

“Explaining the Carter administration’s Israeli-Palestinian Solution”¹
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At the Camp David summit in September 1978, the Carter administration detailed the nucleus of what was to become the dominant approach for addressing the question of Palestine. In “The Framework for Peace in the Middle East,” the United States supported a gradual resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict instead of immediate Israeli withdrawal, Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) involvement, and Palestinian statehood alongside Israel. The U.S. position was at odds not only with most members of the League of Arab States but also with most other members of the international community.

Understanding the U.S. position under President Jimmy Carter is much more than just an assessment of Carter’s policy. Rather, it is really about understanding the heart of the U.S.-led peace process for the last several decades. Carter’s policy is especially important because Carter administration ideas ended up being the core of the largest effort to date to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Oslo process (1993-2001), even though the Oslo Declaration of Principles was negotiated without U.S. mediation. Furthermore, some of Carter’s policy arguably remains the basis for the peace process even into the Barack H. Obama administration 30 years later.

The most compelling explanation for the core elements of Carter policy is that U.S. officials accepted similar ends but favored different means than most other countries. Contrary to later critics, the United States under Carter did oppose Israeli occupation and settlements. But it chose a different policy path than the international community to express that opposition for two reasons. First, the Carter administration thought that its pathway had a higher likelihood of successfully addressing the Palestinian

issue. Second, Carter did not want to foreclose a possible Egyptian-Israeli treaty by holding out for greater Israeli concessions on the Palestinian front.

This explanation is a better fit with the evidence than that the United States under Carter supported Israeli occupation and settlements and sought to create a political process as a cover for continued Israeli expansion. The latter explanation wrongly assumes the Carter administration had no concern for Palestinian rights. Those rights did not trump Israeli concerns in American eyes, but they were meaningful nonetheless.

What Carter did not do, however, was pressure or coerce Israel in an effort to compel Israel to implement the U.S. approach. In other words, when Israel under Prime Minister Menachem Begin neither stopped settlement expansion nor began a partial withdrawal from the West Bank, the Carter administration did not engage in an all-out battle with Israel. U.S. officials protested and continued to try to modify Israeli policy, but Washington did not impose any lasting material sanctions.

The first section of this article considers three previous interpretations of Carter's policy on the Palestinian question. Using archival sources, interviews, memoirs, and secondary histories, the second section studies the Carter record on withdrawal, settlements, and Palestinian rights. The evidence suggests Carter officials were serious in their effort to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the third section, the paper addresses the Israeli position and how that shaped U.S. policy and its hope for a transformative process. The conclusion notes the pragmatic flavor of Carter's approach.

I. Critics of Camp David

Assessments of the Carter administration's policymaking on the Palestinian question have followed at least three different pathways: praise for achieving the most that was possible, criticism of a vague and unworkable solution, and hostility for putting an American imprimatur on Israeli expansionism. This section presents the first two and then delves more deeply into the third one. The detailed evidence in this article supports an understanding most similar to the first one, praise for what was possible, but this article also expands on the transformational intent of Carter policy that has not been addressed by previous works.

Mark Tessler, John Dumbrell, and Erwin C. Hargrove did not claim the agreement was perfect. But each one suggested Carter achieved the most that was possible given that Begin would have chosen no agreement over one in which Israel accepted withdrawal from the West Bank, the closure of settlements, or PLO participation. According to Tessler, Egypt could correctly claim the framework was vague because Jordan and the Palestinians were needed to fill in the details; the process was explicitly designed for them to join after Camp David. Moreover, the document's wording did not "preclude" a result that would be acceptable to Palestinians.² Dumbrell noted the "vague transitional arrangements for the government of Gaza and the West Bank." But he concluded that the agreement was, "in terms of what was feasible and as the various memoirists of the event make clear, an extraordinary achievement for Carter's personal diplomacy."³ Hargrove also noted the critics, but added, "Given American domestic politics and Israeli intransigence there was perhaps no alternative."⁴ Many

analysts praised Carter for the Camp David accords and Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty without getting into the specifics of the Palestinian question.⁵

A second set of scholars have questioned the agreement and highlighted its limitations more than its possibilities. They did not see it as workable. In a brief critique, Gaddis Smith noted the framework for peace was “ambiguous” and did not bridge the differing Arab and Israeli interpretations of security and Palestinian rights. Thus, “there was little chance that the ‘framework’ would achieve its objectives.”⁶ Begin, Stanley Hoffman explained, prevailed on countless issues:

Begin succeeded in forcing [Egyptian President Anwar] Sadat to abandon the link between the Israeli-Egyptian peace settlement and the future agreement about Palestinian autonomy. He preserved his freedom of maneuver about the settlements in the occupied territories, kept the PLO out of the picture (and beyond America’s reach), interpreted the Camp David accords on the West Bank and Gaza in the most restrictive way, and excluded Jerusalem from all discussions.

In short, what Sadat “achieved for Egypt conceded to Israel not only regional military supremacy but continuing control of the West Bank and Gaza.”⁷ Lastly, for Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, Carter established a basis for talks, and, they asked, “what better alternative was there?” Yet in the final analysis, the problems outweighed the possibilities: “The fact remains, though, that the Camp David agreements were dangerously vague, [and] that they were based almost as much on faith as on a hard

assessment of Middle Eastern politics.” Their conclusion was much like Hoffman; the Egyptian-Israeli treaty “had been reached only by avoiding the two crucial obstructions to a meaningful peace in the Middle East: Palestinian autonomy and Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.”⁸

This article supports and expands the claims of the first group and challenges the stance of the second group by amassing a large body of evidence on Carter policymaking and by noting the way in which Carter officials hoped to change the Israeli calculus in the medium term. The Framework for Middle East Peace, designed to address the Palestinian question, had limitations and, as history demonstrated, was not enticing enough for the PLO and Jordan. But the Carter administration developed an alternate pathway that tried to take account of Israeli policy while still leaving room for a positive Israeli-Palestinian outcome. Carter officials saw the Palestinian problem as a political issue, not just a humanitarian one. The next sections of this article offer detailed support, including documents and oral history, of the way in which the United States hoped to circumvent, if not transform, the Israeli position. The article tries to carefully differentiate between the Egyptian-Israeli track and the effort to address the Palestinian matter. But before turning to that material, the article presents a third perspective, the most negative reaction to the agreements. It is especially important as it was the viewpoint of many Arab policymakers in the aftermath of the agreements.

Coming out of the Camp David summit, the United States hoped to win additional Arab support for the accords and the process for addressing Palestinian needs, but Jordan, the PLO, and Saudi Arabia all expressed opposition. Many observers saw an Israeli-U.S. maneuver to paper over the continued growth of the Israeli settlement project. This

criticism was not limited, however, to the immediate aftermath of Camp David. It came to frame one of the major perspectives on the entire peace process for decades to come: an American-Israeli conspiracy to prevent Palestinian self-determination and ensure Israeli control of the West Bank.

In public, the Palestinian establishment reacted negatively to the Camp David agreement. Anwar Sadat, Egypt's president, "was widely accused of having made a separate peace with Israel in return for a sellout on the West Bank, Jerusalem and other issues."⁹ Yasser Arafat, the PLO's chief, complained: "Sadat has sold Jerusalem, Palestine and the rights of the Palestinian people for a handful of Sinai sand."¹⁰ The Camp David framework was merely a "reincarnation" of Begin's plan of December 1977, a limited version of Palestinian self-rule.¹¹

Though Cyrus Vance, U.S. Secretary of State, traveled to Jordan and Saudi Arabia immediately after the summit, both countries rejected the accord because it did not guarantee Israeli withdrawal and did not embrace the Arab position on Jerusalem.¹² Jordan's King Hussein explained: "What has come out of the general framework is a fig leaf for the Begin plan. Pure sugarcoating. Look at all of Begin's statements: Israeli troops to stay for an indefinite period. Settlements, too. What's transitional about that?"¹³ Jordan did not want to "act as Israel's policeman on the West Bank."¹⁴ Hussein's language is especially noteworthy; not only did he disagree with the accord, but it was a "fig leaf" with "sugarcoating." It was contrary to the Arab position – and thus a bad agreement – but the signers were trying to make it appear good. Jordan wanted different substance as the King "thinks he could not get involved again with the West Bank without an Israeli commitment to end its occupation completely within a fixed period of

time. There also had to be accommodation on East Jerusalem beyond Israel's fig-leaf proposal to restore Arab sovereignty over the holy places.”¹⁵ In November 1978, when the Arab League formalized its opposition to the accords, Jordan joined with other Arab opponents.

Writing in the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Fayez Sayegh concisely encapsulated much of the Arab reaction. Camp David, he argued, legitimized the Israeli occupation and Israeli expansionism while starting a process wholly biased toward and controlled by Israel:

The Camp David Framework thus bestows *American-Egyptian* “legitimacy” upon continued Israeli occupation of the Palestinian areas in question for years to come.... Thus, thanks to the Camp David “Framework for Peace,” an Israeli occupation which the entire international community has for eleven years been declaring illegal will now be enabled to maintain itself in the Palestinian territories concerned as a “legitimate” occupation for several more years, if not permanently!¹⁶

Sayegh went on to note that the agreement did not seriously address Israeli settlements or ensure that the core issues would be addressed during future autonomy negotiations. Instead, the framework created “a process of change in which Israel *and Israel alone* can determine both the directions and the pace of change.”¹⁷ The inclusion of the idea that Palestinians had “legitimate rights” was done as “an act calculated to seduce the Palestinians and lull their supporters.” In reality, Camp David precluded Palestinian self-

determination, sovereignty, or the establishment of a Palestinian state; at most, the process would lead to a fraction of the Palestinian people on a fraction of their land with a fraction of their rights.¹⁸ In a sense, the argument was that Camp David laundered Israeli policy.

Other writers echoed Sayegh's perspective on the Camp David process. In his memoir, Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, Egypt's foreign minister at the time of the summit, told of expressing his concern to Sadat that in the proposed agreement, "the West Bank and Gaza remain in the possession and under the domination of Israel. The latter will then proceed to implement its schemes for the final annexation of those territories."¹⁹ The accords "condemned the West Bank and Gaza to a permanent status of subordination, with less real authority than a Bantustan," wrote Naseer Aruri.²⁰ "In the final analysis," Janice Terry wrote, "the Camp David framework and separate Egyptian-Israeli treaty led, not to peace, but to the continuation of Israeli domination over the occupied territories and to the 1982 war in Lebanon, hence to the continuation of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination."²¹ The process served to entrench, not dislodge, the Israeli occupation. At the Camp David talks, Donald Neff contended, "Carter essentially abandoned any effort to aid the Palestinians." Carter traded the Palestinian issue for an Egyptian-Israeli deal.²²

Verbal attacks on the peace process continued even after Camp David as the same ideas continued to anchor the U.S.-led peace process. Some scholars criticized the broad contours of U.S. policy on Palestine as it was concretized in agreements that included linked stages, Palestinian self-rule, and modified Palestinian representation. According to Timothy Mitchell, the United States "helped prolong" the Arab-Israeli conflict because

instead of adopting the Arab/international program for two states, the United States “promoted a series of agreement between the occupying power and the people whose land it occupied – the 1979 Camp David accords, the 1993 Oslo accords, and the 2003 Road Map – all of which left the occupation in place.”²³

That critics took a similar approach to the Oslo agreement (1993) as they did to the Camp David (1978) framework is not surprising at all, given that the former drew heavily from the latter. The two most prominent defenders of Palestine in U.S. academia, Edward Said and Noam Chomsky, had similar reactions. Said saw the same situation: “What the Americans and Israelis were doing was to get Palestinian consent to this repackaging of the occupation. It’s been presented to the public as moving towards peace, whereas it’s been a gigantic fraud.”²⁴ Chomsky compared Oslo I to South Africa under apartheid. His point was that the fragmented territory and limited political responsibility was far short of Palestinian aspirations for an independent state in part of mandatory Palestine.²⁵ In a pithy and provocative summary of decades of the U.S.-led peace process, Avi Shlaim highlighted the real success: “The so-called peace process has been all process and no peace. It is worse than a sham. Peace talks that go nowhere slowly provide Israel with just the cover it needs to pursue its relentlessly expansionist agenda on the West Bank.”²⁶

Thus, much of Arab officialdom as well as academic analysts were dismissive of the Camp David framework and the ideas for resolving the conflict embedded therein. But as the next section demonstrates, such a reading of U.S. policy missed the public and private steps that demonstrated Carter’s genuine search for a resolution Palestinians could ultimately embrace.

II. Carter Policy

The Carter administration made a sincere effort to address Palestinian rights. Particularly in 1977, the president himself publicly spoke about the issues in ways meant to raise aspects of the Palestine question. Carter's comments, in turn, generated displeasure in Israel and among its supporters in the United States, displeasure that a president who cared little for the Palestinian dimension would not likely have incurred. Other issues, especially in 1977-1978, fit this pattern as well: attention to Palestinian rights and the PLO, the repeated private expression of concerns about Israeli settlements, and the work to move Begin's position on withdrawal, UNSC resolution 242, and other aspects of the ultimate agreement. These same examples are not consistent with a U.S. desire to cover for Israeli expansionism.

Carter's public rhetoric repeatedly tested the existing parameters of U.S. policy on the Palestinian question. At a town meeting in Clinton, Massachusetts on March 16, 1977, Carter said one of the "ultimate" requirements for Middle East peace "has to be a homeland provided for the Palestinian refugees."²⁷ Carter probably did not have an exact map of the homeland in mind, but the term was meant to have "political content," both to demonstrate the Palestinian issue was more than just a "humanitarian" one and to make clear there was a Palestinian dimension, not simply an Israeli-Jordanian one.²⁸ While Carter did not use the word 'state,' it was the first time a U.S. president had even gone as far as using the word homeland. The term surely resonated in Israeli ears because it was

the same term used in the 1917 Balfour declaration endorsing a *Jewish* homeland, a British declaration that to this day is considered the cornerstone of the Zionist aspirations.

Carter made a number of other statements in an effort to facilitate a positive negotiating outcome, but such statements often antagonized Israel. On March 9 and May 26, 1977, Carter mentioned the need for Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines with only slight changes: “I would guess it would be some minor adjustments in the 1967 borders. But that still remains to be negotiated.”²⁹ On May 26, Carter also suggested a greater role for past U.N. resolutions than Israel appreciated. On August 8, 1977, Carter told reporters, “If the Palestinians will recognize the applicability of the United Nations Resolution 242, then it would open up a new opportunity for us to start discussions with them.”³⁰ The U.S.-Soviet communiqué of October 1, 1977, including a call for “the resolution of the Palestinian question, including insuring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people,” also angered Israel and its supporters. At Aswan, Egypt on January 4, 1978, Carter called for “withdrawal by Israel from territories occupied in 1967” and referenced UNSC resolutions 242 and 338. He also sought “a resolution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects. The problem must recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and enable the Palestinians to participate in the determination of their own future.”³¹ On July 1, 1978, Carter said a Geneva conference, something his administration had pursued prior to Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, remained a fall back option and several Israeli newspapers reacted negatively. In short, Carter did not hew to a line that kept the Begin government and the Israeli media comfortable about the U.S. stance.

The contention here is not that Carter himself necessarily saw these various statements as a coherent package intended to move closer to the Palestinian position and anger Israeli leaders. He may or may not have had such a wider perspective. He may have thought he was noting favorable and unfavorable points for each and every party. The U.S.-Soviet communiqué, for example, was followed on October 5, 1977, by a U.S.-Israeli paper, negotiated by Carter, Vance, and Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, that angered Israel's critics. Unlike the communiqué, the U.S.-Israeli paper referenced UNSC resolution 242 and did not mention Israeli withdrawal or Palestinian "rights." As the Israeli daily newspaper *Maariv* claimed, "President Carter's utterances on Middle East questions are beginning to remind one of a see-saw."³²

Rather, the key point is that he made statements that pushed in new directions and/or made vague notions more explicit. While the Carter administration frequently invoked UNSC resolution 242 (1967), the resolution itself only considered the refugee question, not the larger question of Palestinian self-determination. As Harold H. Saunders, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, told reporters, in 1978, "[y]ou have a strong Palestinian movement, which none of us took account of in 1967."³³ Moreover, the question of whether the resolution called for a total or partial Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories remained hotly contested by the adversaries. Yet Carter was willing to address these relevant issues as part of addressing the Palestinian dimension of the peace process. "Tha [sic] [Camp David] agreements are a new U.N. Resolution 242," said one diplomat.³⁴ Or, as one U.S. official told the UN General Assembly, "We acknowledge that Resolution 242 does not deal with the political dimension of the Palestinian issue, and at Camp David we tried to meet that need."³⁵

One could reasonably argue that the U.S. position toward the Palestinians was already changing under President Gerald Ford given the testimony of Saunders on November 12, 1975. The Saunders statement put the Palestinian question at the “heart of the conflict” and admitted its political dimension.³⁶ At a minimum, then, the Carter statements and the overall commitment to the Palestinian question detailed below greatly reinforced the ground staked out in the Saunders document (especially given that then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had distanced himself from the Saunders statement in public).

As a result, as the president was expanding the range of the discourse on the Palestinian matter, other officials noted the concern that such positions generated in Israel and among its supporters in the United States.³⁷ When Carter publicly stated several ideas including his contention that a final resolution should include only minor adjustments to the 1967 lines, U.S. diplomats reported Israeli officials were “stunned” and “unpleasantly surprised.”³⁸ At home, on September 19, 1977, Roger Lewis, working in the White House counsel’s office, and Edward Sanders, one of Carter’s liaisons to the Jewish community, warned of American Jewish disenchantment with Carter. They wrote of a “growing crisis” with fears about U.S. policy toward the PLO and “insensitivity toward Jewish concerns” about Israel. The administration had “overreacted” on settlements and “had developed an image of harshness toward Israel.” American Jews did not like Carter’s frequent talk about the 1967 border and the Palestinians in general. Perhaps most consequentially, “Israel’s staunchest supporters” (presumably in Congress) might not support Carter on other foreign policy questions as a result of his Arab-Israeli stance.³⁹ Morris Amitay, executive director of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee

(AIPAC) during the Carter years, later confirmed these tensions: “By reaching out to Palestinians in rhetoric Carter alienated the American Jewish community from the outset of the administration.” AIPAC, Amitay added, “believed Carter, the State Department, and the National Security Council were in fact hostile to Israel.”⁴⁰

In July 1978, Zbigniew Brzezinski, assistant to the president for national security affairs, urged the president to strategize in advance about dealing with troubled ties with Israel. If the United States took certain positions in the peace process, the U.S.-Israeli relationship would suffer. So Carter should think about how he wanted to handle such a situation: “Do we have the political strength to manage prolonged strain in U.S.-Israeli relations? What kind of forces can we marshal and in what manner in order to prevail?” The U.S. response would likely require not only “major domestic efforts” but also international elements. In terms of U.S. Mideast policy, was Carter ready, Brzezinski wanted to know, “to see this matter through to the very end?”⁴¹

In short, whether Carter intended to or not, these types of comments generated Israeli displeasure, something one would not expect if Carter’s real goal was to allow Israel to keep expanding settlements and avoiding withdrawal from the occupied territories. Both Carter and Sadat were very aware of U.S. domestic politics including the Jewish vote and the role of pro-Israeli organizations and members of Congress. Domestic, pro-Israeli politics are a recurring feature of William B. Quandt’s seminal book, *Camp David*.⁴² Quandt, a member of Carter’s NSC staff, later argued that the result was that Carter toned down his statements over time, moving from “public diplomacy” in 1977 to “private exchanges” in 1978.⁴³

Palestine. Carter officials took the Palestinian question seriously. In the summer of 1977, when the administration was still envisioning a Geneva-style multilateral process, Vance traveled to the region to hear reactions to five U.S. principles for the planned talks. One principle Vance raised was a “Non-militarized Palestinian entity with self-determination by the Palestinians.” Vance also used terms such as “interim ‘trusteeship’” and then, when that proved unpopular with Arab officials, “transitional administrative arrangements.” Both terms suggested a stopgap measure prior to a final resolution.⁴⁴ Just days before the Camp David summit, Carter told U.S. officials, “I want to do something for the Palestinians.”⁴⁵ In March 1979, before Brzezinski and Warren Christopher, deputy secretary of state, headed to Saudi Arabia, they were told to emphasize to Saudi leaders that the United States was “mindful of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. We understand that true peace cannot be achieved until the Palestinian issue is resolved.”⁴⁶ Carter’s homeland comment, then, was not merely rhetorical flourish but also something the United States was working on behind the scenes.

In private, U.S. officials weighed options for how to find an area of overlap between Egyptian, Israeli, and Palestinian interests. In a telling memo to Brzezinski, Quandt warned that while the United States should aim for a “broadening of negotiations to include the issues of the future of the West Bank-Gaza and the Palestinians,” the road might lead to total stalemate or solely Egyptian-Israeli progress. He then highlighted that such a broadening would require acceptance of several key points: an interim period of Palestinian “self-government,” Israeli acceptance that 242 applies to the West Bank, and the launch of a process for addressing the West Bank and Gaza’s “future status.” The

memo made clear how hard it would be to get Israeli support: “I do not underestimate how difficult it will be to meet these minimal requirements. I see no sign that Begin is ready to accept the principle of withdrawal, to say nothing of the principle of self-determination.” Quandt’s memo is important not only because it demonstrates full U.S. awareness of the limited room for maneuver given Israel’s position but also because the memorandum explicitly laid out a pathway of compromise that while short of stated Palestinian aspirations could function as a first step and thereby avoid deadlock.⁴⁷ (Near the end of the memo, Quandt accurately listed concerns that mirror the criticism of the actual framework for peace signed at Camp David eight months later.) As Alfred “Roy” Atherton, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs and then U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, later noted, the gap between Egypt and Israel on Palestine, “was not solvable in one step, and therefore we had to find intermediate steps. And that led to the idea of transitional arrangements...”⁴⁸

Saunders made similar points. He wrote the Secretary of State half a year later that the U.S. ideas were “a genuine compromise between the Egyptian and Israeli positions” and “could achieve peace, withdrawal, and sovereignty.” The U.S. approach was “a fair middle course.”⁴⁹ When Saunders urged the United States to delay a UNSC debate on a Palestinian resolution, he noted that the resolution would not produce “concrete results” for the Palestinians. Rather, the “only” place that could produce a breakthrough was the U.S.-led talks.⁵⁰ In the autonomy talks, the U.S. policy on Palestinians was explicitly understood to be an alternative to outright pursuit of a two-state solution: “The effort to achieve full autonomy for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is our response to the plea from most of the people of the Middle East to

promise the Palestinians a state of their own.” Moreover, it was a viable alternative if fully implemented. The United States did not need to achieve a Palestinian state; “we can convince [the Arabs] of progress with less.” The beginning of the end of the Israeli occupation and the start of Palestinian autonomy “could be an important step forward.”⁵¹

In 1977, the United States tried to draw the PLO into talks, but the effort did not succeed. In terms of the larger significance of this episode, this American approach to the PLO would not have been necessary had Washington simply been covering for Israeli policy. The United States worked in secret in 1977 to get Arafat to accept resolution 242, going so far as to write the words he needed to say. In September, Brzezinski sent a private envoy, Landrum Bolling, the former president of Earlham College, to meet with Arafat in Beirut. Brzezinski briefed Bolling as to what the PLO would need to do, but Bolling was not able to get Arafat to say the magic words. Bolling described U.S. policy to Arafat as the “opening of the gate” but would not promise the “creation” of a Palestinian state. Arafat wanted to move forward but was outvoted on the PLO executive committee.⁵² The PLO would not endorse 242 without a guarantee that the process would lead to PLO-led Palestinian state. With that, Quandt later recalled, the United States put on “ice” the question of drawing the PLO into the process.⁵³

What Carter would not do was endorse a Palestinian state, though it appears U.S. officials presented him with such a proposal at the start of his presidency. A largely still classified document, circa February 1977, is quite suggestive on this point. Though the text of the document is not available, the maps and section dividers make it appear to be a comprehensive plan for each track of the peace process. In addition to sections on “W. Bank/Gaza/Palestinians” (Roman numeral III) and on Jerusalem (IV), the document

includes two maps of the West Bank. On one map, a hand-drawn line, labeled “Israeli Withdrawal Line,” excludes the Etzion bloc and the Jordan Valley. The map is titled “ISRAEL-JORDAN/PALESTINE – FIRST Stage (West Bank Portion).” The other map, “ISRAEL-JORDAN/PALESTINE – SECOND STAGE (West Bank Portion),” notes the “Final Border” with Israel retaining only the Etzion bloc, Latrun salient, and few other spots along the Green line. The document also included Sinai and Golan maps and Israel-Egypt and Israel-Syria sections.⁵⁴

In a cover note, Quandt told the president that only eight people, including Quandt, Atherton, Saunders, Vance, and Carter knew this document existed, suggesting the highly sensitive nature of U.S. officials discussing a Palestinian state. In his reply to Quandt, Carter rejected the approach outlined in the document because “this probably asks too much of Israel.” Carter then outlined a different option that accurately described his later policy: “Let’s stick to our specific items: a) ’67 borders, minor adjustments; b) real peace; c) palestine homeland; refugee problem resolved; d) no specifics re Jerusalem; no PLO contact absent UN 242 endorsement, etc.”⁵⁵ Even later, heading into the Camp David summit, Carter thought none of the three leaders “preferred an independent Palestinian state.”⁵⁶

Settlements. The United States was very concerned about Israeli settlements. When Carter met Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, *Ha’aretz* reported, he told the Israeli prime minister “that the U.S. objects to any settlement in the occupied territories.”⁵⁷ Carter, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis recalled, “viewed them as illegal and unjustified.”⁵⁸ In early May, Carter had U.S. officials privately protest the establishment of a new Israeli settlement at Mes’ha.⁵⁹ In the summer of 1977, Vance

privately told Israeli leaders the United States did not accept the “legitimacy” of settlements.⁶⁰ In mid-1977, Begin promised Vance that Israel would limit itself to six to eight new settlements “on land within present military bases or on government-owned land.”⁶¹ After Israel approved three new settlements in August, Carter reminded Begin privately that settlements were illegal and that Carter might need to reaffirm publicly the 1967 border if Begin continued in this direction. The State Department also publicly condemned the Israeli move.⁶²

In a September 1977 meeting at the White House, Carter reminded Dayan that the “U.S. has always felt that Israeli settlements on the West Bank are illegal.” With Carter, Dayan promised settlers would only enter in six “military camps” – what Israel called Nahal units – and, more broadly, “no settlement would stand in the way of peace.” Carter reacted by saying he was “still quite concerned about settlements. We consider them to be in violation of the Geneva conference.”⁶³ Dayan’s promise was “the second best and not the best.” The president also asked Dayan to minimize the publicity surrounding settlements or new settlers.⁶⁴

In early January 1978, Israel announced new settlements in Sinai, angering Carter and sparking another U.S. missive. In a letter to Begin a few days later, Carter clearly spelled out the U.S. position: “On numerous occasions since [September 26, 1967], United States representatives have expressed the disapproval of, and opposition to, the establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories” because they contravene the Geneva convention and “are prejudicial to the achievement of a Middle East peace settlement.” Carter noted Dayan’s words the previous September. Later in the letter Carter warned Begin that it “would be particularly regrettable if a serious setback to the

current peace process were to be perceived as a result of Israeli action on settlements.”⁶⁵
For the rest of 1978, the Israeli government did not establish any more settlements.⁶⁶

In April 1978, Brzezinski was again reviewing the settlement situation for the president. For Begin, Brzezinski wrote, the Dayan statements were “no longer valid.” A different, temporary Israeli freeze also had “now ended.” Begin declined to stop West Bank settlements but would have “due regard for political considerations,” apparently a faint nod to U.S. opposition. Brzezinski concluded: “On ideological and political grounds, Begin is simply not prepared to agree to a full moratorium on all settlement activity. If we hope to persuade Begin to show restraint on this issue, we will have to remind him frequently of our strong opposition to further settlement activity.”⁶⁷ U.S. officials recognized the Begin government’s deep attachment to the settlement project but were committed to continuing to try to slow it to help advance the diplomatic process.

Even in failure, the U.S. effort to achieve a 12-month settlement freeze at the Camp David summit illustrated the Carter administration’s anti-settlement position. Initially, the United States wanted a paragraph on freezing settlements included in the main text of the framework. In the American “Draft Joint Statement” written before Camp David, the point is clear: “During these negotiations⁶⁸ no new Israeli settlements will be established, and there will be no expansion of existing settlements.” (Carter added the hand-written underline on his copy.)⁶⁹ At the end of the summit’s third day, Carter told Sadat: “our hope is that they will stop building settlements in the West Bank and remove them from Sinai.”⁷⁰ Later at Camp David, Begin said he would agree to a freeze only in a separate letter to Carter. “On that basis,” Vance explained, “we agreed to drop from the draft comprehensive accord our proposed language on a settlement

moratorium.”⁷¹ The United States drafted a letter, Begin re-wrote it, and returned it to the United States after the public signing ceremony for the rest of the main agreement.

An American-Israeli dispute immediately broke out as to how long the freeze would last. During the freeze, Israel could thicken existing settlements but not construct new settlements.⁷² A controversy erupted over the length of the freeze, with Carter and Vance believing Begin had promised at Camp David to stay the building for the length of the Palestinian autonomy talks. Begin’s letter only mentioned three months, the length of time set aside for Egyptian-Israeli talks to conclude a peace treaty following the Camp David accords.⁷³ With the public treaty signing ceremony behind them, U.S. officials had little short-term leverage with which to press Begin. It was, Steven L. Spiegel later wrote, Carter’s “greatest error of the conference.”⁷⁴

As talks stalled in late 1978, Brzezinski urged the president to press Israel on settlements and other issues and to raise the possibility that Israeli intransigence would negatively affect U.S.-Israeli relations. He feared Begin would not allow the Palestinians to have “real powers.” The United States, Begin should be told, would reduce future aid “by whatever amounts the Israeli government allocates to support of the settlements.” He repeated the U.S. opposition to “illegal settlements” and the willingness to vote against them at the United Nations. The United States would convey to Begin that if Israel were to cause a “deadlock in negotiations because of a failure to honor the spirit of the Camp David agreements, U.S.-Israeli relations will be adversely and tangibly affected.” He then suggested that Israel be told Israeli-induced deadlock would lead the United States to stop acting as an intermediary; Washington also might raise the “Middle East issue” at the

UNSC.⁷⁵ As Carter pondered a trip to Egypt and Israel in early March 1979, Brzezinski continued to advocate pressing Israel for “an informal de facto settlement freeze.”⁷⁶

In May 1979, in preparing for the autonomy talks, “it was generally agreed that the best issue on which to take a stand is Israeli settlement activity.” This general agreement came despite the experience of the previous fall, Carter and Begin’s sharp disagreement after Camp David about the length of the settlement freeze which Begin had accepted at the summit. This general agreement also prompted Robert S. Strauss, Carter’s personal representative to the Middle East whose job was to oversee the autonomy talks, to emphasize “the importance of preparing the way carefully in Congress and the American Jewish community first.”⁷⁷ In an earlier memo leading up to the autonomy talks, however, Vance told the president that in terms of U.S. domestic politics, he thought settlements were the best issue on which to challenge Israel: “A final factor to be kept in mind is that, of all the issues with Israel, this is the one on which we can expect the best support from the U.S. public and Congress.”⁷⁸

Carter-Begin. Carter and other U.S. officials were displeased with Begin’s position on autonomy, a further hint that they wanted genuine self-rule and did not seek to provide cover for the Israeli occupation and settlement project. At the summit, Begin and Carter frequently argued over the major issues. On September 10, 1978, for example, Carter told Begin that “What you want to do is make the West Bank part of Israel.” Vance added, “The whole idea is to let the people govern themselves.” After Begin replied, Carter kept at it: “If I were an Arab, I would prefer the present Israeli occupation to this proposal of yours.” On many occasions, Carter was frustrated after fighting with Begin to broaden the agreement.⁷⁹ After the accords, Carter was also upset by Begin’s

public comments that seemed to narrow and undermine what Israel had agreed to do in the accords.⁸⁰ Vance later reiterated that despite the failed effort at gaining a settlement moratorium, “[t]he long-standing position of the United States on settlements was that they were contrary to international law and were an obstacle to peace.”⁸¹ If the United States had wanted to cover for Israeli expansionism, it would not have privately pressed Israel to curtail that expansion.

In terms of what was agreed to at the Camp David summit, the United States pushed Israel on several fronts. While the result was not Israeli capitulation, Israel did move on some meaningful issues as can be seen by comparing the Camp David framework (September 1978) with Begin’s own plan (December 1977).

Begin’s 26-point plan offered a limited version of Palestinian self-rule. Israel would abolish the military government, Palestinians would elect an Administrative Council for the West Bank and Gaza to run civil affairs, and Israel would retain responsibility for “security and public order.” Israeli settlements would stay in place. Palestinians would have the option of Jordanian or Israeli citizenship. A committee, including Israel, would determine the “norms” that would govern immigration, a slight nod to the Palestinian refugees. The future was largely ignored, with two important exceptions. First, “Israel stands by its right and its claim of sovereignty to Judea, Samaria and the Gaza district. In the knowledge that other claims exist, it proposes, for the sake of the agreement and the peace, that the question of sovereignty in these areas be left open.” Second, the “principles” would be reviewed after five years.⁸² The plan did not mention UNSC Resolution 242 or Israeli withdrawal (According to Atherton, Begin “wanted not to have to negotiate over withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza.”⁸³)

Carter decided to try to build on Begin's plan, and thus a close reading of the Framework for Peace in the Middle East peace signed at Camp David demonstrates the modifications from Begin's plan. First, UNSC Resolution 242 was the "agreed basis" for peace. Second, the plan emphasized that it was not a final resolution but rather "full autonomy" for a "transitional" period. Whereas Begin's plan could be thought of as perpetually renewable, the U.S. implication was that the "transitional arrangement" was a starting point, not a new but indefinite status quo.

Third, the U.S. plan offered a specific mechanism for developing a permanent, as opposed to transitional, solution: negotiations between Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and "the elected representatives of the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza." These negotiations would take place during the transitional period and address boundaries and security arrangements as well as settle on a solution that recognized "the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people." Begin's plan had not offered any mechanism for negotiations about the future other than the review after five years. Fourth, as noted, the plan explicitly mentioned a crucial component of UNSC resolution 242, Israeli withdrawal.

Thus, the United States challenged core elements of Begin's vision for the future, albeit in a gradual manner. The United States was "carving out some rather shaky middle ground."⁸⁴ U.S. policymakers tried to stretch the Israeli plan so that it not only included more substance but also so that it led to a new process or mechanism to address the long-term aspects of the Palestinian question. These were absent from Begin's plan because Begin had no desire to deepen Palestinian options for the future.

III. Begin's Politics, Transformation, and U.S. Leverage

Begin and his government's political stance greatly limited what the United States could accomplish on the Palestinian question. Begin's stance directly led U.S. policymakers to aim for more modest advances on the Palestinian front.⁸⁵ U.S. officials saw their position – what became the framework in the Camp David accords – was the best option given the political context in which Egypt and Israel would only agree to certain aspects. In other words, had the United States held out for everything (e.g., immediate Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines; or, an explicit endpoint of Palestinian independence), it would most likely have achieved progress neither on the Palestinian front nor on the Egyptian-Israeli one. On Palestine, some process was better than nothing, especially given that Carter was unwilling to sanction Israel as a form of pressure.

Furthermore, some Carter officials hoped that Camp David was the start of an open-ended process that would lead to a mutually agreed-upon final resolution. The process could outlast Begin and a right-wing government or even transform interests and ultimately overcome the political limits Carter faced. This last point helps explain why some process was better than no process; once the United States got the ball rolling, previously foreclosed options might become possible.

Carter made a pragmatic judgment that Begin would not commit to Israeli withdrawal or Palestinian self-determination and then operated within those parameters to seek an agreement. Carter was not alone in such a judgment. When the Likud party triumphed in the May 1977 elections, Arab parties widely assumed Begin would not leave the West Bank.⁸⁶ According to Lewis, from the beginning, “Begin made indelibly clear that he would never yield any of the occupied areas of Judea and Samaria for peace,

nor would he stop advocating and supporting Jewish settlements there.” But this did not stop Carter who, “never gave up trying to dent Begin’s resolve in the interest of his highest priority project: achieving peace for Israel with all its neighbors, including the Palestinians.”⁸⁷

The Begin government repeatedly stressed the limits of its policies and likely concessions. Begin told Vance “he would not be the Prime Minister who agreed to withdrawal from Judea and Samaria.”⁸⁸ Begin, Brzezinski wrote Carter, did not believe that 242 required Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza.⁸⁹ In the summer of 1978, Israeli leaders made clear to Vance that “a prior commitment to full withdrawal by Israel to the 1967 lines as a precondition to negotiations was totally unacceptable.”⁹⁰ Israel took a firmer position than either the United States or Egypt. The words linked to Quandt’s description of Begin are telling: “rock hard,” “rigidity,” “major obstacle,” “six noes,” “would never budge.”⁹¹ Lewis concurred: “Begin, of course, had no intention ever of getting out of the West Bank or Gaza. He believed that they were not only historically important to Israel’s legacy as the Jewish nation, but also the security risks were overwhelming.” In sum, Quandt later recalled, “We never quite figured out how to get around Begin or work through him or work over his head or behind his back. I cannot stress to you how difficult that turned out to be.”⁹²

Begin’s fixed position had an impact on his negotiating adversaries. According to Quandt, “Sadat, like Carter, was eventually worn down by Begin’s adamant refusal to dilute Israel’s claim to the West Bank.”⁹³ Vance later described the accords as “the outer margins of the possible at that time.”⁹⁴ Though Vance wrote the president that Arab actors wanted a broader process than Camp David and one that included an a priori

commitment to Palestinian self-determination, Vance concluded that “[a]t the moment, however, we do not have a workable alternative.”⁹⁵ It was “the only politically viable avenue available.”⁹⁶ Lewis summed it up this way: “One should not, in these kinds of situations, allow the best to be the enemy of the better.”⁹⁷ So if the United States insisted on either withdrawal or self-determination, there would be no Egyptian-Israeli agreement. In 1978, Carter rejected the need for tight linkage between an Egyptian-Israeli deal and an answer to the Palestinian question.⁹⁸

Two memoranda illustrate the way in which the political reality moved the United States toward an interim approach or partial resolution for the West Bank and Gaza. On September 9, 1977, Quandt wrote Brzezinski that the United States risked “an impasse in our diplomatic effort” and then concisely delineated three elements of the Israeli position and three of the Arab political positions that meant negotiations were “not imminent.” Thus, he argued, Washington needed to fashion an alternate approach: “For the moment, we should try to get the concepts of an interim regime and self-determination established, along with the means for setting up an interim regime.” Brzezinski asked Quandt to add this memorandum to a “book” of related material for the president.⁹⁹

A memorandum from April 1978 joined together the idea of Israel’s hardline position and the U.S. desire for a transformative process. After talks with Dayan, David Korn, of the Department of State’s policy planning staff, concluded that the Begin government “is not interested in security arrangements and guarantees for the West Bank if given in the context of the return of Arab control (sovereignty) over the area.” Moreover, Arab and other actors may well view Israeli plans for addressing the West Bank as “a cynical scheme for perpetuating Israeli control.”¹⁰⁰ Despite such concerns,

Korn advocated moving forward because “to wait until we think we can get Israeli agreement would be to postpone actions indefinitely and in the meantime to concede...the loss of the possibility of bringing about internal changes in Israel.”¹⁰¹

Korn’s memo highlights the crucial link between Israel as an obstacle to further advances on the Palestinian question and thus the U.S. hope of transforming or moving past the existing Israeli government.

Saunders illustrated the choice in a briefing to prepare Vance for a visit to Egypt and Israel in August 1978. Saunders explicitly framed the question that Vance should present to Sadat as “a choice between two alternatives.” One option, that Saunders did not favor, was to “insist” that Israel commit from the start to evacuate the occupied territories. Saunders preferred a second alternative, “the course we propose.” Start to wind down the Israeli occupation and establish “a Palestinian Authority.” The parties would also pledge to negotiate a final resolution during that time. If, in the interim, the Palestinians are “responsible” and do not threaten Israel, it will be “very difficult” to dislodge them.¹⁰²

To be clear, Begin’s view of the West Bank forced the United States to the “much more cumbersome exercise” of self-rule and an interim process.¹⁰³ The United States realized Begin would not accept Palestinian self-determination and statehood, despite pushing “him over and over and over on this.”¹⁰⁴ The United States got as much as it could:

Did we knowingly throw the Palestinian issue under the bus in order to get the [Egypt-Israel treaty] and I think the answer is no, we tried to get as much as we

could including the freeze on settlements and we couldn't get it at the end of the day because there are limits to what even a very powerful American president can do given our politics and given the Israelis' capacity to push back and say we're not going to move on that. I think we got probably about as much as we could.¹⁰⁵

In short, "the Camp David accords and the thinking behind them represented pretty much middle of the road thinking about where this problem should go and how it should turn out."¹⁰⁶

Transformation. Carter officials also saw the process as a beginning, not an end, in relation to both the Begin government and a wider transformation. Vance later explained the U.S. position: "Under existing political conditions, more could not be expected from Israel. But if successful, the plan might set in motion a process that could, under the right circumstances, lead to Palestinian self-determination consistent with the security of Israel."¹⁰⁷ Formally, this meant putting off the final decision for a few years (the five-year interim stage) and hoping that in the meantime the initial stages of the process would start to transform Arabs and Israelis. The Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was only a "first step toward a wider peace."¹⁰⁸

The first hope was that the new political process might outlast Begin. If Begin and his Likud-led government were replaced by a more compromising Israeli government and a new, non-PLO Palestinian leadership arose through the elections in the Camp David agreement, a more extensive agreement might come about.¹⁰⁹ Begin himself expressed a similar idea:

So he at one point says look, as long as I am prime minister, I can tell you, I will never agree to withdrawal from the West Bank. I just won't, it's not in me, it's my whole makeup, and ideology and belief is that it is wrong. But I won't be prime minister forever and maybe in the future somebody will have a different view. And I won't annex the territory. I promise you we won't annex it. But I will never do withdrawal. So partly our idea on the transition was maybe we can get through the Begin era and eventually somebody will be prepared to contemplate withdrawal and Palestinian rights and so forth and so on. That was the logic, that was the five-year transition. No guarantee but at least we got the promise of no annexation.¹¹⁰

Or, to put it more succinctly, “after Begin was out of office, peace could be traded for land.”¹¹¹

The second, and more fundamental, hope was that a negotiating process could transform interests and objectives. If Egypt, the self-proclaimed leader of the Arab world, could make peace with Israel, so could other Arab actors. Sadat saw himself as a role model.¹¹² Egypt led the Arab world in war and would do so in turning to peace. Even limited negotiations on the Palestinian question could start to change the public and elite mindset about what was possible.¹¹³ Moreover, this first peace agreement might “reduce Israeli fears and security concerns.”¹¹⁴ The implicit answer to the critics' objection is that the Carter administration believed over time it could overcome Israel's objections to a two-state solution. As Saunders explained, “we see these negotiations as a beginning, a setting in motion of a process.” He added that resolving one issue would help resolve the

next one because “with each act of trust the next act requiring even greater trust becomes more possible. This is not a platitude – it is simply a practical reality basic to any negotiating process.”¹¹⁵

One anecdote from the Camp David summit itself typified U.S. hopes for how the entire process might unfold in the ensuing months and years. At one point, Osama Al-Baz (Egypt) and Meir Rosenne (Israel) sat down for a meeting and began debating about “previous Mideast agreements.” According to an Israeli source, the debate proved fruitful even if neither interlocutor capitulated: “I don’t know that anybody won on points. But our side became gradually convinced that the Egyptians took the summit seriously. They weren’t there just to torpedo it.”¹¹⁶ The act of being part of the same talks and exchanging ideas had, in a small but important way, started to modify beliefs about the other side.

Such sentiments of transformation dovetailed with those of outsiders like the prominent journalist I.F. Stone. In the aftermath of Camp David, he wrote, “The agreements cannot be read with legal, myopic eyes; they are dynamic triggers of change.”¹¹⁷ It would not be an easy process but an opening existed: “There will be a screaming cacophony of confusion as the details are hammered out. But the opportunities are there, and they must not be lost to sight.”¹¹⁸ The final outcome was not spelled out, but a pathway had been brought into being that might lead in one of several directions.

As part of the diplomatic process, Carter expected at least Jordan if not Saudi Arabia to support the Camp David framework and begin participating in the negotiations.¹¹⁹ (Or, more accurately, Saudi Arabia would provide political support for Jordan to become an active participant.) At key diplomatic moments – September 1978 and March 1979 – the United States dispatched high-level delegations to meet with

Jordanian and Saudi leaders. Some reports from meetings with Jordanians offered reason for hope.¹²⁰ The *Washington Post* reported on the administration's initial optimism: "White House aides seem convinced that the Saudis will go along and bring with them Jordan's King Hussein, who is essential to making the complex set of negotiations laid out for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip work."¹²¹

In the few weeks after Camp David, convincing other Arab parties to join the process was not out of the question. Carter "thought he had achieved enough, including in terms of Palestinian rights, that others would join in."¹²² To Saunders, the Palestinians should have used the framework to "get yourselves established in the West Bank and Gaza and ultimately you'll be negotiating final status from that basis."¹²³ At the time, Jordan sent the United States a list of questions about Camp David. Carter signed off on the U.S. answers. Saunders then "took it out to King Hussein and I think the Jordanians were interested, they asked the questions, but they weren't, they didn't see that it opened the door to them." The United States shared the same answers with the PLO after Arafat queried the United States through backchannels. Arafat "was intrigued. He didn't quite know what Camp David meant. There is a period of about a month before the Arab consensus congealed that this was really a disaster for the Palestinians."¹²⁴ Camp David was not a dead letter; the door was slightly, if fleetingly, ajar.

But, as noted earlier in this article, the U.S. effort toward Jordan, the PLO, and Saudi Arabia was ultimately a failure. Months later, Strauss observed that, "Arab opposition to Sadat is deeper than expected."¹²⁵ The United States misjudged the likely Arab reaction to the deal. Without Jordan and without the Palestinians, as Carter himself publicly admitted, "the progress we can make will be limited." Still, the president added,

a “wonderful door” had been opened, and he hoped one day more parties would participate.¹²⁶

Arabs might have been more accepting of the Camp David process “if the U.S. could produce an Israeli agreement to suspend the establishment of new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza during the negotiations.” The Begin-Carter disagreement over a freeze after Camp David had a negative effect: “The Arabs watched the Israelis stand us off on this issue after Camp David and believe that, if we cannot resolve this key issue, there is little chance of our producing an agreement on Palestinian control over “their own” land.”¹²⁷ Vance’s observation here is especially important because it suggests the wider impact on U.S. credibility of what at first glance might seem to be only one specific setback for U.S. policymakers. In considering different U.S. options regarding Israeli settlements, Vance reiterated the point:

...more than any other single issue, the Arabs see our positions on the settlements as the litmus test of our intentions in the West Bank/Gaza negotiations. A position of silence or passivity on our part in the face of apparently unrestrained settlement activity will make it far more difficult to carry out an effective plan to draw Palestinians into the negotiations.¹²⁸

When Atherton met with Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza just after the summit, “The one question that they asked above all else was: What about this commitment that Israel is not going to put any more settlements in our territory?” The U.S. failure on the freeze, Atherton concluded, “ended whatever chance there was of

winning Palestinian and other Arab acceptance of the Camp David Accords.”¹²⁹ Hermann F. Eilts, U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, concurred: “Had we in fact obtained that kind of agreement in writing we could probably have sold what was a vague document, West Bank-Gaza as far as Palestinian rights were concerned, to the other Arabs.”¹³⁰

Leverage. The United States did have one other policy instrument but Carter, like most other U.S. presidents, declined to use material pressure to get Israel to freeze settlements or withdraw from the West Bank. Whether due to Israel’s position, domestic politics, or other factors, Carter would not use aid to Israel to change Israel’s peace process stance.¹³¹ Internally, Edward Sanders drafted a memo to Carter warning that U.S. pressure on Israel to try to get a settlement freeze would backfire. Sanders argued it would be counter-productive and make a peaceful outcome and Israeli cooperation less likely. He concluded by endorsing a low-key approach: “Even as the Israelis take provocative actions in the weeks ahead, our wisest course remains the road of patience, perseverance, and persuasion.”¹³² Lewis agreed: “And I said to everybody that with Begin, honey would get us a lot farther than vinegar. And I still believe to this day that was the right advice.”¹³³

The settlement freeze dispute after the summit provided a perfect example of the U.S. unwillingness to use material pressure on Israel. With Carter and Begin each claiming the Israeli freeze was to last for a different amount of time, the United States considered sanctions. U.S. officials drafted a memo for Carter with all the possible options for dealing with Begin. One option was severe: “freeze military transfers and technology and intelligence cooperation, all these heavy-hitting things that probably no president enjoys the idea that you’re going to have to do things like that. But they are the

levers you have.”¹³⁴ But Carter decided not to use these levers, and Begin did not budge on the freeze. One does not know whether U.S. sanctions would have led to Israeli concessions or simply a deterioration in U.S.-Israeli relations.

At the end of the day, Israel worked with the United States to achieve an Egyptian-Israeli treaty. So Israel was making some concessions but not across the board in a way that was likely to yield a comprehensive solution. Meanwhile, Sadat was willing to cut a deal with Israel; when Carter saw that, his push for peace on all fronts lessened. Withholding aid from Israel might or might not have helped on Palestinian matters, but it easily could have undermined the drive for an Egyptian-Israeli treaty as well.¹³⁵

IV. Conclusion

President Jimmy Carter, whose foreign policy is often talked about in terms of moralism and a commitment to human rights, made a pragmatic decision in the Arab-Israeli arena. He got what he could get, meaning a treaty between Egypt and Israel, and a new package of ideas on Palestinian matters that were neither Begin nor the PLO's preferred position. The United States did not adopt the PLO's core demands: guarantee of Palestinian statehood and the PLO's position as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Although in 1977 President Carter sought a resumption of the Geneva conference in order to achieve a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace, he ended up settling

for a bilateral breakthrough, Egypt-Israel, and the hope that autonomy talks would be enough to get a process going to address the Palestinian question.

Instead of accepting the PLO platform, Carter officials put forward an agreement on how to start a process that might outlast Israel's right-wing government or might even start to transform how the different actors looked at the range of what was possible. As they did this, Carter officials pushed back against Israeli policy. The Carter administration did not simply accept whatever Israel said and provide cover for Israeli occupation and settlements. It opposed settlements, pressed for a settlement freeze, advocated for some political movement on the Palestinian question, and did other things that when taken together indicate a genuine U.S. desire to address Palestinian needs. That process did not succeed, but it may very well have been the only approach that might have worked given the limits on Carter's policy. A process that failed may nonetheless have been a genuine effort to attain a resolution.

Some previous scholars have emphasized the pragmatic aspect of Carter's policy on the Palestinian question, and this article has attempted to deepen support for that claim. It has also highlighted the transformational element as well, something that has not received much attention in the past. In making these claims, this article rejected two other interpretations in the literature. The accords did have limits and shortcomings, but they did not preclude the possibility of a resolution. Carter officials created a process that could have led to genuine Palestinian self-determination. Moreover, the Carter administration did not quietly accept the Israeli position and Israeli expansionism but rather regularly challenged the Begin government on settlement, withdrawal, and the question of Palestine.

More than three decades after Carter left office, the Egyptian-Israeli treaty still held, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained unresolved. With the treaty, Egypt implicitly recognized Israel's superior strategic position, thereby removing the possibility of a united Arab conventional attack on Israel. On the Palestinian question, Israeli and U.S. leaders came to talk openly of a two-state solution. Not only, as the Carter administration hoped, did the Palestinian issue have a clear political dimension, but the long-held goal of statehood was embraced in terms of rhetoric. That said, neither the Oslo process based on ideas from the Camp David accords nor later negotiations were able to put the rhetorical aspirations into practice. The future of Palestinian self-determination remains uncertain.

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² Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 514.

³ John Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), p. 30.

⁴ Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 128.

⁵ Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), p. 201. See also pp. 183, 187. In my reading of Strong, he was largely silent on the Palestinian dimension. See also Douglas Brinkley, "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The "Hands on" Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President," *Diplomatic History* 20:4 (Fall 1996), pp. 505-529 at 510, though it is difficult to be certain whether Brinkley himself agreed or was merely re-stating the claims of other scholars.

⁶ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), p. 167.

⁷ Stanley Hoffman, "In search of a Foreign Policy," *New York Review of Books* 30:14, September 29, 1983.

⁸ Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*, second edition, revised (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006), pp. 152, 153, 155. In Scott Kaufman's own book on Carter, I found his opinion to be right in the middle: Carter "had opened the door to a Palestinian settlement." At the same time, "the accords failed to resolve some key issues" such as settlements, Jerusalem, and defining Palestinian powers. Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), pp. 84-85. See also pp.

86, 152. See also Peter L. Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (Washington DC: Potomac Books, 2005), pp. 64, 67.

⁹ Angus Deming et al, "The Problems," *Newsweek*, October 2, 1978, p. 28.

¹⁰ Deming, "The Problems."

¹¹ Fayez A. Sayegh, "The Camp David Agreement and the Palestine Problem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 2 (1979), pp. 3-40 at 5.

¹² On Jordan, see Jonathan C. Randal, "Hussein Rejects Proposed Role for Jordan," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1978, p. A1.

¹³ Arnaud de Borchgrave, "The Dialogue Goes On," *Newsweek*, October 2, 1978, p. 33. Sahliyah argued that Begin's approach was one factor that led Jordan to reject the Camp David agreement. Emile Sahliyah, "Jordan and the Palestinians," in William B. Quandt, ed., *The Middle East: Ten Years After Camp David* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1988), p. 288.

¹⁴ "Jordan; No," *The Economist*, September 23, 1978, p. 79.

¹⁵ The reporter had lunch with the King in London. Arnaud de Borchgrave, "The Missing Link," *Newsweek*, September 25, 1978.

¹⁶ Emphasis in original. Sayegh, "The Camp David Agreement," p. 10.

¹⁷ Emphasis in original. Sayegh, "The Camp David Agreement," p. 22. See also p. 31: "...the negotiations are left without guiding directives or governing principles or recognizable goals."

¹⁸ Sayegh, "The Camp David Agreement," pp. 28, 40. See also Janice J. Terry, "The Carter Administration and the Palestinians," in Michael W. Suleiman, *U.S. Policy on Palestine: From Wilson to Clinton* (Normal, Illinois: AAUG Press, 1995), pp. 163-174 at 168.

¹⁹ Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, *The Camp David Accords: A Testimony* (London: KPI, 1986), p. 364.

²⁰ Naseer H. Aruri, "Dialectics of Dispossession," in Naseer H. Aruri, ed., *Occupation: Israel Over Palestine* (Belmont, Mass.: AAUG, Inc., 1983), p. 16.

²¹ Terry, "The Carter Administration," p. 172.

²² Donald Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy towards Palestine and Israel since 1945* (Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995), p. 118.

²³ Timothy Mitchell, "American Power and Anti-Americanism in the Middle East," in Andrew Ross and Kristin Ross, editors, *Anti-Americanism* (New York University Press, 2004), pp. 87-105.

²⁴ David Barsamian interviews Edward W. Said, *Arts & Opinion* 2, no. 3, 2003, http://www.artsandopinion.com/2003_v2_n3/said.htm.

²⁵ John Dirlik, "Chomsky Labels Oslo Accords 'Triumph of U.S. Indoctrination System'," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, December 1995, pp. 30, 82, <http://www.wrmea.com/backissues/1295/9512030.html>. See also Noam Chomsky, "A Painful Peace," *Z Magazine*, January 1996; Edward Said, "The Morning After (October 1993)" in Said, *Peace and Its Discontents: Essays on Palestine in the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), pp. 7-20, or here <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after>; Haidar Abdel Shafi, "The Palestinian Crisis: What to do?" as translated by Khader Khader from *Al Quds*, November 18, 2001, <http://www.mediamonitors.net/haidarabdelshafi2.html>; and Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), pp. 161-162, 196-197.

²⁶ Avi Shlaim, "Obama and Israel: The pessimistic perspective," December 27, 2010, <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/foreign-policy/135177-obama-and-israel-the-pessimistic-perspective>.

²⁷ "Clinton, Massachusetts Remarks and a Question and Answer Session at the Clinton Town Meeting," Clinton, Massachusetts, March 16, 1977, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7180&st=&st1=#axzz1Iflo0KU5>. See also William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 1986), pp. 56, 71, 160.

²⁸ Interview with William B. Quandt, February 18, 2011. See also interview with Harold "Hal" Saunders, March 1, 2011. My contention is at odds with claims that Carter officials "saw the Palestinians through a humanitarian lens." See Victor V. Nemchenok, "'These People Have an Irrevocable Right to Self-Government': United States Policy and the Palestinian Question, 1977-1979," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 20, 2009, pp. 595-618 at 596 and 600. Nemchenok's primary focus is on squaring Carter's human rights rhetoric with his Palestine policy.

²⁹ “The President’s News Conference,” March 9, 1977,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7139&st=&st1=>. See also Christine Dodson to Mary Hoyt, “Visit of Prime Minister and Mrs. Begin,” March 8, 1978, NLC-25-110-5-1-6, p. 3: Resolution 242 “has been universally accepted since its adoption ten years ago as requiring Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza, with border modifications.” In another letter stating U.S. policy, a U.S. official rejected the possibility of “major changes in the 1967 lines.” Douglas J. Bennet, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations, to Rep. Kika de la Garza (D-TX), letter, November 23, 1977, White House Central Files (WHCF), Subject File, Countries, Box CO-48, folder: “CO 120 Executive 1/20/77-1/20/81,” Jimmy Carter Library (JCL or NLC), p. 1. The same folder included de la Garza’s original letter to the administration and the approximately 33 letters from constituents he appended.

³⁰ “Plains, Georgia Exchange With Reporters at Carters Warehouse,” August 8, 1977,

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=7945&st=&st1=>.

³¹ “Aswan, Egypt Remarks of the President and President Anwar al-Sadat Following Their Meeting,”

January 4, 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=31177&st=&st1=>. Israel was pleased Carter did not call for a Palestinian state. See excerpts from David Landau’s *Jerusalem Post* article in the Situation Room to Inderfurth for Brzezinski, January 5, 1978, NLC-4-7-3-8-9. On the 1967 lines, see also Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 46, 59, 160. Such talk made Begin uneasy (p. 96) and Israel was not pleased by the Aswan declaration (p. 161). In a later interview, Atherton indicated that Carter’s phrasing was negotiated with Sadat who had wanted Carter to use the phrase “Palestinian self-determination.”

³² *Maariv* as quoted in a U.S. cable, June 16, 1977.

³³ “Background Briefing on Camp David, September 1, Messrs. Quandt and Saunders,” unofficial transcript, National Security Affairs (NSA), Brzezinski, Schechter/Friendly, Box 14, folder: “9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit: 8/78-4/79,” p. 12, JCL. See also p. 13.

³⁴ Jim Hoagland, “Carter Has Moved Into Center of Arab-Israeli Chessboard,” *Washington Post*, September 24, 1978, p. A19. (news analysis)

³⁵ Bennet to Rep. Helen Meyner (D-NJ), letter, January 24, 1979, WHCF, Subject File, Countries, Box CO-48, folder: “CO 120 General 1/20/77-1/20/81,” JCL, p. 2.

³⁶ Prepared statement of Harold H. Saunders, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian affairs, before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East, November 12, 1975, <http://www.mideastweb.org/saunders.htm>.

³⁷ On meetings and, oftentimes, tensions between the Carter administration and American Jewry, see Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 18, 49, 57, 62, 67-69, 77, 116, 122-123, 131-132, 169, 174, 195, 197, 322, 338; and Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), pp. 35-36, 63, 111, 122, 128, 171-172, 177, 194.

³⁸ Tel Aviv to Washington, cable, March 10, 1977, National Security Affairs (NSA) collection, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 34, folder: "Israel 1-3/77," JCL.

³⁹ Sanders and Lewis to Hamilton Jordan and Robert Lipshutz, "Reasons Why the Jewish Community and Other Israeli Supporters are Disturbed by Administration Actions and Inactions Since the July 6 Meeting," September 19, 1977, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: "Israel 8-9/77," JCL. I also note that Brzezinski and Lipshutz discussed a memorandum to the president from Morris B. Abram, "Why Portions of the American Jewish Community are Concerned with the Present Posture of U.S./Israeli/Arab Relations," July 5, 1977. The item is in the same box, folder: "Israel 7/77."

⁴⁰ Morris Amitay, telephone interview by Jonathan Feldman, September 22, 2008 as cited in Jonathan Feldman, "The Israel Lobby? The Influence of American Jewish Groups on the Carter Administration's Middle Eastern Policy," honors thesis, Vanderbilt University, April 2009, pp. 50, 65.

⁴¹ Brzezinski to Carter, "The Middle East," memorandum, July 18, 1978, Brzezinski donated papers (BDP), Geographic, Box 13, folder: "Middle East – Negotiations: (1/78-7/28/78)," JCL.

⁴² Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 5, 7, 10, 12, 20, 25, 57. On Sadat's awareness, see pp. 136, 145, 173.

⁴³ Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 60, 167, 322.

⁴⁴ Gary Sick to Brzezinski, "Summary of Vance's Middle East Trip," August 12, 1977, NLC-SAFE 16 A-13-18-1-2.

⁴⁵ Ambassador Hermann F. Eilts, interviewed by William D. Brewer, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, August 12, 1988, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field%28DOCID+mfdip2004eil01%29>.

⁴⁶ Carter to Brzezinski, BDP, Geographic file, Box 14, folder: "Middle East Negotiations: President's and Brzezinski's Trips: [2/27/79-3/15/79]," March 15, 1979, JCL. See also Bennet to Rep. Paul Findley (R-IL), letter, May 24, 1979, WHCF, Subject File, Countries, Box CO-48, folder: "CO 120 Executive 1/20/77-1/20/81," JCL, p. 1.

⁴⁷ Quandt to Brzezinski, "The Approaching Moment of Truth," memo, January 12, 1978, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: "Israel 1-3/78," JCL. See also the discussion of the Policy Review Committee's meeting on April 19, 1977 in Nemchenok, "These People Have an Irrevocable Right," pp. 601-602.

⁴⁸ Ambassador Alfred Leroy Atherton, Jr., interviewed by Dayton Mak, Summer 1990, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field%28DOCID+mfdip2004ath01%29>

⁴⁹ Saunders to Vance, "Key Papers for Your Middle East Trip," briefing memorandum, July 28, 1978, BDP, geographic, Box 13, folder: "Middle East – Negotiations: (1/78-7/28/78)," JCL.

⁵⁰ Saunders to Vance and Strauss, "The UNSC Resolution on Palestinian Rights," circa August 1979, NLC-126-17-42-1-6, p. 3.

⁵¹ Saunders to Vance and Linowitz, "Strategies for Managing the Peace Process Through 1980," March 19, 1980, NSA, Brzezinski, VIP Visit File, Box 4, folder: "Egypt, President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin, 4/80: Cables and Memos, 3/25/80-4/9/80," JCL.

⁵² Atherton interview, Summer 1990. On efforts to reach the PLO, see also Eilts interview, August 12, 1988; and Ambassador Samuel W. Lewis, interviewed by Peter Jessup, August 9, 1998 and thereafter, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/S?ammem/mfdipbib:@field%28AUTHOR+@od1%28Lewis,+Samuel+W+++Samuel+Winfield+,+1930-%29%29>.

⁵³ See Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 101-102; Landrum Bolling's notes, "Conversation with Yasser Arafat – Beirut," September 1977, 7 pp; and Quandt interview, February 18, 2011.

⁵⁴ Quandt to Carter and attachments, BDP, Geographic, Box 14, folder: "Middle East – Possible Elements of a Solution," JCL. See also Brzezinski to Carter, "Your meeting with Golda Meir, November 8, 1977, 10:30 am," November 7, 1977, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: "Israel 11-12/77," JCL.

⁵⁵ Ibid. On the idea of linking the Palestinian entity to Jordan, see Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 183, 187.

⁵⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), p. 327. See also Seth P. Tillman, *The United States in the Middle East* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 219-222.

⁵⁷ Quandt to Brzezinski, "Israeli and Arab Reactions and Comments," March 17, 1977, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 34, folder: "Israel 1-3/1977," JCL. See also Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 45; and Carter, *White House Diary*, pp. 123, 125, 162, 167, 173, 176, 180.

⁵⁸ Lewis interview, August 9, 1998.

⁵⁹ In addition to calling in Israeli ambassador Simcha Dinitz, Secretary Vance raised the issue with Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon on May 11, 1977. Brzezinski to Carter, "Israeli Settlement at Mes'ha and Vance-Allon Meeting," May 16, 1977, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 34, folder: "Israel 4-6/77," JCL. These exchanges were consistent with what Brzezinski told Carter to tell the U.S. Amb. to Israel, Samuel Lewis, regarding settlements: "We will continue to make our opposition to these policies known." Brzezinski to Carter, "Your meeting with Ambassador Samuel Lewis, Wednesday, May 4, 1977, 2:00 pm," same folder.

⁶⁰ Sick to Brzezinski, "Summary of Vance's Middle East Trip," August 12, 1977, NLC-SAFE 16 A-13-18-1-2, p. 6.

⁶¹ Sick to Brzezinski, "Summary of Vance's Middle East Trip," August 12, 1977, NLC-SAFE 16 A-13-18-1-2, p. 5. On settlements, see also Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 81, 83, 111.

⁶² Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 100.

⁶³ On this draft transcript of the meeting, most or all of the word conference is crossed out and something is written above it. The word might be convention.

⁶⁴ Transcript, "Meeting of Foreign Minister Day[an] with President Carter, Monday, 19 September 1977, at White House, Washington, D.C.," BDP, Geographic, box 14, folder: "Middle East - Negotiations [9/75-9/77], JCL, pp. 1-2, 11, 14-15; and Quandt to Brzezinski, "Aide Memoire," September 20, 1977, NSA,

Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: "Israel 8-9/77," JCL. For a brief assessment of Dayan's promise, see Quandt to Brzezinski, "Israeli Settlements since September 1977," memo, February 1, 1978, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: "Israel 1-3/78," JCL. Quandt also sent "a chronology of our most important private exchanges with the Israelis on the question of settlements" and noted that Carter "has frankly spoken out in press conferences about the illegality of the settlements." See Quandt to Brzezinski, "Chronology on Discussions Concerning Settlements," February 1, 1978, same location. The chronology itself was not in the folder but again suggests the frequent attention Carter officials paid to the settlement question. See also Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 113; and Moshe Dayan, *Breakthroughs: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), pp. 59-63.

⁶⁵ "White House to American Embassy, Tel Aviv," January 10, 1978, NLC-16-101-3-2-7. See also Brzezinski to Carter, "Previous US Votes on UN Resolutions Concerning Israeli settlements," October 27, 1977, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: "Israel 11-12/77," JCL; and Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 179.

⁶⁶ Gush Emunim, an extra-parliamentary settlers' movement, established one in late January in Shiloh. Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 161-162.

⁶⁷ Brzezinski to Carter, "Israeli Settlements," April 19, 1978, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: "Israel 4/78," JCL.

⁶⁸ Earlier in the same paragraph, the talks were defined as "negotiations on resolution of the Palestinian problem in all its aspects." That definition is important given that Begin later claimed he agreed only to a freeze while Egypt and Israel negotiated their peace treaty.

⁶⁹ "DRAFT JOINT STATEMENT: A Declaration at Camp David," at tab 3 in the pre-summit briefing book for Carter, 1978, http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter_1/peaceprocess_appendixE1.pdf. If the sovereignty in the West Bank would be decided later, the United States advocated "that the Arab character of the territories should not be changed by unilateral Israeli action." See Vance to Carter, "An Overview," p. 12.

⁷⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 363; and Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1983), p. 258.

⁷¹ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical years in America's foreign policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 225. The United States also dropped a section on Jerusalem.

⁷² Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 202. Vance attributes this distinction to Begin. Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 236.

⁷³ For a detailed discussion of the controversy, see "Camp David 25th Anniversary Forum," Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington DC, September 17, 2003 as published by the Carter Center, January 2004, pp. 17, 33-36; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, pp. 270, 274; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 397; Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 247-251, 252-253; Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the quest for Arab-Israeli peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 255-256; and Vance, *Hard Choices*, 228-229.

⁷⁴ Steven L. Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 362.

⁷⁵ Brzezinski to Carter, "Strategy for the Vance Trip to the Middle East," memorandum, December 6, 1978, BDP, Geographic file, Box 14, folder: "Middle East Negotiations: [9/7/78-12/78]," March 15, 1979, JCL. In the same folder, see also Brzezinski to Carter, "Initial Reaction to the Latest Middle East Difficulty," November 30, 1978.

⁷⁶ Brzezinski to Carter, "Middle East Scenario," memorandum, March 3, 1979, BDP, Geographic file, Box 14, folder: "Middle East: President's and Brzezinski's Trips: [2/27/79-3/15/79]," JCL.

⁷⁷ "Presidential Review Committee Meeting," May 17, 1979, NLC-132-75-4-1-7.

⁷⁸ Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, "The West Bank/Gaza Negotiations -- Checklist of Preparations and Perspectives," May 2, 1979, p. 6.

⁷⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 376-377. In general, Carter was confronted with Begin and Israeli intransigence. See Carter, *White House Diary*, pp. 56, 62, 78, 81, 83, 97, 99, 113.

⁸⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 405-406, 408-409, 418.

⁸¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 231.

⁸² "Israel's Self-Rule Plan," December 28, 1977,

http://www.knesset.gov.il/process/docs/autonomy1977_eng.htm. The text of the copy the United States passed from Israel to Egypt is at Brzezinski donated papers (BDP), Geographic (G), Box 13, folder: "Middle East – Negotiations [10/77-12/77]," JCL.

⁸³ Atherton interview, summer 1990.

⁸⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 187.

⁸⁵ Had Labor won the 1977 Israeli election, U.S. policy might have been different: “We’ll never know what it would have been like if Rabin had stayed prime minister, had won the election, but our initial strategy was geared to that kind of expectation.” Rabin, Quandt said, told the United States the problem in the West Bank was a matter of security, not Israeli claims of sovereignty. Quandt, interview, February 18, 2011.

⁸⁶ “Noon notes,” memorandum, May 18, 1977, NLC-1-2-3-50-0; Quandt to Brzezinski, memorandum, “Arab Attitudes Since the Begin Election,” June 30, 1977, NLC-15-31-5-8-8; Brzezinski to Carter, “Arab Attitudes Since the Begin Election,” NLC-25-76-3-3-5; and “Evening Report,” memorandum, May 18, 1977, NLC-10-2-6-13-8.

⁸⁷ Akiva Eldar, “Our politics are entangled,” *Ha’aretz*, January 7, 2011, <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/our-politics-are-entangled-1.335770>

⁸⁸ Quandt to Brzezinski, “Begin on 242,” memo, February 27, 1978, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: “Israel 1-3/78,” JCL. For the idea that Begin was not giving up the West Bank, see also Laura Zittrain Eisenberg and Neil Caplan, *Negotiating Arab-Israeli Peace: Patterns, Problems, Possibilities* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 31, 36; and Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 511, 519.

⁸⁹ Brzezinski was reporting to the president on a conversation between Begin and Assistant Secretary Atherton. “Brzezinski to the President,” March 9, 1978, NLC-1-5-5-37-0. See also Christine Dodson to Mary Hoyt, “Visit of Prime Minister and Mrs. Begin,” March 8, 1978, NLC-25-110-5-1-6, p. 3. The latter document added that the “U.S. cannot agree with the Israeli interpretation of Resolution 242.” See also “Begin in 242” cited earlier.

⁹⁰ Sick to Brzezinski, “Secretary Vance’s Talks in Israel,” August 7, 1978, NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 35, folder: “Israel 7-12/78,” JCL.

⁹¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 78, 84, 164, 167-168, 170, 184, 186, 192, 203, 204, 323, 325.

⁹² Lewis interview, August 9, 1998; and Quandt interview, February 18, 2011. Both Lewis and Quandt believed Begin was a master negotiator. See William B. Quandt, “Menachem Begin: A Past Master at Negotiation,” *The Brookings Review* 2:2 (Winter 1983), pp. 12-15.

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- ⁹³ Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 211. See also pp. 322-323, 325. Begin also disavowed the stance of previous Israeli governments that UNSC Res. 242 was “applicable.” Carter, *Keeping Faith*, pp. 385-386.
- ⁹⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 229,
- ⁹⁵ Vance to Carter, “The West Bank/Gaza Negotiations -- Checklist of Preparations and Perspectives,” May 2, 1979, p. 11.
- ⁹⁶ “Proposed Statement in the Security Council on Palestinian Rights,” appended to memorandum from Brzezinski to Carter, “Ambassador McHenry’s UN Statement on Palestinian Rights Resolution,” March 30, 1980, NLC-128-3-5-8-3.
- ⁹⁷ “Camp David 25th Anniversary Forum,” p. 22. In commenting about preparations for the 2000 summit at Camp David, Martin Indyk made a similar point: “we believed we could see a way to bridge the gaps through a variety of technical mechanisms... a victory for solutionism over defeatism.” Martin Indyk, *Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p. 304. See also pp. 316, 392.
- ⁹⁸ Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy*, p. 30; Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President*, p. 129; and Kaufman and Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*, p. 150. Carter knew Sadat would accept such a deal as well. See Strong, *Working in the World*, pp. 186-187.
- ⁹⁹ Quandt to Brzezinski, “An Interim Regime for the West Bank and Gaza,” memorandum, September 9, 1977, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: “Israel 8-9/1977,” CL. Brzezinski wrote a brief reply (no date). For other novel aspects of how the United States suggested addressing the Palestinian issue, see Dan Margalit, “Washington’s Merry-Go-Round (II),” *Ha’aretz*, August 5, 1977, appended to a memo in the same folder.
- ¹⁰⁰ At Karl “Rick” Inderfurth’s suggestion, Brzezinski hand-carried the memo to Carter. Quandt to Brzezinski, “Assessment of Dayan Talks,” memorandum with Korn memo of April 28 attached, May 2, 1978, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: “Israel 5-6/78,” JCL.
- ¹⁰¹ Quandt to Brzezinski, “Assessment of Dayan Talks,” memorandum with Korn memo of April 28 attached, May 2, 1978, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 35, folder: “Israel 5-6/1978,” JCL.
- ¹⁰² Saunders to Vance, “Key Papers for Your Middle East Trip,” briefing memorandum, July 28, 1978, BDP, geographic, Box 13, folder: “Middle East – Negotiations: (1/78-7/28/78),” JCL.

¹⁰³ Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 322.

¹⁰⁴ Quandt interview, February 18, 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Quandt interview, February 18, 2011. Quandt described himself, and Brzezinski, as the most “forward-leaning” U.S. official on the Palestinian question, making him the most likely to frown on the Palestinian aspect. Quandt did wonder whether Carter could have gone back to Begin one more time to get a few more months on the freeze.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Saunders, March 1, 2011.

¹⁰⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, p. 204. See also p. 229. He added: “we believed that an interim arrangement could start a process that would change the status quo.” (212) See also Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, p. 288.

¹⁰⁸ Carter to Brzezinski, BDP, Geographic file, Box 14, folder: “Middle East Negotiations: President’s and Brzezinski’s Trips: [2/27/79-3/15/79],” March 15, 1979, JCL.

¹⁰⁹ Quandt noted U.S. officials hoped the process would outlast Begin and his staunch opposition to withdrawal or Palestinian sovereignty on the West Bank. Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 210. See also pp. 327, 330.

¹¹⁰ Quandt interview, February 18, 2011.

¹¹¹ 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), p. 144.

¹¹² Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 211. Carter agreed and hoped the treaty would inspire other Arab and Israeli leaders. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, p. 429.

¹¹³ Saunders is the most persuasive on this point. See Harold H. Saunders, *The Other Walls: The Arab-Israeli peace process in a global perspective* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. xxi, xxv, xxvi.

¹¹⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, p. 330. See also p. 331: “Negotiations do create a new political dynamic.”

¹¹⁵ “Challenges and Opportunities for Peace in the Middle East,” address by Harold H. Saunders, U.S. Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, Boston, Massachusetts, January 25, 1979, Box 7, folder 11, Edward Sanders papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio. See <http://www.americanjewisharchives.org/aja/FindingAids/EdwardSanders.htm>

¹¹⁶ David Butler et al, "Inside Camp David," *Newsweek*, October 2, 1978, p. 39.

¹¹⁷ I.F. Stone, "The Hope," *New York Review of Books*, October 26, 1978.

¹¹⁸ Stone, "The Hope."

¹¹⁹ Some reports of Jordanian and Palestinian flexibility reached the White House. See Quandt to Brzezinski, "Israeli and Arab Reactions and Comments," March 17, 1977, NSA, Brzezinski, Country file, Box 34, folder: "Israel 1-3/1977," JCL. See also Carter, *White House Diary*, pp. 39, 43-44, 57, 159.

¹²⁰ "Court Chief Sharaf – Area Review," March 2, 1978, NLC-1-5-5-11-8.

¹²¹ Jim Hoagland, "Carter Has Moved Into Center of Arab-Israeli Chessboard," *Washington Post*, September 24, 1978, p. A19; see also Deming et al, "The Problems," p. 28.

¹²² Eilts interview, August 12, 1988.

¹²³ Saunders interview, March 1, 2011.

¹²⁴ Quandt interview, February 18, 2011. For the questions and answers, see Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 388-396. Lewis suggested a slightly longer opening: "There was a period therefore of six-eight weeks when things teetered in the balance in whether we were going to succeed in getting Palestinian and Jordanian participation in the process based on the Camp David framework." See Lewis interview, August 9, 1998. See also Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, p. 517.

¹²⁵ "Presidential Review Committee Meeting," May 17, 1979, NLC-132-75-4-1-7.

¹²⁶ "Aliquippa, Pennsylvania Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting," September 23, 1978, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=29846&st=&st1=>.

¹²⁷ Vance to Carter, "The West Bank/Gaza Negotiations," p. 5.

¹²⁸ Vance to Carter, "The West Bank/Gaza Negotiations," p. 6. See also Stansfield Turner to Carter, "Middle East Peace Negotiations," n.d. (but post-Camp David), NLC-6-51-2-13-3, p. 1.

¹²⁹ Atherton interview, Summer 1990.

¹³⁰ Eilts interview, August 12, 1988.

¹³¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 4, 71, 125, 127.

¹³² I have not been able to confirm whether Sanders sent this memo to the president, but I think it is important in any case as an indication of a certain protective perspective regarding Israel and settlements.

“Approaches to the Settlements Question,” n.d., Box 7, folder 14, Edward Sanders papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

¹³³ Lewis interview, August 9, 1998.

¹³⁴ Quandt interview, February 18, 2011.

¹³⁵ Nemchenok, “These People Have an Irrevocable Right,” p. 612.