

The Camp David Accords: A Revisit in 2022

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This year is the Forty-Fourth year of the Camp David Accords, signed by the President of Egypt and the Prime Minister of Israel on September 17, 1978, an event of great historical importance in the modern Middle East. These agreements, which resulted from the negotiations conducted over some eighteen months, eventually resulted in the signing of a formal treaty of peace between Egypt and Israel on March 19, 1979. As a result, the strategic map of the Middle East was fundamentally altered. The Accords were also a tribute to the negotiating skills of the then US President Jimmy Carter who was almost singularly responsible for the agreement that was reached at Camp David, Washington, in September 1978. This article seeks to analyse the reasons behind the success of this seminal summit in Israel-Palestine peace-building. It argues that President Carter's role was super-essential to the success of the Camp David Accords.

Keywords: Camp David Accord, Arab Israeli Dispute, Palestinian state, Gaza

The process that culminated in the 1978 Camp David Accords had its origins in the Yom Kippur (Ramadan) War of 1973. This war resulted in the Arab states of Egypt and Syria attacking Israel to avenge their 1967 defeat, changed the negotiating strategies of almost all the major players in the Middle East, except perhaps the Soviet Union. Israel won this war but only after almost succumbing to a Syrian invasion and ultimately losing a lot of strategic Suez Canal territory to the Egyptians. It was left to the Nixon administration and, in particular, to his secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, to broker a ceasefire between the two warring groups. The US was ultimately able to use the dominance that it had established during the war to broker three agreements among the combatants-two between Israel and Egypt and the third between Israel and Syria. These agreements established dividing lines between the military forces of both sides and strict limitations on their frontline deployments to reduce the danger of surprise attack (Kissinger, 2001,p. 68). The Sinai II Accord between Israel and Egypt in 1975 was an important step on the path that culminated in the Camp David Peace Treaty of March 1979. This second Sinai agreement contained political elements that dealt with a durable peace between the two parties. However, the commitment to non-recognition was still so great that the entire negotiation process had to be conducted entirely through an American mediator (Henry Kissinger). The two sides never met except at the military level at the very end of the negotiation to sign the documents. The Sinai-II agreement had political leaders' signatures added to the document separately in each country (Kissinger, 2001,p. 68).

This article seeks to analyse the reasons behind the success of this seminal summit in Israel-Palestine peace-building. What forced the Israelis and the Egyptians to the negotiating table after long years as adversaries. What was the role of the United States as a seemingly impartial, yet biased power-broker in the Israel-Arab question? What were the deciding factors that compelled the Egyptians to accept the terms laid down at Camp David that effectively tied their Army down for perpetuity from ever attacking Israel again? How did the Israelis succeed in their military motive of neutralising the Egyptians on their south-western flanks? The article argues that President Carter's role was super-essential to the success of the Camp David Accords. The Palestinian question over-shadowed the Summit meeting. Ultimately the success or failure of the summit will be viewed in terms of the implications for the premier issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict, namely the status of the Palestinian issue in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Arab Oil Embargo

It was the Arab world that was considered to have gained the most politically from the conflict. The war had convincingly demonstrated that the gap in military strength between Israel and the Arab countries had narrowed. The 1973 war also added a new dimension to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Soon after the outbreak of the war, there were demands from within the Arab world to deny oil to Israel's supporters in the West. In mid-October, Arab oil exporters, meeting in Kuwait, agreed to cut production, while the UAE took the lead in halting oil export to the USA. Western nations were soon experiencing rising fuel prices and growing shortages,

showing the extent of their dependency on oil produced in the Arab world. In early November, the member states of the European Community (EC), the forerunner of the present European Union (EU), endorsed a statement calling for an Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 and asserting the need for a settlement in the Middle East that did not ignore the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people (Cossali, 2001, p. 27). It was the first time the Europeans made such a statement endorsing the right of the Palestinians. An outraged Israel accused Europe of surrendering to Arab blackmail. Before they could accuse the US of the same, President Nixon quickly deputed his Secretary of State, Kissinger, to the region on several visits to Middle East capitals. It was the start of Kissinger's legendary shuttle diplomacy. In June 1974, Nixon himself embarked on a tour of the region. America, in spite of having huge oil reserves, had experienced more inconvenience than expected by the Arab oil boycott. Nixon reassured Israel of continued US support. He was also able to please the Arabs by forecasting a new era of cooperation between the U.S and the Arab world. Arab leaders welcomed Nixon's overtures, believing that, at last, US influence would be used to promote an equitable settlement of the long-festering Arab-Israeli dispute. American overtures resulted in the revoking of the embargo on exporting Arab oil to the US. Diplomatic relations between Syria and the USA were also re-established. Israel's international position, on the other hand, was considerably weakened by the revelation of the extent to which the world was dependent upon Arab goodwill (Kissinger, 2001, p. 28).

The Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) in the 1970s

The 1970s were a period during which the PLO made many sterling successes. In fact, by the end of the decade, the organisation had representatives, some with full Ambassadorial positions, in more than 80 countries. On September 22, 1974, the UN General Assembly, disregarding virulent Israeli and American objections, included on its agenda for the first time the Palestine question as a subject for debate rather than as part of the general question of the Middle East. And on November 13, 1974, the Assembly, in a historic move, heard Yasser Arafat, the head of the PLO, plead for the Palestinian people's right to self-determination in his much-quoted 'gun and olive' branch speech (Aburish, 1998, pp.140-142). International recognition of the PLO had an important effect on the intra-state politics of the Arab world. The effect was felt at the Rabat conference of the League of Arab states in Morocco in October 1974. The main item on the agenda was Palestinian representation at the proposed Geneva peace talks. Before this, in November 1973, the Arab states excluding Jordan recognised the PLO as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, previously known as Transjordan till 1967, when it had also included the West Bank and East Jerusalem, had always been unwilling to establish a Palestinian state on the Occupied Territories (OTs). Coupled with this was the traditional role of Jordan's monarchs as the custodians of all major Muslim holy places in Jerusalem, the prime of which was the Al-Aqsa mosque, the third holiest in Islam. The mosque itself was located on a raised platform called the Haram Al-Sharif, worshipped by Jews as the site of their lost Temple, built by King Herod over 2000 years ago. Again, Muslims revered the site as the place from which the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) ascended to heaven. Naturally, the ruling elite of Jordan was reluctant to give up all of this.

At Rabat, however, King Hussein was under the combined pressure of all the Arab states to accept the PLO's right to represent the Palestinians at all international fora. Finally, Hussain accepted a resolution that said that any liberated Palestinian territory 'should revert to its legitimate Palestinian owners under the leadership of the PLO' (Sela, 2002, pp. 158-160). This resolution helped to strengthen the position of moderate PLO elements led by Chairman Arafat since they now had the backing of all the main Arab states to participate in negotiations as the legitimate voice of the Palestinian people. The elevation of the PLO to the state of a principal player on the Middle Eastern stage was welcomed by the Arab people. The Israeli government however refused to have any dealings with the PLO, dismissing it as a terrorist organisation responsible for the deaths of many of its citizens. The PLO's majority position on Israel itself underwent considerable change during the 1970s. Though committed by its charter to the destruction of the Jewish Zionist state and its replacement by a secular democratic Palestinian state, the middle of the 1970s itself saw the majority of PLO members willing to accept the idea of a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital. In late 1975 and early 1976, the international position of the PLO was further legitimised through a series of discussions at the UN. In November 1975, the General

Assembly adopted three resolutions concerning Palestine: establishment of a 20-nation committee to devise plans for the implementation of Palestinian self-determination and national independence; invitation to the PLO to take part in future debates on the Middle East; and defining Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination (Cossali, 2001).

The United States, by prior agreement with the Israelis (through Henry Kissinger), was committed not to recognise or negotiate with the PLO. They, therefore, repeatedly blocked and vetoed resolutions aimed at affirming the Palestinians' right to establish their own state. The Israelis themselves were not interested in the PLO at the moment. Their eyes were set on Egypt and Nasser's successor as president, Anwar el-Sadat. Sadat had evinced more than enough inclination that he was primarily interested in his land of Sinai and he was quite willing to sacrifice the Palestinians by establishing peace with Israel for the sake of that land.

Sadat, Egypt and the United States

When Sadat succeeded Nasser, in September 1970, he was totally unknown to the West. He seemed to be quite the opposite of Nasser in appearance and nature. He lacked the pan-Arab aura of Nasser. Even his people did not know him. Within three years of his rule, he was to change this perception entirely by his momentous decision to attack Israel. Egypt and Syria's combined attack on Israel changed the negotiating spectrum of the Middle East considerably. Israel was brought down from a position of unassailable strength to that of a very vulnerable state committed to finding a durable peace with its neighbours. The 1973 War and subsequent oil embargo resulted in a much more heightened consciousness among the world community about the plight of the Palestinians. Even before the war started, Sadat had shown his sense of 'realpolitik' by ditching the Soviets for the Americans. He carried this further in 1975 after the various withdrawals and military standstill agreements were negotiated with the Israelis by abrogating the Soviet-Egypt Treaty of Friendship signed in 1971. Sadat risked enmity with the Arab world and particularly from Syria, by aligning himself with the US. He knew that the Americans were committed (again through Nixon and Kissinger) to pursuing a hands-off policy vis-à-vis the Middle East. This action of Sadat resulted in Syria assuming temporary leadership of the Arab world.

Carter and the Arab-Israeli Dispute

The late 1970s were a period of more active negotiations on Arab-Israeli disputes. The Arab states supported Palestinian participation in an overall settlement providing for Israeli withdrawal from areas occupied since the 1967 war and establishing a Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza strip. The US position towards the Palestinians also was changing. The new administration of President Jimmy Carter identified the Middle East conflict as a major foreign policy concern and promised more direct involvement in the region. In February 1977, President Carter sent his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, on a tour of the Middle East and invited Israeli and Arab leaders to visit him in Washington (Cossali, 2001,p.29). In March 1977, Carter spoke of the need for a Palestinian homeland. He later stated that it was essential for the Palestinians to take part in the peace process. These were positions that were unthinkable during the Kissinger era. The Israelis, in turn, continued to reject the direct participation of PLO representatives in the peace process but were willing to allow Palestinians to sit in other Arab delegations like that of Jordan.

Begin and the Palestinian Issue

The May 1977 elections in Israel resulted in the victory of the right-wing Likud party headed by the former Yishuv era (prior to the formation of the state of Israel) Jewish terrorist leader Menachem Begin. Begin as an individual and Likud as a party were committed to maintaining Israeli control over the West Bank and Gaza, renamed in Biblical Jewish terminology as Judea and Samaria. In the approach to the 1977 election, Begin had campaigned hard for the expansion of Jewish settlements in the Occupied Territories (OTs) and permanent Israeli control over the West Bank. Begin was violently opposed to negotiation with the PLO, which he dubbed a 'terrorist' organisation, and refused to accept the notion of an independent Palestinian state. Begin was a Polish Jew who had been imprisoned in a concentration camp by the Nazis, where he had lost almost all of his immediate family. This experience, coupled with his later experience in Israel's war of independence, created a

tremendous desire for security in him. For him, no amount of sacrifice was sufficient to safeguard the security and territorial integrity of the Jewish state. He was also imbued with equally great suspicion for the 'goyim' (non-Jews). He saw all land, whether of Israel proper or the Occupied Territories (OTs), including the Golan Heights captured from Syria, as the same sacred and holy part of the Biblical land of the Jews. Begin's long exclusion from governance in Israel and Israeli Labour's treatment of him as a 'pariah' had made him very bitter and created in him a burning determination to leave his mark on the polity of the Holy Land. Almost immediately after the Begin government assumed office in 1977, it announced the extension of health, education and welfare services to the Palestinian populations of the West Bank and Gaza (Cossali, 2001,p. 29). Until then, the Egyptians and the Jordanians and the UNRWA had been fulfilling these needs of the Palestinian people. Arab fears that this was in fact the precursor to Israeli annexation of the two territories were deepened by the announcement of an accelerated program of Jewish settlement building on the West Bank. This was along with the unveiling of an Israeli draft proposal for a territorial settlement that envisaged the maintenance of the occupation throughout the West Bank and Gaza. To counter the unnecessarily aggressive new Israeli government and mollify the Arab world, the USA and the USSR issued a joint statement on 1st October 1977 urging a Middle East settlement that would ensure the legitimate rights of the Palestinians. The inclusion of such a phrase signalled an important shift in the official U.S. attitude to the Arab-Israeli conflict and clearly troubled the Begin regime (Cossali, 2001,p. 29).

Sadat's Attitude towards Israel

Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat made the decisive breakthrough in peace diplomacy with a dramatic visit to Jerusalem in 1977. He decided to take this radical and quixotic step because of his extreme dissatisfaction with the progress of the American mediated peace process in the Middle East. He was also afraid of what steps the right-wing Likud government would take about the Sinai, in particular, to expand and increase the existing number of settlements there. In a speech to the Egyptian Parliament on 9 November, Sadat expressed his frustration with the lack of progress towards a peace settlement and announced that he would be prepared to go to Jerusalem to negotiate directly with Israel. Israel immediately took up his offer and on 19 November, Sadat flew to Tel Aviv (Cossali,2001,p. 29). His initiative was welcomed in the West, where it was regarded as a bold attempt to break with the sterile attitudes of the past. Within the Arab world, however, Sadat's visit was seen with both scepticism and hostility. There was a general feeling that Sadat was prepared to undermine the cause of Arab unity for his own selfish purposes. Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ismail Fahmy, resigned in protest at the proposed visit. Sadat's visit to Jerusalem had been planned a few months before during a secret meeting between Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan of Israel and Deputy Prime Minister Hassan Tuhamy of Egypt in Morocco. This meeting was primarily meant to explore the negotiating positions of both Egypt and Israel. President Sadat wanted to explore Israel's willingness to make serious concessions (Quandt, 1986,p. 111). As a case of pre-negotiation, this meeting helped increase both sides' confidence that negotiation was a credible option. At the meeting, Tuhamy told Dayan that Sadat was ready to meet with Begin, provided Israel gave a prior commitment to full withdrawal from all Arab territory. Moreover, he indicated that the Egyptian President was ready to negotiate secretly and not in a multilateral forum like Geneva. Israeli leaders, on their part, stated a readiness to withdraw from almost all of the Egyptian territory but were not prepared to return all Arab lands captured in 1967 (West Bank and Gaza) (Cossali, 2001,p. 29). The subsequent failure of three months of direct negotiations between Egypt and Israel in which the United States was an observer rather than a participant helped to convince both parties that any further process of negotiation must involve the US as a full participant if it was to succeed (Quandt, 1986,p. 107).

American Mediation in the Camp David Peace Process

Jimmy Carter was unique among American presidents in his deep concern for finding a solution to the issues dividing Israel from its Arab neighbours. In his first speech to the United Nations General Assembly in October 1977, he made these concerns clear:

'Of all the regional conflicts in the world, none holds more menace than the Middle East. War there has already carried the world to the edge of nuclear confrontation. It

has already disrupted the world economy and imposed severe hardships on the people in the developed and developing nations alike (Stein, 1989,p. 413)'.

When Carter came to the White House, he brought little more than a strong biblical knowledge and affection for the Holy Land. Being a devout evangelical Christian, he had a deep affinity for the state of Israel and the Jewish people. On the other hand, he had next to no knowledge about the Palestinians except for the fact that they were obviously Arab. Throughout his tenure, his inability to deal with moderate Israelis as well as Palestinians, coupled with absolutely no first-hand knowledge of the conditions in the Occupied Territories (OTs) made him blind to many facets of the dispute. After his 1983 visit to the West Bank and Gaza, he could not fully understand the Palestinian side of the argument. Carter was an 'outsider,' relatively new to Washington and its ways, as far as American politics was concerned. He had been the former Governor of the state of Georgia (Quandt, 1986,p. 30). So as far as he was concerned, it was a quick transition from local issues to those of great international significance.

Carter knows well enough that American interests would be best served if peace was brought to the Middle East. He came to know many of the leaders in the Middle East personally and established close relations with them. Most important of all, while showing a sympathetic face towards Israel, Carter was able to handle the Jewish lobby in New York and Washington relatively firmly. It must be acknowledged that Carter's achievements in the Middle East were built on the firm foundations laid by Henry Kissinger in brokering three Arab-Israeli agreements during 1974-75 (Quandt, 1986,p. 320). Carter was also officially served by his Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, who helped draft the Camp David Accords and the text of the peace treaty.

President Carter's original aim had been to promote a comprehensive Middle East peace that would be achieved through a series of negotiations that could conclude with the convening of a peace conference in Geneva. This was a highly controversial approach, especially after the failure of the 1973 Geneva Conference. A major point of discord about this approach was that Carter wanted to take the Soviets along, something that the Kissinger Doctrine strictly forbade. The negative response to his policies, both at home and abroad, forced Carter to reassess his priorities in the Middle East. He was forced to give up the Geneva conference paradigm of peace negotiations. Sadat's visit to Israel in November 1977 again forced the Carter Administration to change its Middle East policies (Quandt, 1986,p. 18). The US concentrated now on meditating on a bilateral peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. Ironically this was the very approach that Kissinger had always dreamed of. Carter, who had always been a critic of Kissinger, finally fulfilled the task left behind by him.

President Carter's decision to invite Sadat and Begin to Camp David resulted from his frustration at the slow pace of the Middle East peace negotiations during the later part of 1977 and early 1978. The two main actors, Begin and Sadat, showed no signs of dropping their traditional animosity and sitting down to serious peace talks. At the same time, Carter realised that his continued involvement in the Middle East morass was costing him political breathing space and votes at home. With his re-election bid fast approaching, he could not afford this. Moreover, Carter firmly believed that Middle East Peace, or at least an Egyptian-Israeli settlement, was obtainable and necessary (Quandt,1986,p. 206). He felt that the Egyptian and Israeli leaders suffered from distrust and lack of confidence which could be overcome by helping each to understand the other better. Carter felt that a summit meeting at Camp David would provide an ideal setting for Begin and Sadat to get to know and trust each other. Therefore, invitations were issued to both parties in early August 1978 for a summit in September. Both Sadat and Begin immediately accepted Carter's invitation to Camp David (Quandt, 1986,p. 207).

Camp David: The Course of the Negotiations

The main Camp David negotiations took place over a 13-day interval. During this time, both the Israelis and the Egyptians were kept negotiating in good faith by the presence of the Americans alone. The success of Camp David does not belong to Sadat or to Begin but to President Carter and his team of mediators. Only Carter had the patience and influence to force two diametrically opposite men to sit together and agree to a common purpose. The

peace treaty between Egypt and Israel that arose out of the Camp David talks was a tribute to the skill and mediation of President Carter, his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brezinski. The Camp David talks lasted from 5 to 17 September 1978. Two sets of agreements were produced. One established arrangements for determining the future of the West Bank and the Gaza strip. The other elaborated principles whereby an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty could be formulated to end the state of hostilities and establish normal relations between the two countries. Ups and downs characterised the entire process. The progress of the negotiations was mostly related to Begin's ability to compromise. His tenacity in holding on to each and every bargaining point ensured that success came only at the very end. After ten days of intense discussion and negotiation, almost everyone at Camp David believed that the talks had reached an impasse (Quandt, 1986, p. 234). Faced with failure, Carter was obliged to reconsider his initial strategy. The political costs of leaving the summit empty-handed must have been apparent not only to Carter and Sadat but also to Begin. If an agreement was to be reached, one if not both parties were going to have to make major concessions.

One of the main areas of disagreement between the two sides were related to the military/civilian settlements that Israel had planted in the occupied Sinai Peninsula. Egypt naturally insisted that these be dismantled along with the airfields and all other infrastructure that Israel had built in the Sinai during their occupation. Begin refused throughout the negotiations to withdraw the Sinai settlements. He had made his political career protecting Jewish settlements on occupied lands. So he could not be seen as compromising on this very emotive issue. Finally, he agreed that the issue would be voted on in the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) (Smith, 1992, p. 225).

The Camp David Accords involved enormous skills from all those involved in the negotiations. The talks would have achieved nothing had the participants not been able to demonstrate the will and ability to move away from extreme opening positions and compromise on the issues that sharply divided them. For example, President Sadat began the Camp David Conference on September 6, 1978, by presenting the text of a proposal entitled 'Framework for the Comprehensive Peace Settlement of the Middle East Problem.' It contained an eight-clause preamble and two articles. The major provisions of the plan were: withdrawal of Israel to international boundaries and armistice lines (the pre-1967 borders) in the Sinai, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and Jerusalem; removal of Israeli settlements from the Occupied Territories (OTs); supervision of the administration of the West Bank by Jordan and of the Gaza strip by Egypt 'with the collaboration of the elected representatives of the Palestinian people for a period not to exceed five years (the interim period).'; the establishment of a national entity for the Palestinian people-linked in Jordan if the inhabitants so choose-after they exercised their right of self-determination six months prior to the end of the interim period; recognition of the right of the Palestinian refugees to return or to claim compensation in accordance with UN resolutions; formation of a committee composed of an equal number of resident Palestinians and Israelis to administer the Holy city of Jerusalem; implementation of these points within a framework of peace recognising the principles of 'non-acquisition of territory by war.' and payment by Israel of full compensation for all damages caused by the operations of its armed forces and the exploitation of natural resources in the Occupied Territories (OTs) (Naaz, 1991, pp. 58-59).

As far as Begin was concerned, he was quite willing to sacrifice the Sinai for peace with Egypt (subject to negotiated conditions) but was totally unwilling to compromise on the status of the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) Gaza strip. For him, these areas formed part of Eretz Israel (Greater Israel-the original homeland of the Jewish people). He was unwilling to even grant the indigenous Palestinian people basic human rights in their land. Begin also refused to talk about Jerusalem, the holy city of three religions but holiest for the Jews. Jerusalem was a non-negotiable issue. It was the eternal and indivisible capital of the Jews.

Thus Carter's role in helping to broker the agreements was central. Left to themselves, Sadat and Begin would never have overcome the accumulated legacy of decades of hatred and mistrust. They would have broken off their talks over any number of issues. Carter's position on many issues influenced the final outcome. He wanted an Egypt-Israeli agreement on the Sinai, and he was prepared to press the Israelis hard on withdrawal and on the settlements to get it. However, Carter was less concerned about all agreements on the West Bank and Gaza

(especially when he understood the strong Israeli and American-Jewish dislike for such an agreement). He did not think that any explicit linkage between Egyptian Sinai and the Palestinian question was desirable or necessary (Quandt, 1986). Quandt (1986) has stated that, "in the end, it was Carter who made the final judgments on what to accept and what not to accept, and it was Carter who used his influence with Sadat to get him to stay and to sign an agreement that both men knew was imperfect." (p. 257).

Egyptian gains and losses

Egypt's most important gain from Camp David was a commitment to full Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, including the oilfields, settlements and airfields. To get this commitment, Sadat had offered a period of three years to complete the withdrawal, security arrangements and the UN would monitor, and a promise to 'normalise relations with Israel once the first phase of withdrawal had been reached. The Accords contained general principles referring to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and the right of the Palestinians to choose their own form of government. All the details dealt with the procedures and arrangements for the transitional period and not for the final status of the Occupied Territories (OTs).

To quote Quandt:

Israel had not committed to eventual withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza; nothing was said about Jerusalem; and settlements in the Palestinian Occupied Territories (OTs) were nowhere mentioned, though the Americans were telling everyone that Begin had in fact agreed to a freeze in settlement construction for the duration of the negotiations on autonomy (Quandt, 1986,p. 255).

Sadat thus gained for Egypt but lost on the Palestinian cause. The Camp David accords finally ended Egypt's campaign on behalf of the Palestinians and Arab national unity. The Nasserite legacy was broken. It was revealed that on vital national issues, Egypt, like any nation, would only defend its own rights and not the rights of others, however, just their cause may be.

Israeli gains and losses

The Camp David agreements were greeted in the West as a triumph of US diplomacy. There was also cautious approval in Israel, where there was satisfaction that a peace treaty could be completed with Egypt without substantial concessions on the issues of Jewish settlements and the continued Israeli control over the Palestinian and Syrian territories conquered in 1967. This view was reinforced by a speech made by Menachem Begin on the anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel in 1949, in which he asserted that no border would ever be drawn 'through the land of Israel' and that we shall never withdraw from the Golan Heights (Cossali, 2001,p. 30).

Begin has been conceded by all to be the ablest negotiator at Camp David. This former terrorist leader, associated with some of the most despicable war crimes committed during Israel's war of independence, made sure he fought over every word at the negotiating table. Begin had to concede the Sinai to Sadat, thus giving up something that for Israel was very valuable. There were extensive oilfields in the Sinai that Israel was utilising for their domestic oil needs. In return, Begin won not only a durable peace with Egypt but also a comparatively free hand for Israel in dealing with the West Bank and Gaza. Begin protected himself from the considerable US and Egyptian pressure on the key issues of the future of the Palestinian territories and on any form of linkage between the Egyptian-Israeli agreement and the Palestinian question. Crucial to Begin's victory was the fact that the Accords contained no controversial language like the 'inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war,' the applicability of the principles of UN resolution 242 'to all fronts of the conflict,' and the need for eventual Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. Israel's claim to sovereignty over all of undivided Jerusalem was not contested in the accord. Finally, Begin had only to promise a three-month freeze on settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza. Israel's ultimate victory lay in that, within nine months of signing a peace treaty with Egypt and with Israeli troops still in the Sinai, diplomatic relations between Egypt and Israel were established and ambassadors were exchanged (Naaz,1991, pp. 61-62).

The Camp David Accords and the PLO

The Camp David accords were the first-ever Arab-Israeli agreements that spelt out specific conditions for solving the Palestinian issue. Given the complexity of the issue, the only realistic approach to a solution was felt to be the establishment of a five-year transitional period for the West Bank and Gaza. The first part of the Accords, entitled, 'The Framework for Peace in the Middle East, stated that Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and the representatives of the Palestinian people would participate in three-stage negotiations to determine the area's future. Cairo and Jerusalem would negotiate and then supervise transitional arrangements for five years. The current Israeli military and civilian administration would withdraw when the inhabitants of the areas had elected self-governing authority in free elections. Egypt, Israel and Jordan would determine the powers and responsibilities of the elected self-governing authority in the West Bank and Gaza strip. Israel would withdraw the IDF into specified locations. Local constabulary forces consisting of Israeli and Jordanian forces would patrol and ensure proper border control.

After establishing the self-governing authority, a transition period of five years would begin. Negotiations to determine the territories' final status would begin no later than the third year. These talks must include Egypt, Israel, Jordan and elected representatives of inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza strip. The talks would be based on UN Resolution 242 and include discussions of boundaries and future security arrangements. It was specified that the final 'solution would recognise the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements' (Friedlander, 1983, p. 229). On 18 September 1978, an enlarged emergency session of the PLO-EC (Executive Committee) met to discuss the Camp David accords. The EC session gave a call to all Palestinians, inside and outside the Occupied Territories (OTs), to observe a general strike on 20 September to express 'resolute resistance' to the Camp David 'conspiracy.' Arafat, in a message to the US President stated that the signing of the Camp David accords signalled the 'loss of US interests in the Middle East' (Pradhan, 1994, p. 157).

To the PLO leaders, the accords only served to undermine the aim of Palestinian self-determination and their hopes of creating an independent state. In the eyes of the PLO, the United State's position on the question of autonomy had become a decisive factor. Thus after Camp David, the most important aspect of Palestinian diplomacy was to counter the American design to get closer to Jordan. This strengthened Jordan's opposition to Camp David and strengthened the struggle in the Occupied Territories (OTs) (Gresh, 1983, p. 219). They also targeted Western Europe. The ground realities in Western Europe vis-à-vis the Palestinian question and the PLO were quite different from those in the US. The Europeans had supported the Camp David accords as a process though they had reservations over the provisions related to the Palestinian question. The European states had realised that their interests were being threatened by the continuing failure to solve the 'Palestinian problem.' The European countries recognised that their economic interests were tied to developments in the region. In July 1979, Arafat met with the Austrian Chancellor, Bruno Kreisky and the Chairman of the Socialist International, Willy Brandt, in Vienna. Following talks, they issued a joint statement in which the Palestine question was regarded as 'the central problem in the Middle East conflict (Pradhan, 1994, p. 167).

The Arab countries' opposition to Camp David was coordinated in the Ninth Arab summit meeting in Baghdad in November 1978. The final communiqué rejected the accords on the ground that these agreements 'had taken place outside the framework of collective Arab responsibility' and had harmed the Palestinian cause by violating the resolutions of the Algiers and Rabat summit conferences. It called for a just peace based on the total Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in 1967, including Arab Jerusalem' and for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The fourteenth Palestinian National Council (PNC) that met in Damascus in January 1979, also unanimously condemned the accords as 'a conspiracy that should be rejected and resisted by all means' (Pradhan, 1994, p. 157).

Ultimately the US mediated initiative for lasting peace in the Middle East met only with partial success. The Americans in the immediate Post-Camp David era did try to formulate a more specific peace formula that would help the Palestinians to achieve their aims short of an independent state. The Carter administration's frequently stated policy was that the Palestinian people must have the right for themselves and their descendants to live with dignity and freedom and the opportunity for economic fulfilment and political expression. In

a speech made before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 27th May 1979, Secretary of State Vance stressed that the Camp David accords recognised the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and their just requirements (Sexton, 2009). What prevented the US from recognising the PLO was the American stand on UN resolutions No. 242 and 335 and Kissinger's famous pledge to Israel not to deal with the PLO unless Israel did so first, as a guarantee for Israel's security and sovereignty.

Conclusion

The US, by allowing its policy on the issue of contacts with the PLO to be dictated by Israeli policy, ruled itself out as a credible actor in the search for a solution to the Palestinian problem. Another reason why the Camp David framework was totally inadequate in dealing with the Palestine issue related to the ambiguities surrounding the concept of autonomy negotiations between Egypt and Israel that began in May 1979 and continued for over a year without any agreement over the format of autonomy for the West Bank. The Begin government reasserted its claim to the West Bank and Gaza as an inseparable part of 'Eretz Israel' and stated that any autonomy would not apply to land and water rights which would continue to belong to Israel. Israel announced plans in May 1979 for an ambitious programme of settlement construction in the West Bank and Gaza. In September, the ban on Israeli citizens purchasing Arab land in the Occupied Territories (OTs) was ended (Cossali, 2001). On the other hand, Sadat called for full governing autonomy for the occupied territory within a Jordanian entity, a stance that had the moral support of the Americans. At the end of the Carter presidency, the official American position remained that Israeli settlements in occupied territory were illegal and that East Jerusalem was considered to be occupied territory despite its incorporation into Israel (Smith, 1992). The problem in American politics was that any party who stated this view openly would be sure to lose the influential Jewish vote and backing, thereby weakening their chances in any elections in the US. Carter achieved the Camp David accords and the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, holding to established American positions that, when declared openly, destroyed his chances for a second Presidential term. It was the cost of peace he had to pay.

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