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Push and Pull: Carter Diplomacy in the Negotiations Between Egypt and Israel, October 1978-
March 1979

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Abstract

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This thesis is a critical examination of President Jimmy Carter's Middle East negotiating strategy between the signing of the Camp David Accords and the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. It analyzes President Carter's decision-making, as well as that of his cabinet, in order to gain a deeper understanding into how the U.S. succeeded in brokering this historic agreement which has held for nearly 40 years. The work draws on existing scholarship as well as memoirs and newly declassified documentary evidence from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia. The five-month period in question is one that scholars of Middle East peace have devoted little to since books and articles first started to appear in the 1980s. Analytically, the research draws on many schools of international relations theory and attempts to understand U.S. foreign policymaking during the era as having a multitude of origins that were practical, ethical and theological. Despite misunderstandings, obvious biases, and manifold flaws, the Carter administration saw arguably its greatest triumph in March 1979. The thesis works to explain how it came to be in that position and why it succeeded.

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On March 26, 1979, Anwar Sadat, Menachem Begin, and Jimmy Carter posed for a three-way handshake on the White House lawn. Minutes earlier, Egypt's Sadat and Israel's Begin signed the peace treaty that ended more than 30 years of war between their two countries.

This thesis critically examines how and why the third man of the trio, U.S. President Jimmy Carter, brought together the leaders of two warring nations for the cause of peace. The thesis contains four chapters. The first is a literature review and explanation of the chosen topic. It explores the way in which scholars have written about the Egyptian-Israeli peace process to date and highlights the gaps in the literature; this serves as an entry point for the thesis. The second chapter is a general overview of events that led up to the Blair House Talks in October 1978, which mark the beginning of the last phase of Egyptian-Israeli negotiations. The negotiations began after the June 1967 War, but became more serious after the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and then again with Jimmy Carter's inauguration in 1977. To give background on the dynamics of the peace process, a general history is provided from the early 1970s through the Camp David Accords of 1978. The third chapter ties together memoir and documentary evidence that shapes the unfolding narrative of the Blair House Talks to the peace treaty signing. It takes care to highlight the noticeable differences in published accounts to understand the facts and motivations which animated these five months of difficult negotiations. The fourth chapter utilizes analytical tools from both history and international relations to understand and contextualize President Carter's actions as the central mediator. The chapter seeks to answer four central questions about the months between the Blair House Talks and the signing of the treaty:

1. How did President Carter's early experiences shape his views about Israelis, Palestinians and therefore negotiating the Arab-Israeli conflict? How did President Carter's personal relationships with relevant actors impact the course of the diplomatic process?

2. What was President Carter's personal responsibility for the success of the Egypt-Israel negotiating process?
3. What was the role of President Carter's cabinet and key advisers in helping to create the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel?
4. From an historical perspective, to what extent did the Carter administration consider the impact of Carter's insertion into the Middle East peace process on his domestic political standing and subsequently, his chances for reelection in 1980?

In the conclusion, a short afterword evaluates the failed Palestinian autonomy negotiations of 1979 and 1980, and the eventual U.S. disengagement with Arab-Israeli affairs under President Reagan. In addition, it suggests additional avenues for future research.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

One of the main reasons for choosing this quite specific topic is that there is a dearth of scholarly literature that treats the period in any depth. In fact, there has not been any work which focuses on the period exclusively. However, scholars have written about the overall 1973-1979 period, as well as Carter's political and diplomatic style, and other topics related to Egypt, Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. A book of importance in the area is Kenneth W. Stein's *Heroic Diplomacy*.¹ In the 1999 work, Stein traces the process of Arab-Israeli peace from the Nixon Administration's efforts following the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 through Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, the negotiations in 1978 and from the 1979 peace treaty forward into the 1980s. Of Stein's many contributions with *Heroic Diplomacy*, perhaps his most noteworthy is his use of a somewhat untraditional source base, noted by William Quandt in his review of the book.² Stein uses an impressive number of interviews that he personally conducted with actors on all three sides of the negotiations. He combines them with sources and memoirs available before *Heroic Diplomacy* was published in 1999. The book provides an entry point into the personalities and leadership qualities of the most important men involved in negotiations which occurred outside of its timeframe. I draw on Stein's approach to diplomatic history as guidance for this paper. As noted by Amos Perlmutter in his review of *Heroic Diplomacy*,

“Students of international relations who analyze the complexity of the international system via abstract models, like Marxist and liberal historians, prefer to explain human interaction according to cultural, sociological, racial, religious, and other grand cultural institutions. They must finally surrender to the fact that heroic leadership, that is, individual persistence and vision, is more significant than social-cultural, psycho-historical, and other cultural orientations.”³

¹ Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

² William B. Quandt, “Reviewed Work: *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*,” *Foreign Affairs* 22, no. 3 (Sep. 2000): 727.

³ Amos Perlmutter, “Reviewed Work: *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 574, (Mar. 2001): 206.

Perlmutter praises Stein for being an example of the latter type of scholarship, that which he views as more compelling in its explanation of phenomena in international affairs. *Heroic Diplomacy* serves the dual purposes of having a strong analytical framework and giving valuable background information on the period immediately preceding the focus of my thesis.

One of the main academic studies of Carter's diplomatic style is D. Jason Berggren's "Carter, Sadat, and Begin: Using Evangelical-Style Presidential Diplomacy in the Middle East."⁴ Berggren's article is a valuable analysis of the way in which President Carter fused his religious convictions with real decision-making and relationship building during his time in the White House. It is helpful for contextualizing the difficult relationship between Carter and Begin, and also for understanding why Carter had such a strong personal affinity for Sadat. However, the analysis falls somewhat short in that it does not thoroughly examine Carter's decision to personally reinsert himself into the stalled negotiations after the Camp David Accords were signed in September 1978, a time period which I will continue to show is a gap in the literature.

Berggren's piece is a strong indicator of the way Carter thought about interpersonal relationships and is of use in analyzing in detail specific decisions which were made. However, like any mono-causal analysis, Berggren's fails to take into account the multitude of other factors which combine to form a person's worldview and inform their decision-making.

A key piece of research in the writing of this paper is an honors thesis done by Peter Evan Bass at Princeton University in 1985 entitled "The Anti-Politics of Presidential Leadership: Jimmy Carter and American Jews."⁵ For the project, Bass was able to secure interviews with key members of the Carter administration, including Carter himself, and went to great lengths in

⁴ D. Jason Berggren, "Carter, Sadat, and Begin: Using Evangelical-Style Presidential Diplomacy in the Middle East," *Journal of Church and State* 56, no. 4 (2013): 732-56.

⁵ Peter Evan Bass, "The Anti-Politics of Presidential Leadership: Jimmy Carter and American Jews," (Honors Thesis, Princeton University, 1985).

analyzing the connection between Carter's Middle East policy and the ongoing difficult task he had in maintaining the support of American Jewry throughout his term in office. Bass's research is compelling and informs much of my answer to the fourth question of the thesis regarding the effects of Carter's mediation on domestic politics and vice versa. Bass makes a strong case that Carter was an ineffective political actor, particularly on the domestic front, whose background as an engineer guided him to forced conclusions and stubborn intransigence about the viability of his own solutions. It stands in some contrast to Berggren's analysis. Ultimately, I draw on both of their approaches and see them as complementary in explaining Carter's diplomatic style. As Bass's piece is significantly longer than Berggren's, he is able to go into significant detail on specific conversations and moments that lends more depth to his writing and conclusions about Carter's flaws. However, out of more than 150 pages, Bass spends fewer than three of them discussing the period between Camp David and the signing of the peace treaty.

In 1994, Israeli scholar Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov published *Israel and the Peace Process*, a meticulously well researched account of his country's participation in the Egyptian Israeli peace process.⁶ Combining narrative history with empirical analysis, Bar-Siman-Tov masterfully covers the breadth of the period 1977 to 1982 without sacrificing on detail. The scholar's main analytical frame is the concept of legitimacy; he understands the Israeli delegation to be constantly searching for it both domestically and with the United States. His treatment of the period between October 1978 and March 1979 augments documentary evidence from American archives and other accounts. Its distinctly Israeli perspective is helpful for thinking about the relationship between Carter and Begin, as well as their respective aides and diplomats. Bar-

⁶ Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process, 1977-1982: In Search of Legitimacy* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994).

Siman-Tov's empirical analysis is strong as well, adding an international relations element to the existing piece of exemplary scholarship.⁷

In 2015, American scholar Daniel Strieff published *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy*.⁸ The book on the whole is a strong analysis of Carter's decision-making and the factors which constrained it, containing a particular emphasis on the news media. His seventh chapter deals specifically with the Blair House talks to the treaty signing, weaving together archival documents with memoir to craft an accurate narrative of the events.⁹ Strieff's chapter is crucial in that it is the most recent piece of secondary literature dealing with the period and the only one that includes access to declassified material at the Jimmy Carter Library in Atlanta, material to which neither Stein, Berggren, Bass, nor Bar-Siman-Tov had access.

Strieff treats the facts with care and his analysis is measured and nuanced. Length constraints force him to miss some details that are explored in this thesis and in Quandt's *Camp David*. Strieff's emphasis in the chapter is on the press response and optics of Carter's visit to the Middle East in March, a topic that I touch on only briefly. My focus and differentiation from Strieff is that I choose to analyze American strategy and Carter's understanding of the key actors; this is a more traditional international history approach than examining the role of media in diplomacy as Strieff does. His work is most useful for me in thinking about domestic pressures on the administration and the way that the political calculus shifted noticeably for

⁷ Kirsten E. Schulze, "Reviewed Work: *Israel and the Peace Process, 1977-1982: In Search of Legitimacy* by Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28, no. 1 (Feb. 1996): 147

⁸ Daniel Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015).

⁹ Daniel Strieff, "Desperate Diplomacy and the Egypt-Israel Treaty (October 1978-March 1979)," in *Ibid*: 141-60.

Carter after both Camp David and the signing of the treaty.¹⁰ In the wake of both forays into personal diplomacy, Carter realized there was a steep price to pay domestically.

Egyptian political scientist Adel Safty wrote a journal article in 1991 looking at Sadat's negotiating strategy at both Blair House and Camp David.¹¹ The work is a piece of suspect scholarship which presents the negotiations between Egypt and Israel in a clearly biased light. It is overtly critical of President Sadat for making concessions to Israel and makes gross overstatements and mischaracterizations about U.S. and Israeli policy. An example includes the description of American objectives in the Middle East which, according to Safty, "gave primacy to guaranteeing Israel's existence and to having unimpeded access to the region's strategic resources."¹² In the acknowledgements, Safty thanks Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel for personally going over the Camp David Accords with him and Kamel's memoir is the only Egyptian political source footnoted for the article.¹³ For clarity, Kamel was a disgruntled adviser to Sadat who resigned in the wake of the Camp David Accords.¹⁴ The article reads like a poorly-sourced opinion piece that castigates Sadat for not listening to his advisers enough during the negotiation.¹⁵ Formulated differently, Safty is angry at Sadat for making peace with Israel. This is evidenced by statements such as, "Had [Sadat] been accountable to Egypt's political institutions or to the professional and bureaucratic elites who supported him, it is unlikely that he would have been able to separate Egypt from the Arab camp and pursue a course of actions that Israeli's [sic] attempts to make permanent its occupation of Gaza, the West Bank, the Golan

¹⁰ The eighth chapter of *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East* deals with the post-treaty period.

¹¹ Adel Safty, "Sadat's Negotiations with the United States and Israel: Camp David and Blair House," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 50, no. 4 (Oct. 1991): 473-84.

¹² *Ibid*, 482.

¹³ *Ibid*, 473, 483-4.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 478.

¹⁵ Safty utilizes only three memoirs in his sourcing, one written by an aide each of the three countries represented, and the general phrasing of the work makes it clear that his position is anti-Sadat, and anti-Israel, and sympathetic to Kamel.

Heights and Arab Jerusalem.”¹⁶ Sadat, of course, could not have foreshadowed Israel’s control over these territories for the extended future. The author refers twice to the Arab states collectively as “the world’s sixth power” and also seems resentful of Egypt’s turn away from pan-Arabism. “Most significantly, Sadat agreed to repudiate Egypt’s prior commitments and historic solidarity with the Arab world.”¹⁷ It is clear that this article is not a valuable contribution to the literature on the negotiations; it is replete with overt bias and lack of proper sourcing.¹⁸

Due to the general lack of scholarship on the period in question, much of my source material comes from the memoirs of actors involved in the negotiations. On the American side, these include President Carter, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, with additional material in William Quandt’s books on the peace process.¹⁹ From Israel and Egypt, the foreign ministers of the respective countries wrote memoirs on the peace process.²⁰ They provide crucial insight into the way that the top diplomats from these countries perceived each other and the Americans mediating the conflict between them. Their perspective adds depth to the conversation about successes and failures of American efforts during the peace process. When Americans were not present in meetings between Egyptians and Israelis, these memoirs are some of the only ways to unearth an accurate picture of what was accomplished.

¹⁶ Ibid, 482.

¹⁷ Ibid, 479.

¹⁸ To further underscore Safty’s bias, his book *Might Over Right: How the Zionists Took Over Palestine* (Reading, UK: Garnet, 2012) was entered in the Palestine Book Awards which honors “the best new books in English about any aspect of Palestine.”

¹⁹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1982); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1983); Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983); William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1986); William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005).

²⁰ Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations* (New York: Random House, 1981); Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem: A Diplomat’s Story of the Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 1998).

Differences in interpretation, and even fact, between accounts in memoirs can occasionally be parsed out through consulting archives. In recent years, significant primary source information has been declassified in both the U.S. and Israel. The U.S. Government Printing Office published the two volumes of *Foreign Relations of the United States* concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict during the Carter years in 2013 and 2014. The Israeli State Archives also have material on the period that has only been recently available for public research. They were secured by Professor Stein and translated; he made them available to me. I used these resources to verify information present in the memoirs and to fill in gaps when there was dialogue at meetings or exchanges of ideas that may have been valuable to include.

Chapter 2: An Overview of Peace Efforts Between June 1967 and September 1978

The Egyptian-Israeli negotiating process began after the June 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Before the June War, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser proclaimed the need for the Arab world to avenge its defeat in the 1948 war against Israel by destroying the Jewish state militarily and hence, restoring land to the Palestinians.²¹ In the conflict's aftermath, Israel's victory allowed it to control lands that formerly belonged to Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. From Egypt, Israel took the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip, from Syria, the Golan Heights and from Jordan, the West Bank of the Jordan River and East Jerusalem. This military action increased Israel's size from approximately 8,000 square miles to 46,000 and also placed nearly one million Palestinian Arabs under civilian and military administration.²²

In the wake of this paradigm shifting war, the U.S. focused on crafting a UN Security Council resolution that incorporated President Lyndon Johnson's five points which he articulated immediately after the war concluded.²³ The points included "the recognized right to national life, justice for the refugees, innocent maritime passage, limits on the arms race, and political independence and territorial integrity for all."²⁴ Debates raged between Israelis, Americans, Russians, and other national actors concerned with the exact language of a future resolution. During the negotiations, the Arab League held its annual summit in Khartoum, Sudan at which the participating states signed the "Khartoum Resolution."²⁵ It was most noted for its clause which obliged signatories not to make peace with, recognize or negotiate with Israel.²⁶ In

²¹ "Remarks by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser: Speech to Arab Trade Unionists, May 26, 1967," *Center for Israel Education*, <https://israeled.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/1967.5.26-Nasser-Speech-to-Arab-Trade-Unionists.pdf>.

²² Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 51.

²³ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 45.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David A. Korn, *Stalemate: The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967-1970* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), 84-6.

²⁶ Yoram Meital, "The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War: A Reexamination," *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 64.

addition, this paragraph commanded “insistence on the rights of the Palestinian people in their own country.”²⁷

In November, a British government compromise led to the passage of UNSC Resolution 242, which has been the foundation of all major Arab-Israeli peace initiatives since that time.²⁸ Though concerned with negotiating peace with its Arab neighbors, Israel’s focus in the months following the 1967 war was how to administer its newly acquired territories and the Arab people who lived in them. In the country, leaders were basically split along party lines about what to do with the majority Arab West Bank. On the right, many politicians began to call the formerly Jordanian West Bank, “Judea and Samaria,” the area’s biblical name. They supported “either declared or defacto [sic] annexation,” which would make the West Bank part of Israel.²⁹ Among the left-wing or left of center politicians who had governed Israel since its creation, there was great skepticism about the proposition of absorbing so many Arabs into Israel’s population.³⁰ The debate in Israel was crucial to the way in which Egyptian-Israeli diplomacy developed during the 1970s, as the Israeli government’s leadership shifted from left to right and the Palestinians continued to be left without representation in negotiations. While politicians discussed the issue amongst themselves, several thousand Israelis moved from their country’s original territory to the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula, creating the first settlements in occupied territory. By the beginning of 1977, approximately 11,000 Jewish settlers lived in these lands, compared to the hundreds of thousands that live in the West Bank and Golan Heights today.

²⁷ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 46.

²⁸ Ibid, 5. For a copy of the text of UNSC Resolution 242 see <https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136>.

²⁹ Korn, *Stalemate*, 71.

³⁰ Ibid.

Despite major differences in regard to the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Israeli politicians universally agreed that the Sinai should be returned to Egypt in exchange for peace between the two countries. As Israel and Egypt engaged in intermittent skirmishes along the Suez Canal, freshly inaugurated President Richard Nixon attempted to carve out a role for the U.S. in mediating the conflict.³¹ His main objective: limit the influence of the Soviet Union in the Middle East by simultaneously punishing Arab countries that dealt with Russia while also trying to draw those same countries into the American sphere.³² An outgrowth of the Cold War, limiting Soviet influence in the Middle East was a U.S. foreign policy objective from President Truman through President Reagan.

In late 1969, in the midst of Egypt's "War of Attrition" against Israel, Nixon's Secretary of State William Rogers went public with his plan for a comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This included the return of Sinai to Egypt and an end to the state of war between the two countries, a just settlement of the Palestinian refugee issue and shared governance over Jerusalem between Israel and Jordan.³³ The Israelis rejected the plan outright, citing the fact that there were too many negotiating parties for comprehensiveness to work.³⁴ They felt that a comprehensive settlement prescribed by an outsider, even if that outsider was its closest ally, was not acceptable. The effort to achieve comprehensive Middle East peace would be a theme throughout the 1970s, even after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's unexpected visit to Jerusalem in November 1977.

³¹ Korn, *Stalemate* is the best examination of the fighting between Egypt and Israel post-1967, as well as the diplomatic efforts to contain it.

³² Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 57.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

After Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser died in September 1970, Egypt's Vice-President Anwar el-Sadat assumed control of the country. Almost immediately after taking office, Sadat sent a message to the Israelis through the United States that he would "consider making an agreement with them if they withdrew from all of Sinai."³⁵ This was a pivotal moment in Egyptian-Israeli relations, as Egypt changed its stance from the Khartoum Resolution and opened the door to the prospects of a negotiated settlement. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir did not take to the initiative—she preferred the security of maintaining all of the Sinai, especially in light of Egypt's lack of commitment to a full peace. Failed attempts at interim arrangements brokered by Secretary Rogers and UN diplomat Gunnar Jarring led National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to assume control over Egyptian-Israeli mediation.³⁶ Kissinger and Sadat shared the goal of lessening Soviet influence in Egypt and the desire to communicate directly, bypassing Rogers and the State Department.³⁷ In 1972, the U.S. held a joint summit with the Soviet Union that reaffirmed Resolution 242 and confirmed to Sadat that the Soviets would no longer be a reliable partner in helping him win Sinai back from Israel. That July, Sadat formally expelled Soviet military personnel from Egypt, confirming his desire to have the U.S. be the main superpower involved in negotiating a settlement in the region.

Spring and summer of 1973 saw little progress in the talks between Egypt and Israel. A February 1973 Kissinger initiative seemed to crumble as the U.S. became focused on other international matters and as Quandt posits, Sadat may have been concerned with Nixon's deteriorating domestic position due to Watergate.³⁸ After Nixon made Kissinger Secretary of State, they renewed U.S. efforts to bring the Egyptians and Israelis closer together, planning to

³⁵ Ibid, 58.

³⁶ Ibid, 60-1; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 92-3.

³⁷ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 62-3; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 93.

³⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 101.

begin serious talks after the coming Israeli elections in December 1973. Despite Kissinger's belief that he had secured an agreement to this timeline, on October 6, the Egyptians and Syrians launched a coordinated military offensive against Israel.

The October 1973 "Yom Kippur War," named for its beginning on the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, came as a complete surprise to the U.S. and Israel.³⁹ American officials uniformly understood the possibility for another conflict between Egypt and Israel in terms of a possible shifting of the region's military balance of power.⁴⁰ By tilting the military balance so sharply towards Israel after 1967, the U.S. thought that it had dissuaded an Arab attack. Only two days into the fighting, Sadat made it clear that his desire was to resolve the conflict diplomatically and expressed his goal to only regain Egyptian territory rather than move into Israel.⁴¹

For Israel, the first few days of the fighting looked bleak as it sustained heavy personnel and materiel losses. However, the tide eventually turned, and Israeli forces moved quickly past the June 1967 cease-fire lines and across the Suez Canal, within 60 miles of Cairo and close to Damascus on the Golan Heights. As the Soviet Union resupplied both Arab countries and Kissinger's cease-fire initiatives did not take hold, the U.S. resupplied Israel with large amounts of ammunition and armaments in an airlift. The next day, the Soviets communicated that they were actively persuading their Arab allies to accept a cease-fire.⁴² Fighting continued while the U.S. and Soviet Union negotiated. Kissinger personally flew to Moscow to broker a settlement, reaching an agreement with his Soviet counterpart that would become the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 338, which called for both a cease-fire and negotiations between the parties,

³⁹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 72.

⁴⁰ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 102-3.

⁴¹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 72-3.

⁴² Quandt, *Peace Process*, 115.

a priority that Israel had sought for years.⁴³ Immediately preceding Kissinger's Moscow visit, Saudi Arabia decided to embargo oil sales to the U.S. because of its support for Israel during the war.⁴⁴ The connection between American support for Israel and access to Middle Eastern oil added another layer to an already complicated nexus of policy priorities for the United States.

The cease-fire derived from resolution 338 did not hold, and the Israeli military pushed west of the Suez Canal, encircling Egypt's Third Army.⁴⁵ Tensions rose between the Soviet Union and United States, as both seemed poised to send troops to the region. A combination of backchannel talks and public displays of aggression on the parts of both the U.S. and Russia convinced the Egyptians and Israelis of the need to adhere to international calls for cease-fire. At the end of October, Egypt and Israel convened for the "Kilometer 101 Talks" on the road to Cairo, which were the basis for the disengagement of the respective countries' forces around the Suez Canal.⁴⁶ The talks eventually broke down in late November, in part because of Kissinger's urging. He wanted a disengagement of forces to come from a larger conference at Geneva later that year.⁴⁷ Stein contends that, in fact, all of the parties wanted the Kilometer 101 talks to stall for their own separate reasons.⁴⁸ Kissinger felt the talks to be success overall, but he wanted to choreograph them and in doing so, limit Moscow's influence in the negotiations. In the process of solidifying the cease-fire, he cemented Washington's place as the trusted intermediary between Egypt and Israel, successfully leaving the Soviets on the sidelines.⁴⁹

⁴³ Ibid, 119.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 92.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 97-111 goes into detail about these negotiations.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 112.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 112-3. Quandt does not mention anything about a "breakdown," and in fact, does not even mention the end of Kilometer 101.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 116; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 138.

Though Kilometer 101 broke down, it was clear that both Egypt and Israel desired a full disengagement agreement.⁵⁰ In December 1973, an international conference in Geneva was convened to further that goal, with the U.S. and Soviet Union as co-heads. Stein and Quandt agree that little substance was discussed during the conference, which was not attended by Jordanian or Palestinian representatives and boycotted by Syria.⁵¹ Kissinger conceived of it as small step in creating an Egyptian-Israel understanding, and mainly an optical one. Stein goes as far as describing it as a charade.⁵²

Only two weeks after the conclusion of the Geneva conference, Kissinger persuaded Israel and Egypt to sign an early disengagement agreement on January 18, 1974, which mirrored the agreement that had been produced by the Kilometer 101 talks.⁵³ To spur progress in negotiations on the Syrian front, and interested in removing the Saudi imposed oil embargo, Kissinger returned to the Middle East again in the spring of 1974 to conduct what came to be known as “shuttle diplomacy.” His efforts proved difficult due to Syrian President Hafez al-Assad’s anger at Sadat for moving towards separate talks with the Israelis and Assad’s unwillingness to give any signs of interest in accepting Israel, even through indirect negotiations. The Israeli government, fearful of the security implications of disengagement on that front and wanting its POWs returned, was slow to engage with the Syrians. After a month of Kissinger back-and-forth between Syria and Israel, the parties came to an agreement in late May 1974.

The rest of 1974 and early 1975 proved difficult in advancing on Egyptian-Israeli peace. Domestic turmoil including Nixon’s resignation left Kissinger in a weaker position to deal with Middle East issues. In addition, the parties showed less willingness to move from their stated

⁵⁰ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 117.

⁵¹ Ibid, 118; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 141.

⁵² Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 123.

⁵³ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 144-4.

positions with particular stubbornness shown by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.⁵⁴ After he had embarked on another round of shuttle diplomacy, Kissinger left the Middle East without an agreement—President Gerald Ford publicly blamed Israel for the deadlock. A statement in the wake of the failed round called for a reassessment of U.S. regional policy.⁵⁵ In addition, Sadat's perceived openness to bilateralism vis-à-vis Israel upset the Soviet Union and angered Arab leaders because it contradicted the Khartoum Resolution of 1967.

The reassessment of U.S. policy that Kissinger and Ford had foreshadowed produced few tangible changes. The U.S. considered three options with varying degrees of hostility to the Israeli point of view. The first option was an international conference, with participation by the Soviets, and would include official U.S. positions on Israeli withdrawal. The second option would be similar but stop short of calling for full withdrawal and full peace. Ultimately, the U.S. chose a third course of action—a continuation of Kissinger's step-by-step formula—due to the perceived lack of chance at success from the former two and congressional fears that Kissinger had been pressuring Israel too strongly.⁵⁶

The summer of 1975 proved to be a turning point. Rabin came to Washington in June from a position of domestic strength after rebuking Kissinger's earlier pressure. After some waffling because of cabinet disagreements, Israel offered to withdraw further to the east than its original stated position, but with the caveat of placing American civilians in the Sinai between Israeli and Egyptian forces. Israel continued to push after Sadat agreed to many of its terms. The U.S. agreed to billions more in aid to Israel, as well as language favorable to Israeli positions on

⁵⁴ Ibid, 162-3.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 163-4.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 165.

the Golan Heights and Jordan.⁵⁷ Eventually, the parties came to an agreement after a final Kissinger push in Israel during late August.

Included with the signing of the September 1975 Sinai II agreement was the vitally important U.S.-Israeli memorandum of understanding. This memorandum dealt favorably for Israel with questions related to oil supplies, military assistance, economic aid, and an arms package.⁵⁸ The U.S. also promised that it would not negotiate with the PLO until it recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338.⁵⁹ However, this would be the end of Kissinger diplomacy in the Middle East as President Ford lost the 1976 presidential election to former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter.

In both running for president and in his first months of governing, Jimmy Carter openly acted as an outsider.⁶⁰ He intentionally handled affairs of state, from the attendance at state dinners to the structure of his cabinet, in contrast to Richard Nixon and the traditional order.⁶¹ This extended to foreign policy and its intersection with domestic politics. Until his 1976 presidential run, Carter's political career had rarely extended outside the borders of the state of Georgia, where he served as governor from 1971 to 1975. One of the only ways that he did so was through the Trilateral Commission, organized by future National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski in the early 1970s. The Trilateral Commission had a goal of fostering "closer and more cooperative relations between the United States on the one hand and Europe and Japan on the other."⁶² It served as Carter's introduction to foreign policy and added to his credentials as a presidential candidate by offering him the opportunity to visit a number of countries. Carter

⁵⁷ Ibid, 168

⁵⁸ Ibid, 169.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009), 7.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 5.

came to Washington with some understanding and experience in domestic policy but, according to Brzezinski, “[he] entered the White House knowing little about foreign affairs.”⁶³ Carter was determined to conduct foreign policy based on human rights principles and an emphasis on disarmament, in spite of possible backlash at home.

In the first six months of his presidency, Carter approached the Middle East by taking a completely different tack than his predecessors: he dispensed with political expediency and tried to focus on executing sound policy.⁶⁴ Carter did not see the connection between foreign policy positions and domestic politics. His thinking on the Middle East was highly influenced by the “Brookings Report on the Middle East,” authored by Brzezinski, Quandt, and others in the wake of Ford’s call for reassessment of U.S. policy towards Israel.⁶⁵ The report took the “comprehensive settlement with a conference” approach to resolving the Arab-Israel impasse and called for Palestinian participation in an international summit. A comprehensive approach meshed well with Carter’s preferred problem-solving style. The prospect of a comprehensive settlement frustrated Israeli leaders on both the left and right who favored separate, bilateral negotiations with each Arab actor. They feared that a conference would create a hostile consensus between all the Arab states and the Soviet Union, forcing Israel to accept parameters which would be harmful to its security. Carter and Brzezinski did not seem to grasp the importance that the Israelis placed on bilateral negotiations as opposed to a multilateral conference. This, and other Carter actions such as blocking weapons sales and his unprecedented support for Palestinian positions, were perceived by Israelis and their American supporters as anti-Israel. As 1977 wore on, the administration lost significant support in the American Jewish

⁶³ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁴ Bass, “The Anti-Politics of Presidential Leadership,” 42-62.

⁶⁵ For text of the “Brookings Document” see “The Brookings Report on the Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6, no. 2 (Winter 1977): 195-205.

community. This led to the secret writing of the June 1977 “Jordan Memo,” which was an analysis of the American Jewish community and why it had turned against Carter after it had supported him at a 75% clip in the 1976 election.⁶⁶

In May 1977, an unimaginable event occurred in Israeli politics: the Likud Party won an election over Labor.⁶⁷ Labor’s defeat stunned nearly all world observers, including those in the Carter administration. The election elevated Menachem Begin, who had spent his entire political career in opposition, to the office of Prime Minister. Begin wished to resolve specific aspects of his country’s conflict with the Arab states but openly rejected a strong U.S. role in peace negotiations, fearing the Carter/Brzezinski stance towards the Palestinians.⁶⁸ In Egypt, Sadat grew increasingly frustrated with the lack of Arab consensus on a plan to negotiate with Israel at an international conference. This frustration grew due to an October 1977 joint U.S.-Soviet Communique, which called for a Soviet role in the negotiating process. Again, the Carter administration lacked awareness of both Sadat and Begin’s positions and their joint antipathy towards Soviet participation in peace negotiations. Sadat’s impatience with the lack of progress caused by these factors pushed him to publicly express his desire to make a trip to Jerusalem in order to negotiate directly with Israel. In the past, Sadat had articulated a feeling that the U.S. was in complete control of negotiations, but his unilateral declaration ran counter to earlier statements.⁶⁹ It even came as a partial surprise to the Israelis, who had understood Sadat’s desire to negotiate, but had not anticipated such a bold public statement would be made before

⁶⁶ Memo, Hamilton Jordan to President Carter, 6/77, Office of the Chief of Staff Files, Hamilton Jordan’s Confidential Files, Foreign Policy/Domestic Politics Memo, HJ Memo, 6/77, Container 34a, Jimmy Carter Library, https://jimmycarterlibrary.gov/digital_library/cos/142099/34/cos_142099_34a_24-Foreign_policy_domestic_politics_memo.pdf.

⁶⁷ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 183.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 184.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 191-2.

consulting with them or the Americans.⁷⁰ Perhaps most importantly, Sadat's announcement and subsequent visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 scuttled any realistic hope for a Geneva conference yet Carter and his administration held out hope that the visit could open the door to a comprehensive agreement.⁷¹

In late 1977 and early 1978, the State and Defense departments crafted a proposal to tie upcoming plane sales to Israel to similar sales to Egypt and Saudi Arabia.⁷² The package became a highly charged issue as President Ford had promised Israel the planes in the sale as part of the 1975 Sinai II Agreement. President Carter subsequently altered the premise of the deal by tying the sale to planes to Saudi Arabia also, a country which many American Jews felt to be a military threat to Israel. The first king of Saudi Arabia, Ibn Saud, had long held and publicly espoused anti-Semitic beliefs.⁷³ Despite intense domestic opposition, Carter and his aides pushed the military jet deal through Congress, adding to the distrust that had already been brewing between Carter and American Jewry.⁷⁴

In the midst of the plane deal fiasco and stalling in the bilateral talks between Egypt and Israel, President Carter took a bold risk—he invited both Sadat and Begin to the presidential retreat at Camp David to negotiate an agreement.⁷⁵ Carter's aides differed in their assessment of

⁷⁰ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process*, 36.

⁷¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 111.

⁷² The best history of the “Saudi Plane Deal,” named that way because the sales to the Saudis were deemed most objectionable, is Daniel Strieff, “Arms Wrestle: Capitol Hill Fight Over Carter’s 1978 Middle East ‘Package’ Airplane Sale,” *Diplomatic History* 40, no. 3 (June 2016): 475-99.

⁷³ Elie Kedourie, *Islam in the Modern World* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), 70-4.

⁷⁴ Protesting the White House’s management of the plane deal, Mark Siegel, then Carter’s liaison to the American Jewish community, resigned from his post.

⁷⁵ It is by no means my goal to recount the Camp David summit in detail as entire books have been written on the subject including Quandt, *Camp David* and Lawrence Wright, *13 Days in September: The Dramatic Story of the Struggle for Peace* (New York: Random House, 2014). Wright’s account tends to exaggerate Carter’s role at the summit and gives little credit to Sadat and Begin for making vast compromises for peace. Other accounts of the Camp David negotiations were written by the actors that were present and recount their experiences in great detail. This includes memoirs Carter, Brzezinski, and Vance from the U.S., Dayan and Ezer Weizman from Israel and Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel from Egypt. A strong academic take on the Carter’s role as

the decision, especially considering Carter's precarious domestic situation.⁷⁶ At that time, Carter's negative rating in the Harris Poll stood at 61 percent, and his "strong" approval in the Gallup Poll was only 11 percent.⁷⁷ Many of them feared the domestic and foreign fallout if the summit failed to produce an agreement. Over two weeks in September 1978, American, Egyptian, and Israeli leaders negotiated about the substance and phrasing of an agreement, the basis of which had been drafted earlier in the wake of a July 1978 trilateral, ministerial level conference at Leeds Castle near London.⁷⁸ At Camp David, back and forth between the triumvirate of delegations produced a three-part accord for future agreements: the first, a preamble for the basis of negotiations which laid out the principle of land for peace, then a section on a possible Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, and a third on a settlement of the Palestinian question.⁷⁹ Though Sadat and Begin signed the agreement, it did not have the status of a binding treaty—the Camp David Accords were merely a framework for peace. Adhering to the benchmarks set out by the Accords would prove more difficult than many imagined.

From the 11 years between the June 1967 war and signing of the Camp David Accords, many themes emerged in the effort to create Arab-Israeli agreements. One is the fraught nature of comprehensiveness in negotiating any agreement. For a multitude of reasons, American leaders have been apt to try to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict in one fell swoop. Perhaps it is an

mediator at Camp David is David Princen, "Camp David: Problem-Solving or Power Politics as Usual?" *Journal of Peace Research* 28, no. 1 (Feb. 1991): 57-69.

⁷⁶ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 144-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 144.

⁷⁸ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 250. Stein argues that Leeds was crucial in making a breakthrough between the Egyptians and Israelis which, by nature, downplays Carter's singular importance in achieving the Accords of the Camp David summit. Quandt spends fewer than two pages of *Camp David* discussing the Leeds conference and by Stein's own admission, Carter also felt that Leeds was unimportant. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 251. The subjects of Stein's interviews on all three sides gave considerable credence to the narrowing of differences and trust building that occurred at the Leeds Conference. The implications of the relative importance of Leeds are relevant to my later analysis of the period following Camp David. Documents related to the Leeds Conference can be found in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1981, Volume VIII, Arab-Israeli Dispute, January 1977-August 1978*, ed. Adam M. Howard, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2013), Documents 266-73.

⁷⁹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 253.

American flair for the dramatic or the “go big or go home” mentality present in American popular culture. Whatever the case, a positive attitude towards creating a comprehensive settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict ran—and still runs—actively throughout many circles of American foreign policy experts. Often, Americans had their own interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union in mind when confronting the possibility of a comprehensive settlement. In preparing to convene conferences with Moscow’s participation, the U.S. sought to isolate the Soviet Union and prove its ineffectiveness in solving diplomatic crises. In addition, presidents and their aides tended to be wary of spending too much time on one issue.⁸⁰ Conferences are short and have the potential to solve many problems at once. Protracted, step-by-step diplomacy, like the type that Kissinger conducted, can be costly in terms of political capital if it fails, which is compounded by the lack of attention paid to other issues.

Though popular among much of the foreign policy elite, the idea for a Geneva conference never took hold and attempts at comprehensiveness continuously ended in failure. The first time the U.S. tried to convene such a conference, Kissinger did not even have success as his goal, but instead wanted to push the UN and U.S.S.R. out of the negotiating picture. Later on, the Kissinger used a Geneva conference as a bargaining chip in an effort to force Israel to make more concessions on interim agreements. During the first year of the Carter administration, the idea of a Geneva conference broke down completely, mainly because the prospect enthused neither Sadat nor Begin. Carter and his aides failed to grasp the depth of distrust between Sadat and the Syrians; Sadat had little interest in Syrian participation in a conference.⁸¹ Begin and the Israelis feared Soviet influence over the Geneva talks and the Americans underestimated Sadat’s

⁸⁰ See Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 437-8 for Carter’s take on why he took a back seat on the Palestinian autonomy negotiations. Though this episode occurs after the period in question, it is indicative of the presidential attitude towards devoting too much time to any single foreign policy issue.

⁸¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 133.

frustration with the Soviet Union as well, though the Israelis were more aware of this animosity.⁸² After Camp David, the objective of tying a comprehensive settlement to an Egyptian-Israeli agreement also broke down.

Flowing from the failure of the conference concept is the lack of success in obtaining representation for the Palestinians. A variety of factors complicated their participation in peace negotiations. In 1974, Arab states and the UN recognized the PLO as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”⁸³ However, Israel considered the PLO to be a terrorist organization as its charter had as its goal the destruction of Israel.⁸⁴ The PLO’s string of terror attacks throughout the 1970s did not help its image in the international community, though the Carter administration pushed for Palestinian inclusion in a Geneva conference.⁸⁵ The Jordanians, still harboring deeply bitter feelings towards the Palestinians for their part in the 1970 Jordanian-Palestinian civil war, were not suitable representatives either. The Carter administration made secret efforts in both 1977 and 1978 to obtain PLO acceptance of UNSC Resolution 242 but its leader, Yasser Arafat, refused to accept U.S. overtures. Egyptians were culturally and nationally separate from the Palestinians, and though Sadat encouraged their participation in negotiations, a lack of Palestinian diplomatic presence did not alter his fundamental goal of moving forward with a bilateral treaty with Israel. He wanted Sinai returned to Egyptian sovereignty and was too impatient to wait for outside Arab participation.

⁸² Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 215-6. In September 1977, Egyptian Vice President Hassan Tuhami told Israeli Foreign Minister Dayan, “we do not wish to be in touch with the Soviet Union, but only with the U.S.” which shows in explicit terms that Israel knew of Egypt’s animus toward its former patron. See “Dayan-Tuhami Meeting Minutes: The Institute for Intelligence and Special Operations,” *Center for Israel Education*, <https://israeled.org/resources/documents/dayan-tuhami-meeting-minutes-institute-intelligence-special-operations/>.

⁸³ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 159.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 181.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*.

In Egyptian-Israeli peace efforts, successful diplomacy occurred almost exclusively when the highest-level actors met face-to-face. During the Nixon-Ford years, Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy and personal meetings with Sadat, Meir, and Rabin were the way in which the Sinai interim agreements came together. While ministerial level talks laid the groundwork for the higher-level negotiations, the physical presence of the Kissinger pressured both Israelis and Egyptians into compromise. There are analogues in the first 21 months of the Carter presidency that extend into the later part of his term as well. In many ways, Kissinger was as powerful as Nixon or Ford with regard to Arab-Israeli negotiations. Domestic issues, Vietnam, and the Soviet Union commanded more executive attention. Carter on the other hand, delegated significantly less to Brzezinski and Vance, preferring instead to conduct diplomacy himself. Carter's personal involvement, specifically at Camp David, was a catalyst for bringing Egypt and Israel to an agreement.

A final theme is that American domestic politics played a critical role in the negotiations. Presidents during the post-1967 war period were particularly sensitive to domestic concerns about pressuring Israel too strongly. In the wake of the Six Day War, Johnson was cautious in how he treated Israel's occupation of other nations' territory, specifically in relation to the blowback that President Eisenhower received after the Suez Crisis.⁸⁶ As Watergate unfolded, Nixon's deteriorating domestic condition coincided with Kissinger's inability to bring Egypt and Israel to agreement. Ford's threat of reassessment could never be realized, primarily due to the strength of Israel's allies in Washington and the upcoming election in 1976. Among Bass's primary arguments is that Carter bucked this trend because he did not feel beholden to Jews as a core part of his constituency.⁸⁷ Indeed, Carter was much more apt to make public statements that

⁸⁶ Ibid, 44.

⁸⁷ Bass, "Anti-Politics," 37-41.

antagonized both Israeli leaders and Israel supporters at home. Brzezinski remarks, “In general, Carter rarely, if ever, thought of foreign policy in terms of domestic politics.”⁸⁸ Bass also concludes that by February 1978, the Carter administration had lost interest in currying favor with the American Jewish community. This point is reinforced by James Fallows, a Carter speechwriter that left in the middle of his term.⁸⁹

In the months following Camp David, many of the above threads can be easily seen in the way in which Carter and his aides brought Egypt and Israel together to form peace. The desire for a comprehensive agreement persisted on the American and Egyptian sides and on the Palestinian issue, the sides were unable to reconcile their differences. Personal diplomacy, which uniquely suited Carter, brought Egypt and Israel together at Camp David and the return of shuttle diplomacy produced the final agreement in March 1979. Both Begin and Sadat wanted an American negotiating role so that the final peace treaty would be “guaranteed” by Washington and have significant funding attached. Lastly, domestic political considerations played a greater role than previously considered in the pre-Camp David era. The coming midterm elections in November 1978 crystallized the need for the White House to cash in on the success of Camp David and turn it into electoral momentum. To finalize an agreement and derive electoral benefits from Carter’s diplomatic success, the administration invited Egyptian and Israeli delegations to the Presidential guest house less than a month after the signing of the Camp David Accords.

⁸⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 35.

⁸⁹ James Fallows, “The Passionless Presidency: The trouble with Jimmy Carter’s Administration,” *The Atlantic* (Boston), May 1979.

Chapter 3: From Blair House to the White House Lawn: The Negotiations behind the Three-Way Handshake

After the perceived success of the Camp David negotiations in September 1978, the Egyptians, Israelis, and Carter administration officials had much work left to do in order to finalize a treaty and implement Palestinian autonomy. The agreement signed at Camp David was merely a framework for peace and did not truly bind the two belligerent parties.⁹⁰ Numerous issues remained open and neither side had achieved all their aims in September. For the Egyptians, tensions with other Arab states were heightened by face-to-face negotiations with the Israelis at Camp David and there was increased pressure on President Sadat to take a tougher line with Israel, specifically on the question of the Palestinians. For the Israelis, Begin continued to be fearful of the idea of linkage: the idea that the Egyptian-Israeli treaty would be contingent upon autonomy negotiations regarding the Palestinians. His public speeches in the wake of Camp David were bombastic. Publicly, Begin claimed that the Accords granted Israel the right to a physical presence in the West Bank indefinitely.⁹¹ This was an exaggeration. He drew the ire of all involved in the negotiations and the American public as well. At the conclusion of the Camp David summit, a serious issue developed between Begin and Carter. During a meeting on the summit's final night, Carter and Vance contended that Begin agreed to halt all future settlement activity in both the West Bank and Gaza until the overall negotiations were completed, to be solidified through an exchange of letters.⁹² Begin and Dayan claimed that they had never given their firm agreement to those terms, a stance that is corroborated by Quandt.⁹³ Carter's perception of Begin as a result of this misunderstanding soured relations between the two leaders for the rest of their lives. Carter believed that Begin was dishonest and lied. In 1983, the two

⁹⁰ Ibid, 273.

⁹¹ Ibid, 274.

⁹² Quandt, *Camp David*, 248.

⁹³ Ibid, 250. It is important to note that Quandt was not physically present and comes to this conclusion by assessing the stories of all present actors.

barely spoke to each other when Carter came to address the Knesset and in 1987, Begin actively avoided the former president during the latter's trip to Israel.⁹⁴ Whatever transpired that night at Camp David, the rift between Carter and Begin only expanded over time.

When talks between Egypt, Israel, and the U.S. resumed in October 1978, four key issues divided the parties. The first was linkage. The prospect of tying an Egyptian peace treaty to progress on the Palestinian issue made the Israelis extremely uncomfortable, while Egyptian aides pushed for this point throughout the negotiations. Another point of contention was the concept of "priority of obligations." Israel wanted their treaty with Egypt to transcend Egypt's mutual defense commitments with all other Arab states. Begin hoped that Egypt would stay on the sidelines in the event that any Arab state, or group of Arab states, attacked Israel. A third issue concerned oil. By 1978, Israel was fulfilling much of its domestic oil needs through drilling in the Sinai. Because the premise of the treaty was that Israel would grant Sinai back to Egypt in exchange for peace, the question of what to do with Israeli oil drilling there became problematic for negotiators. Israel needed to find a way to fulfill its domestic oil needs while Egypt wanted to retain the Sinai wells as they would exist on sovereign Egyptian territory. The fourth and final major issue was timing. The parties needed to determine how Israeli withdrawal from Sinai would coincide with normalization of relations with Egypt. The Egyptians wanted to delay or prevent normalization as much as possible to mitigate some of the pressure on their country from the Arab world, which generally perceived the Camp David Accords as damaging to the pan-Arab cause.

In his memoir *Keeping Faith*, Carter remarks on the fact that at the conclusion of the Camp David summit, the main actors had no idea how far they still had to go to obtain true

⁹⁴ Conversation between Ken Stein and Jay Schaefer.

peace.⁹⁵ The view that the hard work had been done and that the final negotiations would be simple redounded through both government and the press.⁹⁶ Immediately, however, the talks hit substantial roadblocks. Carter notes that the parties had agreed that he would not be personally involved.⁹⁷ As already stated, the lack of presidential—or at least Kissingerian—involvement had not boded well for earlier rounds of talks. Carter had spent an inordinate amount of time mediating at the Camp David summit and felt it was time to move onto other issues.⁹⁸ Though Carter delegated responsibility for the next negotiating round to Vance, the secretary also prioritized other issues and further delegated to Roy Atherton, the State Department Ambassador-at-large. Atherton had been intimately involved in the shuttle diplomacy which preceded Camp David as well as previous negotiating efforts.⁹⁹

The Americans decided to use a strategy at Blair House that had worked well at Camp David: they put forth American drafts, took comments from both sides, and then revised the text based on those comments.¹⁰⁰ On the major issues however, the parties found it difficult to come to consensus. From the Israeli side, Begin's lack of attendance yet "iron grip" over the negotiations paralyzed Foreign Minister Dayan and Defense Minister Weizman.¹⁰¹ Dayan writes that much of Begin's Likud cabinet feared that he and Weizman—who were leftovers from the era of left-wing Israeli governance—would "sell out" Israeli interests, thereby handcuffing the

⁹⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 403.

⁹⁶ Memo, Situation Room to Zbigniew Brzezinski, 10/12/78, National Security Archives 1, Box 8, Folder 2, Item 9, Jimmy Carter Library. This contradicts Quandt's account, "From the beginning the Americans realized that several issues would be contentious," in Quandt, *Peace Process*, 269. Though Quandt may be correct in part, I think that many saw the four main issues as procedural with much room for common ground compared to more difficult questions like Israeli settlements, and the future of Jerusalem which were tangentially addressed by the Camp David Accords.

⁹⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 407.

⁹⁸ Ibid; Quandt, *Camp David*, 270.

⁹⁹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 270.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 268. Interestingly, Vance describes the strategy as follows, "[it] sidestepped the classic problem of advancing an 'American plan'" in Vance, *Hard Choices*, 233. Proposing an American draft treaty seems like "advancing an American plan" and Vance does not reconcile this obvious contradiction.

¹⁰¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 271; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 209-10.

pair's ability to introduce or commit to important positions. The Egyptian delegation contained a few newcomers to the high-level negotiations due to the resignation of Foreign Minister Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, Sadat's firing of Defense Minister General el-Gamasy, and the appointment of Mustafa Khalil as Prime Minister. There was little continuity among the Egyptian delegation from the Camp David talks. Though the group lacked earlier hardliners, it still skewed further away from Israeli positions than Sadat himself. Specifically, the Egyptian team was not willing to make the compromises that Sadat wanted to make, holding fast to policy preferences that would play better in the global Arab press whose readership was bitter towards Egypt. At Camp David, Carter became used to convincing Sadat to compromise over his advisers' objections.¹⁰² But for the first few days of Blair House, neither Carter nor Sadat were even directly involved.

In his memoir, *Breakthrough*, Dayan claims that the Israeli delegation was suspicious of American one-sidedness during the Blair House Talks.¹⁰³ Though the point is not mentioned in the American or Egyptian memoirs, before the talks began, Dayan writes that American representatives "made a point of giving pro-Arab – and incorrect – interpretations of the Camp David framework agreement" during public appearances.¹⁰⁴ Dayan highlights Vance's speech before the UN General Assembly in early October as an example of an instance in which the U.S. departed from the terms of Camp David.¹⁰⁵ Six days into the Blair House Talks, the Israelis were further incensed by the American replies to a questionnaire sent by the Jordanian monarchy to the U.S.. Dayan explicitly states that the intention of the questionnaire was "to justify Jordan's

¹⁰² Quandt, *Camp David*, 270.

¹⁰³ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 211.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 200.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

refusal to join the peace negotiations” and Quandt notes the harsh Israeli reaction to the content of the American response, which they deemed confirmation of a U.S. bias towards Egypt.¹⁰⁶

Perhaps not coincidentally, the day on which the Israelis received the text of the Jordanian questionnaire response was also the day that Carter joined the negotiations.¹⁰⁷ By October 17, the president had become frustrated with the lack of progress at the ministerial level, and his detail-first approach helped to bring about a resolution of a few issues including interim withdrawal, i.e. the amount of time it would take for Israel to first move its forces east in Sinai. Dayan recalls that Vance’s absence from the negotiations allowed Brzezinski to play a larger role in the negotiations, with an approach that Dayan describes as “highly tendentious.”¹⁰⁸ In *Power and Principle*, Brzezinski recounts the advice that he gave to the President in advance of Blair House, “I am concerned that if more moderate Arabs see the Egyptians and Israelis signing a peace treaty under our sponsorship, they may begin to see themselves as deceived, and this may have serious repercussions for the U.S. position in the Middle East.’ Thus, I kept reminding Carter of the importance of obtaining some Israeli commitment to sustain progress on the West Bank issue.”¹⁰⁹ Interim Egyptian Foreign Minister Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s account states that Carter looked favorably upon the linkage concept in advance of Blair House. “It was clear from Carter’s comments that he, like us, considered it necessary to link the Egypt-Israeli peace treaty with progress for the Palestinians.”¹¹⁰

Carter’s personal insertion into the talks came as the parties remained apart on issues ranging from linkage to oil. Even presidential involvement did not resolve the massive

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 201; Quandt, *Camp David*, 275.

¹⁰⁷ Quandt, *Camp David*, 274.

¹⁰⁸ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 213.

¹⁰⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 275.

¹¹⁰ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 159-60.

discrepancy between the Israeli and Egyptian positions on linkage. This could have been due to the fact that Carter's opinion on the matter was farther from the Israeli position than even the Egyptians. Boutros-Ghali writes that in pushing for linkage Carter "wanted to create a context that would give the Palestinians and other Arabs the confidence to join the process."¹¹¹ He acknowledges that Dayan's complaints were valid, mainly in that it was problematic to tie the treaty to progress with Palestinians who were not willing to engage with Israel or Egypt.¹¹² By contrast, Carter's view of linkage lined up with the Egyptians' *stated* positions, ones that they knew could be overturned by Sadat at any moment.¹¹³ On the oil and withdrawal issues, Carter was able to make significant progress. The Egyptians appeared to soften their stance on the oil fields once Boutros-Ghali fully immersed himself in the issue; he came to understand that Egypt would need Israel to be a buyer of any oil produced in Sinai.¹¹⁴ Further, Carter and the Americans formulated a way in which UN or international forces would be stationed in Sinai while Egypt and Israel immediately exchanged ambassadors.¹¹⁵ Carter's presence began to narrow the distance between the parties.

Though progress was being made, wide gaps existed on priority of obligations, linkage, and the timetable for Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. A dinner meeting on October 20 exacerbated tensions between the Israelis and Americans. Earlier bilateral talks between the Egyptians and Americans had been fruitless on the issue of priority of obligations. The Israeli formulation, which strongly held the Egyptian-Israeli agreement above all others, proved initially unacceptable to Egypt. The Arab press had crucified Egypt for its perceived sellout of the

¹¹¹ Ibid, 166.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid 165-7. Neither Carter nor Brzezinski understood how angry Arab states were at Sadat for negotiating with Israel at all. The Americans were naïve in believing that progress on the Palestinians would alleviate that view.

¹¹⁴ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 170.

¹¹⁵ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 216-7.

Palestinians and adding any kind of priority of obligations clause would further isolate Egypt from the rest of the Arab world. For his part, Sadat's "mood seemed to change almost daily. One day he was contemptuous of the Arabs. The next day he was morose after reading the Arab press's charging him with treason and yearned for Arab goodwill."¹¹⁶ This left the Egyptian delegation in a position where they could not commit to negotiating positions on almost all of the issues which would impact wider Arab opinion. On October 20, the American delegation informed the Israelis that Egypt would be unable to accept the Israeli verbiage on priority of obligations. Israeli legal adviser Aharon Barak played his "trump card"—a group of international attorneys at Yale had agreed with Israel that the American/Egyptian formulation was inadequate.¹¹⁷ Carter was incensed. He neither understood why Israel would go behind his back by consulting with outside experts nor why they "attached so much importance to the issue."¹¹⁸ Neither Carter nor Brzezinski wanted external influence to shape their foreign policy negotiating positions. Hours more of difficult conversation ensued during which the Americans and Israelis went back and forth on the issue of linkage. It was clear that Carter wished there to be concrete ties between an Egyptian-Israeli agreement and progress on the Palestinians. But when he determined that Israel would not budge, he acquiesced and directed his aides draft language acceptable to Israel.¹¹⁹

The next day, early morning bilateral talks between Carter and the Egyptians left the president with the impression that a full compromise could be reached and more expansive trilateral negotiations were held throughout the day¹²⁰ Interestingly, Dayan claims that the three

¹¹⁶ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 164.

¹¹⁷ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 219.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 220.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 220-1; Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 168.

parties agreed to a draft that afternoon, while Boutros-Ghali conspicuously leaves out this non-trivial matter.¹²¹ Sadat's response to the draft treaty was mostly positive.¹²² His primary sticking point with regard to the language on priority of obligations, as he objected to the idea that the Egypt-Israel treaty would supersede Egypt's other commitments.¹²³ Carter noted that this would be a problem. Predictably, Begin's response was more negative in tone. He complained at length about the American response to the Jordanian questionnaire and also justified settlement expansion based on technicalities. On the text of the treaty he had few objections and won cabinet approval for it, a crucial step before ratification. However, Begin decided to announce the cabinet approval of the treaty draft and a "thickening" of settlements in the West Bank simultaneously, infuriating Carter.¹²⁴ In Carter's official response to Begin, he linked the prime minister's actions to having "the most serious consequences for our relationship."¹²⁵ It is unclear whether Carter was threatening the personal relationship between the two, which was already cold, or the entire U.S.-Israeli special relationship which had existed since the early 1960s.¹²⁶

After the letters and responses had been sent back and forth, the three parties could not say that they came to an agreement. Gaps clearly still remained on all of the key issues and the delegations would continue to rehash many of the same arguments. On a positive note, Sadat and Begin had been jointly awarded the Nobel Prize, a development which itself caused tension as Dayan was unwilling to congratulate Sadat without first obtaining a similar sentiment from his

¹²¹ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 221; Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 169. Quandt seems to confirm Dayan's account in *Camp David*, 275. Perhaps Boutros-Ghali's intentional omission stems from the fact that he knew the agreement would not hold due to the likelihood that Begin or Sadat would not find the terms acceptable.

¹²² Quandt, *Camp David*, 276.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 277.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Despite his frustration, Carter continued to negotiate with Begin and the U.S.-Israeli relationship suffered a publicity setback rather than a substantive one. Begin understood that the special relationship would outlast the negotiations with Egypt, regardless of their outcome and that his actions on settlements would not create negative consequences despite in spite of the threats.

Egyptian counterparts.¹²⁷ The Israelis further increased tensions with the Americans and Egyptians as rumors swirled that Begin planned to move his office to East Jerusalem, which nearly the whole world considered occupied Palestinian territory. Carter writes, “Cy Vance was supervising the negotiations, but not much could be accomplished under the circumstances.”¹²⁸ Both the Egyptians and Israelis seemed to retreat into their respective corners after the draft agreement fell apart. Though Vance insisted on not reopening negotiations on previously concluded issues, both sides chose to do so.¹²⁹ The talks pressed forward slowly. On linkage, the Israelis and Egyptians exchanged drafts of a side letter which would deal with the Palestinian issue. While the Egyptians pressed for specific timetables and deadlines for Palestinian elections, the Israelis resisted all efforts to be pinned to specified dates.¹³⁰ During this period, Egypt re-proposed the concept of “Gaza first,” a formulation which would grant autonomy to Gazan Palestinians before Palestinians in the West Bank.¹³¹ The parties bickered over language to which they had already agreed and refused to commit fully to positions because of lack of authorization. The early days of November 1978 did not seem promising for substantive negotiating progress.

Begin stopped in New York on November 1 while en route to an official visit to Canada and coincidentally, Carter was in New York at the same time to campaign for Democratic congressional candidates. The two had not planned any kind of an official meeting, which the press perceived as a Carter snub to Begin.¹³² During a bilateral meeting in New York between the full Israeli delegation and Vance, Begin surprised the entire room by requesting a loan, rather

¹²⁷ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 228.

¹²⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 408.

¹²⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 236.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.* For evidence of earlier references to “Gaza first” at Blair House see Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 164 and 167.

¹³² Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 233

than a grant, from the U.S. in order to finance the relocation of civilian settlements in Sinai. When news broke of this proposal in Israel, the domestic press roundly criticized the prime minister.¹³³ To make matters worse, a pan-Arab summit convened in Baghdad called on Sadat not to make peace with Israel. The Arab states threatened a political and economic boycott should Egypt not comply.¹³⁴ In response, Sadat informed the U.S. that he could not sign any treaty without guarantees about what would occur vis-à-vis the West Bank and Gaza. Privately, the Egyptian and Israeli delegations met in the Madison Hotel in Washington, D.C., by then colloquially referred to as “Camp Madison.”¹³⁵ Boutros-Ghali admitted to the Israelis the extreme degree to which the Baghdad conference had handcuffed Egypt. Due to Egypt’s vast and complex economic relationships with the Arab world, it could not afford the economic boycott proposed in Baghdad.¹³⁶ Boutros-Ghali floated a solution that included measures which Israel had rejected earlier: specific timetables for the beginning of autonomy negotiations and Palestinian elections, the removal of the military government, and redeployment of the Israeli defense forces. In addition, the Egyptian Foreign Minister requested a number of confidence building measures to persuade Palestinians to join the peace process, including the release of convicted terrorists. This proposal in particular angered Dayan though he chose not to express his point of view.¹³⁷

At this point, progress on the talks essentially stalled. The American delegation saw many of Israel’s proposals as backing away from arrangements that they had previously agreed to at Camp David.¹³⁸ In a meeting of senior staff, Brzezinski suggested reducing aid for every

¹³³ Ibid, 234.

¹³⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 238.

¹³⁵ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 235; Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 171.

¹³⁶ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 235.

¹³⁷ Ibid, 237.

¹³⁸ Quandt. *Camp David*, 280.

new settlement that the Israelis constructed and that any aid decisions should be postponed until Begin accepted the Egyptian proposals on Palestinian elections.¹³⁹ Vance had been scheduled to make a Middle East trip in order to bring the progress made at Blair House to a conclusion but Carter pulled the idea, considering the lack of movement from the Israelis. Despite wide gaps on many issues, the Americans compiled a draft treaty, with corresponding annexes and side letters, that went to the Egyptians and Israelis on November 11, 1978. Frustrated and impatient, Carter wanted to make a bold move which would bring the dragging negotiations to an end.

The Americans struggled to get either side to accept its draft compromise. Begin did not care for the language in the West Bank/Gaza side letter, which called for a “target date” for Palestinian elections.¹⁴⁰ Further, the Israeli prime minister reneged on his proposal to have the Sinai settlements with a loan rather than a grant and also repeated his refusal to accelerate withdrawal from Sinai. Sadat may have liked the American draft even less than Begin. He insisted that the beginning of self-governance for the Palestinians coincide with the first Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. This idea had been rejected out of hand by Israel since before Camp David.¹⁴¹ Sadat also asked for special Egyptian privileges in Gaza, a notion that Carter did not even support.¹⁴² Calls back and forth between Carter and Sadat, as well as Carter and Begin, produced little movement from any of the three leaders. Carter’s phone call diplomacy overshadowed bilateral and trilateral meetings that had taken place over the past month. Dayan and the Israeli delegation departed Washington on November 13 while the Egyptian government

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 282.

¹⁴¹ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 240.

¹⁴² Quandt, *Camp David*, 283. In the days immediately before and after sending out the draft treaty, every account mentions Carter’s aggravation at Israel. Generally, Quandt writes that the American delegation’s “sympathies were more with Sadat than Begin.” (*Camp David*, 282). This does not mean that on every point Carter and Sadat agreed, and their disagreements are important for understanding their relationship as a part of peacemaking.

also summoned Boutros-Ghali back to Cairo.¹⁴³ Though an American draft was on the table, the Blair House Talks were over, and the parties did not seem ready to come to a full agreement.

On November 16, Egyptian Vice President Hosni Mubarak met with President Carter. His goal was to reiterate the Egyptian concerns on linkage between the Egyptian-Israel treaty and Palestinian elections and on article 6 of the treaty itself—the section on priority of obligations.¹⁴⁴ This section had become a sticking point of Sadat’s since the Baghdad conference and Mubarak expressed interest in discussing the issue directly with Ezer Weizman.¹⁴⁵ Somewhat duplicitously, Carter reminded Mubarak how much the Israelis had moved with their proposal to begin autonomy negotiations one month after the parties ratified the treaty.¹⁴⁶ He recommended to the Vice President that Sadat accept the treaty as drafted.¹⁴⁷ This time around, it would not be the case.

Five days after the Mubarak-Carter meeting, Israel informed the White House that it would accept the American draft of the treaty and annexes, a decision which Begin called “momentous.”¹⁴⁸ Of course, there was a wrinkle—Begin did not agree to the side letter dealing with the West Bank and Gaza Strip because it called for target dates on autonomy negotiations and elections.¹⁴⁹ Though the lack of agreement on the side letter meant that negotiations were not over, Israel went to the press by publishing the draft treaty, without the side letter, and Dayan announced publicly to the Egyptians that they could “take [the deal] or leave it.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴³ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 246; Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 175.

¹⁴⁴ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 175; Quandt, *Camp David*, 283.

¹⁴⁵ Quandt, *Camp David*, 283.

¹⁴⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 239. Throughout Blair House, Carter directed stinging criticism towards the Israelis on their policies with regards to linkage. For him to reverse course with Mubarak is worthy of interest.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 261.

¹⁴⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 239.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 176. In all accounts of this period, much is made of Dayan’s pronouncement that the Egyptians could “take it or leave it,” though this proclamation is conspicuously absent from his own memoir.

The Israeli approval of the American draft altered the calculus for the Egyptians who, for the majority of earlier negotiations, had pushed Israel to make concessions rather than the other way around. Boutros-Ghali attempted to convince his fellow aides that they should just accept the treaty as it stood in order to focus their energy on the Palestinian issue, but he was unsuccessful.¹⁵¹ In Israel, acceptance of the draft treaty did not mean that joy had swept over Begin's cabinet. Many on the right were disappointed that the efforts of Dayan, Weizman, and Begin had been in vain despite what they viewed as Israeli acquiescence on key issues. In addition, little progress had been made on the oil issue and economic aid to Israel, which were being handled parallel to the treaty negotiations.

November 30, 1978 proved to be a busy day in both Jerusalem and Washington for taking the next step forward in talks. In Israel, the government publicly listed its positions on the draft treaty which reaffirmed its desire to sign it, criticized Egypt for deviations from the Camp David framework, and showed a willingness to be more flexible on the West Bank/Gaza side letter.¹⁵² In Washington, Brzezinski drafted a memo which gave his interpretation on why the talks had stalled.¹⁵³ He gave five reasons: Carter's lack of personal control over the negotiations, the impression that a bilateral Egypt-Israel treaty was acceptable to both the U.S. and Egypt, Begin's lack of willingness to move on the Palestinian front/Israeli domestic opposition, the effect of the Baghdad Conference on Sadat, and a joint Egyptian-Saudi belief that the U.S. could not produce success.¹⁵⁴ He also gave recommendations for bringing the negotiations to a conclusion. These included a wide reaching public campaign to stress the importance of implementing the Camp

¹⁵¹ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 176.

¹⁵² Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 248-9.

¹⁵³ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter, 11/30/1978, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Material, Box 14, Folder 2, Item 21, Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

David framework. Brzezinski also wanted Sadat to agree to the already drafted priority of obligations clause but to combine it with a public statement that would undercut all of its meaning.¹⁵⁵ This was to be done with Saudi support to lend it credibility in the larger Arab world. In tandem with pressure on Sadat, Brzezinski wanted to push Israel to agree to a target date for Palestinian autonomy negotiations.

The memo's action steps represented a wide-reaching change in U.S. policy: Brzezinski essentially wished to conduct diplomacy through threats. He recommended that Vice President Mondale travel to the Middle East, first stopping in Egypt to "threaten" Sadat with the end of U.S. cooperation should he not accept the treaty as it stood. However, Mondale would then offer Sadat increased military and economic assistance should he choose to accept. With Israel, Brzezinski recommend only the proverbial stick without the corresponding carrot. Should Begin not agree to a timetable, Brzezinski said, he should be threatened with shifting the negotiating arena to the UN Security Council where the Soviet Union and more anti-Israel elements could take over the negotiations.¹⁵⁶ It is unclear whether Brzezinski wished that his threats be carried out should the negotiations have truly fallen apart.

In response to the stalemate, Carter sent Secretary of State Vance to the Middle East in order to "break the deadlock" and with instructions to "press Israel hard, even if that ended up costing him the election and Jewish support."¹⁵⁷ Vance landed in Egypt on December 10 staying for three days in difficult negotiations.¹⁵⁸ According to Vance, "After all that had happened since

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 411; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 277-8. Carter does not mention that he gave this instruction to Vance in *Keeping Faith* and Vance does not mention receiving the instruction in *Hard Choices*. I take it as fact because it is written in *Power and Principle* and repeated by Quandt in *Camp David*. It would seem to make sense given Carter's general lack of interest in intertwining domestic politics with foreign policy decision-making, especially when it involved American Jews. See Bass, "Anti-Politics" for further study of this phenomenon.

¹⁵⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 241.

the Blair House talks opened on October 12, it was extremely difficult to get them to compromise once again.”¹⁵⁹ Meetings with Sadat produced progress on only a few key issues. The Egyptian president agreed to the treaty text as it had been drafted, including all of the annexes and interpretive notes. Further, Sadat agreed to overrule his cabinet and drop the Egyptian demand for a fixed date for Palestinian elections; this was a major step in bringing the Egyptians and Israelis closer to an agreement on the West Bank/Gaza side letter. Sadat’s compromising attitude had its limits though, as he reversed course on the timing for ambassador exchange and “reiterated his willingness to have autonomy begin first in Gaza.”¹⁶⁰

Vance left Egypt for Israel acutely aware of the impending deadline for completing the treaty; Camp David had set December 17 as the date on which negotiations should end by. He also carried with him Sadat’s somber warning that the Israeli reception to Egypt’s proposals would be negative and could cause a “big confrontation that might last several months.”¹⁶¹ Sadat’s premonition proved correct. Upon arrival, Vance met with a large Israeli delegation to summarize his meetings with Sadat and explain the new Egyptian positions. Begin unleashed a lengthy rebuke that dismissed all of Sadat’s concessions in response while a right-wing cabinet member piled on with a wide-ranging denunciation of U.S. policy in the region.¹⁶² While Vance was in transit, Carter had publicly praised Egypt for its flexibility and urged Israel to have the same outlook in response.¹⁶³ Vance’s presentation of the Egyptian positions also put off the Israelis. In Dayan’s words, “We could not avoid the feeling that the Americans had misled us, and were applying a double standard, one for the Egyptians and one for us.”¹⁶⁴ The Israelis saw

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 287.

¹⁶² Ibid, 288-9.

¹⁶³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 241-2.

¹⁶⁴ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 250.

Vance's presentation of Egypt's position as if it was also America's which Vance admits was, in fact, the case.¹⁶⁵ Amidst the bitterness from his short trip to Israel, there was a breakthrough in normalization talks between the U.S. and China which required his immediate attention, as did other international matters. Carter recalled the secretary of state to Washington after only one day.

The Israelis' public response to the Vance visit was swift and cutting. At once it both accused the Egyptians of deviating from Camp David and also the Americans of being complicit in the deviation.¹⁶⁶ While his party was on its way back to the U.S., Vance went on record blaming Israel for the lack of a settlement before the December 17 deadline.¹⁶⁷ Small efforts from the State Department continued throughout December and January as Vance met briefly with Dayan and Egyptian Prime Minister Mustafa Khalil and lower level State Department officials went to both Cairo and Jerusalem. These trips produced little, prompting a U.S. reassessment of the status of negotiations.

In Vance's view, both Sadat and Begin still desired a treaty at the end of 1978.¹⁶⁸ The fall of the shah in Iran stiffened Israel's position on the oil issue while both countries seemed to retreat because of the political instability caused by the Iranian revolution. To create progress, Vance suggested at a January 12 foreign policy breakfast that the U.S. make contact with the PLO.¹⁶⁹ Both Carter and Vice President Mondale criticized the idea, though Brzezinski noted

¹⁶⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 242.

¹⁶⁶ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 250-1.

¹⁶⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 242.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 278. Vance does not mention this suggestion in his memoir. Perhaps this is because UN Ambassador Andrew Young actually made these contacts in July 1979, causing him to be fired and publicly criticized by American and Israeli officials (including Vance himself), as well as American Jews. U.S. policy at the time was not to have contacts with the PLO until it accepted Israel's right to exist. It is likely that Vance did not want to admit that he advocated a policy which he knew ran contrary to an American promise and for which he later rebuked a deputy. For a contemporary account of the Andrew Young-PLO meeting and cover-up see

that at some point, the PLO would have to become involved in the process. Hamilton Jordan sarcastically remarked, “one of us might want to be the first U.S. ambassador to the West Bank because in two years we [will] all be unemployed.”¹⁷⁰

In the rest of January and early February, the U.S. foreign policy team focused its attention elsewhere. A flare-up of Chinese-Vietnamese tensions threatened to unravel the recently concluded normalization agreements.¹⁷¹ The Iranian Revolution dominated a lot of the White House’s allotted time for foreign affairs, though the policy implications of the shah’s fall were unclear.¹⁷² The State Department and National Security Council watched the unfolding drama intently, but the U.S. foreign policy apparatus produced few answers for how the administration should respond to the crisis. Finally, those involved in Middle East diplomacy produced few answers. Lower level State Department officials had been unsuccessful in producing movement on stated positions from either side while shuttling back and forth between Cairo and Jerusalem. Brzezinski advocated further pressing of the Israelis in light of his belief that Israel would have leverage over the U.S. in an election year.¹⁷³ Following a suggestion made by Vance, President Carter called on Israel and Egypt to reconvene trilateral talks at Camp David on February 21, though only at the ministerial level.¹⁷⁴

In Dayan’s words, the so-called Camp David II Conference was “cold, short and sterile.”¹⁷⁵ A series of imbalances plagued the talks from their outset. First, Sadat had authorized Prime Minister Mustafa Khalil to negotiate freely with Israel and the U.S. while Begin forced

Don Oberdorfer, “Young Admits PLO Talks, Draws Rebuke From Vance,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Aug. 15, 1979.

¹⁷⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 278.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Quandt, *Camp David*, 291.

¹⁷³ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, January 23, 1979, quoted in Quandt, *Camp David*, 295.

¹⁷⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, 295.

¹⁷⁵ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 259.

Dayan to consult with the cabinet before advancing any positions.¹⁷⁶ There was also an imbalance in experience at Camp David II. Dayan and Vance were veterans of the negotiations while Khalil had only been appointed to the government in advance of the Blair House Talks. In Egypt, tensions rose within the government due to Boutros Boutros-Ghali not being selected as the Egyptian delegate despite his prior experience.¹⁷⁷ The Israeli determination that Dayan could not fully negotiate for the government underscored the absence of trust that hung over the proceedings and between Begin and Dayan. The frustration with the lack of progress came to a head when Osama el-Baz, a longtime participant in Egypt-Israel peace talks, excoriated William Quandt for being weak and at the mercy of the Jewish lobby.¹⁷⁸ To move the negotiations forward, the U.S. invited Begin to join the talks as he was the only cabinet member who could effectively negotiate for the Israeli government. Begin privately declined, citing his lack of interest in directly negotiating with a lower figure in the Egyptian government's hierarchy.¹⁷⁹

In light of Begin's intransigence, Carter reformulated his invitation, offering both the Israeli prime minister and Sadat a chance to meet with him personally at the White House.¹⁸⁰ Begin accepted and began formal talks with the president in Washington on March 2. Vance describes the meetings between the 2nd and 4th as "among the most difficult the two leaders ever had."¹⁸¹ In the March 2 entry of *White House Diary*, Carter writes,

"We met with Begin and his people in the Cabinet Room, and he was very strong, negative, apparently confident, making unreasonable demands and adamant statements. He said Sadat still wants to destroy Israel... That night I thought about how to break the obvious impasse, caused by Begin himself... He deliberately

¹⁷⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 413; Quandt, *Camp David*, 297.

¹⁷⁷ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 187-90. Eventually, Boutros-Ghali participated as an aide in the talks despite Khalil assuming the official role of foreign minister in addition to his existing role as prime minister. It is clear that Boutros-Ghali felt slighted because he assumed that his status as interim foreign minister would develop into a permanent appointment.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

¹⁷⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 413.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 243.

distorts our position and spreads lies through the news media... So I decided to pursue the possibility of going first to Egypt, getting together with Sadat, and then going to Israel. If we're not successful, just describe what we proposed and what they've given up, and let the whole thing shift to the UN."¹⁸²

The next day did not show signs of improvement. According to Carter's account, Begin left the talks after only two hours and no progress made but a "clear picture of our concern and [American] willingness to break off the negotiations."¹⁸³ On March 3 and 4, the two leaders made significant progress in hashing out some of the more minute details about language in the annexes and West Bank/Gaza side letter.¹⁸⁴ Much of the high level, trilateral attention since the Leeds conference had focused on the Palestinian problem and interim withdrawal, but over and over again, the oil issue reappeared. In *Camp David*, Quandt highlights it as one of only two outstanding issues between the Americans, Egyptians, and Israelis on the eve of Carter's forthcoming visit to the Middle East.¹⁸⁵ At this stage, Carter found himself in the unusual position of agreeing with Begin on the majority of the remaining questions, going as far as offering American guarantees should Egypt refuse to supply Israel with Sinai oil.¹⁸⁶ As the talks between Begin and Carter wound down, Sadat cabled to Washington that he planned to come to Washington within the week. His strategy—go to Congress and the American public to convince them that the lack of an agreement was the fault of Begin and the Israelis.¹⁸⁷ Immediately, the

¹⁸² Carter, *White House Diary*, 298-9. This entry is condensed to highlight the most relevant points. It is crucially important to note that Carter seems to have invented Begin's statement on Sadat's desire to destroy Israel. The Israeli transcript of the meeting does not have Begin mentioning this point at all and the word "destroy" does not appear in the FRUS summary of the meeting. In FRUS see, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1981*, Volume IX, Arab-Israeli Dispute, August 1978-December 1980, ed. Alexander R. Wieland (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2014), Document 184. In his post-presidency, Carter grew increasingly critical of Israeli policy and *White House Diary* was published in 2010, four years after his book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* had caused widespread controversy due to inaccuracies and assertions that Israeli policy in the West Bank amounts to apartheid.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 299.

¹⁸⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 244; Quandt, *Camp David*, 299-301.

¹⁸⁵ Quandt, *Camp David*, 301.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 281.

Americans saw that this would be a bad idea and stalled Sadat long enough for the Israeli cabinet to approve the draft treaty, annexes, interpretive notes and side letters on March 5.

In the wake of the Begin-Carter meetings, tepid optimism pervaded the executive branch's power centers. Carter's main aides saw four mechanisms available to bring the Egyptian-Israeli peace negotiations to a close: ministerial level talks, shuttle diplomacy, an invitation to Sadat to conclude the negotiations with trilateral talks, and a presidential trip to the Middle East.¹⁸⁸ Carter called Sadat, informing him of the decision to send Brzezinski to Egypt to begin preliminary negotiations.¹⁸⁹ During this phone call, the president also floated the idea of coming to Egypt personally to conclude the negotiations. Carter recalls in *Keeping Faith* that Sadat's overwhelmingly positive reaction to this potential visit convinced him to go forward with it against the advice of his senior advisers.¹⁹⁰

The decision to undertake a Middle East trip with issues still unresolved was a massive political gamble for Carter.¹⁹¹ Other foreign policy questions outside the scope of Arab-Israeli affairs had complicated Carter's standing abroad and with Congress. The temporary Iranian takeover of the U.S. embassy there in February 1979 highlighted the growing crisis in Iran after the ousting of the shah and it emphasized the lack of coherent American policy in that country and part of the world.¹⁹² The Carter administration was also preparing itself for a difficult congressional fight over the impending second Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) with the Soviet Union.¹⁹³ Vance identifies five key issues that remained in limbo on the eve of Carter's trip to Egypt: an interpretative note on comprehensiveness, the Egyptian demands on

¹⁸⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 245.

¹⁸⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 417.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 416-7; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 245.

¹⁹¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 245.

¹⁹² This event, colloquially known as the "Valentine's Day Open House," occurred on the same day as the kidnapping and murder of the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

priority of obligations, the West Bank/Gaza side letter, the timing of ambassadorial exchange and the oil question.¹⁹⁴ In spite of the challenges, Carter was upbeat in the days leading up to the mission. This was most likely due to the phone call between Sadat and Carter during which Sadat all but guaranteed the trip's success.¹⁹⁵ In order to ease the Egyptians into accepting some of the more controversial Israeli demands, Carter stressed to Brzezinski the need to emphasize the wider strategic importance of the treaty's signing, rather than focus on phrasing and language.¹⁹⁶ Carter saw an avenue for Begin to hold out for more concessions should the Egyptians get bogged down in details. The president also left his national security adviser with secret instructions to inform Sadat of the precariousness of the American domestic arena and of Carter's view that Begin may have wanted him defeated in the 1980 election.¹⁹⁷

Brzezinski found Sadat in a compromising mood upon his arrival on March 6.¹⁹⁸ The Egyptian president showed willingness to work with Carter given Begin's proposals on the target date and the Israeli prime minister's lack of interest in the "Gaza first" autonomy formulation. The pre-negotiations were successful, and Carter arrived in Egypt on March 7 with surprisingly little intense work to be done. On the phone and in Egypt, Sadat had given Carter license to negotiate with Israel on his own country's behalf, effectively pushing Sadat's more cautious advisers out of the negotiating picture.¹⁹⁹ In describing Carter's visit to Egypt, Boutros-Ghali writes, "The talks in Alexandria seemed to go nowhere, but the prevailing opinion among the Egyptian delegation was that Sadat was prepared to compromise for the sake of a peace treaty.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 245-6.

¹⁹⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 417.

¹⁹⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 282.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. In the note on this instruction in *Camp David*, Quandt writes that Carter did not recall telling Brzezinski to discuss the domestic situation's relationship to the talks. It would, however, make sense that this was on the president's mind given that the possible domestic fallout from a failure greatly concerned his advisers and was a topic of conversation among them in advance of the trip.

¹⁹⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 282.

¹⁹⁹ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 302-3; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 283.

Would these compromises be as dangerous as I feared or as trivial as Sadat assured us they were? The peace treaty, Sadat declared, was far more important than the details we kept raising with him.”²⁰⁰ The contrast with Carter’s account is stark. “Over the objections of some of his close advisers, Sadat accepted all the troublesome texts, and within an hour he and I resolved all the questions which still had not been decided after all these months.”²⁰¹ For the Egyptian aides, Sadat’s acquiescence to Begin’s formulations seemed a great failure which would be detrimental to their country’s long-term interests. For the American delegation, joy abounded as the side that they had backed since 1977 made yet another bold move for peace.

Carter and his aides spent the remaining days in Egypt touring and speaking to wider Egyptian audiences. This was “designed to let the Egyptians and the rest of the world know the closeness between us, the ties between our nations, and the overwhelming support of the Egyptian people for the peace process.”²⁰² On March 10, the American delegation departed with a joint Egyptian formula to bring to Israel.²⁰³ Within the group, however, a plan emerged to “arrive in Tel Aviv with a somber demeanor, so that the Israelis would not feel that an Egyptian-American deal had been cooked up.”²⁰⁴ Carter was “confident of success” as he and the Americans touched down in Tel Aviv.²⁰⁵

In a manner to which Carter’s party had become accustomed, the Israelis brought reason for concern and pessimism to the process. Brzezinski, Vance, and even Dayan note that tension pervaded President Carter’s arrival, despite the full military reception that greeted him.²⁰⁶

Around Jerusalem, there were throngs of angry protestors. Many of them shouted slogans or

²⁰⁰ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 195-6.

²⁰¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 417.

²⁰² Ibid, 418-9.

²⁰³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 283.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. This intentional attitude deception is not mentioned by any Americans other than Brzezinski.

²⁰⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 420.

²⁰⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 283; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 246; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 269.

displayed critical signs in Hebrew.²⁰⁷ On the drive between the airport and Israel's capital, the streets were largely empty, which compared poorly with the cheering crowds that lined Carter's routes in Egypt. The change in popular response reminded Carter that Israel was a true democracy, implicitly juxtaposing it with the authoritarianism of Egypt.²⁰⁸ The opening of negotiations did not alleviate much of the tension. To Carter's suggestion that the treaty signing occur while he was still in the Middle East, Begin responded with a firm no.²⁰⁹ He insisted that the Knesset would have to ratify the treaty before he could sign it. This scuttled Carter's effort to score a massive political victory by concluding the negotiations and signing the treaty at the same time. In the American calculus, a delay between Carter's trip and the signing could have adverse effects on the press cycle and therefore, public opinion.

The day of meetings on March 11 were rife with the same bitterness that characterized the previous night's conversation. "There were sharp and angry statements on both sides of the table," according to Vance and Dayan used the exact same adjectives to describe a Begin diatribe about the priority of obligations clause, Article 6.²¹⁰ Carter's retorts were equally harsh in response. He pressed Begin for commitments while Begin claimed a need for more time to formulate positions.²¹¹ On each of Sadat's counterproposals, Begin refused to budge, citing the agreement between he and Carter in Washington earlier that week on language.²¹² As other Israeli cabinet members started to add their grievances to the talks "it seemed as if no headway would ever be made."²¹³ After the third session on March 11, Begin suggested retiring for the day so that he could confer with his cabinet about the Egyptian proposals. This overnight

²⁰⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 420; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 283.

²⁰⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 420.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 420-1.

²¹⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 247; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 271.

²¹¹ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 271.

²¹² Quandt, *Camp David*, 394-5.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 395.

meeting, lasting from before midnight to five thirty in the morning, brought Israel much closer to signing the treaty.²¹⁴ The Israelis made a few key concessions and reformulations. They decided to accept the Egyptian language on the interpretive note to Article 6 of the treaty, accept the possibility of a Gaza first option during autonomy negotiations and also commit to buying all of the oil from Egypt's Sinai wells at market price.²¹⁵ The most important concession, according to Dayan, was on exchange of ambassadors.²¹⁶ Israel would withdraw from Sinai in stages, and at a faster pace than called for by Camp David, on the condition that Egypt would exchange ambassadors one month after the first stage of withdrawal had been completed. At this point, Israel was prepared to sign the draft treaty.

The United States was unsatisfied with the extent of the Israeli concessions, most specifically on Gaza.²¹⁷ According to Dayan, "Vance said he saw no point in going to Egypt unless [the Israelis] agreed to the stationing of Egyptian liaison officers in Gaza."²¹⁸ Begin had always seen this "Gaza first" approach as a non-starter because he feared that Egypt would quickly cede control of the strip to the local population, who would then actualize his fear of a Palestinian political entity. The March 12 meeting atmosphere was "strained and gloomy" despite the fact that Israel had made so much progress the previous evening.²¹⁹ Begin was exhausted. He had not slept in many nights and had no patience for the compromises offered by the Americans. Both he and Carter were scheduled to give speeches at the Knesset that day and the morning produced no results. In his Knesset speech, Carter emphasized the intense desire of the Israeli and Egyptian peoples for peace and he criticized Israeli leadership for not doing

²¹⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 247-8; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 273.

²¹⁵ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 273.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 274.

²¹⁸ Ibid. Interestingly, Carter was adamantly opposed to an Egyptian presence in Gaza during Blair House but now reversed course given his pseudo-official role as Egypt's negotiator with Israel for the trip.

²¹⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 248.

enough to get there.²²⁰ Protestors from both the right and left frequently interrupted Begin's address, shouting him down and resulting in one MK's removal from the chamber in a display which left Dayan "sorry and ashamed."²²¹

After the Knesset session, the negotiations moved to the ministerial level, but the aides could not progress. Carter made plans to leave the next day empty-handed.²²² The prospect of Carter departing their country without a treaty in hand made Dayan and the Israelis distraught.²²³ Some of the aides went to work reformulating their proposal on the oil issue. Israel would ask the U.S. for oil commitments for twenty years rather than ten, with a new appendix affirming Israel's right to buy oil direct from Egypt; Israel did not want the Egyptian boycott to remain in place *de facto*. In the morning of March 13, it appeared that this change had won the Americans over. The U.S. compromised on a fifteen-year guarantee while promising to present the Israeli case for a lack of Egyptian presence in Gaza sympathetically. According to Vance, "there was a feeling in the room that we had crossed the last river."²²⁴ On the tarmac, Begin bid Carter farewell, telling the American president that he had succeeded.²²⁵ The historic peace between Egypt and Israel was nearly complete.

In Egypt, it took only an hour for Carter to convince Sadat to accept the Israeli proposals.²²⁶ The Egyptian president agreed to drop his demands to mention an Egyptian liaison in Gaza and to have autonomy begin in Gaza first. Further, he accepted the Israeli formulation of the interpretative note on priority of obligations and their position on exchanging ambassadors. Khalil voiced his objections, but Sadat considered them and overruled. Upon hearing of Sadat's

²²⁰ Quandt, *Camp David*, 308.

²²¹ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 275.

²²² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 423.

²²³ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 275.

²²⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 251.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 196.

concessions, Boutros-Ghali, who was not present at the session, remarked to U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts, “You are pressuring [Sadat] to reach a peace treaty at the expense of Egypt’s Arab obligations. The price of responding to your pressure will be paid by Egypt and President Sadat.”²²⁷

Carter returned to Washington exhausted, but relieved. His efforts had led to an agreement between nations who had been at war with one another only a few years earlier and whose people were historic enemies. After personally involving himself in diplomacy to an unprecedented extent, Carter wrote in his diary that he would “[resolve] to do everything possible to get out of the negotiating business!”²²⁸ At home, the press reaction to the conclusion of the negotiations “disgusted” the president.²²⁹ Press Secretary Jody Powell had briefed reporters in the hours before the American delegation left Israel, a time when negotiations seemed totally stalled. Only a few hours later, the White House reported that the parties had reached an agreement, leading to accusations that Powell had deliberately misled the press as a negotiating tactic.²³⁰ Reports also surfaced that the U.S. had made substantial financial guarantees to the parties, further tempering positive coverage of the achievement. Abroad, the reaction to the treaty was mainly positive, though its terms brought denouncement from the Arab world.²³¹

The parties had to sort out a few outstanding issues before the official signing ceremony. On bilateral issues between Israel and the U.S., there were remaining questions about withdrawal phases, added military assistance, the oil guarantees, and American security guarantees in the

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 426.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid; Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 153.

²³¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 426.

event that Egypt broke the terms of the treaty.²³² Israeli ministers and American aides worked out the necessary details on March 26, 1979, the day of the treaty signing. For both parties, the U.S. committed to significant increases in military aid which Carter had withheld during the negotiations for leverage.²³³ Egyptian Prime Minister Khalil wrote at length in response to some of the last-minute letters and interpretive memoranda, but his consternation did not hold up the signing. From within the ceremony, the shouts of Palestinian protestors confined to the margins of the White House property could be heard clearly.²³⁴ Their anger reminded Boutros-Ghali of the treaty's essential ignorance of the Palestinian people lending the ceremony "a sense of bitterness that spoiled the joy of the occasion."²³⁵

²³² Quandt, *Camp David*, 312-3.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 314.

²³⁴ Edward Walsh and Jim Hogaland, "Sadat and Begin Sign Treaty; Carter Pledges to 'Wage Peace': 30 Years of Strife Officially Ended," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 27, 1979.

²³⁵ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 199.

Chapter 4: An Analysis of the Blair House to Peace Treaty Period

The path from a three decades-long state of war to a full peace agreement for Egypt and Israel was an effort that spanned a decade and involved a variety of actors. Diplomatic historians who focus on structures and institutions may emphasize the outsized role of U.S. power in creating peace. Others that fall into the *primat der innenpolitik* school would focus on Carter, Begin, and Sadat's tenuous domestic standings during 1978 and 1979 to highlight why they each worked tirelessly for peace.²³⁶ Begin's election represented a sea change in Israeli politics and brought to the fore tensions within the polity that had previously not existed. An emboldened Israeli right needed concrete victories to maintain power but had policy priorities which were anathema to world opinion. Meanwhile, the top of the government bureaucracy primarily consisted of center-left politicians who felt obligated to moderate Begin without pushing too hard as to elicit a reaction from his base. In Egypt, Sadat could easily clamp down on his population because of Egypt's autocratic military-civilian government overlap. This could not stop his key advisers from dissenting with their president because of his concessions to Israel. It also did not change the reality that Egypt's civilian population struggled with obtaining basic supplies due to Russian abandonment and a lack of fully-funded U.S. aid. Cold War minded historians might point to Brzezinski's outsized role in crafting Carter's foreign policy, arguing that the joint desire among all three actors for the removal of the Soviet Union from the Middle East brought them to peace. However, these frames of analysis all neglect to highlight the vitally important role of personality in creating peace. In some diplomatic history, actors are reduced to types that play a role rather than dynamic and fluid figures that can change opinions because of seemingly trivial factors. Their individual backgrounds and idiosyncrasies are obscured by

²³⁶ A primary example of this school, which in English means "primacy of domestic politics," is Fritz Fischer, *War of Illusions: German Policies from 1911 to 1914*, 2nd ed. (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975). It stood in contrast to the more traditional German diplomatic history school of "Primat der Außenpolitik," in English "primacy of foreign politics."

scholarly generalizations, which cannot fully account for the events during which peace is created.

Understanding Carter as a person gives a lot of insight into his role as mediator during the post-Camp David peace process. His background in engineering imparted on him a task-oriented approach to governance and policy.²³⁷ Many presidents before and after have trafficked in generalities and abstractions and left policy detail to their aides and advisers. One of Carter's great gifts was that he could at once debate phrasing with Begin then some minutes later, abstract the same phrases to help bring Sadat to the table. Only a few years prior to the beginning of Carter's term, Egypt and Israel fought a brutal war that cost many lives on both sides. Carter's ability to make both leaders see the vision for peace lay in his ability to connect with each on a personal level. Carter could not have convinced Begin and Sadat to engage in historic diplomacy had they not wanted the agreement both personally, and for their respective countries. Carter's positive relationship with Sadat is well documented. Brzezinski recalls, "Carter's discussions with Sadat were punctuated by comments such as... you are my brother... I shall always be proud of our friendship, of our brotherhood."²³⁸ In *Keeping Faith*, Carter writes that his first meeting with Sadat had been the best day of his presidency.²³⁹

Carter worked to understand both Sadat and Begin deeply, especially through the medium of religion.²⁴⁰ He studied the both Old Testament and Koran to prepare for his meetings with the two leaders.²⁴¹ At Camp David, Carter attempted to bring Sadat and Begin together using the common language of faith. The U.S. made space for Sadat to conduct his daily prayers

²³⁷ Bass, "Anti-Politics," 132-47.

²³⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 284.

²³⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 282.

²⁴⁰ Berggren, "Carter, Sadat, and Begin: Using Evangelical Style..." 734.

²⁴¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 329; Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1993), 9.

and Carter brought his annotated bible with him to the summit in order to reference it as the negotiations progressed.²⁴² Despite Carter's familiarity with biblical history, and his appreciation for Begin's deeply held religious commitments, the relationship between the two leaders was rocky throughout the negotiations between their countries.

Begin's lack of interest in comparative religious study troubled Carter, who genuinely felt that these conversations at Camp David would build trust between he, Begin, and Sadat.²⁴³ As on many matters, Carter felt that Sadat was more forthcoming and generous than Begin. In addition, Sadat impressed Carter with his biblical knowledge, the depth of which Carter could not match in his study of Koran.²⁴⁴ Whereas Sadat made a genuine effort at friendship with Carter, Begin's attempted to extract maximum concessions from the U.S. and Egypt at all times. This posturing frustrated Carter from Camp David onward and it, along with Begin's perceived dishonesty, was a primary cause of Carter's lasting distaste for the Israeli prime minister. Begin calculated that a strong U.S.-Israeli relationship, but not necessarily a warm personal relationship with Carter, was necessary for Israel's prominence on the world stage. Begin knew that in his corner he possessed an American Jewish community displeased and distrusting of Carter.

To what extent Carter can take personal credit for the success of Egyptian-Israeli peace is complex. As an empirical matter, Carter's insertions into the talks correlated with progress and his retreats correlated with stalls.²⁴⁵ The same can be said however, of Sadat and Begin. Their ministers were generally incapable of adequately producing movement from the other side without the personal acquiescence of their respective heads of government. Carter had a desire to

²⁴² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 329.

²⁴³ Berggren, "Carter, Sadat, and Begin: Using Evangelical Style..." 747-8.

²⁴⁴ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 9.

²⁴⁵ Carter's personal interjection into Blair House, his invitation for Begin to come to Washington in early March, and his Middle East trip later in March were the three key moments post-Camp David that were breakthroughs for peace.

engage with both leaders on their own terms while remaining reluctant to compromise his own beliefs. Often, those beliefs clashed with the realities of the negotiating sphere. His position on the Palestinian issue did not alter from early 1977 until the end of his term; he sought comprehensive peace and envisioned the Egypt-Israel treaty as the first in a series of many that would end the constant wars in the region.²⁴⁶ As it became more and more clear that Sadat was willing to sign a treaty with Israel that was legally independent from progress on Palestinian autonomy, Carter was forced to adjust his tactics but not his long-term objective of multilateral peace. In the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations, most people would intuitively consider Carter's role as that of the mediator.²⁴⁷ As the talks moved from Blair House through the end of 1978 however, it became increasingly clear that Carter's role was more like Egypt's liaison to Israel. Sadat saw that Carter had leverage over the Israelis because of military dependence and never relinquished his belief that the U.S. "held 99 percent of the cards."²⁴⁸ In addition, Sadat trusted Carter to advocate for Egypt's positions because he understood that on nearly all key issues, Carter's ideal point in the policy space was the same as Egypt's or even possibly farther away from Israel's than his own.²⁴⁹

After Camp David, Sadat became increasingly concerned about his standing in the Arab world because of the Baghdad Conference.²⁵⁰ In response to Baghdad, Sadat's references to gestures and progress on the Palestinian issue mainly concerned the need to appease, if only minimally, his Arab allies. Carter saw the Palestinian issue as a moral stain on Israel and the

²⁴⁶ For Carter's view on this point near the beginning of his term see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 85-8. For a view near the end see Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 438.

²⁴⁷ A strong analysis of the mediator's role in international relations is Jacob Bercovitch, *Mediation in International Relations: Multiple Approaches to Conflict Management* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1992).

²⁴⁸ "Sadat Says the U.S. Holds 99% of the Cards in the Middle East," *JTA* (New York), Mar. 28, 1977.

²⁴⁹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 281.

²⁵⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 238.

world as his term began.²⁵¹ His genuine concern for human rights caused him to focus on this issue and make gestures toward the Palestinians that had never been made previously by an American president.²⁵² There is little evidence that Sadat saw the need for autonomy for the Palestinians as anything more than a political question. Boutros-Ghali notes that at Camp David, “Osama al-Baz was becoming the hero of our ‘gang,’ fighting for a formula to recognize Palestinian rights and strengthen the document’s comprehensive character. Sadat paid attention only to what really interested him, the total return of Sinai before anything else.”²⁵³ Boutros-Ghali feared that once Israel withdrew from Sinai, Sadat would “lose interest in the process” thereby leaving the Palestinians out of the equation and creating animosity towards Egypt in the Arab world. Publicly, Sadat often made reference to the Palestinian question and its importance.²⁵⁴ But through difficult negotiations, it became clear that he was willing to put the Palestinian question aside for bilateral peace with Israel.²⁵⁵

It remains unclear to what extent Carter understood Sadat’s willingness to move so far towards a separate peace and at what point Carter came to this realization. At the outset of the Blair House Talks, Carter found the most pertinent question to be “whether there would be no more than a separate treaty with Egypt, without follow-up action on the West Bank and on

²⁵¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 284.

²⁵² This is evidenced by lack of clarification on Clinton Town Hall statement and Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 87, 99 in which he references the administration view that Israeli sovereignty should not exist past the 1967 lines with only minor security modifications. On 99, Brzezinski speaks of Carter and Vance’s lack of flexibility on settlements compared to his view.

²⁵³ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt’s Road to Jerusalem*, 143.

²⁵⁴ See Anwar el-Sadat, “Peace with Justice” (speech before Israel’s Knesset, Jerusalem, Israel, Nov. 20, 1977) and many other public addresses.

²⁵⁵ Quandt, *Camp David*, 315-7, 323. Quandt’s analysis points to Carter’s unwillingness to press Begin as the reason that Sadat had to accept a bilateral treaty. I essentially argue the inverse; Sadat’s willingness to acquiesce to Begin forced Carter to negotiate a separate peace. Quandt gestures to the possibility of my analysis on 316.

Palestinian rights.”²⁵⁶ During the Blair House Talks in early November 1978, Carter wrote naively in his diary about Sadat’s capacity to be the leader of the Arab world,

“Zbig and Cy have evolved an erroneous impression lately that Sadat doesn’t care about the West Bank/Gaza settlements. Obviously, Sadat wants his own territory back very badly, but even more than that, he considers himself the political and military leader of the Arab world. His word of honor is at stake. He’s promised his people he would not betray them, and I have never doubted his sincerity.”²⁵⁷

In a November 30 memo to the president, Brzezinski observed, “The Camp David Accords created the impression that in fact a separate peace between Egypt and Israel was acceptable to both the US and Egypt – and for a while I even thought that perhaps you and Sadat had secretly agreed on this.”²⁵⁸ We see evolution in Carter’s thinking as during the Camp David II period, Carter was angry during a meeting with his Middle East policy team and speculated that Sadat “did not give a damn about the West Bank.”²⁵⁹ Carter’s anger at this meeting betrayed his policy positioning and underscored his disappointment in negotiating a separate peace. Doing so directly contrasted with Carter’s commitment to a comprehensive agreement. Even as early as Blair House, he stated that the Egyptian-Israeli treaty should not depend on the success of Palestinian autonomy.²⁶⁰ However, Carter warned Israel that the treaty may not stand if Israel was the party that caused the breakdown of the autonomy talks, implying that the president felt a need for implicit linkage at minimum.²⁶¹ By early March, when Sadat had already given Carter “carte blanche” to negotiate with Israel on his behalf, the dream of linkage was over.²⁶² The sides

²⁵⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 417. It is valuable to note that this was written after the fact and may reflect Carter’s later thinking about Blair House. In Dayan’s view, the Palestinian question was out of the scope of the Blair House Talks and therefore, would not be a pertinent question at all. See Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 213.

²⁵⁷ Carter, *White House Diary*, 257.

²⁵⁸ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to President Carter, 11/30/1978, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Material, Box 14, Folder 2, Item 21, Jimmy Carter Library.

²⁵⁹ Carter quoted in Quandt, *Camp David*, 296. This was in reference to Sadat’s “Gaza first” formulations but illustrates the larger point that to Sadat, solving Palestinian issue was a political rather than moral imperative.

²⁶⁰ Quandt, *Camp David*, 274.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 302.

were arguing about the phrasing of the West Bank/Gaza side letter, which was not a binding part of the treaty and even at the Egyptian maximum position, only imposed vague commitments on Israel.

Carter had many of his own opinions but did not operate in a vacuum. He was heavily influenced by his aides and advisers, many of whom had years of experience dealing with the Middle East, foreign affairs, or the American Jewish community. Like many cabinets in U.S. history, Carter's engaged in its fair share of argumentation.²⁶³ It differed, however, in that it was arranged like "spokes on a wheel" rather than the pyramid structure that had been popular among other presidents.²⁶⁴ This contributed to Carter having a well-informed, pluralistic view of the Middle East that was not dominated by any one aide's thinking. It is worth noting that the main players in foreign policy all contributed to the Trilateral Commission, including Carter himself.²⁶⁵ Though disagreements may have abounded behind closed doors, the Americans presented a unified front when it came time to negotiate with Egypt or Israel.²⁶⁶ In contrast, the Egyptian and Israeli teams both had wide discrepancies amongst themselves which often came to the fore during meetings.

The American foreign policy team's impact on the negotiations between Egypt and Israel ebbed and flowed. At times, advisers seemed to hold a lot of sway over Carter, including instances in which Carter repeated the exact words that Zbigniew Brzezinski had uttered the previous day.²⁶⁷ But there were others in which that the U.S. cabinet's impact was minimal, such

²⁶³ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 15.

²⁶⁴ Bass, "Anti-Politics," 46.

²⁶⁵ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 23.

²⁶⁶ Ibid, 27. This is corroborated by meeting summaries and other memoirs. From the written record, there appear to be no instances in which the U.S. delegation openly aired a disagreement in front of Egypt or Israel.

²⁶⁷ Ibid, 36.

as Carter's decision to embark on shuttle diplomacy in March 1979.²⁶⁸ Carter maintained control of final decision-making on all major issues.²⁶⁹

The foreign policy team often made negotiating recommendations without consideration for domestic political positioning. In instances where Israel particularly frustrated Vance and Brzezinski, they each made suggestions which would have had massive political fallout in the U.S. if they were implemented.²⁷⁰ Sometimes, these recommendations spilled into reality, such as Vance's remark to the traveling press corps that Israel was responsible for not meeting the December 17 deadline for completing negotiations.²⁷¹ The repeated failure to understand the negative political consequences of foreign policymaking on the domestic setting repeatedly opened the Carter administration to criticism from pro-Israel groups and the press at large.²⁷² Carter's foreign policy wing, namely Brzezinski, intentionally kept domestic considerations out of its decision making process until re-election became a pressing concern in early 1979 and forced it to abandon high-level involvement during the autonomy talks.²⁷³

In the course of making peace between Egypt and Israel, President Carter and his cabinet inevitably ran into domestic concerns, primarily with the Jewish community. By the time that Hamilton Jordan crafted his June 1977 memo on the tense relationship between Carter and American Jewry, much of the damage to Carter's reputation among American Jews had already been done. Jordan's recommendations for winning back Jewish support—75% of Americans voted for Carter in 1976—were sidetracked by the U.S.-Soviet joint communique and subsequent

²⁶⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 281.

²⁶⁹ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 15.

²⁷⁰ For Vance suggesting PLO contacts, see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 278. For Brzezinski threatening to reduce aid for every new settlement constructed and to hold any new decisions on aid until Begin accepted a target date for Palestinian elections see Quandt, *Camp David*, 280.

²⁷¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 242.

²⁷² Bass, "Anti-Politics"; David Ignatius, "Solving the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in *Zbig*, ed. Charles Gati (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 186.

²⁷³ Bass, "Anti-Politics," 117-20; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 254.

efforts to push the package plane deal through Congress. Why the Carter administration and Brzezinski chose to reinsert Moscow into the negotiations remains a mystery. Neither Egypt nor Israel desired Russian involvement. In mid-1978, with Jewish support at a low because of the plane package deal to Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia, Carter regained some momentum by brokering the Camp David Accords.²⁷⁴ As negotiations at Blair House faltered and reports came that Carter had essentially promoted Egyptian positions there, much of the support that Carter had garnered as a result of Camp David fell apart.²⁷⁵

Carter spent a great deal of time seeking to resolve the Middle East conflict, likely more than any other president has spent on any other foreign relations issue. In doing so, Carter expended a lot of political capital. With Congress, Carter pushed the pro-Israel legislators to their limits with the 1978 plane deal.²⁷⁶ By going to Camp David, Carter conducted the most ambitious summit diplomacy in the history of the U.S., devoting his whole foreign policy team to the issue and practically shutting the executive branch down for two weeks. Carter weighed his options on whether or not to personally engage in diplomacy based on domestic considerations. This calculus tended not to come into play when crafting policy but rather, when it came time to committing his own involvement. Here Carter may have been driven by a belief that only he had the ability to derive adequate concessions from both sides to produce an agreement. Notably, Carter's expenditure of political capital, combined with the looming presidential election, forced him to bow out of the 1979-1980 autonomy negotiations.²⁷⁷ By mid-1979, Carter's "political stock was low," and he had many other issues to tackle which had been sidelined as he worked

²⁷⁴ Bass, "Anti-Politics," 113.

²⁷⁵ Ibid, 114.

²⁷⁶ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 196.

²⁷⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 437-9.

towards the peace treaty.²⁷⁸ In fact, it was Carter's own idea to withdraw from the exhausting negotiations.²⁷⁹ His choice for chief negotiator during the autonomy negotiations was Bob Strauss, a Jewish member of the establishment wing of the Democratic Party who had serious concerns about Carter's domestic precariousness.²⁸⁰ Carter wanted a "political shield" from the difficult negotiations and felt that Strauss could effectively protect him against attacks from the pro-Israel lobby.²⁸¹ Vance was ineffective in convincing Carter to allow him to run the autonomy negotiations as opposed to Strauss after Carter gave him a domestic politics rationale.²⁸² As demonstrated at many times throughout Carter's four years, the high level foreign policy staff did not factor domestic politics into policy decisions. Vance could not understand why Carter would appoint a special negotiator with no experience to a position that both felt was crucially important, someone whose success could lead to their joint goal of actual Palestinian autonomy. To Carter, the dream of successfully creating an independent Palestinian entity was not worth the domestic fallout from engaging in the effort.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid; Bass, "Anti-Politics," 117.

²⁸⁰ Bass, "Anti-Politics," 118-9.

²⁸¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 438; Carter, *White House Diary*, 315; Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 162.

²⁸² Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 164.

Afterword: Autonomy, Reagan and Avenues for Further Research

After the treaty signing, the negotiations moved into a new phase: Palestinian autonomy. As previously noted, Carter removed himself from these talks completely due to political considerations and handed the reins to Robert Strauss. Sadat and Begin did not necessarily feel the need to move quickly on autonomy after the treaty signing. Both Jordanian and Palestinian refusal to take part in the negotiations lent them little credibility and forced Egypt to negotiate for parties that it could not adequately represent. Begin's thinking on autonomy had been consistent for many years and did not change because of the treaty signing. He never had an interest in serious Palestinian political expression or the removal of an Israeli presence from the West Bank. As such, he carried out the terms of the peace treaty to the letter and participated in autonomy negotiations based on his "self-rule" plan that both Carter and the Egyptians rejected outright. Facing a primary challenge, the Iranian hostage crisis, high mortgage and interest rates and economic downturn at home, Carter insisted on not pushing Begin on the settlement issue, leading to a direct confrontation between the president and Vance. Though Carter's advisers disagreed with Begin's settlement policies and his goals for autonomy, their political standing was too weak to force a showdown.

Tensions between the Carter administration and the American Jewish community continued to bubble when press reports revealed that UN Ambassador Andrew Young met with the PLO's UN observer and subsequently misled Vance about the encounter.²⁸³ Politics at the UN caused a stir again in March 1980 when an anti-Israel resolution went up for a vote before the UN. Brzezinski and Vance supported a mild version of the resolution and counseled Andrew Young's successor to vote for it. The version that passed ended up having strong language that was deeply critical of Israel's policy on Jerusalem and the political wing of Carter's cabinet

²⁸³ Don Oberdorfer, "Young Admits PLO Talks, Draws Rebuke From Vance," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Aug. 15, 1979.

forced Vance to issue a retraction and blame it on a “bureaucratic error.”²⁸⁴ These issues sowed further distrust in Carter from American Jews and, combined with the looming election, forced Carter to remain on the sidelines despite his principled support for Palestinian autonomy.

The autonomy talks themselves were fruitless.²⁸⁵ Strauss could not even get the two leaders to agree about the negotiating parameters. Sadat concerned himself with the “powers and responsibilities” of a future elected authority for the Palestinians. Begin’s interest laid more in the definitions of certain phrases like “self-governing authority” and “autonomy.”²⁸⁶ Strauss was a U.S. special trade representative who, in this appointment, saw the potential to become a world renowned figure like Henry Kissinger.²⁸⁷ When the time came to negotiate, it became clear that he neither had the requisite knowledge of the Middle East nor the patience to bring the parties near agreement.²⁸⁸ Even Strauss began to air the concern that he had only been brought on to cover Carter domestically because the president knew that autonomy talks would be impossible.²⁸⁹

The era of autonomy talks coincided with Vance’s deteriorating influence in the White House. Carter had assigned Vance to other projects after March 1979, but Vance continued to weigh in on Middle East issues, even suggesting that Carter go to Congress with a proposal to cut aid to Israel for each new settlement it built. As the year wore on, Carter further isolated

²⁸⁴ Edward Walsh and Josh M. Goshko, “Carter Says Error Led U.S. to Vote Against Israelis,” *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), Mar. 4, 1980; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 441-2. Brzezinski asserts that the bureaucratic error was an excuse and that the U.S. meant to vote for the resolution in a different form.

²⁸⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 253.

²⁸⁶ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 237-8.

²⁸⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 438.

²⁸⁸ Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 164-6.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 166. Vance addresses these claims in *Hard Choices*, 253-4 and uses complex, and in my opinion meaningless, language to refute the claim that the Carter administration had a goal of doing less than creating autonomy for the Palestinians. The way Vance writes would seem that he is directly addressing Strauss, with whom he had major disagreements during 1979.

Vance from the Middle East and gave more and more authority to Strauss.²⁹⁰ Strauss and Vance's disagreements stemmed from how hard to push the Israelis on the settlement issue both privately and publicly. Vance threatened to resign over Carter's proclamation in an August 1979 meeting that Strauss should be given full control over Middle East issues for the administration. Even into 1980, once Strauss had been replaced by Sol Linowitz, Vance's settlement preoccupation pushed him further out of favor with Carter. The secretary of state regretted being forced to retract the American vote on the Jerusalem resolution at the UN and made his negative feelings about Israel's settlement policy well known to Carter.²⁹¹ According to Brzezinski, Carter was quite upset with what he saw as Vance's obsession with the settlements and the president sought to smooth things over through a one-on-one meeting at Camp David, but made it clear that he was displeased with Vance's position.²⁹²

Once Senator Ted Kennedy's primary challenge became serious, Carter moved Robert Strauss back into the domestic wing in order to work on the re-election campaign.²⁹³ His replacement, Sol Linowitz, was an experienced negotiator with proven success on the Panama Canal Treaty and he also had strong credentials in the Jewish community.²⁹⁴ By the time Linowitz took over, the Israeli foreign policy team had lost Moshe Dayan who had resigned over Begin's autonomy views. Continuing PLO disinterest in participation forced the Egyptians into a difficult negotiating position as they attempted to represent a people who had never granted Egypt that authority.²⁹⁵ Linowitz made some progress on technical issues but on major ones like

²⁹⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 440.

²⁹¹ Ibid, 440-3.

²⁹² Ibid, 442.

²⁹³ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 238.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 239.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

the status of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem and water rights, the parties remained very far apart.²⁹⁶

The November 1980 election saw President Carter defeated by Ronald Reagan, from whom many votes were siphoned off by independent John Anderson. Carter's defeat proved, in an electoral setting, that diplomatic success does not carry over to electoral success on its own. On issues outside the Middle East, Carter had also negotiated positive agreements including the Panama Canal treaty and normalization with China. However, voters perceived Carter's lack of attention to the deteriorating situation in Iran between 1978 and 1979 as contributing to the shah's fall and the rise of the anti-Western regime that replaced him. The ensuing Iran hostage crisis and the botched rescue effort to save the Americans held there had an obvious negative impact on Carter's electoral chances. Economic issues including inflation and high interest rates also soured him with the American public. His investment in the pursuit of broad Arab-Israeli peace laid out the framework out for later treaties between Israel and Jordan, as well as an agreement the PLO, but the period 1978-1980 did not yield Carter any domestic political returns.

The transition from Carter to Reagan in January 1981 fundamentally altered the substance and style of U.S. foreign policy, including toward the Middle East. The center of Reagan's focus on nearly all international issues was the Soviet Union. Moving forward with autonomy for the Palestinians did not figure into his policy priorities or world view. Much of Reagan's political messaging emphasized that he would be making radical shifts away from Carter. As Carter placed high priority on Arab-Israeli peace generally and the Palestinians in particular, a Reagan initiative on that front would not have fit with the "break from Carter" messaging of his campaign. The new White House advising team also had little interest in or

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

experience with the Middle East as they shared Reagan's primary interest in combating the Soviet Union, an initiative for which Menachem Begin and Israel would become a strategic asset. Then, within the first ten months of Reagan's term, Islamic fundamentalists assassinated Anwar Sadat. Vice President Hosni Mubarak stepped into the presidency and only made vague gestures toward working on the Palestinians' behalf. With all of this in mind, it is easy to see why autonomy talks broke down and efforts at extending Arab-Israeli peace would not be seriously reconsidered until later in Reagan's term.²⁹⁷

Significant gaps in scholarship on later Carter diplomatic efforts still exist. It would be useful for scholars to examine records from Egypt, Israel, and the U.S. to determine more accurately the timeline and content of all of the meetings at Blair House. In addition, few scholars have taken a deep dive into the Palestinian autonomy talks in 1979 and 1980. It may be useful to do some comparative analysis of Robert Strauss and Sol Linowitz and how they approached the negotiator's role. One of the biggest regrets of this thesis is the lack of availability of Egyptian sources on the period. Once Sadat and Khalil had colluded to sideline Boutros-Ghali in early 1979, it becomes quite difficult for scholars to make any kind of accurate judgments about Egyptian policymaking in relation to the peace process. Declassification on that side could open up the possibility for considerable amounts of original scholarship on that front. To date, the Egyptian archives, in all languages, remain closed to researchers.

²⁹⁷ I draw heavily on Quandt, *Peace Process*, 245-8 in the analysis for this paragraph.

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