most, equivocal on this point. In his memoirs, Vance attempted to bolster Carter's version, claiming, without substantiation, that Begin changed his position when he became aware of the adverse reaction of Israeli public opinion.¹³⁸ But Vance's notes from the meeting itself reflect Begin's unwavering refusal to commit to a freeze beyond three months.¹³⁹ Similarly, Ambassador Sam Lewis has also reported that "Begin was quite determined about what he believed he agreed to and certainly never admitted any doubt."¹⁴⁰

The other Israelis who were present also backed Begin's version. Dayan reported that Begin had only agreed to consider the president's proposals and to give him an answer the next day.¹⁴¹ Aharon Barak's limited public discussion of this session also backs this version of the events, and Quandt paraphrases his notes, confirming "that Carter asked for Begin's agreement on a settlement freeze during the autonomy talks, to which Begin responded that he would think about it and would give Carter his answer the following day."¹⁴²

In contrast to Carter's claims, and as the case of the previous friction with Carter in December 1977, Begin again sought to reduce the friction, realizing that a public brawl would not serve Israel's interests. In an interview a few days later, Begin said "There are some divergences of opinion about what was actually agreed upon on this issue. But as my two colleagues Dayan and Barak who were with me during the conversation with President Carter are now in Israel, I just have to consult them."¹⁴³ In his earlier publications, Quandt sought to support Carter and asserted that Begin exhibited hesitation and even confusion as to what was agreed. But Quandt also cites Barak's notes in support of Begin's version. And while Quandt makes the best case possible in support of Carter's version, stating that "Carter and Vance felt they had Begin's essential agreement on all points", in the end, he is forced to acknowledge that the case is weak. "It is clear from most accounts that Begin did say something about a freeze for only three months though he apparently implied that it could be extended. It seems most likely that on Saturday night Begin did not give Carter a firm agreement to a freeze on settlements for the duration of the autonomy negotiations. But he may have wanted to leave the president with

the impression that such an agreement had almost been reached.”¹⁴⁴

Since his days as a prisoner in the Soviet camps, Begin always chose his words with extreme care, even in the most difficult of circumstances, and the Americans should have known this.¹⁴⁵ Begin was apparently trying to avoid saying “no” explicitly to the President of the United States, and to avoid Carter’s threat to blame him for failure, but he was clearly not saying yes, despite the late hour and tremendous pressure that he faced. In an understatement, Stein writes, “This disagreement soured their relations for the remainder of Carter’s administration and thereafter. Because Carter openly and publicly disagreed with the Israeli prime minister over a highly sensitive issue of Israeli prerogative, the settlements controversy repeatedly soiled Carter’s already suspicious relationship with the American Jewish community as well....”¹⁴⁶ Indeed, “No unresolved issue clouded U.S.-Israeli relations more than the settlements controversy.”¹⁴⁷

The battle for support of the American Jewish community was another important dimension of the conflict. For Carter, the support of the Jewish leadership was critical, not only in terms of domestic politics, but also with respect to the success of the negotiation effort. Thus, Spiegel notes, “Carter repeatedly sought aid from American Jewish leaders in pressing Begin to make concessions.... Snafus, leaks, and misstatements constantly kept Israel’s supporters aware that the administration was at odds with Jerusalem and with their own preferences for U.S. policy.”¹⁴⁸ But Carter continued to work to turn the Jewish leadership against Begin, particularly using the false claim that the Israeli leader had failed to keep his promises.

In his defense, it is possible that Carter genuinely misunderstood Begin’s ambiguous language, or, in psychological terms related to cognitive dissonance theory, may have been unable to accept the fact that he had failed to move the Israeli leader, whom he never really understood. Thus, Stein writes “Carter believed that after he had met with Begin on September 16, he had a commitment from the Israeli prime minister to halt [settlement construction] for the duration of the negotiations.”¹⁴⁹

However, other evidence indicates that Carter was aware of Begin’s refusal to go beyond the three months, but still claimed the contrary. When, as agreed, Begin sent the letters on Sunday September 17, Carter declared that they did not reflect what had been agreed. Quandt notes that “A red flag should have gone up for Carter when he read the Begin letter on settlements in the West Bank and Gaza. In black and white Begin had spelled out that a freeze on settlements would take place for only the three-month period set for the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations. Carter told Barak this was unacceptable, and read to him from his notes of the previous evening

where he had written down the formulation he thought Begin had accepted.” (Later, Carter claimed that Barak had confirmed his version, but Carter’s ambiguous memo at the time noted that Barak “did not disagree with the agreed text.”)¹⁵⁰ Quandt concludes that “At this time Carter knew that he did not have a clear-cut agreement with Begin ... It was an act of faith, to say the least, to think that Begin would change his mind and sign the text of the letter Carter had requested.”¹⁵¹

But Carter’s behavior in this conflict reflected far more than another example of the President’s propensity for “acts of faith”. On Sunday, before getting Begin’s letter, Carter eagerly told Sadat that “he had obtained Begin’s promise about the settlements”.¹⁵² When Begin refused to budge, “Carter’s prestige was on the line with Sadat for having made a promise he thought he had before finding out that he did not have that *exact* promise.”¹⁵³

However, as Stein notes, Sadat “did not care very much about the settlements freeze” and a few days later, Sadat accepted Begin’s terms, stating that the freeze on settlements was limited to the three-month period.¹⁵⁴

Carter, who claimed to be only acting as a mediator between the parties in this task, would not accept success, and continued to fight with and accuse Begin of obstructing the negotiation, and far worse.¹⁵⁵ Six years later, Carter wrote that his most serious omission had been in “not clarifying in writing Begin’s promise concerning the settlement freeze during the subsequent peace talks.”¹⁵⁶ This is a further distortion of the record -- if Carter had been able to succeed in forcing Begin’s hand on this issue, he certainly would have. This was not a mere technical error or omission, but the clear result of the negotiation process, in which Carter had failed to achieve his objective on this central issue. As Dayan notes, “The truth was that if the US President wanted clear and specific commitments from us, he should have demanded and tried to get them before the signing of the Camp David accords. Since he was then satisfied with the limited commitment Begin was prepared to give, he could not now blame us but only himself.”¹⁵⁷

Instead, Carter has continued to blame Begin, using increasing blunt and hostile language to distort the evidence and attempt to rewrite events, covering up his own failures in the process. In his memoirs, Carter wrote “My notes are clear—that the settlements freeze would continue until all negotiations were completed—and Cy Vance confirms my interpretation of what we decided.”¹⁵⁸ And in a 1991 interview with Kenneth Stein, Carter went further, adding a major and totally unjustified insult, long after Begin was no longer able to set the record straight. This time, Carter declared, “I think Begin deliberately sabotaged the whole thing with the damn settlements. He knows he lied. He hadn’t left Camp David twelve hours before

he was under tremendous [domestic] pressure. And when Begin and Sadat and I walked into the Capitol Monday night to give my report to the world, Sadat and I took Begin to the side and really gave him a hard time because he had just totally betrayed the spirit of the commitments of Camp David. There was never any equivocation when we left Camp David about the fact that there would be no settlements during the interim period, during which we would be negotiating the final peace agreement. That was absolutely and totally understood."¹⁵⁹ Begin was no longer able to respond, but the historical record, as presented above, clearly does not support Carter's allegations.

This conclusion is further reinforced by the continued efforts by Carter to rewrite other parts of the Camp David outcome, including the text of the agreements themselves. In a lengthy interview with CNN on the occasion of receiving the Nobel Prize in December 2002, Carter claimed that in the Camp David Accords, "Israel agreed to withdraw their military and political forces from the West Bank and Gaza." In fact, none of these claims can be found in the agreed text, and as has been shown, Begin rejected all of Carter's efforts to force acceptance of these terms. Similarly, although Begin agreed to the inclusion of United Nations Resolution 242 in the preamble to the agreement, he repeatedly and explicitly rejected Carter's interpretation that this text "prohibits the acquisition of territory by force and calls for the withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories." During the CNN interview, Carter also asserted, falsely, that "leaders from within the Israeli government decided to forget or to ignore or to violate those commitments that they had made. And so Israel has since then continued to occupy or colonize the West Bank and Gaza, ..."¹⁶⁰ Carter's language has not changed since his "Palestinian homeland" comments in 1977, and he seems to be unable to accept the fact that he failed to convince not only Begin, but all of Israel's democratically elected leaders since then, to accept his policy prescription. In this sense as well, Carter has created an alternative version of Camp David that is not supported by the evidence.

WHERE CREDIT IS DUE: BEGIN'S CENTRALITY TO THE PEACE AGREEMENT

While all three leaders – Begin, Sadat and Carter – deserve the accolades that they received for seeing this difficult and unprecedented negotiation through to a successful conclusion, the previously published and accepted accounts of the process, particularly with respect to the contributions of Begin and Carter, need to be revised. Carter's preaching, his "penchant for self-righteousness"¹⁶¹ the misplaced moral sympathy for "Palestinian suffering", and the antagonistic and unsympathetic behavior towards Begin could easily have caused the entire negotiating effort to fail.

Just as Begin's election caught Washington unprepared, officials, including Carter, were unable to comprehend and respond to the changes in the Israeli leadership following the end of Labor Party domination. To some degree reflecting the attitude of Israel's Labor Party leadership, the Americans generally viewed Begin and the Likud government as a fluke – a passing phase that would soon be over, with power returning to the “traditional” Israeli leadership with whom Carter, Brzezinski, Vance, Quant, et al, were more comfortable (perhaps forgetting the sharp friction experienced with Rabin). Begin's conception of Israeli national interests, his strong commitment to maintaining Jewish historical rights in Judea and Samaria, his perception of Israeli security as extremely fragile, and his belief that the creation of a Palestinian state would mean the end of Israel, were entirely anathema to Carter, the narrow technocratic problem-solver and “peace-making engineer”.¹⁶²

For Carter and his aides, Begin's unshakable commitment to maintaining Israeli control over Judea and Samaria – both to avoid the perceived existential threat from a PLO-led Palestinian State and also because of the historical links to this land – was unacceptable. Other U.S. administrations before and after Carter disagreed with Israeli settlement policy, and called for a freeze or withdrawal as part of a peace agreement, but the extent of the clash on this issue was never so wide. From Carter's perspective, Begin's refusal to relinquish the West Bank and consider Palestinian self-determination and a homeland, in any format, was tantamount to blocking all hope for resolving the Middle East conflict. But despite his strongest efforts, Carter could not get Begin to accept this view. To reach the framework agreement at Camp David and the subsequent Treaty, both Begin and Carter were forced to accept major compromises, which Carter appeared to resent long after the events.

As demonstrated, the Americans also appeared not to comprehend the political environment in which Begin functioned, or perhaps understood but sought to alter this environment by helping to return the Labor Party to power. But even if they could engineer this political change, the Labor party was too weak and its leadership too divided to make and implement the type of decisions that Begin and his government were making. Kissinger's difficult experiences in attempting to negotiate terms of the disengagement agreements with the Labor led-governments after the 1973 war should have led Carter and his advisors to the conclusion that the same problems would resurface. And beyond Israeli domestic political realities, the regional obstacles to comprehensive peace, including the fundamental policies of the PLO leadership, made such a grand resolution of the conflict entirely unrealistic.

Furthermore, on a personal basis, Begin was never respected by the Carter

team, and National Security advisor Brzezinski placed him in the same category as Qaddafi, Khomeini, Brezhnev among leaders who exploited the State Department's emphasis on compromise.¹⁶³ As noted above, Carter even accused Begin of lying, exposing the depth of the antipathy even further.¹⁶⁴ (Begin's concept of protocol and honor precluded personal attacks in response, even after the U.S. elections, although he admitted that he was "disappointed in Jimmy Carter".¹⁶⁵)

Given this perspective, it was still harder for the U.S. to contend with and incorporate the fact that Begin's harshest critics were from his own party and faction in Likud and Herut. It was difficult for the Carter Administration to imagine or understand that Begin's willingness to make compromises, including the closing of settlements and withdrawal from the Sinai, and to accept even limited autonomy in Judea and Samaria, were fiercely rejected by those who accused him of treachery or capitulation to American pressures. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Labor Party and the Israeli Left attacked Begin for not moving quickly enough or for not making generous concessions or taking the security risks that they might have taken had they been in power.¹⁶⁶ From the beginning, Begin was always caught between these different pressures, and chose his political path very carefully.

From Sadat's visit through the final stages of the negotiations, followed by implementation of the treaty and removal of the settlements in Sinai, Begin maneuvered this path carefully and successfully. His Likud-led government was committed to maintaining the Israeli presence in Judea and Samaria, and this commitment was not open to debate or reassessment.¹⁶⁷ In their first meeting and again on many later occasions, Begin told Carter that these areas contained the Biblical heartland of the Jewish people, were vital to Israeli security and survival, and were not negotiable, regardless of the stakes involved.

Begin fervently viewed demands for Palestinian self-determination and sovereignty under the leadership of the PLO as being tantamount to creating the conditions for the destruction of Jewish sovereignty in Israel and the end of the Jewish people. As Begin tried to explain to Carter in their repeated and intense confrontations, the conflict with the Arabs could not be compared to the American civil rights movement, and the attempt to impose this framework was not only misleading but fundamentally immoral. Begin passionately believed but failed to convince Carter that given these circumstances, personal autonomy was the best possible compromise. Instead, Carter continued to insist that Begin's arguments reflected a refusal to take the necessary steps for peace.

However, the record shows that within these limits, Begin understood the benefits of a peace treaty with Egypt, but there were also considerable costs and

risks. As a result, Begin was faced with very difficult choices throughout this process. Far from being an isolated “Prime Minister under Siege”, frozen into inaction, Begin was responsible for the overall strategy and for managing the process at the crucial stages.¹⁶⁸

After the Camp David summit and the negotiation of the framework agreements, Begin continued to pursue these complex objectives. Had he regretted the terms of this agreement, as negotiated tenaciously with Jimmy Carter on the final night of the summit, as Carter and others have claimed¹⁶⁹, Begin had many opportunities to back away from the treaty negotiations and end the process. In particular, he could have used Carter’s personal animosity and accusation, and the efforts to rewrite the agreement reached regarding a settlement freeze, as a basis for ending further discussions. Instead, as the record shows, Begin overcame the deep personal insult and disappointment resulting from the intense disagreement with Carter, and continued to focus on the efforts to implement the Camp David framework into a peace treaty. (Two months after the Camp David meeting, in a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau in Ottawa, Begin noted that the of decision to relinquish Israeli settlements in Sinai for the sake of peace "will be a pain in my heart until the day I die". But once this pain was accepted, it was not subject to revision.¹⁷⁰)

Finally, in reassessing and reconsidering the lessons of these extraordinary negotiations, some of the generally accepted conclusions and implications are shown to be highly problematic. In many ways, the agreement at the end of the Camp David talks was not, as usually portrayed, primarily the result of the full-time involvement of the President of the United States, carefully developed negotiation strategies based on psychological profiling, and a careful manipulation of Israeli decision making structures, but rather, was the result of a complex process initiated by Begin and Sadat, and their perceptions of the supreme interests of their respective nations. The intense mediation efforts of President Carter and his advisors were of course of major importance in bridging the gaps, but they also led to major errors in managing this process. But these errors have largely been hidden from view, and when President Clinton tried and failed to replicate this outcome with Barak and Arafat in July 2000, he and his advisors discovered that deep Presidential involvement was insufficient for agreement.¹⁷¹ In the Middle East, and elsewhere, unless the leaders themselves define their interests in a way that promotes agreement, the isolated setting and full-time direct involvement of the President cannot produce an agreement.¹⁷² In other words, in attempting to understand the singular success of the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations, Begin and Sadat’s contributions

and their commitment to reaching an agreement constituted the essential elements, and without these core conditions, the personal mediation skills of Jimmy Carter, the strategies that he attempted to implement, and the political pressures exerted by the U.S. government, would have remained insufficient.

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⁵⁶ Bar-Siman-tov (1994) p. 24-5

⁵⁷ Stein (1999), p. 200

⁵⁸ E. T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*, New York: Anchor Press, 1976; Jeanne M. Brett, W. Adair, W., et al. "Culture and Joint Gains in Negotiation," *Negotiation Journal*, 14:1, 1998. pp. 61-86; Robert A. Rubenstein, "Cross-cultural Considerations in Complex Peace Operations", *Negotiation Journal*, 19:1 2003 pp. 29-50

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- ⁵⁹ Raymond Cohen, *Culture and Conflict in Egyptian-Israeli Relations: A Dialogue of the Deaf*, Indiana University Press, 1990
- ⁶⁰ Prime Minister's Statement on His Visit to the US, *Sitting 18 of the 9th Knesset*, 27 July 1977, "Major Knesset Debates, 1948-1981" Vol. 6 p.2123
- ⁶¹ *Ibid.* p. 2123
- ⁶² Spiegel, (1985) p. 337
- ⁶³ Spiegel, (1985) p. 338; Stein (1999), p. 205; 213-216
- ⁶⁴ Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of Egypt-Israel Negotiations*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981
- ⁶⁵ The argument that the Geneva process under Carter was, in reality, a form of "pre-negotiation" to "explore the positions of the parties, their willingness to negotiate, and the appropriate forum of negotiation" is not sustainable when compared to the evidence, and highlights the problematic nature of pre-negotiation theories. See Janice Gross Stein (1989)
- ⁶⁶ Stein (1999), p. 228 fn 192
- ⁶⁷ Bar-Siman-Tov, (1994) p. 57; Stein (1999), p. 225-7, fn 191; Interview with Begin, Dan Patir, *Yediot Aharonot*, November 13, 1977; Benziman, (1981) pp, 44-47; Arye Naor, *Begin in Power: A Personal Testimony* (in Hebrew) Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 1993, pp. 147-148.
- ⁶⁸ Stein (1999)
- ⁶⁹ Quandt (1986) p. 153
- ⁷⁰ Quandt (1986) p. 152
- ⁷¹ Quoted in Stein (1999), p. 232; see also Touval, (1982) p. 291
- ⁷² Quandt, (1986) p. 197; Stein, (1999), pp. 170-1
- ⁷³ Spiegel, (1985) pp. 320, 332 In contrast, Stein (1999, pp. 180-6) argues that there was significant continuity between the Ford and Carter with respect to the increasing importance of the Palestinian dimension, and he cites Congressional testimony by Harold Saunders in November 1975 referring to "the legitimate interests of the Palestinian Arabs". However, there is also considerable evidence against the claim of continuity, and neither Ford nor Kissinger made any reference to a Palestinian "homeland".
- ⁷⁴ Cited by Stein (1999), p. 182
- ⁷⁵ Malka Rabinowitz, "Begin hopes to forestall U.S.-Egyptian front" *Jerusalem Post* 16 Dec. 1977 p. 1
- ⁷⁶ Stein (1999), p. 200; Prime Minister's Statement on His Visit to the US, *Sitting 18 of the 9th Knesset*, 27 July 1977, "Major Knesset Debates, 1948-1981" Vol. 6 p. 2125; and Bar-Siman-Tov, p. 64
- ⁷⁷ Begin's views during this period were expressed in his Knesset speeches, at meetings of the Herut faction, in public gatherings. See, for example, Begin's answer to a question (Sheilta) in the Knesset, 1 January 1969 *Divrey Hakneset*, vol 53.
- ⁷⁸ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2002. p. 314
- ⁷⁹ Yitzchak Rabin, *Pinkas Sherut*, (Hebrew), 2 vols. (Ma"ariv, Tel .Aviv, 1979), vol. I pp. 227-8
- ⁸⁰ Haber et al, (1979) pp. 172-3; Stein (1999) p. 233 , (citing Zav Jabotinsky, *Hazit HaMilhamah shel 'Am Yisrael'* (Jerusalem: Lipshutz Press, 1941), pp. 182-192; Weizman (1981) p. 121, Sofer (1988) p. 131-4; Naor (1993) p. 154-5; Shmuel Katz, *The Hollow Peace* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1981, p. 193; Bar-Siman-Tov (1994) p. 64; Quandt (1986) p. 155, citing Oscar K. Rabinowicz, *Vladimir Jabotinsky's Conception of a Nation*
- ⁸¹ Bar-Siman-tov (1994) p. 65, citing Dayan, p. 58 (According to Bar-Siman-Tov, in this version, Begin included Israeli citizenship and voting rights for Palestinians who chose to exercise this option.)
- ⁸² Bar-Siman-Tov (1994) p. 65; Quandt (1986) p. 155 Malka Rabinowitz, "Begin reveals part of peace plan in CBS interview-self-rule for territories, Jerusalem stays united" *Jerusalem Post*, 19 December 1977 p.1
- ⁸³ Bar-Siman-Tov (1994) p. 65; Quandt (1986) p. 155
- ⁸⁴ According to Quandt, Begin surprised Vance by announcing that he intended to go to Washington to present to Carter his ideas on home rule, particularly considering Begin's policy of "not coordinating with Washington" in the past. Quandt (1986) p. 153. Bar-Siman-Tov, whose narrative and analyses are often based on Dayan's version of events, claims that the trip to Washington to obtain Carter's support was Dayan's idea. p. 69
- ⁸⁵ Stein (1999), fn 15
- ⁸⁶ Wolf Blitzer, "U.S. pleased Begin- Sadat talks stress Geneva" *Jerusalem Post*, 22 Nov.

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- 1977 p.1; Wolf Blitzer, "U.S. 'reassures' Sadat after lukewarm response to meeting" *Jerusalem Post*, 2 Dec. 1977 p.1
- ⁸⁷ Stein (1999) p. 236, fn 23 and p. 242; Quandt (1986) p. 157; Brzezinski (1983) pp. 115-120
- ⁸⁸ "Carter: Will tell Begin if his offer falls short" (No Author) *Jerusalem Post*, 16 Dec. 1977. p.1.
- ⁸⁹ Quandt (1986), p. 154
- ⁹⁰ Quandt, (1986) p. 155
- ⁹¹ Quandt, (1986) p. 157; Malka Rabinowitz, "Carter seen backing Israelis new offer" *Jerusalem Post* 18 Dec. 1977. p. 1.
- ⁹² Yehuda Avner, "The day Jimmy Carter was reduced to silence", *Jerusalem Post*, September 16 2003
- ⁹³ Stein (1999), p. 235, fn 17
- ⁹⁴ Quandt, (1986) p. 157
- ⁹⁵ Stein (1999) p. 234-5 fn 18; Quandt (1986) p. 158; Carter, (1982), p. 300
- ⁹⁶ Murray Marder, "Carter lauds Begin's flexibility, sees no reason for pessimism" *Jerusalem Post* 30 Dec. 1977 p.1
- ⁹⁷ No Author, "Sadat unhappy with Carter's stand on Middle East" *Jerusalem Post* 30 Dec. 1977 p.1; No Author, "Begin lauds statement" *Jerusalem Post* 30 Dec. 1977 p.1
- ⁹⁸ Asher Wallfish, "Begin to be queried on Arab 'autonomy'" *Jerusalem Post* 22 Dec.1977p. 1, Joshua Brilliant and Asher Wallfish, "Begin may face serious challenge by supporters over his proposals" *Jerusalem Post*, 20 Dec. 1977 p.1; Wallfish, "Begin to lift veil-just enough-at full Cabinet session today", *Jerusalem Post* 21 Dec. 1977 p.1; Joshua Brilliant, "Settlers worried about 'autonomy': Peres: Jordan is defense line" *Jerusalem Post* 21 Dec. 1977 p. 2
- ⁹⁹ Bar-Siman-tov (1994) p. 71, fn 35
- ¹⁰⁰ Asher Wallfish, " 'Certain realities' caused Begin's changed approach" *Jerusalem Post* 25 December 1977 p.1
- ¹⁰¹ Asher Wallfish, "Begin's peace plan wins massive vote" *Jerusalem Post*, December 28, 1977. P.1
- ¹⁰² Stein (1999), fn. 19, 21
- ¹⁰³ Quandt, (1986) p. 158
- ¹⁰⁴ Stein (1999), fn 20
- ¹⁰⁵ Stein (1999), p. 235
- ¹⁰⁶ Quandt, (1986) p. 164
- ¹⁰⁷ Elyakim Rubenstein, oral history
- ¹⁰⁸ Bar-Siman-Tov, pp. 85-113
- ¹⁰⁹ Touval, (1982) p. 299, citing Begin "My personal advice would be for the United States to fulfill the function of honest broker, and bring the two parties together for face-to-face negotiations." (Interview in Newsweek, August 28 1978).
- ¹¹⁰ Brzezinski (1983) p. 242; "...We would try to get Sadat to come out first with an Egyptian proposal which in some ways would be evidently unacceptable to the Israelis, and that the United States would then step forth with a more moderate compromise solution. That would enable us to generate the greatest degree of international and domestic pressure on Begin to acquiesce". p. 243. See also Quandt, p. 171
- ¹¹¹ Shibley Telhami, "From Camp David to Wye: Changing Assumptions in Arab-Israeli Negotiations, *The Middle East Journal*, 53:3 Summer 1999 p. 382
- ¹¹² Quandt, (1986) p. 209; Bar-Siman-Tov, p.116
- ¹¹³ Interview with Tahseen Bahir, March 1984, in Shibley Telhami, "From Camp David to Wye: Changing Assumptions in Arab-Israeli Negotiations, *The Middle East Journal*, 53:3 Summer 1999 p. 382
- ¹¹⁴ Jerrold Post, draft of appendix, *Personality and Political Behavior*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, forthcoming (2004)
- ¹¹⁵ Quandt, (1986) p. 218, citing Carter, keeping faith, p. 322
- ¹¹⁶ Jerrold Post, (2004)
- ¹¹⁷ Carter (1982), p. 358 claims that in an initial meeting, Sadat rejected concessions that Begin had proposed by noting that Egyptian public opinion would not accept such a move. Begin responded that the Egyptian public could be easily manipulated, citing the major change in relations with the Soviet Union under Sadat. According to this version, as a result of this exchange, Carter separated Sadat and Begin for the rest of the summit. (Cited by Telhami, 1999 p. 389)
- ¹¹⁸ Yehuda Avner, "From Menachem Begin to Sadat: Zion", *Jerusalem Post*, May 30 2003

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- ¹¹⁹ Stein (1999), p. 252
- ¹²⁰ Carter (1982) p. 322; Sam Lewis, (2002), p. 19
- ¹²¹ Carter (1982) p. 328
- ¹²² Telhami, (1999) p. 382
- ¹²³ Stein (1999) p. 252
- ¹²⁴ Benziman (1987) p. 192
- ¹²⁵ Weizman, *Battle for Peace*, Jerusalem: Idanim. 1981, p. 373; Quandt (1986) p. 246
- ¹²⁶ Quandt (1986) p. 246
- ¹²⁷ Jerrold Post (2004)
- ¹²⁸ Elyakim Rubenstein, oral history (interviewed by Dr. Naneh Sagi, May 5 1994) Menachem Begin Heritage Center, Jerusalem (Hebrew)
- ¹²⁹ Elyakim Rubenstein, oral history
- ¹³⁰ Elyakim Rubenstein, oral history
- ¹³¹ Quandt (1986) p. 251; Kenneth Stein "Sadat, Carter, Begin: An Unequally Sided Triangle", *The Camp David Process*, Menachem Begin Heritage Center, Jerusalem 2002, p.32
- ¹³² Quandt (1986) p. 247
- ¹³³ Quandt (1986) p. 247
- ¹³⁴ Quandt (1986) p. 245-251; Bar-Siman-Tov 127-129
- ¹³⁵ Quandt (1986) p. 247
- ¹³⁶ Handwritten note of President Carter's, probably drafted on September 18, 1978, a copy of which was sent to Prime Minister Begin. Cited by Quandt (1986) p. 248. In his memoir, *Keeping Faith*, (p. 397) Carter provides a slightly different variation. (cited by Stein (1999), *Heroic Diplomacy* p. 255)
- ¹³⁷ Quandt (1986) p. 251
- ¹³⁸ Cyrus R. Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy*, Simon and Schuster 1983 pp. 225, 228-29
- ¹³⁹ According to Quandt's notes of the reports from Carter and Vance immediately after the session ended, "Begin will write a letter to Carter that will be made public. There will be no new settlements during the negotiation except by agreement." Quandt (1986) p. 249
- ¹⁴⁰ Lewis (2002), p.20
- ¹⁴¹ Dayan, (1981), pp. 184-86
- ¹⁴² Quandt (1986) p. 249
- ¹⁴³ "An Interview with Begin," *Time* October 2 1978, p. 21 Cited by Quandt *Camp David* p. 248
- ¹⁴⁴ Quandt (1986) p. 250; In a later interview, Quandt stated "I tend to believe Begin's version. There is a little bit of ambiguity here because Begin's first reaction was when he gave us this letter and Carter immediately sent it back and said it was unacceptable, Begin did not immediately say, 'I'm right, you're wrong'. He said, 'I cannot believe that I agreed to anything other than what I said in this letter but I will consult my colleagues and see if they remember'. (Quandt, interview with Charles Weiss, archive of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center)
- ¹⁴⁵ Some Americans officials were, in fact, very cognizant of Begin's caution in the use of language. See Sam Lewis (2002) p. 21.
- ¹⁴⁶ Stein (1999), p. 256
- ¹⁴⁷ Stein (1999), p. 255
- ¹⁴⁸ Spiegel, (1985) p. 316-7. While spurning advice from Jewish leaders who were familiar with Begin and his policies, "the input from Sadat and other Arab leaders was welcomed by the State department and other branches of the US government, and largely accepted at face value." Spiegel , 321. For example, the Carter administration accepted Sadat's claim that he could deliver Jordan's King Hussein. Stein (1999), (*Heroic Diplomacy* p. 254).
- ¹⁴⁹ Stein (1999), p. 255
- ¹⁵⁰ Carter, (1982), p. 400, cited by Quandt
- ¹⁵¹ Quandt (1986) p. 253; According to Sam Lewis (2002), "Carter said, 'This isn't what was promised, and it's got nothing to do with the peace treaty anyway. It's got to do with autonomy; go back and get the right letter'. He handed it to Hal Saunders." p. 20
- ¹⁵² Quandt (1986) p.263; Sam Lewis, (2002), p. 20
- ¹⁵³ Stein (1999), p. 255-6, citing Quandt p. 263
- ¹⁵⁴ Stein (1999), p. 255-6, citing Quandt p. 263; see also Sam Lewis, (2002) p. 22
- ¹⁵⁵ In his interview with Charles Weiss, Quandt stated "It's no secret that Carter did not particularly like Begin"

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- ¹⁵⁶ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1985, p. 169 cited by Quandt (1986) p. 253
- ¹⁵⁷ Dayan (1981) p. 229 cited by Quandt (1986) p. 253
- ¹⁵⁸ Carter (1982), p. 397, cited in Stein (1999), p. 255
- ¹⁵⁹ Stein (1999) p. 256 (Interview with Jimmy Carter, April 23, 1991). According to Brzezinski, (p. 262) Carter used the term “psycho” in referring to Begin, and also raised questions regarding Begin’s rationality.
- ¹⁶⁰ Jonathan Mann interview with Jimmy Carter, CNN Special Report, December 10, 2002 Transcript # 121001cb.k10
- ¹⁶¹ Yehuda Avner, “The day Jimmy Carter was reduced to silence”, *Jerusalem Post*, September 16 2003
- ¹⁶² Sam Lewis (2002), p. 12; See also Stein (2002), p. 39
- ¹⁶³ Brzezinski, (1983) p. 42, cited by Spiegel, p. 321
- ¹⁶⁴ At the same time, there is a deep contradiction in Carter’s behavior. According to Stein, “President Carter comes every year to my classes on the Arab Israeli conflict ... Over and over, he says: My basic problem was that I trusted Sadat too much and didn’t trust Begin enough.” Stein (2002), p. 40
- ¹⁶⁵ Harry Hurwitz, *Begin: A Portrait*. Bnai Brith Books, Jerusalem 1994 p. 168
- ¹⁶⁶ See Ilan Peleg, *Begin’s Foreign Policy 1977-1983: Israel’s Move to the Right* New York: Greenwood Press, 1987
- ¹⁶⁷ Moshe Arens, (2002), p. 29-30
- ¹⁶⁸ For a strong critique of Uzi Benizman’s portrayal of Begin as “under siege”, see Elyakim Rubenstein, oral history
- ¹⁶⁹ See the discussion of “buyer’s remorse” in Sam Lewis, (2002), p. 18
- ¹⁷⁰ Minutes from the working meeting with Menachem Begin in Canada Nov. 7, 1978 (Menachem Begin Heritage Center, Jerusalem)
- ¹⁷¹ Jonathan Rynhold, American-Israel Relations: From Camp David I (1978) to Camp David II (2000) in *The Camp David Process*, Menachem Begin Heritage Center, Jerusalem 2002; Kenneth W. Stein, “Comparing the Camp David Summits”, *Middle East Insight*, September/October 2000, pp. 7-14
- ¹⁷² Kenneth Stein concludes that this was “a unique time when three people got together when the constellations of history just happened to be at that eclipse that comes every three hundred years”. “*Sadat, Carter, Begin: An Unequally Sided Triangle*”, *The Camp David Process*, Menachem Begin Heritage Center, Jerusalem 2002, p.32