

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**The President and the Peacemaker: Jimmy Carter and the
Domestic Politics of Arab-Israeli Diplomacy,
1977-1980**

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis offers a study of the impact of American domestic politics on President Jimmy Carter's role as diplomat-in-chief during the Camp David peace process. It argues that Carter's personal involvement in fostering an Egyptian-Israeli dialogue, the Camp David Accords and Palestinian autonomy talks created a circular pattern of influence between domestic politics and foreign affairs. Carter's role as president-mediator engaged political actors, focused public attention and raised the domestic stakes. As his term progressed, he subordinated diplomatic objectives to political needs, which in fact had grown more urgent by controversy in Arab-Israeli negotiations.

As chief diplomat, Carter became intimately identified with American policy, which was completely imbued with his own political character. That activated a number of reinforcing domestic factors, some general to American foreign policy and others specific to the Arab-Israeli arena, which served to constrain what he could achieve. By examining newly released archival material, and engaging with news reportage and opinion polling, this thesis demonstrates how advice reaching the president from multiple sources – his domestic, foreign and media advisors – served to augment the other.

This thesis does not purport to offer a complete history of the Camp David peace process, Egyptian-Israeli negotiations or Carter's presidency. Instead, it examines the possibilities and the hazards of presidential diplomacy. It argues that the domestic aspects of the dispute narrowed Carter's options, limited public debate and influenced decisions at pivotal moments. These forces circumscribed what was politically possible, and interacted with strategic and diplomatic considerations to affect policy. Broadly, this thesis offers fresh perspectives on the nature and limits of presidential power, the role of the news media in American life, U.S. public opinion and foreign policy, and public engagement with the Arab-Israeli conflict.

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List of Abbreviations

ABC – American Broadcasting Company

ADST – Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training

AIPAC – American Israel Public Affairs Committee

AIPO – American Institute of Public Opinion (Gallup)

AP – Associated Press

APP – American Presidency Project

AYP – Andrew Young Papers

bpd – Barrels per day

CBS – Columbia Broadcasting System

CLOHP – Carter Library Oral History Project

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CPD – Committee on the Present Danger

CPDP – Committee on the Present Danger Papers

CPP – Carter Presidency Project

CSR – Cambridge Survey Reports

CT – *Chicago Tribune*

DDRS – Declassified Documents Reference System

DNC – Democratic National Committee

DNSA – Digital National Security Archive

DPMP – Daniel Patrick Moynihan Papers

DSB – *Department of State Bulletin*

EGAFP – Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy Project

F-5E – U.S. light tactical jet fighter

F-15 – U.S. all-weather tactical jet fighter

F-16 – U.S. multi-role jet fighter

FCO – Foreign and Commonwealth Office

FCP – Frank Church Papers

FRUS – Foreign Relations of the United States

HBP – Howard Baker Papers

HIRC – House International Relations Committee

IPS – Institute for Palestine Studies

IFRSD – Israel’s Foreign Relations: Selected Documents

ISA – Israel State Archives

JCL – Jimmy Carter Presidential Library

JJP – Jacob Javits Papers

JVL – Jewish Virtual Library

LAT – Los Angeles Times

LHP – Lee Hamilton Papers

LOC – Library of Congress

memcon – Memorandum of conversation

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

n.a. – No author

NAAA – National Association of Arab Americans

NARA – National Archives and Record Administration

NBC – National Broadcasting Corporation

NER – Near East Report

n.d. – No date

NLC – Remote Archives Capture program, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library

NPR – National Public Radio

NSA – National Security Affairs

NSC – National Security Council

NYT – *The New York Times*

OPEC – Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

PBS – Public Broadcasting Service

PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization

PNC – Palestine National Council

PNP – Paul Nitze Papers

PPP – Public Papers of the Presidents

PREM – Prime Minister's Papers

PRC – Policy Review Committee

PRM – Presidential Review Memorandum

PRO – Public Record Office

QOP – Question of Palestine

REP – Rowland Evans Papers

RG – Record Group

SALT – Strategic Arms Limitation Talks

SCC – Special Coordinating Committee

SEP – Stuart Eizenstat Papers

SFRC – Senate Foreign Relations Committee

SHAFR – Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations

SLP – Sol Linowitz Papers

UKNA – United Kingdom National Archives

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UPI – United Press International

WAFA – Palestine News Agency

WHCF – White House Central File

VTNA – Vanderbilt Television News Archive

WCP – Walter Cronkite Papers

WP – The Washington Post

WSJ – The Wall Street Journal

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Introduction

As James Earl Carter Jr. stepped into view on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives shortly after 8:00 p.m. on 18 September 1978, the hundreds of lawmakers crowded into the chamber erupted in rapturous applause. The 39th American president made his way to the rostrum and delivered a 25-minute address announcing the conclusion one day earlier of the Camp David Accords, signed by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin with Carter as a witness. When Carter concluded his speech, he turned to Begin and Sadat, and quoted Matthew 5:9: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be the children of God.' Another ovation followed. The moment represented the apogee of Carter's four years in office, as politician and diplomat, president and peacemaker.¹

Perhaps no other president in American history has embraced his constitutional role of chief diplomat more enthusiastically than Jimmy Carter. To a degree unmatched before or since, the former Georgia governor invested his personal, presidential and national prestige in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Carter's extraordinary involvement in the Arab-Israeli peace process during his one-term presidency enabled him to achieve greater success in the dispute than any previous American leader. Yet that same presidential engagement also imposed political pressures and constraints on diplomacy that Carter could not transcend.

This thesis is a study of the American system and the impact of domestic politics on Carter's role as diplomat-in-chief during the Camp David peace process.² It offers a president-centred critique of U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.³ As such, full explanations for the outcome

¹ 'Special Report: Camp David "A Framework for Peace,"' CBS News, 18 September 1978, Vanderbilt Television News Archive (hereafter VTNA) record 837720; 'Camp David Meeting on the Middle East,' 18 September 1978, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Jimmy Carter, 1978, Vol. II* (Washington: GPO, 1979) (hereafter *PPP: Carter*), 1533-1537.

² This thesis generally will use the term 'Camp David peace process' to refer to the negotiations beginning in 1977 that led to the 1978 Camp David Accords, the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and the Palestinian autonomy talks in 1979-1980. When referring to the 13-day summit between Egypt, Israel and the United States in Maryland, it will use 'Camp David Summit.'

³ The 'Arab-Israeli' construction is vague, but for the purposes of this work it will be used to refer to the political dispute involving Israel, the Palestinians and the Arab states that has led to several wars since 1948. Greatest – but not exclusive – attention will be paid to Egypt, Israel, and the Palestinians and their main political entity, the Palestine

of Egyptian-Israeli negotiations or the Palestinian autonomy talks lie beyond the scope of the present work.⁴ It will offer insight into, but not final verdicts on, Carter's overall foreign policy and presidency.

This thesis argues that Carter's personal involvement in fostering an Egyptian-Israeli dialogue, the Camp David Accords and the beginning of Palestinian autonomy talks created a circular pattern of influence between domestic politics and foreign affairs. As the president's positions grew intertwined with U.S. politics, it became virtually impossible to determine cause and effect. This dynamic is not unique in American history, but in Carter's term it exerted unprecedented influence both on U.S. policy and Carter's domestic political standing.

Trends in public opinion acted in concert with assumptions of the news media and elite to set a narrow 'permissive consensus' within which Carter could pursue options in Arab-Israeli diplomacy.⁵ This process narrowed Carter's options, limited the scope of public debate and influenced decisions at pivotal moments. These domestic forces circumscribed what was politically possible, and interacted with strategic and diplomatic considerations to affect policy.

This thesis proposes a new way to consider 'domestic politics' in the context of American policy toward the Arab-Israeli dispute. Among the multifarious issues arising from the president's domestic context, the electoral cycle, Congress, public opinion, the organised American Jewish community and associated pro-Israel lobby groups, and the national news media exerted the greatest influences on Carter's position toward the conflict. Collectively, these factors constituted the domestic pressure to which previous works refer in structural, but rarely specific, terms.

Direct presidential involvement in any foreign policy issue engages domestic political actors, focuses public opinion and shifts media coverage from diplomatic to political. Domestic

Liberation Organisation (PLO). References to 'U.S. policy' are to Washington's positions on facilitating peace and establishing its regional influence.

⁴ Overviews of this period include James Gelvin, *The Israel-Palestine Conflict: One-Hundred Years of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165-228; Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*, Revised ed. (New York: Vintage, 2001), 444-93; Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: W.W. Norton and Co., 2000), 352-83; Charles Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martins, 1992), 240-78; Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1994), 499-531.

⁵ The term belongs to Orren. Gary Orren, 'The Salience of Public Attitudes on the Middle East,' in *U.S. Middle East Policy: The Domestic Setting*, ed. Shai Feldman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988).

politics have played a major role in U.S. policy toward Israel since President Harry Truman's decision to recognise the Jewish state.⁶ But not since Woodrow Wilson has an American president immersed himself so deeply in the intricacies of diplomacy. Yet even Wilson never resorted to writing out draft treaties in longhand or negotiating with another country's entire cabinet while his aides looked on, as did Carter.

The spectres of Watergate and Vietnam haunted the 1976 presidential campaign.⁷ Carter frequently referred to the previous era as constituting the 'Nixon-Ford administration,' with little distinction between the two.⁸ Carter emphasised candour, integrity, an end to government secrecy, and promised, 'I will never lie to you.'⁹ He promised a 'government as good as its people,' one in which American citizens shared in making policy.¹⁰ He believed that U.S. foreign policy should emanate from the inside out – that the morality that governed American behaviour at home should dictate U.S. actions abroad.¹¹ This emphasis on style – candour, openness, his 'outsider' status – was based in significant part on domestic considerations, designed to define Carter against the Washington establishment.¹² Yet it complicated his initial forays into Arab-Israeli diplomacy.

Carter's dual role of politician and mediator fundamentally altered the development, promulgation and enactment of American policy. This thesis desegregates the strands of advice from Carter's international, domestic and media advisors to reveal their reinforcing tendencies. The introduction of presidential prestige to the talks granted greater credibility to U.S. promises; Egyptian and Israeli leaders knew without a doubt that he spoke for his administration. However, the political nature of the presidency meant that Carter had a lower tolerance for failure and, therefore, less leverage. If the sides failed to reach an agreement, he could offer no justification for

⁶ Lawrence Davidson, 'Truman the Politician and the Establishment of Israel,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 39, no. 4 (2010); Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 1-22.

⁷ Betty Glad, *Jimmy Carter: In Search of the Great White House* (London: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1980).

⁸ Bob Woodward, *The Shadow: Five Presidents and the Legacy of Watergate* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 32.

⁹ 'Our Foreign Relations,' Address to the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 15 March 1976, *The Presidential Campaign 1976: Jimmy Carter, I* (Washington: GPO, 1978), 109-19.

¹⁰ Jimmy Carter, *A Government as Good as Its People*, 2nd ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), x.

¹¹ ———, *Why Not The Best?* (Nashville: Broadman, 1975), 145.

¹² Carter revelled in the description of him as an 'outsider.' The term referred to his lack of Washington experience prior to his ascension to the presidency. ———, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1982), 69-142.

diverting his attention from other pressing national issues. Avoiding failure became more important than achieving success.

As Carter's term progressed, pro-Israel forces dramatically reduced his ability to pressure Israel for concessions toward Egypt and the Palestinians. Domestic considerations played the central role in the administration's decision to avoid a public 'confrontation' or 'showdown' – two words that appear frequently in the source material – with Israel. Absent such political pressures, Carter could have pursued more forcefully bringing the Palestinians into the negotiations, linked U.S. economic and military aid to Israeli concessions, and aggressively sought Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Carter would have struggled to achieve these aims, irrespective of domestic pressures, given that the United States 'had no strategy whatsoever for overcoming Begin – he wasn't going to budge on Judea and Samaria,' the biblical names the Israeli premier used to refer to the West Bank, according to William Quandt, who directed the Middle East Office of the National Security Council (NSC) under Carter.¹³ Still, Carter could have pursued an alternate course, one that would have further strained American-Israeli ties in the short term but with unclear implications for the peace process in the long term.

Scholars continue to debate whether the United States is, in President Bill Clinton's phrase, 'the one indispensable nation.'¹⁴ Regardless, in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United States has been the central outside power consistently working with the regional parties toward a settlement. This thesis contends that Washington's role in the Camp David peace process was indeed significant. In doing so, it rejects Karsh's argument, which gives overwhelming credit to the regional actors and relatively little to the 'naïve' Carter, who nearly spoiled the process.¹⁵ Begin and Sadat implicitly colluded to co-opt Carter into their designs for bilateral negotiations to allow the former to establish

¹³ William Quandt, Commentator, Panel: 'Carter, Reagan and the Middle East,' 21 June 2013, Annual Meeting of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (hereafter SHAFR), Arlington, Virginia.

¹⁴ William Clinton, 'Inaugural Address,' 20 January 1997, American Presidency Project (hereafter APP). Retrieved 10 September 2013, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=54183>; Vali Nasr, *The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat* (New York: Doubleday, 2013).

¹⁵ Efraim Karsh, 'Israel,' in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Yezid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

peace on its southern border, and the latter to recover the Sinai Peninsula. However, neither was likely to conclude a bilateral agreement without U.S. economic, military and political guarantees.

A bevy of unique factors converged in the late 1970s to complicate Carter's task as president and convert the Arab-Israeli dispute into a domestic American issue. Executive overreach in the U.S. war in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal helped embolden the press and empower the legislature, further eroding the weak foundation of the American state.¹⁶ Public opinion had grown restive and wary of American commitments overseas.¹⁷ In the Middle East, the 1973-1974 oil shocks and the rising wealth of oil-producing Persian Gulf states led to shifting U.S. strategic interests in the region and an emphasis on domestic energy policy.¹⁸ The 1970s also coincided with the rise of the fervently pro-Israel Christian Right, which forged a de facto alliance with Israel's Likud Party.¹⁹ Meanwhile, Democrats and Republicans who disapproved of the principles of détente formed a core of elite opposition, represented most prominently by the virulently anti-Soviet Committee on the Present Danger, to criticise U.S. defence policy and Soviet restrictions on Jewish emigration. These stances frequently coincided with support for Israel.²⁰

Moreover, the lessons of the Holocaust became increasingly prominent in the collective American memory.²¹ The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), for example, sometimes used the memories of the Holocaust in its calls to support Israel. This greater awareness also coincided with Begin's ascension. According to Shlaim, the Holocaust's horrors stood at the

¹⁶ On the foundations of U.S. foreign policy within the early development of the American system, see Walter LaFeber, *The American Age: United States Foreign Policy at Home and Abroad Since 1750* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 5-39.

¹⁷ John Rielly, ed. *American Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy, 1979* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Foreign Relations, 1979), 4-5.

¹⁸ Carter made energy policy the centrepiece of his domestic program. He called it the 'moral equivalent of war' and outlined goals for reducing American consumption, including slashing U.S. oil imports by half. 'The Energy Problem – Address to the Nation,' 18 April 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 656-662. Also see Olav Njolstad, 'Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years,' *Cold War History* 4, no. 3 (2006).

¹⁹ Colin Shindler, 'Likud and the Christian Dispensationalists: A Symbiotic Relationship,' *Israel Studies* 5, no. 1 (2000). Also see Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel* (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 161-87; Robert Freedman, 'The Religious Right and the Carter Administration,' *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (2005).

²⁰ John Ehrman, *The Rise of Neoconservatism: Intellectuals and Foreign Affairs 1945-1994* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 97-136; Jerry Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 191-276.

²¹ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 207-38.

centre of the military and political ideology of Begin and his immediate colleagues.²² This dynamic kept the public's attention focused on the crimes of the past, even while Carter contemplated a showdown with Israel over settlements.

Throughout the Camp David peace process, all parties faced formidable, and perhaps impassable, diplomatic, political and strategic obstacles. Regional factors remained paramount. The constellation of U.S. domestic factors strongly *influenced*, but *did not determine*, the development of *American* policy, which was personally determined and carried out by the president himself.

Existing literature

The politicised popular narrative contends that Carter's single-term presidency was an abject failure.²³ Yet scholarly accounts show greater nuance. Dumbrell's revisionist work argues that Carter enjoyed some success in forging a new direction in U.S. foreign policy, but that his own missteps along with the complex global circumstances of the time combined to explain his lack of success.²⁴ Zelizer concurs that Carter suffered from factors beyond his control, but that he should also be faulted for failing to sustain a political coalition.²⁵ In Hargrove's view, Carter approached his role as one that centred on policy and issues, not politics, which was a strength in foreign policy but a weakness in domestic politics.²⁶ The Kaufmans are more critical. They maintain that Carter's presidency was 'mediocre' and his inability to craft a coherent message or offer effective leadership constituted his most serious failures.²⁷

International affairs quickly became the focus of Carter's presidency. Initially, he attempted to pursue a new course in American foreign policy, one that was not based around an 'inordinate

²² Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 353-54.

²³ Walter Russell Mead, 'The Carter Syndrome,' *Foreign Policy* (2010). Scott Shane, 'Romney Team Tries Hanging a Jimmy Carter Label on Obama,' *The New York Times* (hereafter *NYT*), 28 September 2012. Retrieved 12 September 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/29/us/politics/romney-compares-obama-presidency-to-carters.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

²⁴ John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1993).

²⁵ Julian Zelizer, *Jimmy Carter* (New York: Times Books, 2010).

²⁶ Erwin Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

²⁷ Burton Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter, Jr.*, 2nd ed. (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 250.

fear of Communism,' but rather which tackled global problems on their merits.²⁸ He placed concern for human rights at its centre, the moral foundation upon which he built all else.

However, the most common critique of Carter's foreign policy is that his tolerance of ideological differences between National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance undermined his agenda and led to policy incoherence. Vance was a traditional diplomat who sought to defuse tensions through quiet negotiation and the search for areas of mutual interest. On the other hand, Brzezinski was a strategic Cold War thinker who believed in the primacy of power in global politics. In this orthodox view, the ineffectual and weak Carter allowed himself to be buffeted and swayed by his advisors' rivalry. As his term progressed, and especially after the fall of the U.S.-allied shah in Iran, the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, and enhanced assessments of Soviet nuclear capability, Brzezinski outmanoeuvred Vance to ensure the triumph of his policy preferences.²⁹

Of Carter's policy toward the Soviets, Mitchell concludes he had the task of leading the United States at a time of flagging national confidence and exaggerated belief in Moscow's strength. Moreover, his complex view of global affairs resisted facile categorisation, which made it difficult to generate public support or understanding.³⁰ Garthoff suggests the Vance-Brzezinski split led to a Soviet policy that 'zigzagged'.³¹ Skidmore argues Carter's fear of conservative opposition eclipsed his desire to abandon the containment doctrine.³² Similarly, many point to two Carter

²⁸ 'University of Notre Dame,' 22 May 1977, *PPP: Carter 1977, I*, 954-962.

²⁹ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2009); Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb, Ill.: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Jerel Rosati, *The Carter Administration's Quest for Global Community: Beliefs and Their Impact on Behavior* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987); Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986); Itai Sneh, *The Future Almost Arrived: How Jimmy Carter Failed to Change U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008); Richard Thornton, *The Carter Years: Toward a New Global Order* (New York: Paragon House, 1991). Also see Erwin Hargrove et al., 'H-Diplo Roundtable Review of Betty Glad: "An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisers, and the Making of American Foreign Policy",' H-Diplo, Retrieved 3 September 2013, <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/Roundtable-XII-6.pdf>.

³⁰ Nancy Mitchell, 'The Cold War and Jimmy Carter,' in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War: Volume 3: Endings.*, ed. Melvin Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³¹ Raymond Garthoff, *Detente and Confrontation: American-Soviet relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Revised ed. (Washington: Brookings, 1994), 623-65. Also see Odd Arne Westad, 'The Fall of Détente and the Turning Tides of History,' in *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

³² David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter's Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996).

presidencies: his first two years, in which he emphasised global interdependence and human rights, and his second two years, in which he pursued containment and militarism.³³

However, these narratives are often reductive and simplistic, especially when it comes to Arab-Israeli policy. Carter's broader foreign policy looks better, though still flawed, with age. His policy toward the Soviet Union, whose collapse less than a decade after his presidency underscored its fundamental weakness, has become less central. In addition, with perspective it is clear that the disaster for American policy in Iran was decades in the making and the hostage crisis would have been difficult, perhaps impossible, for any president to resolve.³⁴

Instead, Carter's emphases on human rights, multipolarity, improving relations with the developing world, safeguarding Persian Gulf energy supplies and the projection of soft power emerge as prescient.³⁵ Stueck observes that the changes Carter undertook actually came to fruition under his successors, who tended to receive the credit.³⁶ Several scholars contend that Carter's 'hands-on' involvement in foreign policy, especially on the Middle East and Panama Canal Treaties, was an asset.³⁷ Moreover, no basic disagreements roiled the relationship between Brzezinski and Vance on the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Most scholars agree that three themes have animated American policy toward the Middle East since 1945: commitment to Israel's survival; protection of U.S. economic and security interests, especially access to oil; and containment of Soviet influence, chiefly by cultivating

³³ Yael Aronoff, 'In Like a Lamb, Out Like a Lion: The Political Conversion of Jimmy Carter,' *Political Science Quarterly* 121, no. 3 (2006); Brian Auten, *Carter's Conversion: The Hardening of America's Defense Policy* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008).

³⁴ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985).

³⁵ Friedbert Pflüger, 'Human Rights Unbound: Carter's Human Rights Policy Reassessed,' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 19, no. 4 (1989); Jerel Rosati, 'The Rise and Fall of America's First Post-Cold War Foreign Policy,' in *Jimmy Carter: foreign policy and post-presidential years*, ed. Herbert D. Rosenbaum and Alexej Ugrinsky (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994); David Schmitz and Vanessa Walker, 'Jimmy Carter and the Foreign Policy of Human Rights: The Development of a Post-Cold War Foreign Policy,' *Diplomatic History* 28, no. 1 (2004); Mary Stuckey, *Jimmy Carter, Human Rights, and the National Agenda* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008). For trenchant critiques, see Jeanne Kirkpatrick, 'Dictatorships and Double Standards,' *Commentary Magazine* 68, no. 5 (1979); Joshua Muravchik, *The Uncertain Crusade and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (Lantham, Md.: Hamilton Press, 1986).

³⁶ William Stueck, 'Placing Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy,' in *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era*, ed. Gary Fink and Hugh Graham (Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas Press, 2001).

³⁷ Douglas Brinkley, 'The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The 'Hands On' Legacy of Our Thirty-Ninth President,' *Diplomatic History* 20 no. 4 (1996); John Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton* (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press Ltd., 1997), 11-52; Robert Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

favourable relations with Arab states.³⁸ Other writers, however, contend American policy stems from cultural factors and engagement, as much as strategic interests.³⁹

Nevertheless, John F. Kennedy cemented the U.S.-Israeli alliance, while Carter became the first president to commit the prestige of the office to the peace process.⁴⁰ Every subsequent president has launched a Middle East peace initiative. None has been successful. Moreover, as Khalidi contends, American policy toward the Arab-Israeli dispute has often been defined more by ‘process’ than ‘peace.’⁴¹ Aruri reaches similar conclusions, arguing Washington’s strategic relationship with Israel precludes it from acting as an impartial mediator.⁴²

Carter wanted to chart a different course. For the new president, a devout Baptist, the commitment to Arab-Israeli peace constituted a ‘religious commitment.’⁴³ Carter’s early approach was deeply informed by a 1975 Brookings Institution report, which called for an end to step-by-step diplomacy in favour of a comprehensive settlement.⁴⁴ He devoted much of his first year in office toward filling these prescriptions. Only a comprehensive settlement would ensure stability, diminish the potential for an American-Soviet confrontation, protect oil supplies, and keep oil prices under control, Carter felt. His approach was regional, not global. The president envisioned agreements based on the land-for-peace formula in U.N. Security Council Resolution 242.⁴⁵ He sought Israel’s withdrawal from the territories occupied after the 1967 war, with minor border adjustments, and a

³⁸ Peter Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Washington: Potomac, 2005), 1, 7-8. Also see Rashid Khalidi, *Sowing Crisis: The Cold War and American Dominance in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2009); Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

³⁹ Matthew Jacobs, *Imagining the Middle East: The Building of an American Foreign Policy, 1918-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East, 1945-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy’s Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁴¹ Rashid Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit: How the US Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013), xviii-xix. Quandt makes a similar point. William Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Brookings, 2005), 1.

⁴² Naseer Aruri, *Dishonest Broker: The Role of the United States in Palestine and Israel* (Boston: South End Press, 2003).

⁴³ George Edwards III, ‘Exclusive Interview: President Jimmy Carter,’ *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2007): 3. Also Darren McDonald, ‘Crisis of faith: Jimmy Carter, religion, and the making of U.S.-Middle East foreign policy’ (Boston College, 2012); Merkley, *The Heirs of Cyrus*, 87-148.

⁴⁴ Brzezinski and Quandt were both members of the group. Brookings Middle East Study Group, *Toward Peace in the Middle East* (Washington: Brookings, 1975).

⁴⁵ UNSC S/RES/242, 22 November 1967, United Nations: The Question of Palestine (hereafter QOP). Retrieved 5 September 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136>.

process for Palestinian self-determination in the occupied territories. Carter also sought cooperation with the Soviet Union in bringing all parties together at a conference. Moreover, he became the first American president to call publicly for a Palestinian ‘homeland’ and the only one to label Israeli settlements in the occupied territories ‘illegal.’

Carter’s failed attempt to pursue this course, and his subsequent policy reorientations, has been well documented. Yet a historiographical lacuna remains around *how* and *why* this process occurred. This thesis addresses the domestic obstacles that *Carter* faced in pursuit of *his* preferred objectives, conceding that U.S. desiderata alone could not determine the outcome of Egyptian-Israeli, broader Arab-Israeli and Palestinian autonomy negotiations.

Supporters of Carter’s efforts consider the Camp David Accords, and his subsequent mediation of the peace treaty between Israel and the largest Arab state, to be a landmark of Middle East diplomacy. However, Stein’s account, for example, is congratulatory, devotes little attention to the Palestinians, and fails to incorporate domestic political history with his diplomatic approach to produce fresh insight.⁴⁶ For Camp David’s critics, the agreements were too vague to be judged a success, did not quell regional instability, and, moreover, the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty allowed Israel to protect its southern flank while invading Lebanon and consolidating its hold on the West Bank.⁴⁷

Quandt offers the seminal analysis of the Camp David peace process. As a member of the U.S. delegation at Camp David, he brings unique insight into the personalities and also benefits from ‘unusually full access to relevant documents.’ Perhaps as a result, it is sparsely footnoted, leaving historians with few breadcrumbs to follow. Quandt contends that Carter’s experience offers proof positive that the American system delimits any efforts by an administration to approach forcefully an issue as complicated as the Arab-Israeli conflict: presidential terms are too short, turnover in top national-security posts occurs too rapidly, and the constant need to appeal for

⁴⁶ Kenneth Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 35-45, 187-259.

⁴⁷ Naseer Aruri, ‘U.S. Policy toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict,’ in *The United States and the Middle East: A Search for New Perspectives*, ed. Hooshang Amirahmadi (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 104; Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, 13; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 494-560; Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 240-78.

congressional and public support all conspire to blunt sustained initiatives. Yet while he concedes that domestic politics complicated the administration's role, his analysis does not reach into American society to limn the influence of specific actors on policy.⁴⁸

In contrast to this thesis, Quandt places the policymaking process at the centre of his narrative. He faults Carter's lack of strategic vision and his inability to tend to his domestic base. Quandt's critique of the limitations placed on Carter is structural. Conversely, this thesis prioritises Carter's personal and political roles in the negotiations, arguing that the two were inseparable. It contends that the overlapping advice Carter received from his aides merged with societal pressures to constrain his diplomatic manoeuvrability and damage him politically.

Spiegel takes a regional approach. He contends the Carter administration based its interests around preventing major oil production cuts and price rises, which strained its Arab-Israeli policy.⁴⁹ However, Lenczowski indicates Carter's investment in Arab-Israeli peace amounted to a 'superfluous exertion' of presidential resources. His efforts yielded nothing beyond what Egypt and Israel wanted anyway and, additionally, they consumed time that should have been spent on Iran.⁵⁰ Brands asserts Carter's interest in peacemaking stemmed from his religious beliefs and because he recognised its potential political benefits.⁵¹ Yet none of these accounts are augmented by fresh primary research.

One of Carter's policy innovations was to emphasise the Palestinians' centrality to the conflict.⁵² However, his attempts to bring the Palestinians into the negotiations were opposed by Israel and aroused fierce domestic criticism. Khalidi argues that Carter's experience on the

⁴⁸ Another difference is that Quandt's analysis ends with the conclusion of the Egypt-Israel treaty, whereas this thesis extends into 1980. William Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington: Brookings, 1986), xi-xii.

⁴⁹ Steven Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985), 315-80.

⁵⁰ George Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1990), 157-211.

⁵¹ H.W. Brands, *Into the Labyrinth: The United States and the Middle East, 1945-1993* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994), 143-52.

⁵² On the Palestinian movement, see Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement 1949-1993* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997).

Palestinian issue ‘served as a bitter object lesson’ to U.S. administrations about the perils of policy innovation.⁵³

Pressman contends Carter’s approach was ‘pragmatic’: he helped achieve the outer limits of what was possible at the time – an Egypt-Israel treaty – while setting in motion a process for Palestinian autonomy that he hoped would outlast Israel’s Likud government. Pressman’s archival research is thorough, but it devotes little attention to Egypt and does not delve into the domestic politics of Carter’s presidential diplomacy.⁵⁴ This thesis elaborates on Carter’s ‘pragmatism,’ the reasons for which Pressman leaves vague, arguing that it resulted from regional challenges *in conjunction with* his considerable domestic pressures.

Separately, Terry criticises the president for abandoning the comprehensive approach and instead merely reverting to shuttle diplomacy.⁵⁵ Others contend that in the case of the Palestinians, Carter’s human rights emphasis fell victim to other strategic imperatives.⁵⁶ Still, just by speaking publicly about the Palestinian situation, Carter elevated the issue on the American policymaking agenda.⁵⁷

The U.S. role in Arab-Israeli negotiations was essentially non-legislative during Carter’s term, but that did not obviate congressional influence. Carter had to contend with congressional power and influence to gain support for controversial items on his agenda. He consequently had to expend political capital, which in turn limited his tolerance for sustained controversy over his stance in Arab-Israeli negotiations.

Carter’s relationship with Congress, both houses of which were controlled by his own Democratic Party, was generally poor. As Jones contends, Carter conceived of his role as president ‘as that of the trustee – an official entrusted to represent the public or national interest, downplaying

⁵³ Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, 4-7. Christison concurs. Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 157-94.

⁵⁴ Jeremy Pressman, ‘Explaining the Carter administration’s Israeli-Palestinian Solution,’ *Diplomatic History* (2013).

⁵⁵ Janice Terry, ‘The Carter Administration and the Palestinians,’ in *U.S. Policy on Palestine from Wilson to Clinton*, ed. Michael Suleiman (Normal, Ill.: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, Inc., 1995).

⁵⁶ Victor Nemchenok, “These People Have an Irrevocable Right to Self-Government”: United States Policy and the Palestinian Question, 1977-1979,’ *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 20, no. 4 (2009).

⁵⁷ Saunders makes this point generally. Harold Saunders, *The Other Wall: The Politics of the Arab-Israeli Peace Process* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1985).

short-term electoral considerations.' But such a principled stance did not endear him to lawmakers.⁵⁸ Carter later admitted that he 'sometimes ... was not adequately concerned with how [his] proposals affected the views of voters on whom they relied for re-election.'⁵⁹ Moreover, as Congress wrestled with the White House for control of the foreign policy agenda, lobbyists had unprecedented access to decision-makers on international affairs.⁶⁰

En route to the presidency, Carter overcame 'latent suspicion' from some members of the Jewish community about his Southern Baptist background⁶¹ to win 71 percent of the Jewish vote.⁶² More than 60 percent of the substantial donors to the Democratic Party were Jewish and even while Carter was still a relative unknown in the race, he received more than one-third of his funding from Jewish donors.⁶³ Carter attributed the backing to his support for Israel and anti-boycott legislation, which was adopted to punish American citizens and firms that conducted business with companies that participated in the Arab League economic embargo against Israel.⁶⁴

Jews comprise around 2 percent of the American population – about 6 million people – but they have the highest percentage voter turnout of any ethnic group. The centres of American Jewry are also located in electorally critical states, such as California, Florida and New York. The societal support for Israel provided fertile ground for organised American Jewish groups and other pro-Israel lobbyists to gain support.⁶⁵ Conversely, Americans have been less supportive of the Arab

⁵⁸ Charles Jones, *The Trusteeship Presidency: Jimmy Carter and the United States Congress* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 2.

⁵⁹ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 526.

⁶⁰ Russell Warren Howe and Sarah Hays Trott, *The Power Peddlers: How Lobbyists Mold America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1977); Janice Terry, *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East: The Role of Lobbies and Special Interest Groups* (London: Pluto Press, 2005).

⁶¹ Stuart Eizenstat interview, 11 May 1978, Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy Oral History Project, Columbia University, New York (hereafter EGAFP), 4.

⁶² 'Election Reference Information: Jewish Voting Record (1916-2012)', Jewish Virtual Library (hereafter JVL). Retrieved 28 August 2013, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/jewvote.html>.

⁶³ '1977 Report on Jewish Vote,' n.a., n.d. [circa March 1977], Folder: 'Middle East, 1977 [1],' Box 35, Jordan Files, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter JCL or NLC).

⁶⁴ 'Antiboycott Regulations,' JVL. Retrieved 29 August 2013, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/antiboy.html>.

⁶⁵ Mitchell Bard, *The Water's Edge and Beyond: Defining the Limits to Domestic Influence on United States Middle East Policy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1991); Connie De Boer, 'The Polls: Attitudes Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict,' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1983); Walter Russell Mead, 'The New Israel and the Old: Why Gentile Americans Back the Jewish State,' *Foreign Affairs* 87, no. 4 (2008).

cause generally, and the Palestinian one specifically.⁶⁶ This thesis will not make reference to a 'Jewish lobby,' which is a nebulous term insufficient for this level of analysis. However, a number of actors combined to constitute a pro-Israel lobby in the United States.

The former editor of AIPAC's biweekly *Near East Report* defines the pro-Israel lobby as 'those formal and informal actors that directly and indirectly influence American policy to support Israel.' The 'informal lobby' influences policy indirectly, and derives from patterns of Jewish voting behaviour and broad trends in American public opinion. The 'formal lobby,' represented most prominently by AIPAC, attempts to influence legislation.

AIPAC distributes information, encourages involvement in the political process and serves as a conduit of opinion to Congress. Unlike traditional political action committees, it does not rate, endorse or finance candidates.⁶⁷ It was established to counteract 'pro-Arab' sentiment detected in the Defense and State Departments, according to its co-founder.⁶⁸ Conversely, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (Presidents' Conference) is the main contact between the organised Jewish community and the White House. Comprised of dozens of organisations, it formulates positions, meets with executive branch officials, including the president, and allows the American Jewish community to speak with one voice. The lobby has no effective rival in Washington; the pro-Arab lobby has limited means and influence on Arab-Israeli issues.⁶⁹ Although Bard overstates the case, the pro-Arab network has greater success lobbying for economic and defence interests.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ William Dorman, 'Media, Public Discourse, and U.S. Policy Toward the Middle East,' in *The United States and the Middle East: A Search for New Perspectives*, ed. Hooshang Amirahmadi (Albany: 1993); Fouad Moughrabi, 'American Public Opinion and the Palestine Question,' in *Public Opinion and the Palestine Question*, ed. Elia Zureik and Fouad Moughrabi (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Edward Said, 'The Formation of American Public Opinion on the Question of Palestine,' in *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969-1994* (London: Vintage, 1994).

⁶⁷ Mitchell Bard, 'The Israeli and Arab Lobbies,' JVL (updated July 2012). Retrieved 28 August 2013, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/lobby.html>.

⁶⁸ I.L. Kenen, *Israel's Defense Line* (Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1981), 66-91.

⁶⁹ Khalil Marrar, *The Arab Lobby and US Foreign Policy: The two-state solution* (London: Routledge, 2009), 84-119; and Michael Suleiman, 'A History of Arab-American Political Participation,' in *American Arabs and Political Participation*, ed. Philippa Strum (Washington: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2006).

⁷⁰ Mitchell Bard, *The Arab Lobby: The Invisible Alliance that Undermines America's Interest in the Middle East* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010).

Mearsheimer and Walt argue that the domestic strength of pro-Israel factions compels American politicians to tilt U.S. policy toward Israel despite its strategic failures.⁷¹ But their work lacks historical context, archival research or adequate reference to Americans' broader policy preferences. It was also written more than a quarter century after the Carter administration, by which time the lobby – especially AIPAC – had developed into a much different entity than it was in the late 1970s.

Tivnan's account concludes that the lobby had a significant influence on Carter's policy, but refrains from contextualising that influence within broader American policy preferences.⁷² Tillman reaches similar conclusions, contending that the lobby has been 'the root cause of a chronically unbalanced policy that ... remains a strategic failure.'⁷³

Conversely, Bard argues the lobby's influence is a salutary part of the pluralistic U.S. system. During the Carter administration, he believes that pro-Israel factions exerted 'an observable degree of influence' on American policy by reducing U.S. leverage over Israel.⁷⁴ Miller tends to agree. He acknowledges that many U.S. negotiators have held biases, but that nothing is nefarious about the influence of domestic politics on Arab-Israeli policy, as long as the issue is discussed publicly.⁷⁵ Although Lazarowitz does not examine the pro-Israel lobby per se, she argues that Carter dealt with the organised American Jewish leadership in a similar way to other special interest groups, with little regard to the emotional bond between many Americans and the Jewish state.⁷⁶ In contrast to these accounts, this thesis contends that the pro-Israel lobby's influence on Carter's policy can only be understood in the context of mass opinion and broader domestic pressures.

This thesis contends that the heavy media coverage of Carter's involvement in Arab-Israeli negotiations piqued the public's interest. Once aroused, Americans expected rapid results in the

⁷¹ John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy* (London: Allen Lane, 2007).

⁷² Edward Tivnan, *The Lobby: Jewish Political Power and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 98-134.

⁷³ Seth Tillman, *The United States and the Middle East: Interests and Obstacles* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 276.

⁷⁴ Bard, *Water's Edge and Beyond*, 213.

⁷⁵ Aaron David Miller, *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Bantam Books, 2008), 75-124.

⁷⁶ Arlene Lazarowitz, 'Ethnic Influence and American Foreign Policy: American Jewish Leaders and President Jimmy Carter,' *Shofar* 29, no. 1 (2010).

peace process. As the diplomatic slog stretched into months, news coverage of the stalemated negotiations, coupled with elite criticism of Carter's approach, contributed to an image of a weak president. Moreover, Carter's determination to involve the American people in policymaking engaged the public as a collective entity. The public, thus engaged, soon became a principle arena of competition between Egyptian and Israeli leaders, who looked to American opinion to fortify their positions.⁷⁷

Carter grounded his political approach, expressed frequently during his campaign, in the belief that the Washington establishment had led American government astray. His administration would be different, and his foreign policy would not be predicated on the received wisdom. Carter committed himself to pursue a foreign policy that 'the American people both support and ... know about and understand.'⁷⁸ Implicit in this approach was the need to cultivate popular support for his program. Yet virtually no analyses of Carter's foreign policy have incorporated public opinion analysis into the study of the archival record.⁷⁹

Although Americans' policy preferences were pro-Israel, the enthusiasm generated by Sadat's 1977 trip to Jerusalem created a climate more conducive than ever to pressuring Israel for concessions. Sadat became extremely popular, but that did little to diminish overall public favouritism toward Israel. Additionally, Americans generally disapproved of Begin's settlements policy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but the ascension of his right-wing government only notionally influenced the trend of public support for the Jewish state.⁸⁰ Carter discovered that some courses – namely, pressuring Israel by withholding arms or economic aid – were unavailable to him.

In his classic work on public opinion and U.S. foreign policy, Rosenau contends the media circulates opinions between decision makers and elites, whom he collectively refers to as 'opinion

⁷⁷ Patrick O'Heffernan, *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy* (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1991), 9-17, 123-58.

⁷⁸ 'University of Notre Dame,' 22 May 1977, *PPP: Carter 1977, I*, 954-962.

⁷⁹ An exception is Katz, who examines Carter's human rights record and his Soviet policy. Andrew Katz, 'Public Opinion and the Contradictions of Jimmy Carter's Foreign Policy,' *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (2000).

⁸⁰ Works on Israel's settlements under Begin include Geoffrey Aronson, *Creating Facts: Israel, Palestinians and the West Bank* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1987), 53-186; Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar, *Lords of the Land: The War Over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories, 1967-2007*, trans. Vivian Eden, 2nd ed. (New York: Nation Books, 2007), 55-73.

makers.' In turn, these opinion makers sway the preferences of the public, which otherwise merely sets the outer limits for policy.⁸¹ Powlick and Katz conclude public opinion becomes significant 'when an issue produces a debate among elites that is covered by the media in such a way as to focus the public's attention.'⁸² Similarly, Brody asserts that Americans 'form and revise their impressions of the quality of presidential performance on evidence contained ... in the news media.' That process of opinion formation is inherently 'politicized,' Brody contends.⁸³ Separately, Gilboa believes that since 1948 'American public opinion has had *some* effect on U.S. policy in the Middle East and on certain critical Israeli policies,' but during the Carter years it played 'a significant role.'⁸⁴

Lippmann argues that foreign policy should be the domain of the elite because most members of the public are either uninterested or unable to make reasoned judgments on international affairs.⁸⁵ Moreover, he contends that public opinion reacts not to the environment, but to the 'pseudo-environment' constructed by the news media because the world 'we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind.' The press acts 'like the beam of a searchlight that moves restlessly about, bringing one episode and then another out of darkness into vision.'⁸⁶ Additionally, the news media's searchlight has rested on the Middle East more than most other regions.⁸⁷

The issues emphasised in the major American news outlets, and in particular *The New York Times*, set the agenda for national news coverage and become the issues regarded by the public as the most important. This dynamic has come to be called the media's 'agenda-setting role.'⁸⁸ As

⁸¹ James Rosenau, *Public Opinion and Foreign Policy* (New York: Random House, 1961).

⁸² Philip Powlick and Andrew Katz, 'Defining the American Public Opinion/Foreign Policy Nexus,' *Mershon International Studies Review* 42, no. 1 (1998).

⁸³ Richard Brody, *Assessing the President. The Media, Elite Opinion, and Public Support* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 4.

⁸⁴ Eytan Gilboa, *American Public Opinion toward Israel and the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1987), 320, 83. Emphases in original.

⁸⁵ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1922). Almond broadly agrees. Gabriel Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1950).

⁸⁶ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, 15-17, 197.

⁸⁷ Thomas Friedman, 'The US Media and the Middle East,' in *U.S. Middle East Policy: The Domestic Setting*, ed. Shai Feldman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1988).

⁸⁸ Maxwell McCombs, *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 1-2.

Cohen notably wrote, the press ‘may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.’⁸⁹

Complaints about unfair news coverage are a common trope in every administration. However, Carter’s task of winning over the media was particularly arduous because of the moment in which he served. The 1970s was a heady decade for the American news media. By the time Carter entered the White House, journalists felt empowered to ask questions, challenge authority and generally demonstrate a newfound scepticism toward authority.

Moreover, throughout the 1970s, technological changes made international reporting more accessible to the American public and facilitated a greater number of foreign news stories on television.⁹⁰ The Middle East featured most prominently in that coverage.⁹¹ Additionally, according to one 1978 study, U.S. newspapers ran more stories on foreign policy than on any other issue out of Washington. White House correspondents also wrote more frequently on, and showed a keener interest in, foreign policy than anything else.⁹²

Carter’s personal involvement in Arab-Israeli negotiations ensured the proceedings were often reported on and interpreted by White House reporters, rather than or in addition to diplomatic correspondents. White House correspondents tend to focus on the ups and downs of politics, rather than the slow grind of diplomacy.⁹³ Consequently, coverage tended to view Carter’s role through the prism of its domestic political ramifications.⁹⁴

The Carter administration generated consistently more negative coverage than his predecessors, a dynamic that contributed to the public perception of a president incapable of strong leadership.⁹⁵ His moralistic tendencies, ‘outsider’ status and seeming lack of humour failed to

⁸⁹ Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), 13.

⁹⁰ James Larson, ‘International Affairs Coverage on U.S. Evening Network News, 1972-1979,’ in *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, ed. William C. Adams (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982).

⁹¹ William Adams and Phillip Heyl, ‘From Cairo to Kabul with the Networks, 1972-1980,’ in *Television Coverage of the Middle East*, ed. William C. Adams (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981).

⁹² Stephen Hess, *The Washington Reporters* (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1981), 108-12.

⁹³ Hedrick Smith telephone interview with author, 3 November 2011.

⁹⁴ Kern, Levering and Levering conclude that a domestic political ‘prism’ frames foreign policy news. Montague Kern, Patricia Levering, and Ralph Levering, *The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 4-12, 195-204.

⁹⁵ Mark Rozell, *The Press and the Carter Presidency* (London: Westview Press, 1989).

endear him with seasoned Washington journalists.⁹⁶ Primed for presidential misconduct, the media pounced in summer 1977 when allegations surfaced that Carter's confidante and new director of the Office of Management and Budget, Bert Lance, had engaged in shady practices in his pre-Washington businesses in Georgia. Lance was cleared of wrongdoing, but the uproar prompted his resignation and badly damaged Carter.

This work contends that the news media played a pivotal role in developing public opinion and shaping Carter's political environment. Historians often rely on news coverage to supplant the documentary record, but with little regard to the influence that reporting has in creating the consensus within which policy can be developed. Too often historical analysis has omitted the study of television news. This study agrees with Iyengar and Kinder's assertion that 'for good or ill, television news has become a regular participant in the American political process,' while further contending that the main print coverage drives TV news.⁹⁷

Carter's political acumen propelled him from obscure local official to the Georgia governorship and then to the Oval Office in less than seven years, but it rarely surfaced during his presidency. Once ensconced in the White House, he concentrated on managing the country's problems, not generating support for his policies or offering a national vision. President Carter bore scant resemblance to candidate Carter.

As part of Carter's 'trusteeship' mentality, he sought to make decisions based on their merits, not on what was politically beneficial. 'Many times the one argument that I would find would ruin a person's case is when he'd say, "This is good for you politically." He didn't want to hear that,' Vice President Walter Mondale said. 'He wanted to know what's right.'⁹⁸ While such an approach fuelled Carter's willingness to tackle difficult problems, it also alienated key members of the Democratic coalition and eroded his popularity.

⁹⁶ James Reston, *Deadline: A Memoir* (New York: Random House, 1991), 422-27.

⁹⁷ Shanto Iyengar and Donald Kinder, *News that Matters: Television and American Opinion* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 112.

⁹⁸ Adriana Bosch, 'Jimmy Carter: American Experience,' (United States: PBS, 2002). Retrieved 8 September 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/carter/player/>.

This work is also a study of presidential leadership in foreign policy. Due to its domestic political repercussions, the key to understanding U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli dispute resides not in the foreign policymaking bureaucracy, but rather the presidency.⁹⁹ Carter took responsibility for detailed issues and expected results of himself. He looked to lasting solutions to complex problems that extended beyond his time in office.

Little historical work has been done on presidential performances as chief diplomats. Plischke mentions Carter's role at Camp David in his study of presidents' engagement in summit diplomacy, but does not analyse the 39th president's sustained involvement in the Arab-Israeli dispute. He contends that presidents who act as diplomats-in-chief find their greatest success when their activities easily reconcile both their immediate image and long-term prestige.¹⁰⁰ Simon argues that summits consistently have an impact on U.S. presidential popularity, bilateral relations and foreign economic relations. That data-heavy approach, however, differs from the present one in that it looks for longitudinal patterns over decades, does not incorporate primary documents and is not centred on a specific policy area.¹⁰¹

Typically, a president's leadership is exercised through his influence on elite opinion, journalistic coverage and congressional debate rather than through the general public.¹⁰² In his seminal work, Neustadt argues that the main weapon in the president's arsenal is 'the power to persuade.' But his source of power should be tapped judiciously; otherwise, the president risks depleting his wellspring.¹⁰³ Greenstein does not rate Carter highly in the two qualities he emphasises – communicative ability and, above all else, 'emotional intelligence'.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*; Avi Shlaim, 'The Impact of U.S. Policy in the Middle East,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 17, no. 2 (1988).

¹⁰⁰ Elmer Plischke, *Diplomat in Chief: The President at the Summit* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 265-66.

¹⁰¹ Agnes Simon, 'The Political and Economic Consequences of the Summit Diplomatic Activity of the U.S. President' (PhD dissertation, University of Missouri, 2012).

¹⁰² George Edwards III, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (London: Yale University Press, 2003).

¹⁰³ Richard Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

¹⁰⁴ Fred Greenstein, *The Presidential Difference: Leadership style from FDR to George W. Bush*, 2nd ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 6. Johns also emphasises the importance of policy communication. Andrew Johns, 'Introduction: Hail to the Salesman in Chief: Domestic Politics, Foreign Policy and the Presidency,' in *Selling War in a Media Age: The Presidency and Public Opinion in the American Century*, ed. Kenneth Osgood and Andrew Frank (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

Instead, Carter's style of leadership more closely resembled that described by Kernell. The president appealed directly to his electorate for support in an attempt at 'forcing compliance from fellow Washingtonians by going over their heads to appeal to their constituents.'¹⁰⁵ However, Carter did not 'go public' in an attempt to bolster his position in Washington. Rather, his public comments were predominantly intended to call attention to certain domestic issues, such as the energy crisis, and to educate the public on complex foreign affairs like the Arab-Israeli negotiations. However, his goals were nebulously defined, his tactics unorthodox and his style helped turn elite opinion against his administration.

Carter demonstrated ample ability to bargain, cajole and compromise in his direct talks with Begin and Sadat. Yet he did not show a similarly deft hand with his own citizens. Had he been a smooth persuader, rather than a blunt advocate, it is conceivable that Carter could have generated public and congressional support for pressuring Israel for concessions.

Sources and methodology

The rich first-hand accounts of the Camp David peace process are a mixed blessing.¹⁰⁶ They provide a useful record of an extraordinary period in diplomacy. However, they have also led to a scholarly overreliance on accounts by participants who may lack distance and balance. As a result, most studies tread similar ground using the same source base. Moreover, standard diplomatic approaches have failed to appreciate the political reverberations of Carter's role in the negotiations.

The present work is based predominantly on research in government and private archives in Britain, the Middle East and the United States. It developed a unique source base in order to

¹⁰⁵ Samuel Kernell, *Going Public: New Strategies of Presidential Leadership*, 3rd ed. (Washington: CQ Press, 1997), 2.

¹⁰⁶ Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem: A Diplomat's Story of the Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 1997); Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1983), 83-122, 234-88; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 275-438; —, *Diary*; Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1984), 255-90; Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981); Ismail Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East* (Beckingham, Kent: Croom Helm, 1983); Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, *The Camp David Accords: A Testimony* (London: KPI, 1986); Sol Linowitz, *The Making of a Public Man: A Memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), 207-36; Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1984), 54-102; Quandt, *Camp David*; Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 159-255; Ezer Weizman, *The Battle for Peace* (New York: Bantam Books, 1981).

facilitate a fresh perspective on events and issues often subsumed within the larger historiography of the Carter presidency. This thesis takes advantage of the growing amount of primary material available from this period, but does not purport to offer the final verdict on Carter.

Research for this thesis was carried out principally at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta, Georgia, not the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA) in College Park, Maryland, because the work concentrates on the presidency rather than the foreign policy bureaucracy. Available material at NARA on Carter's role in the Camp David peace process was sparse during the research for this work. Unfortunately, requests at the Carter Library for Mandatory Declassification Review yielded Camp David Summit materials that were essentially devoid of content. Additionally, the State Department's Office of the Historian published the first volume of the *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)* series on Carter's Arab-Israeli policy, covering January 1977 to August 1978, in the very final stages of preparation of this thesis.¹⁰⁷

Nevertheless, a significant amount of new material became available at the Carter Library during the research for this thesis. The Presidential Handwriting File consists of papers that have crossed Carter's desk and was therefore indispensable. Brzezinski and his staff's daily reports, which are contained in the National Security Affairs collection, provide a record of policymaking-in-progress. Brzezinski, in particular, proved a master at controlling the paper flow to the president; his memos are filled with strategic advice for Carter. Many of these documents, especially those available exclusively on the Remote Archives Capture terminal at the Carter Library, were declassified in the course of this project.

Hamilton Jordan's files were critical. As one of the president's longest-serving advisors, his central role soon became 'trying to reconcile [Carter's] foreign policy interests and objectives with the political realities.'¹⁰⁸ Many new national security documents also became available with the

¹⁰⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume VIII: Arab-Israeli Dispute, January 1977-August 1978* (Washington: GPO, 2013) (hereafter *FRUS*).

¹⁰⁸ Hamilton Jordan interview, 6 November 1981, CPP, 52. Accessed 21 August 2013, http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_1981_1106_jordan.pdf.

2010 opening of Mondale's donated collection. The vice president was an experienced foreign policy hand and a conduit between the Jewish community and the administration.

Cyrus Vance did not leave a voluminous paper trail, participate in any of the post-Carter administration oral history projects consulted for this thesis or donate historical materials to the Carter Library, so his voice is somewhat muted in previous studies. Thus, his papers at Yale University were examined, although they are more substantial on the campaign and transition than his tenure at Foggy Bottom. Similarly, the recently opened papers of U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young, held at Atlanta's Auburn Avenue Research Library, proved relatively thin on his time in New York.

Nevertheless, in keeping with this project's contention that Carter's involvement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy was fundamentally political, it also engages with primary materials from his domestic and media advisors held at the Carter Library. Although head of the Domestic Policy Staff, Stuart Eizenstat consistently acted as an advocate for Israel, while White House Counsel Robert Lipshutz also had an informal role as Middle East advisor.¹⁰⁹ The files of both Eizenstat and Lipshutz yielded rich dividends of rarely accessed documents on Middle East policy, public opinion and contacts with the American Jewish community. Moreover, Eisenstat's personal papers, opened in 2011, were examined at the Library of Congress. He often transmitted 'personal messages' between Jerusalem, Israel's embassy in Washington and the president.¹¹⁰ Transcripts of interviews conducted by Eizenstat for an unwritten book on the Middle East proved especially pertinent to this study.

The Carter Library papers of Press Secretary Jody Powell were also consulted. Powell's role went beyond that of mere spokesman; he frequently provided advice on the press-policy link. His collection also contains extensive polling and analysis on the domestic politics-foreign policy nexus by Carter's influential pollster, Patrick Caddell. The files of communications chief Gerald Rafshoon were also illuminating. Rafshoon's focus on the president's image often became intertwined with

¹⁰⁹ Eizenstat interview, EGAFP, 15; Robert Lipshutz interview, 15 February 1978, *ibid.*, 12-13.

¹¹⁰ Notes, 'Discussion on Air Force 1 regarding PLO at UN reception,' 17 March 1977, Folder 5, Box 2, Stuart Eizenstat Papers (hereafter SEP), Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter LOC).

political and even diplomatic advice. Taken together, these documents reveal the remarkable confluence of advice from Carter's domestic, foreign policy and communications staffs. By integrating the study of domestic and foreign policy sources, this thesis shows how each served to augment the other in Carter's approach toward the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Many other U.S. collections were consulted, including the congressional records at the National Archives Building in Washington, D.C., the personal papers of several former members of Congress and manuscript collections at the Library of Congress. These collections provided documentary evidence from figures inside and outside the administration.

This thesis, however, does not focus solely on government decision-making, but also on the broader political and societal pressures brought to bear on Carter during Arab-Israeli negotiations. Foremost, it treats the news media as a political actor. Print and television news reporting and commentary are used as a primary source for the insight they provide into the political environment in which Carter operated.

The most important news organisations constituted what Hess calls the 'inner ring.'¹¹¹ Basing its analysis on Hess' categorisation, this thesis devotes greatest attention to the daily coverage of three television networks (ABC, CBS and NBC) and five newspapers (*Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*). The personal or corporate archives of several notable journalists and institutions were also accessed. Unfortunately, the Walter Cronkite Papers, which opened in 2010 at the University of Texas, and *The New York Times* Foreign Desk Archives at the New York Public Library provided less insight than hoped.

In order to ascertain the public's preferences, a variety of polls, mainly through the electronic resources of the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, were accessed. The author interviewed several subjects both inside and outside the administration, but requests for others, including Carter, Brzezinski and Eizenstat, went unheeded. Regardless, a number of oral history

¹¹¹ Hess arrives at this categorisation through an analysis of access, distribution and prestige. Hess, *Washington Reporters*, 23-46.

collections provide first-hand accounts and opinions from individuals in or close to the Carter administration. These include the Carter Presidency Project at the University of Virginia's Miller Center, the Frontline Diplomacy collection of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training at the Library of Congress, and Columbia University's Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy Project, all of which were used liberally.

The materials of non-governmental groups were also consulted. Access to AIPAC archives was denied. However, this project makes use of the group's biweekly *Near East Report*, as well as the annual reports of the Presidents' Conference, both of which are available at the Library of Congress. The archives of the Committee on the Present Danger at Stanford's Hoover Institution gave insight into that group's beliefs and strategies.

This thesis mostly avoids analysing the actions of non-American parties. However, where necessary, documents from non-American sources have been consulted to provide context. The British National Archives in Kew released several files – including eloquent and insightful dispatches from British diplomats – during the course of research for this project. These materials are mostly located in the Prime Minister's Office and Foreign Office files. The Israel State Archives (ISA) in Jerusalem holds a number of English-language documents. In March 2013, ISA released a slew of documents online from the files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister's Office pertaining to Carter's 1979 trip to Jerusalem. These materials offer necessary supplemental perspectives on Carter's role. Finally, the materials held at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut, Lebanon, provide a useful regional context, especially from the Palestinian perspective, which was otherwise absent from the negotiations. In particular, the daily reports from WAFA, described by Khalidi as 'the P.L.O.'s news agency,' were instructive for commentary, news and official releases.¹¹²

This methodology has been employed in order to gain a new understanding of *Carter's political role* in the negotiations. As new American material becomes available, especially from the

¹¹² Rashid Khalidi, *Under Siege: P.L.O. Decisionmaking During the 1982 War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 7.

State Department, the underpinnings of American policy will need to be revisited. The forthcoming releases of the relevant *FRUS* volumes will likely spawn a new surge in interest and scholarship. Moreover, future researchers with facility in either Arabic or Hebrew – or both – who can gain access to new Egyptian, Israeli and Palestinian materials can help provide a corrective to what has been a U.S.-centric narrative.

Structure

The present study explores the political reverberations of Carter's role as chief diplomat in the Camp David peace process and, in turn, how those consequences influenced the American contribution to Arab-Israeli negotiations. It offers fresh perspectives on the nature and limits of presidential power; the role of the news media in American life; the link between U.S. public opinion and foreign policy; and public engagement on American policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.

This work takes a chronological approach. Chapter One examines the Carter administration's first months, when the new president carried over his campaign commitments to candour and open diplomacy into loose rhetoric on his emerging Arab-Israeli policy. Chapter Two considers the administration's response to domestic and international backlash over Carter's style and substance, and its concomitant recognition of the 'need for a political plan' on controversial foreign policy initiatives. In Chapter Three, the path to the politically disastrous U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué on the Middle East is examined.

Chapter Four is centred around the administration's response to Sadat's trip to Jerusalem, an event that threatened to render meaningless the political knocks the president had theretofore taken on his way toward pursuing a regional conference. Chapter Five mostly steps away from Arab-Israeli negotiations. It offers the first archive-based examination of a U.S. warplanes deal to Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia in the context of shifting American priorities in the Middle East. Chapter Six presents a fresh analysis of Carter's extraordinary role in the Camp David Summit. It focuses on

the administration's effort to gain control of media coverage of the negotiations – a move that was done for diplomatic purposes but had an ancillary domestic political benefit.

In Chapter Seven, this thesis traces the path from the Camp David Summit to the Carter's last-minute March 1979 trip to the Middle East to conclude the peace treaty. Finally, Chapter Eight spans the early phases of the Palestinian autonomy negotiations. It contemplates how the bitter residue left by Carter's sustained involvement in the peace process contributed to a domestic political narrative of failure and incompetence.

Chapter One: The Limits of Candour –

Carter’s Early Forays Into “Open Diplomacy”

Introduction

Less than two months after Carter was sworn into office, a sketch on the popular NBC comedy programme ‘Saturday Night’ captured the growing public perception of Carter’s personality. Spoofing on the previous week’s first-ever presidential radio call-in show, which had enabled Americans to query – directly and on-air – Carter, on any issue, the skit portrayed the president’s ability to respond intelligently to every caller’s problem in detail, no matter how insignificant.¹¹³ Among other wisdom doled out, ‘Carter’ helped a postal worker repair a mechanical sorting device and advised a panicky caller on an acid trip to drink a beer and listen to the Allman Brothers.¹¹⁴

Whatever its humour, the sketch accurately portrays Carter’s use of earnest competency and openness, rather than inspiration and vision, to lead. Carter came across as alternately sanctimonious, humble, awkward and intelligent. In these initial months, Carter’s call-in shows and impromptu public comments underscored his intention to govern differently: he plunged into complicated issues in full public view, trying fresh approaches to old problems. Carter extended this openness into the arena of Middle East diplomacy, most notably when he became the first U.S. president to speak publicly on the Palestinian dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

This chapter argues that the course of Arab-Israeli diplomacy early in Carter’s term cannot fully be understood without an appreciation of the new president’s style and domestic political environment. However, it does not contend that these communicative, political and stylistic aspects determined the course of the peace process at this moment. Carter’s forthright approach and open discussion of his Arab-Israeli policy narrowed policy options, shifted the public debate and

¹¹³ Album, n.d., Folder: ‘Ask President Carter, The CBS Radio Network, March 5, 1977,’ Box 2.325/F33, Walter Cronkite Papers, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, University of Texas, Austin (hereafter WCP).

¹¹⁴ ‘Ask President Carter,’ ‘Saturday Night,’ 12 March 1977, NBC. Retrieved 15 August 2013, <http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/ask-president-carter/n8649/>.

established a climate of criticism. These efforts at ‘open diplomacy’ turned large segments of the American elite against the administration, displeased foreign leaders and began to alienate elements of the American Jewish community.¹¹⁵

Carter’s advisors encouraged him to make the most of his early-term political capital by making bold moves in foreign policy, especially in the Arab-Israeli dispute. However, the haste with which Carter moved during that early period helped determine the problems his diplomatic efforts encountered later. Carter’s ‘public statements sometimes seemed to be a little bit ill considered. … He would make them just because there was an occasion to say something,’ according to the NSC’s William Quandt. ‘I think that caused more problems than were necessary in the Middle East [because] everybody’s antenna is so finely tuned. … He talked too much in public about things.’¹¹⁶

Historical scholarship has mostly neglected this aspect of Carter’s early months as president. One exception is Quandt, who is critical of the president’s tendency to act as an ‘unguided missile’ in his public remarks.¹¹⁷ On the other hand, Christison’s contention that as president Carter ‘changed the vocabulary’ and ‘to a great extent changed the frame of reference for the Palestinian issue’ for U.S. policymaking dates to this period, when he spoke of the need for a Palestinian ‘homeland.’¹¹⁸

Carter’s initial months, from January through May 1977, set the tone for the opposition he faced in his remaining years in office. This period also demonstrated the difficulty in translating positions taken in a political campaign for domestic gains into diplomatic practice. Carter’s early attempts to do things differently in the Middle East – speaking openly about terms for an agreement, pressuring Israel for territorial concessions and trying to bring Palestinians into the negotiating process – agitated problems that worsened as his administration proceeded.

¹¹⁵ ‘Open diplomacy’ can be defined as, ‘The democratic doctrine that both in the making of foreign policy and the negotiation and ratification of agreements in its pursuit, the public -- universally peace-loving -- should be as fully involved as possible.’ G.R. Berridge and Lorna Lloyd, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Diplomacy*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), <http://www.palgraveconnect.com/pc/doifinder/10.1057/9781137017611>. E-book. 271.

¹¹⁶ William Quandt interview, n.d. [circa 1980], Folder 6, Box 17, Rowland Evans Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter REP).

¹¹⁷ Quandt, *Camp David*, 44-49.

¹¹⁸ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 157.

The inheritance

Initially, the administration devoted its energies in Arab-Israeli diplomacy toward devising with regional actors an acceptable format and procedure for reconvening the Geneva Peace Conference. The Geneva conference had been dormant since December 1973, when it was held following the October War. The meeting, co-chaired by the Soviet Union and the United States, arose out of UNSC 338, which called on all belligerents of the war to begin negotiations on the basis of 242 'under appropriate auspices.'¹¹⁹

In substance, the conference achieved little.¹²⁰ However, Kissinger used it to generate momentum toward two U.S.-mediated disengagement-of-forces agreements between Egypt and Israel, and one between Israel and Syria.¹²¹ He effectively excluded the Soviets from the process.¹²² However, in order to obtain Jerusalem's signature on the second Egypt-Israel agreement, known as Sinai II, Washington pledged it would 'not recognize or negotiate' with the PLO so long as it 'does not recognize Israel's right to exist and does not accept' 242 and 338.¹²³

It remained unclear whether that commitment prohibited any contact whatsoever between a U.S. official and PLO figure, or if it was legally binding.¹²⁴ Regardless, in political terms Israel, its friends in the United States, and both the Ford and Carter administrations interpreted the agreement as binding. The pledge had significant repercussions. 'From that point on our greatest vulnerability

¹¹⁹ UNSC S/RES/338, 22 October 1973, QOP. Retrieved 16 September 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/7FB7C26FCBE80A31852560C50065F878>.

¹²⁰ Document 415, Report by Kissinger to Nixon, n.d. [circa 21 December 1973], and Document 416, Memcon, Gromyko, Sukhodrev, Kissinger and Rodman, 22 December 1973, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XXVI: Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1974-1976*, 1187-90, 90-93.

¹²¹ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 138-73.

¹²² Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London: Phoenix Press, 1982), 757-58; Janice Gross Stein, 'Structures, Strategies, and Tactics of Mediation: Kissinger and Carter in the Middle East,' *Negotiation Journal* 1, no. 4 (1985).

¹²³ Document 227, Memoranda of agreement, 1 September 1975, *FRUS, 1969-1976, XXVI*, 828-32.

¹²⁴ Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.) was among those who believed the commitment did not prohibit American contact with the PLO, nor did Israel have a de facto veto over a change in American policy toward the group. Letter from Hamilton to Carter, 23 May 1977, Folder: '6/3/77 [1],' Presidential Handwriting File, Box 23, JCL; Letter from Hamilton to Vance, 16 October 1978, Folder: 'Middle East: Palestine, 1977-1978,' Box 160, Lee Hamilton Papers, University of Indiana, Bloomington (hereafter LHP).

in pursuing an effective mediatory role in the peace process was our inability to have dialogue, real dialogue with the PLO,' U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Elts believed.¹²⁵

Nevertheless, the Ford administration recognised the need to facilitate a political solution for the Palestinians. Indeed, 242 had referred only to 'refugees.' In 1975, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Harold Saunders told a House subcommittee that the Palestinians constituted a 'political factor,' and their status represented 'the heart' of the Arab-Israeli conflict.¹²⁶ However, while this necessity may have been recognised in theory, diplomatic and political exigencies conspired against any genuine American-led initiative.

Despite the limitations imposed by Sinai II, various channels remained open between Washington and the PLO throughout Carter's term. For example, several lawmakers kept the administration informed of their meetings with top PLO officials, including leader Yasser Arafat.¹²⁷ Carter also used educator Landrum Bolling as an intermediary during U.S. attempts to convince the group to accept 242 and recognise Israel's right to exist.¹²⁸ In Beirut, Washington maintained regular contact with the PLO through the CIA's source in Arafat's inner circle, Ali Hassan Salame,¹²⁹ while Ambassador John Gunther Dean said American officials met PLO figures over U.S. security interests in the country.¹³⁰ Additionally, the U.S. ambassador to Austria met twice

¹²⁵ Hermann Elts interview, 12 August 1988, Association for Diplomatic Training and Studies Oral History Collection (hereafter ADST), LOC. Retrieved 16 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004eil01\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004eil01)).

¹²⁶ Harold H. Saunders: U.S. Foreign Policy and Peace in the Middle East (November 12, 1975),' Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., *The Israel-Arab Reader: A Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict*, 7th ed. (London: Penguin, 2008), 203-06.

¹²⁷ Memcon, Hamilton, Rosenthal, Obey, Mikva, Habib and Atherton, n.d. [circa March 1977], 'CoDel Hamilton Trip to the Middle East,' Folder: 'Middle East: Palestine, 1977-1978,' Box 160, LHP; Summary with attachments, 'Transcript of meeting between members of the PLO and members of the U.S. Congress,' Damascus, Syria, 5 January 1978, Folder: 'Middle East 1977 to 1978,' Box 71, Jacob Javits Papers, State University of New York, Stony Brook (hereafter JJP); Letter, Carter to Abourezk, 2 October 1978, Palestine Liberation Organization Name File, JCL; Letter, Bolling to Carter, 20 December 1978, WHCF, Box ND-40, JCL.

¹²⁸ Notes on Brzezinski-Bolling meeting, 6 September 1977. The author extends deepest thanks to Professor Quandt, who shared this document. Quandt, *Camp David*, 100-04.

¹²⁹ Quandt, SHAFR.

¹³⁰ John Gunther Dean interview, Carter Library Oral History Project (hereafter CLOHP), 6 September 2000, 223, 238-40, JCL. Retrieved 16 September 2013, http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/oralhistory/clohp/Initial_Interview_Part_One.pdf.

with the PLO's European representative¹³¹ and the PLO acted as a go-between with the Iran hostage-takers to help free the American captives held there from 1979-1981.¹³²

Moreover, signs emerged early in Carter's term that some leading PLO figures sought a U.S. dialogue. Through contacts in Beirut, the CIA learned in January that Yasser Arafat, at Sadat's suggestion, was 'seeking ways of establishing a dialogue' with U.S. officials but was 'uncertain' how to go about it.¹³³

However, while diplomatic obstacles to bringing the organised Palestinian political leadership into the process were formidable, domestic factors added further complexity for American policymakers. With Israel opposed to any U.S. contact with the PLO, its supporters in Congress, the media and the public objected to any indication of an American policy shift. Moreover, Soviet patronage of the PLO intensified U.S. – especially conservative – animosity toward the group. Finally, the frequent conflation in the American media and in public discourse of the Palestinians as a people and the PLO as a political body virtually ruled out the prospect of any meaningful contact between U.S. officials and Palestinians, whether members of the PLO or otherwise.

Transformative agenda

Despite being a global-affairs neophyte, Carter came to office with an ambitious agenda for transforming American foreign relations. In a document outlining the administration's priorities in its opening months, Brzezinski urged Carter to 'initiate a new phase in U.S. foreign policy, going beyond the Atlanticist/East-West Cold War framework of the years 1945-1976.' Carter's advisors said the four 'most urgent' foreign policy issues to be addressed were stabilising the U.S.-Soviet relationship, beginning work 'toward a comprehensive Middle Eastern settlement,' improving the North-South relationship and containing the arms race. All of these issues had pertinence to Arab-Israeli policy.

¹³¹ Terry, 'Carter Administration and the Palestinians,' 167.

¹³² Gunther Dean interview, CLOHP, 238-40.

¹³³ Document 5, Memo from Acting CIA Director Knoche to Brzezinski, 8 February 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 25.

Carter was determined to abandon Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy in favour of a Middle East policy that resolved all outstanding issues through 'direct negotiations between the parties.' Carter's advisors perceived 'the urgent need for U.S. initiatives to bring about negotiations' before the end of 1977. At the outset, the central goal would be to work toward a settlement through direct negotiations in which the United States would have little more than an 'intermediary role.' Carter was advised to consult with Congress and leaders of the American Jewish community while developing U.S. policy toward multilateral talks and, especially, the form of Palestinian representation in any negotiations. The United States and Soviet Union should engage in a 'consultation,' but otherwise Washington's envisioned role for the Kremlin remained nebulous.¹³⁴

Brzezinski believed that the 'prospect of a Geneva Conference ... should be used as a form of pressure on the Israelis and inducement for the Arabs, though not as an end in itself.' Substantive negotiations on the issues should take place beforehand and Geneva 'should be held to legitimize any agreement previously reached by the parties through U.S. efforts.'¹³⁵ Quandt suggested the conference itself was mostly symbolic, but its pursuit provided the administration cover to achieve its goals. 'Geneva was sort of a mythical notion that was held out there to ... entice the Arabs but it was always something you wanted to have three or six months off in the future and not rushed,' he said.¹³⁶

The decision to work toward Geneva had taken time to develop. For example, Vance's pre-election memo to Carter offered similar – though more modest – prescriptions. He advised Carter that they should 'nudge the (Arab-Israeli) situation along, but not take any strong initiative in the first several months, which should be devoted to quiet diplomacy ... I believe we should urge the parties to reach a general settlement to be carried out in stages.' Vance added that the new president

¹³⁴ Memo from Brzezinski, Gardner and Owen to Carter, 'Foreign Policy Priorities November 3, 1976 – May 1, 1977: A Memorandum to the President-Elect,' 3 November 1976, Folder: 'Transition: Foreign Policy Priorities, 11/76,' Plains File, Box 41, JCL.

¹³⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 87.

¹³⁶ Quandt interview, REP.

should make Congress and ‘the America people joint partners in foreign policy matters’ and must take leadership to educate the public about his international agenda.¹³⁷

Less than three weeks after the election, Kissinger and other Ford administration officials visited Carter to discuss foreign policy challenges facing the president-elect. Of all of the topics, the Middle East was the only discussion held off the record. Nevertheless, the minutes note that Carter said ‘he would try to avoid going to a Geneva Conference out of concern for the role the Soviets might play there.’¹³⁸

What changed between that discussion and Carter’s first day in office is unclear. However, the foreign policymaking bureaucracy felt a sense of urgency. Just days before Carter’s inauguration, an interagency intelligence analysis for the incoming administration concluded, ‘It is now evident that in the absence of progress toward … a settlement, there will be a slide toward renewed Arab-Israeli confrontation with all of its possible consequences …’ It suggested that ‘the end of 1977 seems the outer limit by which it will be necessary to be able to point to concrete progress in the negotiations.’ Geneva was the best option because it would offer a chance of a comprehensive settlement, which is something upon which the Arabs insisted, including some form of Palestinian solution. ‘The question is therefore probably not “whether Geneva,” but “when and how,”’ they wrote.¹³⁹

Expectations for Carter were high. The United States had finished its electioneering, the Lebanese civil war had temporarily abated, and the two key powers – Egypt and Israel – were both looking to the United States as the powerbroker. Editorial opinion in U.S. newspapers reflected the optimism. *The Washington Post* wrote that ‘a better world’ was ‘within Jimmy Carter’s reach’ and urged Carter to take his first months ‘to strengthen the domestic political base he will need to

¹³⁷ Memo from Vance to Carter, ‘A Suggested Carter Administration Agenda,’ n.d. [circa 24 October 1976], Folder: ‘“A Suggested Carter Administration Agenda,” notes, background, and proposals,’ Box 8, Cyrus and Grace Sloan Vance Papers, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (hereafter Vance Papers).

¹³⁸ Memcon, Carter, Mondale, Kissinger, Eagleburger and Aaron, 20 November 1976, Folder: ‘Carter Presidency transition papers 1976-1977,’ Box 8, Vance Papers.

¹³⁹ Intelligence Assessment, n.a., ‘Arab-Israeli Dispute,’ 18 January 1977, NLC-17-111-6-2-2.

undergird the difficult measures ... that effective diplomacy will require.¹⁴⁰ A *New York Times* analysis suggested that 'more than any other region of the world' the Middle East 'clamors' for Carter's attention.¹⁴¹

On 21 January, Carter requested a review of the U.S. position toward the Middle East, including reconvening Geneva, Palestinian representation at any such conference and official contact with the PLO.¹⁴² The administration further forged details of its policy over the course of three meetings in January and February, before and after Vance's initial visit to the region.¹⁴³

Prior to Vance's departure, Carter's aides agreed on the 'urgency of an American initiative.' They decided against 'a largely damage-limiting policy of temporizing, maneuver and apparent activity' and instead chose to pursue a policy 'designed to gain early control of the situation by active and serious initiative in structuring and pursuing a negotiating process, and by making clear our willingness to put our full weight on the scales behind these negotiations.' Geneva was the preferred forum. 'If [the Palestinians] are left out entirely, then any agreement that is reached will be dangerously incomplete,' they added. 'The questions are whether to try to find a way to get them in early or at the end, and whether some alternative to the mainstream PLO can speak for the Palestinians authoritatively.'¹⁴⁴

Upon Vance's return, policymakers agreed at an NSC meeting to work out as many substantive details as possible ahead of Geneva.¹⁴⁵ The administration's approach offered a sharp contrast to its predecessor, Brzezinski believed. Kissinger 'tried to take small steps toward an indefinite future in the Middle East. We should try to define the future first, and then move by small steps in implementing an agreement. This is a key difference,' he said. Carter concurred. Vance

¹⁴⁰ Editorial, 'How Mr. Carter Sees the World,' *The Washington Post* (hereafter WP), 23 January 1977; Editorial, 'Mideast Moderation,' WP, 10 January 1977. Even conservative-leaning newspapers were cautiously optimistic. For example, Editorial, 'Hopeful signs in the Middle East,' *Chicago Tribune* (hereafter CT), 27 December 1976; Editorial, 'A Moment of Optimism,' *The Wall Street Journal* (hereafter WSJ), 31 December 1976.

¹⁴¹ Henry Tanner, 'Complex Issues of Mideast Pose Challenge to Carter,' NYT, 31 December 1976.

¹⁴² Middle East, Presidential Review Memorandum, PRM/NSC 3, 21 January 1977, Item PD01538, Digital National Security Archive (hereafter DNSA). Retrieved 16 September 2013,

http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:dnsa&rft_dat=xri:dnsa:article:CPD01538.

¹⁴³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 85-88.

¹⁴⁴ PRC, 'Session on PRM/NSC 3: Middle East,' 4 February 1977, NLC-132-25-1-3-3; 'National Security Council Policy Decisions By Subject,' n.d. [circa September 1978], NLC-21-4-5-1-8.

¹⁴⁵ For records of Vance's meetings in Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria, see Documents 6-15, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 26-122.

believed the case for Geneva was urgent, but he counselled that the United States should move cautiously until Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's visit the following month in order to avoid antagonising Congress or American Jewry.¹⁴⁶

However, the main sticking point for Geneva remained Palestinian representation. Israel refused to negotiate directly with the PLO, but Arab states insisted on some form of Palestinian presence, perhaps in the form of the PLO or other Palestinians subsumed within Jordan's delegation. Agreement on that, Carter believed, would 'determine whether we have Geneva or not.' He placed the onus on Israel. 'We will have to judge what the Israelis can really accept,' he said. 'For example, recognition of the PLO, not necessarily officially, but at least recognizing their existence. This might be a useful step.'¹⁴⁷

The desire to press the Palestinian issue – whether with the PLO, Israel's settlements or otherwise – onto the agenda proved to be the root cause of Carter's friction with two successive Israeli prime ministers and provoked controversy at home. Ultimately, he took tentative steps toward involving Palestinians both early and late in his administration; neither was successful.

Regardless, the contours of Carter's position began to take shape: he sought a comprehensive peace, believed Israel should withdraw to its pre-1967 boundaries with minor adjustments, the Palestinians should get a 'homeland' and 'self-determination,' Israeli military rule in the West Bank and Gaza violated Palestinians' civil and human rights, and Jewish settlements in the territories were illegal under international law. As his term progressed, Carter alternately loosened and clung to these principals. Egypt's role in the negotiations became pivotal, while the Palestinian issue faded as a central component of the president's vision for a settlement.

The president intended to facilitate the negotiations, but emphasised his disinclination to impose a settlement on the regional players. Stating 'this year is the brightest hope for peace that I remember,' Carter enunciated in February for the first time publicly his determination to convene Geneva by the end of 1977. He was careful to stress the American role as 'the stimulating factor.'

¹⁴⁶ NSC meeting minutes, 'Middle East,' 23 February 1977, NLC-15-31-4-4-4.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

Rather than 'to exert an improper, outside pressure' on the negotiating parties, the United States, Carter said, wanted a peace 'done among those who lived there.'¹⁴⁸

From the start, however, the administration knew that domestic politics were intrinsically wrapped up in Arab-Israeli policy. For example, Vance had actually been Carter's second choice for secretary of state. He preferred George Ball, but decided against nominating him because Ball's criticism of Israel 'would have made it difficult for him to pass confirmation hearings.'¹⁴⁹ Still, Ball remained an informal advisor throughout Carter's presidency.¹⁵⁰

Then, less than two weeks after the inauguration, Senator Richard Stone (D-Fla.) made 'a strong appeal' that the NSC establish 'close contact' with Morris Amitay, AIPAC's executive director. Stone also 'attacked the pro-Arab bias he detected in the analyses of the Defense Department' and 'supplied the names of officials who were allegedly very anti-Israel.'¹⁵¹ Shortly afterward, Quandt met with Amitay and the two 'agreed to work for a common definition of peace based on the principle of mutual recognition and acceptance of the right to independent existence.'¹⁵²

In early February, the Carter administration decided to block Israel's sale of 24 Kfir jets to Ecuador because they were made with American engines. The administration also decided against supplying Israel with cluster bombs, despite the previous administration's commitment to provide them.¹⁵³ These stemmed from Carter's determination to limit weapons proliferation, but strained U.S. relations with Israel and upset many American supporters of the Jewish state.

Although Arab-American groups never had the clout or success of pro-Israel organisations, they did make inroads during this period. In January 1977, the National Association of Arab Americans sent the White House a letter advocating U.S. humanitarian aid to war-ravaged Lebanon

¹⁴⁸ 'Department of the Interior,' 18 February 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 197-205.

¹⁴⁹ Douglas Brinkley, 'Out of the Loop,' *New York Times Magazine*, 29 December 2002.

¹⁵⁰ For Ball's views, see George Ball, 'How to Save Israel in Spite of Herself,' *Foreign Affairs* 55, no. 2 (1977). Also see Paper, George Ball, 'The Middle East and the Giraffe Question,' 9 August 1978, Folder: '8/9/78,' Presidential Handwriting File, Box 99, JCL.

¹⁵¹ Evening Report from Middle East Desk to Brzezinski, 2 February 1977, NLC-10-1-2-1-6.

¹⁵² Someone, presumably Brzezinski, has bracketed this portion of the memo and written a large exclamation point alongside it, apparently indicating surprise at the assertion. Evening Report from Middle East Desk to Brzezinski, 11 February 1977, NLC-10-1-3-2-4.

¹⁵³ Don Oberdorfer, 'Israel to Get Extra \$285 Million in Aid; Plane Sales Barred,' *WP*, 8 February 1977.

and urging a resumption of the Arab-Israeli peace process.¹⁵⁴ Shortly afterward, three members of the group met with an NSC official and the head of Carter's Office of Public Liaison. They discussed Vance's forthcoming Middle East trip, the president's arms sales policy and American assistance to Lebanon.¹⁵⁵

Style and substance

A month after the election, Carter pollster Patrick Caddell sent the president-elect a 10,000-word memo that closely mapped out the beginning of the administration. Caddell argued that because the traditional party structure had broken down, the president needed to take symbolic actions to retain public support and confidence. That, in turn, would give Carter the political base necessary to govern. 'The old cliché about mistaking style for substance usually works in reverse in politics,' Caddell wrote. 'Essentially, it is my thesis that governing with public approval requires a continuing political campaign.'¹⁵⁶

Carter accepted Caddell's advice – to an extent. Most prominently, he moved to cut down on the imperial trappings of the office. Early in his term, for example, he banned the playing of 'Hail to the Chief' at appearances, made a point of carrying his own luggage on official trips and lowered the White House thermostat to save energy. On foreign policy, this emphasis on style manifested itself most evidently in Carter's willingness to conduct policymaking in the open. Indeed, his loose manner of speaking was not generally a feature of his domestic policy discourse.

Carter's initial efforts proved largely successful. His first fireside chat, delivered 2 February, received a 65 percent favourability rating, according to Carter's pollster.¹⁵⁷ The effort was praised in the media, which judged the casual address to be pitch-perfect and made frequent mention of the unbuttoned beige cardigan worn by the president. The sweater 'may prove to be the most

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 9 February 1977, NLC-10-1-2-32-2.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 22 February 1977, NLC-10-1-4-1-4.

¹⁵⁶ Memo from Caddell to Carter, 'Initial Working Paper on Political Strategy,' 10 December 1976, Sidney Blumenthal, *The Permanent Campaign*, Revised ed. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982), 44-75.

¹⁵⁷ Cambridge Survey Reports, 'An Analysis of Political Attitudes in the United States of America,' March 1977, Folder: 'CSR: Analysis of Political Attitudes in the United States, March, 1977,' Powell Donated, Box 15, JCL.

memorable symbol of an Administration that promises to make steady use of symbolism,' *Time* noted.¹⁵⁸

Carter attempted to introduce openness and accessibility to the office in other ways, too. In March, he held the aforementioned call-in show, hosted by Cronkite, for the first time.¹⁵⁹ The White House received more than 9 million calls during the two-hour program.¹⁶⁰ Carter noted in his diary: 'The Congress has got to know that I can go directly over their heads when necessary. And, of course, I wouldn't hesitate to do it.'¹⁶¹

This willingness to take his case directly to the American people did not endear Carter to his own party and damaged his relations with Congress. Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill Jr. (D-Mass.) served as Speaker of the House for the entirety of Carter's term. In most circumstances, a speaker from the president's own party could be counted on as an ally on Capitol Hill. However, their relationship was often strained. O'Neill never displayed a willingness to fight for Carter's legislative agenda. In February, he complained about Carter's proclivity for bypassing lawmakers in favour of 'going public' with his political messages. Taking his message directly to 'the people,' O'Neill told a reporter, is 'the biggest mistake Carter could ever make.'¹⁶²

Those strains, in turn, fed Carter's poor relationship with the press. 'I would say he started off with the benefit of the doubt from the media,' said then-Washington bureau chief for *The New York Times*, Hedrick Smith. 'That didn't last, in part because I think a lot of a lot of reporters began to understand very quickly that Carter was in trouble with Congress. ... That led to a lot of scepticism on the part of the press toward the Carter White House.'¹⁶³ As a political outsider, Carter's determination to bring his own style to Washington weakened ties with the two other major power centres in the American capital: Congress and the press, both of which he needed to cultivate for a successful presidency.

¹⁵⁸ 'Warm Words from Jimmy Cardigan,' *Time*, 14 February 1977.

¹⁵⁹ Album, n.d., Folder: 'Ask President Carter, The CBS Radio Network, March 5, 1977,' Box 2.325/F33, WCP; Peter Goldman, 'Dial-a-President,' *Newsweek*, 14 March 1977; Charles Mohr, 'Carter Discusses Problems and Policies with Telephone Callers from 26 States,' *NYT*, 6 March 1977.

¹⁶⁰ 'Ask President Carter' on CBS Radio, 5 March 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 291-327.

¹⁶¹ 5 March 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 30-31.

¹⁶² Hedrick Smith, 'Congress and Carter: An Uneasy Adjustment,' *NYT*, 18 February 1977.

¹⁶³ Hedrick Smith interview.

Nevertheless, early press assessments of Carter's efforts at openness were positive. 'No president since FDR so easily and effectively uses the means of communication with the public and he's done it best of all with that old fashioned medium of the Roosevelt era, ... the electric radio,' CBS News commentator Eric Sevareid said.¹⁶⁴ Polls indicated that a majority of the public also felt the phone-in show represented genuine efforts by Carter to 'keep in touch.'¹⁶⁵ Americans overall assessed that first show and Carter's subsequent ones positively.¹⁶⁶ More broadly, the early returns on Carter's political style were glowing. One March poll found that 70 percent of respondents said they liked the 'style and tone of government' that Carter was setting.¹⁶⁷ A separate poll reported that 82 percent of respondents liked Carter's informality.¹⁶⁸

Among the keys to Carter's style was his emphasis on transparency. Indeed, he came to office promising unprecedented openness in foreign-policy formulation and governance. 'We can ... have a foreign policy that the American people both support and, for a change, know about and understand,' Carter said in his first major foreign policy speech. 'And we are confident of the good sense of the American people, and so we let them share in the process of making foreign policy decisions. ... Our policy must be open; it must be candid ...' On the Middle East, he said, 'The historic friendship that the United States has with Israel is not dependent on domestic politics in either nation; it's derived from our common respect for human freedom and from a common search for permanent peace.'¹⁶⁹ Reporting to London, British Ambassador Peter Ramsbotham concluded the speech represented 'a reaffirmation of the principle of involving the whole American people in international issues.'¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁴ CBS News transcript, 7 March 1977, Folder 5, Box 54, Eric Sevareid Papers (hereafter Sevareid Papers), LOC.

¹⁶⁵ *Time/Yankelovich, Skelly*, March 1977, iPOLL Databank, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, University of Connecticut. Retrieved 16 September 2013, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ipoll.html (hereafter Roper Center).

¹⁶⁶ Harris Survey, 31 May-5 June 1977, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Roper Report 77-4, 19-26 March 1977, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Time/Yankelovich, Skelly & White Poll*, March 1977, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ 'University of Notre Dame,' 22 May 1977, *PPP: Carter 1977, I*, 954-962.

¹⁷⁰ U.K. National Archives (hereafter UKNA): Public Record Office (hereafter PRO) PREM 16/1909, 'USA. Internal situation; assumption of office by President Carter; new administration appointments; part 2,' Telegram from U.K. Embassy Washington (Ramsbotham) to FCO, 'President Carter's Foreign Policy Speech,' 25 May 1977.

Carter met with the major Middle Eastern leaders in a flurry of activity from March through May 1977 as he attempted to generate support for a Geneva conference on mutually acceptable terms.¹⁷¹ During this period, Carter proved fearless in making extemporaneous public statements on the Arab-Israeli dispute. These remarks often struck Israeli's supporters as seeking more concessions from Israel than from Arab states. Consequently, they had a lasting detrimental impact on his support from pro-Israel groups and helped set the tone for American involvement in the peace negotiations.

Carter's early efforts demonstrated his lack of patience with standard diplomacy. Brzezinski 'favored as rapid movement as possible' because he felt that any American president had maximum political influence during his first year.¹⁷² He felt this sense of urgency especially strongly toward Arab-Israeli negotiations. 'We have to move toward a more active role. We can't wait. I believe the situation is more propitious than it has been in the past 23 years,' he said in February.¹⁷³ Carter's spokesman, Jody Powell, concurred. The president 'understood very well' that his 'leverage at home and abroad' was greatest in his first year, 'and he was determined to waste no time in using it,' Powell wrote.¹⁷⁴ Vance, however, counselled Carter to proceed slowly 'to avoid exacerbating Israeli apprehension and stirring unnecessary anxieties in Congress and the American Jewish community about American "pressure" on Israel.'¹⁷⁵

"The open mouth policy"

Carter's lack of patience for protocol was most apparent in his dealings with Israel. Carter spoke without a text when he welcomed Rabin on 7 March. The president said that any Middle East

¹⁷¹ Carter met Israel's Rabin on 7-8 March, Egypt's Sadat on 4-5 April, Jordan's King Hussein on 25-26 April, Syrian President Hafez al-Assad on 9 May and Saudi King Fahd on 24 May. Carter displayed particular effusiveness in welcoming Sadat to the White House: 'It is hard to exaggerate our admiration for you and for your forceful moves toward peace.' Document 25, Memcon, 4 April 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 166-176.

¹⁷² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 88.

¹⁷³ Document 3, PRC meeting minutes, 4 February 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 5-19.

¹⁷⁴ Powell, *Other Side*, 56. Jordan also alludes to a sense of urgency, 'as though we had been elected for four months instead of four years and had to accomplish everything right away.' Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: Berkley Books, 1982), 48.

¹⁷⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 172.

peace settlement would require that Israel have ‘defensible borders’ so that any peace agreements ‘would never be violated.’¹⁷⁶

The term ‘defensible borders’ caught the attention of followers of Middle Eastern diplomacy because it appeared the president had just articulated a major shift in U.S. policy in Israel’s favour. With just a few syllables, Carter had gone beyond the language of 242, which called for ‘secure and recognized’ borders for Israel, and statements made by American presidents since 1973. The term ‘defensible borders,’ for Israel, suggested the Israelis would be able to retain control of virtually all of the territories it seized in the 1967 war. For Rabin, Carter’s initial comments were ‘music to my ears’ but the talks soon took ‘an ominous turn’ as Carter pressed him on the PLO.¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, Carter’s comments spurred Vance to rush out a statement: ‘There is no change in position by the use of the words “defensible borders,”’ he told reporters.¹⁷⁸ Asked whether Carter’s use of the phrase indicated a shift in American policy, Powell exercised damage control: ‘It should not be construed as any sort of departure or a breaking of new ground.’¹⁷⁹ Still, the confusion of where U.S. policy stood was reflected in *The Washington Post*’s headline the following morning: ‘Carter View on Borders Buoy Rabin.’¹⁸⁰ AIPAC somewhat disingenuously disregarded subsequent clarifications of Carter’s remarks, which it felt represented a policy shift in Israel’s favour. ‘[F]oreign policy in the United States is formulated at the top – by the President – and not by an “evenhanded” State Department,’ it wrote.¹⁸¹

Subsequent closed-door talks achieved little on substance and were strained at the personal level.¹⁸² Carter told Eizenstat that ‘he liked Rabin but didn’t think Rabin liked him.’¹⁸³ From the outset, Carter expressed his desire to conduct diplomacy openly. ‘The president spoke at length about his mission to restore the American people’s faith in the presidency by eliminating secrecy in

¹⁷⁶ ‘Visit of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel,’ 7 March 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 329-31.

¹⁷⁷ Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), 292-300.

¹⁷⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, ‘Carter Causes Stir by Seeming to Back Israel on Borders,’ *NYT*, 8 March 1977.

¹⁷⁹ Don Irwin, ‘Carter Welcomes Rabin – Words Stir Controversy,’ *LAT*, 8 March 1977.

¹⁸⁰ Don Oberdorfer, ‘Carter View on Borders Buoy Rabin,’ *WP*, 8 March 1977.

¹⁸¹ ‘Carter for Defensible Borders,’ *Near East Report* (hereafter *NER*), Vol. XXI, No. 10, 9 March 1977.

¹⁸² Document 18, Memcon between Carter and Rabin, 7 March 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 132-145. Also see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 90-91; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 280; Rabin, *Memoirs*, 298; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 173.

¹⁸³ Notes, ‘Discussion on Air Force 1,’ 17 March 1977, Folder 5, Box 2, SEP.

diplomacy,’ according to Rabin. ‘He must tell his people what he wanted to achieve and how he meant to go about it.’¹⁸⁴ They also differed on Palestinian representation. Rabin insisted that the need to resolve the Palestinian issue be kept separate from the question of PLO representation. Carter, however, responded: ‘It may or may not be possible to separate the two issues.’ Vance concurred: ‘They are intertwined.’¹⁸⁵ Rabin was disconcerted.¹⁸⁶

Then, with peacemaking efforts already running into obstacles, both the Americans and the Israelis made their cases publicly. Speaking to reporters in Washington, Rabin implied that Carter backed Israel on ‘defensible borders.’ In Israel’s view, Rabin said, ‘defensible borders’ precluded a return to the 1967 lines.¹⁸⁷ Afterward, Rabin set off on a cross-country speaking trip, where he discussed policy with American audiences. Nevertheless, Rabin expressed irritation. ‘If [Carter] publicized his views on the Middle East, in keeping with his credo of frank speaking, he would bring comfort to the Arabs and weaken Israel’s negotiating position,’ the premier believed.¹⁸⁸

Carter pursued this strategy energetically. At a 9 March press conference, he dismissed the controversy over ‘defensible borders’ as ‘just semantics.’ The three elements of the negotiations would involve a peace deal, recognised borders and addressing the Palestinian question, Carter said. He also suggested, for the first time, that ‘defense lines’ might exist separately from legal borders. ‘There may be extensions of Israeli defense capability beyond the permanent and recognized borders,’ Carter added. That idea was contrary to both Arab and Israeli hopes. In addition, Carter suggested – again, for the first time – that a deal might include demilitarised zones for a period of two to eight years, as well as electronic ‘monitoring stations.’¹⁸⁹ Carter wrote that these comments were intended ‘to plow some new ground.’¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁴ Rabin, *Memoirs*, 292-300.

¹⁸⁵ Document 20, Memcon between Carter and Rabin, 8 March 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 148-156.

¹⁸⁶ Rabin, *Memoirs*, 292-300.

¹⁸⁷ Don Oberdorfer, ‘Rabin Concludes Talks With Carter, Shows No Sign of Changing Policy,’ *WP*, 9 March 1977. This report said ‘defensible borders’ were ‘endorsed by Carter’ despite the administration’s clarifications.

¹⁸⁸ Rabin, *Memoirs*, 296. Carter told Rabin: ‘You have noticed, and I will continue to adhere to this position, that I will not say different things in public than I say in private.’ Document 20, Memcon between Carter and Rabin, 8 March 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 148-156.

¹⁸⁹ ‘The President’s News Conference,’ 9 March 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 340-48; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 287-88; Quandt, *Camp David*, 47-49.

¹⁹⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 287-88.

Shortly afterward, at a town-hall meeting in Clinton, Mass., Carter weighed in again, this time on the Palestinians. After initially discussing his ideas for peace in general terms, Carter became the first president to call for a Palestinian ‘homeland’: ‘There has to be a homeland provided for the Palestinian refugees who have suffered for many, many years.’¹⁹¹ He publicly repeated the point twice in the following two months.¹⁹² Even more so than the phrase ‘defensible borders,’ the word ‘homeland’ was electric for Israel’s supporters because it was reminiscent of the 1917 Balfour Declaration on the need to create a ‘national home’ for the Jewish people.¹⁹³

Carter’s remarks ‘surprised’ Brzezinski, but he was ordered not to issue any clarifications.¹⁹⁴ Quandt said use of the word ‘homeland’ was Carter’s ‘own contribution. We certainly didn’t brief him on it or suggest it.’¹⁹⁵ Eizenstat noted that Carter’s comments had ‘taken by surprise’ both the president’s advisors and Israel.¹⁹⁶ Journalists who queried a White House spokesperson laughed audibly when the aide insisted ‘the word “homeland” does not have a specific connotation. … It developed later that the briefer fumbled his answer because he was afraid to say anything that he wasn’t sure the President would say.’¹⁹⁷ Such a display suggested a lack of professionalism and disorganisation at the centre of foreign policymaking.

Harold Saunders believes Carter’s remarks represented an early attempt to change the diplomatic discourse. ‘I think he felt at that moment that he could break some of the semantic crockery because he was a new boy on the block; he probably felt he was in a position to get the Palestinian issue on the agenda,’ Saunders said.¹⁹⁸ Quandt concurs. Carter ‘didn’t really care much about the niceties of the diplomatic formulations which in some ways [was] refreshing and in some

¹⁹¹ ‘Clinton, Massachusetts,’ 16 March 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 382-402.

¹⁹² ‘The Presidents’ News Conference,’ 12 May 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 860-70; ‘University of Notre Dame,’ 22 May 1977, *ibid.*, 954-62.

¹⁹³ Balfour Declaration, 2 November 1917, QOP. Retrieved 16 September 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/E210CA73E38D9E1D052565FA00705C61>.

¹⁹⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 91.

¹⁹⁵ Quandt interview, REP.

¹⁹⁶ Notes of meeting with Dinitz, 16 March 1977, Folder 5, Box 2, SEP.

¹⁹⁷ John Osborne, ‘Carter on Show,’ *The New Republic*, 2 April 1977, Folder: ‘Brzezinski, Zbigniew, 1978-1981,’ Box 139, Hedrick Smith Papers, LOC.

¹⁹⁸ Harold Saunders interview, 24 November 1993, ADST. Retrieved 30 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004sau01](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004sau01)

ways caused him problems,' he said. 'He felt one of the virtues of being new on the job was that he could ... break through some of the taboos.'¹⁹⁹

Meanwhile, Egypt's Sadat reaffirmed his support for the Rabat Declaration that the PLO was central to the peace process and rejected Carter's reported support for Israel's 'defensible borders.'²⁰⁰ 'The Palestinian people must take their own decisions on everything related to their destiny and their cause,' he told the Palestine National Council (PNC). 'We (in Egypt) also insist on ... the choice of the PLO as the Palestinians' sole legitimate representative and defender of their rights and interests.'²⁰¹ In response to Carter's comments, the PNC overwhelmingly affirmed its rejection of 242 and vowed to escalate its 'armed struggle'.²⁰² Later, however, the PLO heralded the president's 'homeland' statement as 'a step forward' in U.S. policy.²⁰³

Israel was displeased. 'I would have been happy had he used another expression in place of the term "homeland." I do not know what it is, this homeland,' Rabin said. 'I accept this formulation if we agree that their homeland is in Jordan.'²⁰⁴ Later, he argued that Israel 'should prepare for a campaign to win over public opinion, Congressional opinion and the U.S. administration' to Israel's view on 'defensible borders' and 'the entire [complexity] of the Palestinian issue'.²⁰⁵

Less than a week after Clinton, Carter encountered a PLO envoy at a U.N. reception. Coming soon after the earlier controversies, his aides were uneasy and advised Carter against attending the function. Even a fleeting encounter would grant the group legitimacy, cause bad

¹⁹⁹ Quandt interview, REP.

²⁰⁰ Arab League Summit resolution, 28 October 1974, QOP. Retrieved 16 September 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/63D9A930E2B428DF852572C0006D06B8>.

²⁰¹ Document 227, Sadat's speech before the PNC, 12 March 1977, *International Documents on Palestine, 1977*. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1979), 345-46.

²⁰² Document 206, Declaration by PNC, 22 March 1977, Israel's Foreign Relations, Selected Documents, Volume 3: 1974-1977 (hereafter IFRSD). Retrieved 16 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook2/Pages/206%20Declaration%20by%20the%20Palestinian%20National%20Council.aspx>.

²⁰³ 'The Palestinian Homeland' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 7 (15 May 1977), 3, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, Lebanon (hereafter IPS).

²⁰⁴ Document 74, Radio interview with Rabin, 17 March 1977, *International Documents on Palestine, 1977*, 173.

²⁰⁵ Document 205, Rabin radio interview, 20 March 1977, IFRSD: 1974-1977. Retrieved 16 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook2/Pages/205%20Interview%20with%20Prime%20Minister%20Rabin%20on%20Israel.aspx>.

publicity and could even strengthen Israel's right wing ahead of elections, Eizenstat argued.²⁰⁶

Nevertheless, consistent with his 'open' style, Carter shook hands with the PLO official as part of the reception line. 'It didn't hurt anybody,' he wrote in his diary.²⁰⁷

The push for 'openness' affected not only the Middle East. Carter's decision to outline American objectives for a comprehensive proposal on arms reductions in a speech to the United Nations in March and a background briefing to the press likely contributed to Moscow's decision to reject the American proposals. The Soviets grew angry over U.S. 'propaganda' and SALT II was dealt a setback.²⁰⁸ 'The administration's "openness" violated that canon (confidentiality of negotiations) of the SALT process and may have contributed to Moscow's suspicions,' Vance judged.²⁰⁹ In retrospect, Carter conceded that making public his position had been a mistake.²¹⁰

This tendency generated a backlash from elite opinion. Although Carter's initial attempts at communicating directly to the American people earned praise, the efforts began to take their toll. In a column, *The Washington Post*'s David Broder noted 'puzzlement' about Carter's foreign policy: 'The frequent "clarifications" of comments from assorted foreign policy spokesmen ... and the president's own eagerness to rush in verbally where others fear to tread ... have caused a degree of consternation ...'²¹¹

Sevareid's 11 March TV commentary took aim at Carter's 'breezy' statements on an Arab-Israeli settlement and criticised the administration's tendency to 'talk now, think later.'²¹² A week later, Cronkite noted the 'string of surprises [Carter] has sprung on foreign policy experts. ... Many people like the idea of an open foreign policy' but questions remained as to whether it could ever work.²¹³ Describing Carter's method as the 'the open mouth policy,' James Reston opined that

²⁰⁶ Memo from Eizenstat to Carter, 'United Nations Reception,' 16 March 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 3-6/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL.

²⁰⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 288.

²⁰⁸ Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six Cold War Presidents* (New York: Times Books, 1995), 397-98.

²⁰⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 53.

²¹⁰ Jimmy Carter interview, CPP, 56. Retrieved 4 October 2013,

http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_1982_1129_carter.pdf.

²¹¹ David Broder column, 'Back to Carter's Basics,' *WP*, 13 March 1977.

²¹² CBS News transcript, 11 March 1977, Folder 5, Box 54, Sevareid Papers.

²¹³ 'Carter/United Nations Speech/Foreign Policy,' 'CBS Evening News,' 17 March 1977, VTNA 250946.

Carter may be making ‘blunders, but he has calculated them, and what startles Washington is the increasing evidence that he means what he says, even when it thinks he says the wrong and unconventional thing.’²¹⁴

An analysis in *The New York Times* said that Carter’s ‘public pronouncements in foreign affairs have sometimes caught his own aides by surprise and have enmeshed the Carter Administration in complications … even before normal diplomacy can gain momentum.’²¹⁵ Statements by Carter’s foreign policy team ‘give an impression the United States Government is a centipede, none of whose feet knows what the others are doing until they go into the creature’s mouth,’ one columnist noted.²¹⁶ ‘The upshot has been confusion, a multitude of explanations and a hardening of suspicion among Palestinians and Israelis,’ wrote another.²¹⁷

Foreign diplomats also noted this tendency. Ambassador Ramsbotham acknowledged ‘the president has been enunciating his main foreign policy objectives, without waiting for the full bureaucratic study of the issues involved.’ That, in turn, had ‘caused some of the apparent contradictions and the impression among allies that policy was being made without full consultation,’ he wrote. Ramsbotham saw Brzezinski’s hand in Carter’s public statements, ‘while the retractions, corrections and refinements of those statements, which have often followed, reflect the advice of Vance and the State Department machine.’²¹⁸

Following the March uproar over his Arab-Israeli comments and the Soviets’ rejection of the SALT II proposals, Carter was queried about his proclivity to speak publicly. He stood his

²¹⁴ James Reston column, ‘The Open Mouth Policy,’ *NYT*, 16 March 1977.

²¹⁵ Hedrick Smith, ‘Carter’s Public Diplomacy Causing Questions and Complications,’ *NYT*, 15 March 1977.

²¹⁶ C.L. Sulzberger column, ‘Madness in the Method,’ *NYT*, 13 March 1977.

²¹⁷ Joseph Kraft column, ‘Muddling the Mideast,’ *WP*, 20 March 1977. Also see: J.F. terHorst column, ‘… and Public Chitchat Means Little Anyway,’ *LAT*, 13 March 1977; Don Oberdorfer analysis, ‘Carter: Unorthodox Public Diplomacy,’ *WP*, 14 March 1977; Edward Walsh analysis, ‘“Plain Speaking” More Difficult Now,’ *WP*, 14 March 1977; Bill Neikirk analysis, ‘Diplomacy, Carter-style: Say what others are thinking,’ *CT*, 23 March 1977; Robert Keatley column, ‘Mr. Carter’s “Open Mouth” Diplomacy,’ *WSJ*, 22 April 1977. Opinion was not universally negative, however. For example: Aldo Beckman column, ‘Candor of Carter can be diplomatic,’ *CT*, 13 March 1977.

²¹⁸ UKNA: PRO FCO 82/766, ‘Visit by Cyrus Vance, US Secretary of State, to UK, 31 March – 1 April 1977,’ Telegram from U.K. Embassy Washington (Ramsbotham) to FCO, ‘Visit of Mr. Vance,’ 25 March 1977.

ground: 'I don't intend to refrain from expressing very clearly my position on foreign issues to the public on occasion when negotiations are going on.'²¹⁹

Nevertheless, concern over Carter's public statements began to percolate in the American Jewish community. In late March, the administration invited dozens of American Jewish leaders to the White House for a consultation. 'The peace issue and the prospects for a Geneva conference were the basis for the dialogue between us and the Administration people,' according to James Weinberg of the New York United Jewish Appeal.²²⁰ Brzezinski, Eizenstat and Lipshutz hosted the discussions, while Mondale spent an hour with the visitors and Carter about 10 minutes.

The Jewish leaders opposed any suggestion of a return to Israel's pre-1967 borders, expressed concern about the acceptance of the PLO as a negotiating partner and voiced anxiety over Carter's discussion of a Palestinian 'homeland.' White House officials emphasised that the U.S. commitment to Israel's security was 'organic' and unbreakable. The visitors were told that the administration felt the Palestinians 'need a place,' but did not support the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.²²¹

Regardless of the concerns that had arisen over Carter's public statements, officials stressed that the president intended to continue speaking out. Carter would 'resume two traditional roles lost to the Presidency in recent Administrations.' First, he would consistently 'articulate the central aims of foreign policy' and, second, he would become 'the public educator.' Although such open diplomacy continued to roil the administration's relations with both Israel and its American supporters, Weinberg concluded his report by writing he felt reassured of the administration's support for Israel.²²²

Following the uproar over Carter's Palestinian 'homeland' remarks, and concerned that Arab-Israeli policy could prove politically damaging, the administration named Mark Siegel as

²¹⁹ 'The President's News Conference,' 26 May 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 1016-25.

²²⁰ James Weinberg, 'Report on March 23, 1977 Meeting at the White House,' Folder 1, Box 13, Edward Sanders Papers, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter Sanders Papers).

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.* Also see: Theodore Mann, 'Report on White House Meeting of March 23, 1977,' Folder 1, Box 13, Sanders Papers.

White House liaison to the American Jewish community. Siegel, who was a deputy on political advisor Hamilton Jordan's staff, was 'to communicate administration goals to Jewish American leaders while also relaying back policy concerns of U.S. Jewish groups to the White House.' Siegel's brief included reaching out daily to the Presidents' Conference and other organisations to inform them about American policy. Siegel arranged for Jewish leaders to come to the White House monthly to meet with senior policymakers. But improving communication had its limits. 'The problem (for the Jewish groups) was not how the policy was communicated. The problem was the policy,' Siegel, who later resigned in protest over U.S. arms sales to Saudi Arabia, said.²²³

However, Carter's public posture sometimes limited the options of his own policymakers. A paper prepared for an NSC meeting on the Middle East in April noted that the United States had introduced into the debate 'ideas of our own on the key issues of withdrawal and borders, normalization, security and the Palestinian issues' – the very issues on which Carter had taken such public, and often improvised, positions. 'We have done so in a way that has not required the Middle East Governments to take formal positions in response, but *our ideas stand on the record and will influence the direction of the negotiations*,' the author argued.²²⁴

At the Presidential Review Committee (PRC) meeting, it was agreed that Washington would work to achieve 'as much prior agreement on general principles as possible' before Geneva, which remained a 'high-priority goal.' 'This should be the focus of our diplomatic effort between June and September. It is unclear whether we can reach agreement on principles primarily by talking to the parties, or *whether we should go public at some point with our own views*.'²²⁵ During the summer, the administration would assess the feasibility of contacts with the PLO. These conclusions underscore the tension maintained by the administration between quiet diplomacy and the desire to use the public forum to generate support for, and pressure on behalf of, its recommendations.

²²³ Mark Siegel telephone interview with author, 21 July 2011.

²²⁴ 'Discussion Paper for the PRC Meeting on the Middle East—April 19, 1977,' n.a., Folder: 'Meetings—PRC 13: 4/19/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Subject, Box 24, JCL. Emphasis added.

²²⁵ Summary and conclusions, PRC Meeting, 'Middle East,' 19 April 1977, Folder: 'Meetings—PRC 13: 4/19/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Subject, Box 24, JCL. Emphasis added.

In late April, Carter also delivered two major speeches on energy policy, which was his chief domestic priority. ‘In his mind, a comprehensive energy policy was a corollary of a comprehensive Middle East policy,’ according to Quandt.²²⁶ The link between the Arab-Israeli peace process and U.S. energy policy arose continually throughout Carter’s term.

Israel’s “earthquake” election

Meanwhile, plagued by scandals and the fallout from intelligence failures in the 1973 war, Rabin’s Labour Party was sputtering.²²⁷ On 8 April, Rabin stepped down over revelations that he and his wife had maintained an illegal U.S. bank account. Labour was defeated the following month and a Likud government, headed by Herut’s Menachem Begin, a Polish-born former resistance fighter during the British mandate, was formed.

Likud’s ascension represented a sea change in Israeli politics; it ended a half-century of Labour domination of the politics in, first, mandatory Palestine, and then the modern state of Israel. Rabin’s loss was due to many factors, especially his party’s series of scandals and as part of a broader ethnic and sociological shift in Israeli society to include the Sephardic Jews, who overwhelmingly supported Likud.²²⁸

Nevertheless, Begin made Rabin’s strained ties with Carter an issue in the campaign²²⁹ and, later, Rabin suggested Carter was partly to blame for Labour’s defeat.²³⁰ Even initial assessments by the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv pointed to American-centric factors to explain Labour’s loss, chiefly ‘the uncertainty of current US/Israeli relations’ and ‘the recent flap over the arms transfer priority issue in US Congress.’ U.S. officials believed ‘the Israeli electorate foresees tough times ahead and

²²⁶ Quandt, *Camp David*, 53.

²²⁷ Amos Perlmutter, ‘Cleavage in Israel,’ *Foreign Policy*, no. 27 (1977); Yoram Peri, ‘Political-Military Partnership in Israel,’ *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique* 2, no. 3 (1981).

²²⁸ Joseph Massad, ‘Zionism’s Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews,’ *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 4 (1996); Mark Tessler, ‘The Political Right in Israel: Its Origins, Growth, and Prospects,’ *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 2 (1986).

²²⁹ Samuel Lewis interview, 9 August 1998, ADST. Retrieved 16 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004lew03\).](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004lew03).)

²³⁰ Rabin, *Memoirs*, 300.

has prepared to batten down the hatches by taking a strong swing to the right.²³¹ Some U.S. commentators also blamed Carter for Rabin's loss, which fed the distrust felt by Israel's American supporters toward the president.²³² While such accusations overestimated American influence on Israeli politics, they nevertheless became commonplace in U.S. discourse during this period.

Likud's ascension had immense ramifications for the peace process, especially on the Palestinians. Referring to the West Bank by the biblical names 'Judea and Samaria,' its platform stated that the territory would 'not be handed to any foreign administration; between the Sea and Jordan there will only be Israeli sovereignty.' Foreshadowing disputes with the Carter administration, it took a clear stand on Jewish settlements in the occupied territories: 'Settlement, both urban and rural, in all parts of the Land of Israel is the focal point of the Zionist effort to redeem the country, to maintain vital security areas and serves as ... strength and inspiration for the renewal of the pioneering spirit.' It labelled the PLO 'an organization of assassins' and said a Likud government would 'strive to eliminate' the group.²³³

WAFA opined that it was 'almost sure that the victory of the Likud Bloc means greater Israeli inflexibility' and called for a 'major reinforcement of Arab military potential.'²³⁴ The 'main conclusion we draw in light of Likud's impending rise to power in Israel, is the overwhelming importance of stopping the Arabs from gambling on US policy in our region, and of strengthening our unity,' it editorialised.²³⁵

The United States was unprepared for Labour's loss. 'Much of our strategy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict has been predicated on the assumption that a strong and moderate Israeli government would at some point be able to make difficult decisions on territory and on the Palestinians,' Quandt wrote to Brzezinski. 'Now we face the prospect of a very weak coalition, a prolonged period of

²³¹ Document 35, Telegram from State Department (Christopher) to Vance in Geneva, 18 May 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 265-266.

²³² Tad Szulc, 'How Carter Fouled the Israeli Elections,' *New York*, 6 June 1977.

²³³ 'The Likud Party: Platform (March 1977),' Laqueur and Rubin, *Israel-Arab Reader*, 206-07.

²³⁴ 'Editorial on Likud Victory,' WAFA, 19 May 1977, IPS.

²³⁵ 'Editorial on Begin Declaration Regarding West Bank,' WAFA, 20 May 1977, IPS.

uncertainty, and an Israeli leadership which may be significantly more assertive in its policies concerning the West Bank, Palestinians, settlements, and nuclear weapons.²³⁶

Yet Likud's rise also provided opportunities, Quandt believed. 'American public support for a Likud-led government is likely to be less than it has been for Labor governments ... This may give us some room for maneuver. ... [A]t the right time, we may be able to act without fear of a serious *domestic backlash*,' he wrote.²³⁷ Immediately after the election, Caddell analysed for Carter poll results to determine Israelis' attitudes toward the government and peace negotiations, with an eye toward determining whether the administration could reach beyond the Israeli leaders to the public if necessary.²³⁸

Similarly, in a 19 May meeting with Carter and Eizenstat, Brzezinski argued that 'precisely because Begin is so extreme, the President will be able to mobilize on behalf of a settlement a significant portion of the American Jewish community. ... This will make it easier for the President to prevail and to have the needed congressional support.'²³⁹

Within days of Likud's victory, White House Counsel Robert Lipshutz spoke to the United Jewish Appeal. '... I placed the most emphasis on the importance of American Jewish leaders becoming very active and positive in expressing their opinions and giving their advice to the leaders and people of Israel,' he informed Carter. Lipshutz conveyed the attendees' suggestion that the administration arrange for a pro-Israel member of Congress to communicate White House attitudes to Begin prior to the prime minister's first U.S. visit.²⁴⁰

Carter heeded the advice. Two weeks later, the president invited Sen. Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.), a long-time Israel supporter, to the White House to ask him to make a public statement supporting Carter's policy. Humphrey accordingly did so.²⁴¹

²³⁶ Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, 'Israeli Elections,' 18 May 1977, Folder: 'Israel 4-6/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 34, JCL.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* Emphases added.

²³⁸ Memo from Caddell to Carter and Brzezinski, 'Survey Results from Israel,' 19 May 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Israeli Public Opinion, 5/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL.

²³⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 95-96.

²⁴⁰ Memo from Lipshutz to Carter, 'Israel Election and Related Matters,' 23 May 1977, Folder: 'Israel, 4-6/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 34, JCL.

²⁴¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 296.

The organised American Jewish community began to mobilise after Begin's victory to pre-empt pressure on the young government. Regional organisations urged their members to contact the White House to voice concerns about perceived pressure on Israel.²⁴² From Washington, AIPAC wrote that in the wake of the election, 'a spate of false and unfounded statements (had appeared) in the media regarding the prospective new government and its leadership.' It asked members to 'act immediately' to make 'every effort ... to set the record straight.' AIPAC distributed talking points to combat what it referred to as 'myths' spread in the American media: that 'Menachem Begin is a terrorist,' that 'Begin's Irgun committed a massacre at the Arab village of Deir Yassin,' that the 'Irgun bombed the King David Hotel and killed innocent people,' and that 'the Palestinians have a right to the West Bank.'²⁴³ The information campaign launched by the grassroots Jewish community and professional lobbyists made for a potent counterweight to administration pressure on Israel.

Carter was not unusual in believing that he needed the support of American Jewish leaders for his policy to be effective. However, his readiness to admit to his domestic constraints was unusual. For example, when Syria's Hafez al-Assad questioned why Carter was so eager to have the PLO accept 242 before Geneva, the president replied that much of the American Jewish community believed the PLO wanted to destroy Israel. If the PLO accepted 242, that argument could no longer be made. 'I need to have American Jewish leaders trust me before I can make progress,' Carter told al-Assad in May.²⁴⁴

Meanwhile, Carter continued his efforts at open diplomacy. In a 26 May news conference, the president again stumbled while discussing specifics of the conflict without notes. Carter incorrectly stated that UNSC resolutions affirmed the right of Palestinians to a homeland and 'to be compensated for the losses they have suffered.'²⁴⁵ Carter's subsequent attempts to clarify his

²⁴² For example: Memo from Community Relations Committee of the Jewish Federation-Council of Greater Los Angeles, June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 3-6/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL.

²⁴³ Memo from Weinberg and Amitay to AIPAC members, 'Action Memorandum,' 25 May 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 3-6/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL.

²⁴⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, 57.

²⁴⁵ 'The President's News Conference,' 26 May 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, I*, 1016-25.

comments only fed his critics because they seemed to endorse a narrower definition of Israel's borders than even the pre-1967 frontiers. Brzezinski sought to reign in Carter by reminding the president that 242 and 338 provided the only agreed upon framework for negotiations, and that the United States had never backed a resolution calling for a 'Palestinian homeland.'²⁴⁶

Conclusion

New to Washington, Carter did not feel bound in his early days by the established foreign policy parameters. To him, the Arab-Israeli conflict's anodyne diplomatic phrases seemed stale and emblematic of policy inertia. By speaking out, Carter hoped to create fresh possibilities for debate and progress. Yet he soon became captive of his own formulations, such as the term 'Palestinian homeland.'

Carter's remarks stirred the concerns of Israel and its U.S. supporters, who feared such a homeland could prejudice Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, and made Arab leaders – none of whom he had yet met – uneasy because of the ambiguity of his remarks. Carter did not appear to appreciate the issue's sensitivity for Israelis, the American Jewish community and even Arab leaders.

Carter later acknowledged that he 'lost a tremendous amount of Jewish support because I talked about (a) Palestinian homeland' and 'dealt with very sensitive issues in a politically foolish way.'²⁴⁷ Moreover, Carter's insistence that Geneva was the only way toward peace, and that Palestinian representation at such a gathering was essential, meant that any public backtracking had the appearance of a political defeat. The president's early months also set all parties hurtling down the path of open diplomacy, which soon characterised the negotiations.

The problem with Carter's decision to 'go public' with his Arab-Israeli diplomacy was that his objectives were ill defined. It was never clear how public support would strengthen his diplomacy. Nor was it obvious how the United States would allay the concerns of Israel, which had

²⁴⁶ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'UN Resolutions on the Middle East,' 3 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East/Panama, [2/2-6/30/77],' Mondale Donated, Box 206, JCL.

²⁴⁷ Jimmy Carter interview (I), 4 June 1991, Folder 8, Box 63, SEP.

a greater direct interest in the terms of a settlement. Carter's eagerness to speak directly to ordinary people dovetailed with his campaign rhetoric but in practice had few salutary diplomatic effects.

Caddell's advice to Carter to run a continuous political campaign through the generous use of symbolism missed the mark. Style counts, but only inasmuch as it serves to complement substance. Caddell's memo did not anticipate the president's need to persuade the public to support his policies.

Despite Carter's campaign pledges, he did not *consult* with the American people about foreign policy. Rather, he *informed* them about his administration's decisions. That may have represented greater openness than previous administrations, but without a commensurate political plan to capitalise on existing trends in U.S. opinion, it did not improve his chances of success.

Instead, the president stirred the ire of Israel's most devoted supporters and alienated elite opinion. His tendency to speak openly and appear to make foreign policy on the fly suggested confusion at the top of the new administration. These forays into open diplomacy also intensified the identification of the chief executive with the Arab-Israeli peace process. As policy became more controversial, the toll on the president mounted.

Carter took office with an approval rating of nearly 70 percent. In March, it peaked at 75 percent. Perhaps not coincidentally, the gradual fall in his ratings began just as he began his forays into public diplomacy.²⁴⁸ Immediately before his meetings with Rabin, Carter's efforts at 'running an open government' garnered a 77 percent positive rating.²⁴⁹ Two months later, that figure had dropped 14 points.²⁵⁰ It is difficult to conclude but that the drumbeat of negative coverage of Carter's 'open' style helped degrade his support.

Carter's rush to spend his political capital on a range of ambitious initiatives quickly eroded his support base. This weakening was not merely the result of his foreign policy. However, Carter's missteps during these scattershot efforts contributed to the image of the president as a well-meaning

²⁴⁸ 'Presidential Job Approval Center,' Gallup. Retrieved 16 September, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124922/Presidential-Job-Approval-Center.aspx>.

²⁴⁹ Harris Survey, 1-7 March 1977, Roper Center.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 31 May-5 June 1977, *ibid.*

man who was out of his depth, and one whose ideas about global interconnectedness translated poorly from the campaign trail to government. The public pressure that Carter placed on Israel helped mobilise pro-Israel groups and the American Jewish community in support of the Jewish state, regardless of whether it was led by Labour or Likud. A softer approach – ‘staying private’ rather than ‘going public’ – in Carter’s early months may not have stoked anxieties that Washington was ready to impose a settlement on Israel.²⁵¹

²⁵¹ Matthew A. Baum, 'Going Private: Public Opinion, Presidential Rhetoric, and the Domestic Politics of Audience Costs in U.S. Foreign Crises,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 5 (2004).

Chapter Two: Domestic Politics and Foreign Policy – “The Need for a Political Plan”

Introduction

In June 1977, Hamilton Jordan personally typed a 54-page memo and placed it in President Carter’s in-tray. He locked the only other copy of the document, innocuously entitled ‘Politics and Foreign Policy,’ in his office safe. Jordan’s memo asserts ‘the need for a political plan’ in order to win ‘public and Congressional support for specific foreign policy initiatives,’ with an emphasis on the Middle East. Noting that the “American Jewish lobby” was ‘something that was not a part of our Georgia and Southern political experience and [is] consequently not well understood,’ he proceeded to analyse Jewish voters and outline a plan for relations with the American Jewish community. The community was ‘very nervous,’ Jordan warned Carter. ‘You have discussed publicly things that have only been said before privately to the Israelis with assurances,’ he added.²⁵² That the administration devised such a detailed strategy of consultation and consensus building on a non-legislative issue underscores the unique place Arab-Israeli policy occupies in American political discourse.

Indeed, by summer 1977 it had become abundantly clear that the administration needed to devote greater attention to the politics of its Arab-Israeli diplomacy. As Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin formed his Likud government in Israel, Carter faced increasingly organised opposition at home. During this June-July period, the administration began to create and execute a political plan intended to cultivate the domestic support needed to make the difficult decisions en route to Geneva. The White House sought to apply the lessons learned from the backlash over Carter’s open diplomacy to achieve a more successful second half of 1977.

This chapter argues that the political plan was fundamentally flawed. It was predicated on the belief that the administration could generate support by notifying the main domestic actors on Arab-Israeli policy of the course it had already decided to take rather than through patient

²⁵² Memo with attachments from Jordan to Carter, ‘Politics and Foreign Policy,’ 29 June 1977, Folder: ‘Foreign Policy/Domestic Politics Memo, HJ Memo, 7/77,’ Box 34A, Jordan Files, JCL.

intellectual and moral suasion. The White House overestimated its ability to convince key actors to back its policy based on the rectitude of its position, with little regard to existing beliefs. Moreover, the administration incorrectly believed Begin's government would be susceptible to indirect pressure through domestic American figures.

Carter's tendency to follow a diplomatic style characterised by 'thinking out loud,' as Vice President Walter Mondale described it, had mobilised those most concerned with specific policies, including lawmakers, the elite and American Jewry.²⁵³ These voices then exerted a powerful influence on the public debate. 'In the addressing of issues that were highly politically sensitive in a kind of open and frank way you don't accumulate support from the moderates who say that is a good idea,' Carter later conceded of his stance on Arab-Israeli issues. 'You accumulate collectively [the] fervent opponents – the true believers ... on the Middle East' and other issues.²⁵⁴

Four events shaped this period. First, in an effort to placate growing domestic restiveness, Mondale delivered a major speech on the administration's Arab-Israeli policy on 17 June. Shortly afterward, Jordan sent Carter the aforementioned strategy memo. On 6 July, the White House hosted dozens of American Jewish leaders for policy consultation ahead of the final major event, Begin's first official visit to Washington on 19-20 July.

Detailed treatments of this period in the Camp David Peace Process place primary emphasis on the Begin-Carter meetings.²⁵⁵ However, the present work is unique in emphasising the administration's prior political preparation, especially the way in which Jordan's memo sets forth operative assumptions for generating domestic support.²⁵⁶ This study does not underestimate the diplomatic significance of the Begin-Carter meetings. Rather, it offers an alternative focus to explain the significance of domestic influences in shaping Carter's policy.

Analysis of this episode contributes to the understanding of Carter as both a peacemaker and a president. He pursued a somewhat reckless style of diplomacy in his initial months in an attempt

²⁵³ Miller, *Much Too Promised Land*, 163.

²⁵⁴ Carter interview (I), SEP.

²⁵⁵ Quandt, *Camp David*, 63-95.

²⁵⁶ The memo is mentioned in passing in various works, but none of them delve into it in detail nor do they locate it within the entirety of Carter's involvement in Arab-Israeli negotiations.

to ‘plow new ground.’ Now, however, he and his aides sought to inaugurate a sophisticated political strategy to heal wounds and prepare the way for future diplomatic objectives.

Carter’s political and foreign policy advisors were in concert on, in Jordan’s phrase, ‘the need for a political plan.’ The administration considered whether it could persuade Israel’s supporters in the American Jewish community and in Congress to exert pressure on Israel, and some members weighed the idea of a public ‘confrontation’ with Jerusalem. This episode offers an extraordinary example of a president and his staff learning, six months into the job, how to tackle perhaps the most explosive diplomatic and political issue on their agenda.

First mention of a “public showdown”

The sight of the president out front on controversial policy disconcerted White House advisors. In May, Zbigniew Brzezinski urged other senior administration members to speak out in defence of the Arab-Israeli policy because the national security advisor ‘was becoming increasingly fearful that the President was overly identified as the sole spokesman on the Middle Eastern issue.’²⁵⁷

Early the following month, Carter convened a meeting with Brzezinski, domestic advisor Stuart Eizenstat, Jordan and Mondale to discuss AIPAC’s campaign against his policies.²⁵⁸ ‘It was during this period that the President first discussed the possibility of a public showdown over our policy toward Israel,’ according to Brzezinski. Additionally, the president, who sought to strengthen his domestic standing in advance of Begin’s anticipated summer visit, told his aides he felt too much of the burden for defending his policies had fallen to him.²⁵⁹

That evening, Brzezinski spoke with House Speaker Tip O’Neill, who told him ‘point-blank that if the choice came down between the President and the pro-Israel lobby, the country would clearly choose the President – but only if the choice was clearly posed.’ Such a choice was never

²⁵⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 96.

²⁵⁸ Quandt, *Camp David*, 69. For example, AIPAC’s Amitay issued a telegram opposing U.S. advocacy for, or recognition of, a Palestinian state. Amitay telegram, 6 June 1977, Folder: ‘Foreign Policy/Domestic Politics Memo, HJ Memo, 7/77,’ Box 34A, JCL

²⁵⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 97.

made explicit, however. ‘The President felt that it would be too divisive and that it was not necessary at this stage,’ Brzezinski wrote.²⁶⁰

Shortly afterward, Brzezinski advised Carter to make the domestic aspect of Arab-Israeli policy his first controversial issue ‘rather than second or third or fourth’ because he would then have more political capital to spend on it. ‘Our strategy domestically should be designed to give [American Jewish groups that believed Israel should make concessions for peace] credibility and support,’ he continued. In the meantime, the White House should engage in ‘consolidation and education of the public and the Arabs and Israelis as to why all of this is in our collective interests.’ On domestic opposition, he advised, ‘We should be careful not to overreact and thereby contribute to a crisis atmosphere.’ The administration’s efforts at building domestic support for its policy should be handled in a ‘deliberately *low-key* and *discreet* fashion,’ he emphasised.²⁶¹

Brzezinski offered these thoughts as the organised American Jewish community raised its profile regarding U.S. policy. In addition to AIPAC’s advocacy, the Presidents’ Conference reported that in 1977-78 it ‘was called upon as never before to serve as the voice of American Jewry in speaking to our own Administration and to the Government of Israel …’ Within a week of Begin’s election, he invited President Alexander Schindler and Executive Director Yehuda Hellman to Israel for consultations. On 7 June, Schindler and Hellman described these meetings to administration officials, including Undersecretary of State Philip Habib, Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs Alfred Atherton, Eizenstat and White House Counsel Robert Lipshutz.²⁶²

During the transition between Labour’s loss and the ascension of Begin’s government, a group of pro-Israel senators advised Senator Richard Stone to carry a message to Begin. They wanted the Florida Democrat to tell Begin ‘in very strong terms that “an inflexible posture will not sell with Congress or the executive Branch,”’ Secretary of State Cyrus Vance relayed to Carter. During Stone’s visit, Begin should be informed that he should be willing to compromise on

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ NSC Weekly Report #16, 10 June 1977, NLC-SAFE 16 B-28-14-7-3. Emphases in original.

²⁶² *Report of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations for the Year Ending March 31, 1978* (New York), 1-7, LOC.

territorial issues, especially on the West Bank, the lawmakers believed. New York Republican Senator Jacob 'Javits told Stone that he should warn Begin that an uncompromising position will tear the American Jewish Community apart because it is basically a moderate group,' Vance added.²⁶³ More broadly, Carter increased efforts in June to cultivate congressional support for his initiative.²⁶⁴

Publicly, however, Schindler brushed aside queries about whether the administration might try to drive a wedge between American Jewry and the Begin government. 'I don't know whether any such effort is being planned or is under way, but it will without question be rejected by American Jews and the organizations that represent them,' he insisted.²⁶⁵ Carter was also kept abreast of the outcome of visits to Israel by U.S. lawmakers and others, such as American Jewish Congress President Arthur Hertzberg.²⁶⁶

Meanwhile, Begin's personal representative, Shmuel Katz, visited Washington to meet with American officials to discuss the new government's views. According to Katz, Begin believed that the Jewish people had a right to 'Western Palestine as a whole' (i.e., all territory west of the Jordan River), Israel should not have to refrain from creating new settlements because that would indicate a prejudging of the outcome of negotiations, and the creation of any Arab entity west of the Jordan would pose a threat to Israel. On the Palestinians, Katz provided a glimpse of Begin's perspective when he said, 'Some say the heart of the problem is the Palestinians, but this is not true historically. ... The conflict stems from the Arab refusal to recognize our existence in any area.'²⁶⁷

To the Americans, that suggested that Begin's vision of peace negotiations contained an underlying 'harshness.'²⁶⁸ Katz also provided an early indication of the U.S.-Israeli battle for public

²⁶³ Memo from Vance to Carter, 25 May 1977, NLC-128-12-8-17-0.

²⁶⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 296-97.

²⁶⁵ *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 7.

²⁶⁶ Carter's relationships with some of these leaders seemed strained on a personal level. Upon being informed by Brzezinski that the Israeli prime minister had received a visit from Hertzberg, Carter wrote in the margins, 'Poor Begin.' Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Visitors to Israel,' 6 July 1977, Folder: 'Israel, 7/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 35, JCL.

²⁶⁷ Document 41, Memcon, Katz, Dinitz, Brzezinski, Lipshutz, Aaron and Quandt, 10 June 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 308-15.

²⁶⁸ Quandt, *Camp David*, 69-70.

opinion. ‘We are confident that the Jewish community in America will stand out courageously and challenge its government if it becomes necessary,’ he said.²⁶⁹

The administration also kept tabs on Israeli public opinion. Brzezinski notified Carter that Israeli press reports reflected a concern about erosion of U.S. support for Israel. ‘This concern has produced a noticeable closing of the ranks within the country and the press has focused on the need for Israel to secure its base of support in the U.S. – in Congress, the Jewish community and among the public at large,’ he informed the president. Brzezinski suggested that Begin was facing growing pressure ‘to make changes (in his positions) which would facilitate Israel’s public relations campaign.’²⁷⁰ Meanwhile, however, the Israeli press stepped off its criticism of Carter’s style. ‘President Carter’s utterances on Middle East questions are beginning to remind one of a see-saw,’ one daily Israeli newspaper asserted in mid-June.²⁷¹

Shortly afterward, Quandt met with the United Jewish Appeal’s Gordon Zacks. In order to bolster the administration’s support in the Jewish community, Zacks made several suggestions, including ‘continuing consultations with American Jewish leaders’ and conducting less diplomacy ‘in public.’ At some point, he added, ‘a confrontation’ between Israel and the United States was inevitable, but it could be contained so long as it did not threaten Israel’s basic security. ‘It should come later rather than sooner, and should not resemble the Kissinger reassessment,’ he told Quandt.²⁷²

The following day, Brzezinski received an AIPAC-compiled list of concerns about administration policy that was ‘circulating on [Capitol] Hill.’ Brzezinski’s aide noted ‘that what is at the root of this mood is the fear that the President has been taken in by Arab protestations of

²⁶⁹ Tillman, *United States and the Middle East*, 158.

²⁷⁰ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Information Items,’ 6 June 1977, Folder: ‘6/1/77-6/10/77,’ NSA, Brzezinski, President’s Daily Report, Box 2, JCL.

²⁷¹ Pressman, ‘Explaining the Carter administration’s Israeli-Palestinian Solution,’ 10.

²⁷² Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, 9 June 1977, ‘Conversation with Gordon Zacks of United Jewish Appeal,’ DDRS CK3100122272. Quandt appeared to heed Zacks’ concern that the Jewish community was anxious that Washington would severely curtail weapons supplies to Israel as a matter of principle. The following month he expressed concern that a review of Israel’s arms needs would lead to a ‘politicized exercise’ and risked being interpreted as another ‘reassessment’ of policy toward Israel. Memo from Quandt to Aaron, ‘Arms Transfers and Israel,’ 8 July 1977, NLC-21-21-9-12-3. On the 1975 ‘reassessment,’ see Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 424-33; Salim Yaqub, ‘The Weight of Conquest: Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,’ in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, ed. Frederik Logevall and Andrew Preston (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

wanting peace, and has neglected to look for tangible proof of that desire ...' Most of the 21 points of contention listed related to the administration's public statements and subsequent clarifications on the nature of a peace agreement, weapons sales policy, and its emphasis on the Palestinian question as a 'core issue' of the conflict.²⁷³

Still, whatever its later positions, even AIPAC initially seemed to underestimate the depth of Begin's ideological commitment to Greater Israel. It suggested that Begin's rhetoric might have been mere election sloganeering rather than indicative of any deeply held ideological belief. 'There is often a difference between what politicians say when they are out of office and how they actually act after they take over the responsibilities of government,' it argued.²⁷⁴

Yet any careful reading of Begin's public statements would have shown categorically the consistency of his beliefs. The day after the 1947 U.N. partition vote, which helped provide basic legitimacy for the creation of an independent Jewish state, Begin stated the underground fighters' credo: 'The partition of the Homeland is illegal. It will never be recognized. ... Jerusalem was and will forever be our capital. Eretz Israel will be restored to the people of Israel. All of it. And forever.'²⁷⁵ In 1970, Begin resigned from Israel's unity government after it accepted the principle of land-for-peace as set forth in 242.²⁷⁶ This was no passing phase.

The American Jewish community soon became a highly sought after demographic during the Carter era. With Jewish groups expressing reservations about Carter's Arab-Israeli policy and also having an interest in the plight of Soviet Jewry, conservative organisations such as the reconstituted anti-Soviet and pro-defence Committee on the Present Danger (CPD) saw an opportunity to make common cause. In June, the organisation sought to spread its message and attract new members by calibrating its pitch to three groups of opinion leaders: members of Congress, newspaper and magazine editors, and the 'American Jewish Community.' American Jewry's liberal political tradition could broaden its base, but also 'inroads could be made quickly in

²⁷³ Memo with attachments from Tuchman to Brzezinski, 'Middle East Policy,' 10 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: 5-6/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Office, Box 31, JCL.

²⁷⁴ 'Israeli Elections,' *NER*, XXI: 21, 25 May 1977.

²⁷⁵ Avi Shlaim, 'The Iron Wall Revisited,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012).

²⁷⁶ _____, *Iron Wall*, 296.

this community because of their concern over the continuance of the freedom of the state of Israel,' a strategy memo argued. 'Many members of this community understand that the strength of Israel is today inextricably tied to the strength of the United States ...'²⁷⁷ Throughout Carter's term, the CPD and other neoconservatives drew a connection between U.S. policy in the Middle East and toward the Soviet Union, using opposition to one to reinforce opposition to the other.²⁷⁸

Mondale outlines administration policy

Against this backdrop, the administration sent Mondale to clarify the administration's policy. The vice president's carefully crafted 17 June speech in San Francisco was intended to relieve the pressure on Carter as the primary spokesperson on Arab-Israeli issues and demonstrate the administration's unity on policy. Mondale was tapped to deliver the speech because of his strong ties with the American Jewish community and his record of supporting Israel while serving as a senator. The American Jewish Congress, for instance, believed he was its 'best friend' in the White House.²⁷⁹ Carter's communications chief, Gerald Rafshoon, described Mondale as 'more pro-Israel than Begin.'²⁸⁰

In the California speech, which was written with input from both domestic and foreign policy advisors, Mondale used sensitive terms to revisit the issues that Carter had addressed in March. He continually emphasised Washington's commitment to Israel's security, that the United States had no interest in imposing a settlement and that its goal remained a comprehensive peace through Geneva by the end of 1977. He also attempted to ease concerns about American arms transfer policy. 'We do not intend to use our military aid to pressure Israel,' Mondale said. 'If we

²⁷⁷ Alan Woods, 'Public/Congressional Relations Plan for the CPD,' 10 June, 1977, Folder: 'Committee on the Present Danger, 1977,' Box 447, Committee on the Present Danger Papers, Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Palo Alto, California (hereafter CPDP).

²⁷⁸ Ehrman, *Rise of Neoconservatism*, 97-136; Justin Vaisse, *Neoconservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010), 145-47. A CPD co-founder, Eugene Rostow, wrote that Israel was 'the perfect case history through which to observe the development of our foreign policy since Truman.' Eugene Rostow, 'The American Stake in Israel,' *Commentary Magazine* 63, no. 4 (1977).

²⁷⁹ Lazarowitz, 'Ethnic Influence and American Foreign Policy: American Jewish Leaders and President Jimmy Carter,' 119.

²⁸⁰ Gerald Rafshoon interview, 8 April 1983, CPP, 66. Retrieved 4 September 2013, http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_1983_0408 Rafshoon.pdf.

have differences over military aid ... it will be on military grounds or economic grounds but not political grounds.²⁸¹ Indeed, whatever U.S.-Israeli disputes arose during his presidency, Carter never touched U.S. economic or military assistance to Israel.²⁸²

However, Mondale's final speech had been watered down from earlier versions. On the Palestinian question, a 3 June draft used the word 'homeland' three times in reference to a settlement and included this phrase: 'the key ingredients as we see them [are] genuine peace; withdrawal and security; and a Palestine homeland.'²⁸³ A 15 June draft was limited to two 'homeland' references.²⁸⁴ In the final speech, Mondale referred just once to 'the possibility of some arrangement for a Palestinian homeland or entity – preferably in association with Jordan.' The 'key elements' had become: 'a commitment to a genuine and lasting peace demonstrated by concrete acts to normalize relations ... ; the establishment of borders for Israel which are recognized by all and which can be kept secure; a fair solution to the problem of the Palestinians.'²⁸⁵ Based on its timing, it seems likely that Mondale's speech was adjusted in significant measure to respond to domestic pressures.

Mondale's address did not mollify domestic criticism, however. AIPAC criticised the speech for being 'compulsively "even-handed,"' assigning 'peaceful positions' to Arab leaders who have 'never expressed' such, and its delivery by the vice president, not the president.²⁸⁶ 'Because the speech gave added credence to the growing impression that the United States is enunciating an overall plan for a Middle East settlement, it actually reinforced fears both here and in Israel,' it wrote.²⁸⁷ Subsequently, AIPAC exhorted members to pressure their legislators during the forthcoming congressional recess. 'In your conversations emphasize [the] need for defensible

²⁸¹ Remarks of Walter Mondale, 17 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East—V.P. Mondale's Speech-SF, 6/17/77,' Jordan Files, Box 35, JCL.

²⁸² Quandt, *Camp David*, 71.

²⁸³ Memo from Brzezinski to Mondale, 'Draft Remarks on the Middle East,' 3 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East/Panama, [2/2-6/30/77],' Mondale Donated, Box 206, JCL.

²⁸⁴ Memo from Clift to Lipshutz, Eizenstat and Aaron, 'Vice President's June 17 San Francisco Speech,' 15 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Speech by Vice President—6/17/77 San Francisco, 6/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 36, JCL.

²⁸⁵ Remarks of Walter Mondale, 17 June 1977.

²⁸⁶ AIPAC memo, 'Comments on Vice President Mondale's Speech Before the World Affairs Council,' 20 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 3-6/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL.

²⁸⁷ 'The Mondale Speech,' *NER*, XXI: 25, 22 June 1977.

borders, direct negotiations, and testing of Arab peace intentions in advance of Israeli territorial concessions,' it advised. 'If you cannot have a meeting with your legislators please write them and [the] White House immediately.'²⁸⁸

The unease went beyond AIPAC, however. In response to Mondale's speech, Javits made a statement on the Senate floor criticising Carter's approach and the public nature of his diplomacy.²⁸⁹ Meanwhile, Carter received two letters of complaint about his policy from Jerold Hoffberger, head of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds.²⁹⁰ Brzezinski felt compelled to write to Hertzberg, of the American Jewish Congress. It would be 'morally wrong and politically stupid' for the administration to sacrifice its relationship with Israel, he assured Hertzberg.²⁹¹ Schindler complained that the administration's statements 'have not served to allay our fears' because they were a 'mere recapitulation of what gave rise to these apprehensions in the first place.'²⁹²

Regional reaction to Mondale's articulation of U.S. policy was unenthusiastic. Israel said the speech offered nothing new.²⁹³ The PLO rejected any hint of being linked to Jordan. 'It is for the Palestinians themselves to decide whether their homeland should be "tied" to the Hashemite Kingdom or not,' it wrote.²⁹⁴

A PRC held the week after Mondale's speech focused on weapons sales and the negotiations. In an unsigned discussion paper for the meeting, the author noted that U.S. policy was at a 'delicate moment' during which the Americans needed to balance four broad objectives: maintain momentum for a comprehensive peace through Geneva in 1977; establish a working relationship with Israel's new government; retain the confidence of 'moderate' Arab leaders, 'and

²⁸⁸ Mailgram from Amitay to Lipshutz, 'Action Memorandum,' 30 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 3-6/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL.

²⁸⁹ Seven other senators seconded Javits' remarks. Jacob Javits, 'President Carter's Mideast Peace Proposals,' *Congressional Record – Senate*, vol. 123, pt. 17, 23-30 June 1977 (Washington: GPO, 1977) 20947-20950.

²⁹⁰ Letter from Hoffberger to Carter, 15 June 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 3-6/77 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL; *Ibid.*, June 22, 1977, *ibid.*

²⁹¹ Letter from Brzezinski to Hertzberg, 22 June 1977, WHCF Name File, American Jewish Congress, JCL.

²⁹² *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 7.

²⁹³ William Farrell, 'Israel Says Mondale Offered Nothing New in Speech on Mideast,' *NYT*, 20 June 1977.

²⁹⁴ 'The Independent Palestinian State' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 10 (15 July 1977), 3, IPS.

try to bring the Palestinians into their orbit of influence'; and 'gain' – not keep – the support of Congress, public opinion and American Jewry.²⁹⁵

In the meeting, the committee decided to recommend approval of a relatively modest arms package to Israel and Egypt, while the likely more controversial F-15 sales to Saudi Arabia were temporarily placed on hold. On the diplomatic front, the committee decided to keep the focus on a comprehensive approach. The United States would try to get Begin to reaffirm Israel's commitment to UNSCR 242, restrain settlement building and accept a pre-Geneva process intended to establish an agreed framework for negotiations. The attendees also noted with some concern – and mild humour – that the U.S. approach 'might make Begin appear intransigent; that an image of intransigence might help him to build domestic support; and that then "we would have him just where he wants us!"'²⁹⁶ While Vance favoured quiet diplomacy, Brzezinski apparently was more willing for a clash.²⁹⁷

The U.S. public campaign against Begin's interpretation that 242 did not apply to the West Bank gathered speed in late June. Partly as a response to Javits' Senate speech, which suggested that a return to the pre-1967 boundaries would leave Israel vulnerable, the State Department released a text outlining the elements Washington believed necessary for a comprehensive peace. Essentially, the U.S. statement said that negotiations needed to include the West Bank – otherwise, it would be contrary to the principle of negotiations without preconditions.²⁹⁸ According to Quandt, this was also an attempt, pushed by Brzezinski, to place State, rather than Carter, at the centre of the debate.²⁹⁹ Israel issued its official rejoinder that 'everything is negotiable'.³⁰⁰

This statement again provoked controversy at home. According to Eizenstat, the 'disastrous' statement had been neither seen nor approved by Carter, Mondale, Jordan, Powell or himself – in

²⁹⁵ 'Discussion Paper for the PRC Meeting on Middle East—June 22, 1977,' n.a., Folder: 'Meetings—PRC 18: 6/25/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Subject, Box 24, JCL. Quandt is most likely the author of this paper.

²⁹⁶ Document 43, Summary of PRC conclusions, 25 June 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 317-319.

²⁹⁷ Quandt, *Camp David*, 71-72.

²⁹⁸ 'U.S. Statement on the Middle East,' *NYT*, 28 June 1977.

²⁹⁹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 72-74.

³⁰⁰ Document 8, Foreign Ministry statement, 28 June 1977. IFRSD, Vols. 4-5: 1977-1979. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/8%20Foreign%20Ministry-s%20statement%20on%20Israel-s%20negotia.aspx>.

other words, the president's main domestic advisors. The administration needed to tune its political radar better, he believed: 'Foreign policy is too important for experts.' Going forward, he suggested that Jordan clear all future statements. '... [W]e have galvanized public opinion in Israel against us and – I am afraid – alienated in a permanent way the American Jewish community. ... [W]e have talked too much,' he added. 'Now *we* look like the heavys [sic] and Begin the good guy. I really think *you* should orchestrate this thing.' Eizenstat viewed the State Department's statement as a 'self-inflicted wound that serves no good purpose and makes every dimension of this problem more difficult.'³⁰¹

Jordan's plan to build support

It was in this context that Jordan sent Carter the memo on building and sustaining domestic support for foreign policy.³⁰² Jordan focused mostly on three areas, all of which had domestic implications: the Panama Canal Treaties, SALT II and the Middle East negotiations. However, of these three, only the Arab-Israeli issue was non-legislative in nature.

Jordan contended that 'this confluence of foreign policy initiatives and decisions will require a comprehensive and well coordinated domestic political strategy if our policies are to gain the understanding and support of the American people and the Congress.' He believed the public had a 'limited ... understanding of most foreign policy issues. ... This is not altogether bad as it provides us an opportunity to present these issues to the public in [a] politically advantageous way.'

Jordan lists the five main administration figures to be used in foreign policy consultation: the president, who would work on key committee chairmen, Southern senators and senators up for re-election in 1978; the vice president, who would attend to liberal Democrats and Republicans; the secretary of state, who would be assigned to key Democrats and Republicans 'who would be flattered' to have him consult with them; Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, who would

³⁰¹ Note from Eizenstat to Jordan, 28 June 1977, Folder 20, Box 3, SEP. Emphases in original. It is unclear if this handwritten note was ever delivered to Jordan, but it nevertheless reflects Carter's top domestic policy advisor's perspective.

³⁰² The account that follows comes from: Memo with attachments from Jordan to Carter, 'Politics and Foreign Policy,' 29 June 1977, Folder: 'Foreign Policy/Domestic Politics Memo, HJ Memo, 7/77,' Box 34A, Jordan Files, JCL.

concentrate on conservative Democrats and Republicans especially concerned with the military; and the national security advisor, who would be assigned a mix of all of those figures. Jordan suggested a 10-week process, during which each person would spend an hour per week meeting with two senators, would be sufficient.

Yet the emphasis of Jordan's memo was on the Middle East.³⁰³ Jordan informed Carter that the 'cumulative impact of the Jewish lobby is even greater when one considers the fact that their political objectives are pursued in a vacuum,' because no effective political counterforce existed in Washington. The memo also dissects Jewish American voting patterns, political contributions, 'the Jewish lobby,' and the 'widespread uncertainty' felt by many Jewish groups about the ascension to power of Begin's Likud government.

This constituted a unique moment in which to sway these groups to the administration's point of view, Jordan suggested. 'One of the potential benefits of the recent Israeli elections is that it has caused many leaders in the American Jewish community to ponder the course the Israeli people have taken and question the wisdom of that policy,' he informed Carter. 'This new situation provides us with the potential for additional influence with the Israeli government through the American Jewish community, but at present we are in a poor position to take advantage of it.'

Jordan set out an eight-week consultation plan, specific to Middle East policy, in which the top foreign policy figures as listed above would meet with lawmakers, leaders of Jewish organisations, the Jewish press and lay leaders. In the Senate, Jordan suggested, AIPAC could consistently rely on 65-75 votes on any issue pertaining to Israel: 31 'hard votes' that were virtually always supportive of Israel; 43 'sympathetic' votes that AIPAC could 'count on in [a] showdown' over Israel; 23 votes that were depended on the issue; and three votes that were 'generally negative' toward Israel.

³⁰³ Attached to Jordan's strategy document was a 16-page memo that analyses Jewish American voting patterns, political contributions and support in Congress, while also offering extremely personal thoughts on Jewish identity. Siegel wrote that memo for Jordan. Siegel Interview. 'A Gentile can never tell a Jew what is best for him and for Israel. We have heard 'final solutions' before,' Siegel wrote.

This memo is significant because it spells out the major concerns, goals and tactics of the administration's Arab-Israeli diplomacy within a domestic context. Moreover, it demonstrates the administration's belief in the need for public support for its peacemaking aims and the need to forge an approach that was not just palatable to Israel's supporters in the United States, but also one that took their concerns into account. After first 'educating' the public to a certain point of view, the administration hoped the Jewish community would present those concerns directly to Israeli officials. 'Our efforts to consult and communicate must be directed *in tandem* at the Israeli government and the American Jewish community,' Jordan wrote. 'It is difficult for me to envision a meaningful peace settlement without the support of the American Jewish community.'

The memo lays out the complex way in which the administration hoped its wooing of American Jewry could help sway policy outcomes.³⁰⁴ It included some errors, however. For instance, Jordan appeared consistently to confuse AIPAC and the Presidents' Conference, which although both strongly supportive of Israeli policy, differed in composition and mission. Nevertheless, Jordan's memo helped grab the president's attention. Subsequently, Carter occasionally sat in on high-level policy deliberations.³⁰⁵

While it would be a mistake to believe that Jordan's memo explains fully Carter's policy and his attitude toward American Jewry, the aide's advice should not be discounted easily. It was Jordan, after all, whose bold 58-page year-by-year strategy plan to then-Governor Carter in 1972 served as a blueprint for his victorious White House run.³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, that it took the administration nearly six months to consider these tactics seriously points to the relative inexperience of Carter's inner circle.

By this time, Brzezinski had become distressed by the personal nature of the negative media coverage about the administration's policy. 'I was presented as anti-Israeli, perhaps even worse than

³⁰⁴ The American Jewish community was, and remains, active on a range of issues beyond policy toward Israel. However, as Siegel advised Jordan, 'let's make no mistake about the most salient voting issue for American Jews – Israel. To American Jews, the question of Israel is the most salient and determining voting issue, foreign or domestic.'

³⁰⁵ William Quandt email correspondence with author, 4 May 2011.

³⁰⁶ 'Jordan's Strategy Memo for Carter's Run for President,' 4 November 1972, CSPAN's Presidential Libraries. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://presidentiallibraries.c-span.org/Content/Carter/CarterStrategy.pdf>; Glad, *In Search of the Great White House*, 211-13.

that, and the references to my Polish and Catholic background became increasingly pointed in some of the commentaries on the subject of the Middle East,' he believed.³⁰⁷

Even so, an ABC News report in June noted that U.S. opinion had generally become more sympathetic toward the Arab cause. Israel, and especially Begin's Likud government, correspondent Ted Koppel reported, faced new criticism in the American media. In terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict, 'These are the battlegrounds now: the White House, the Congress and the U.S. news media,' he reported.³⁰⁸

The following week, CBS' Eric Sevareid tackled the U.S.-Israeli relationship. He opined that 'the impression sets in that while the Carter team does not love the Arabs more, they do love the Israelis less, or at least, differently.' Sevareid recognised that the president needed to balance competing interests in the region, including keeping such Arab states as Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the American camp, partly to ease oil supply concerns. 'What is sure is that Mr. Carter is taking on himself more and more responsibility for the outcome,' he noted.³⁰⁹

Carter prepares to meet Begin

Ahead of Begin's July visit to Washington, Carter felt he 'had to repair his political base among Israel's American friends, and in the process build further support for our peace effort.'³¹⁰ Carter had his work cut out for him. By early summer, the organised effort to criticise the administration's policy had gathered pace.³¹¹ In the last week of June, for example, 95 percent of the 1,552 letters on the Middle East received by the White House opposed Carter's position that

³⁰⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 98.

³⁰⁸ 'Israel/Begin/United States as Mid. East Battleground,' 'ABC Evening News,' 20 June 1977, VTNA 49126. Also see Adams and Heyl, 'From Cairo to Kabul with the Networks, 1972-1980.'

³⁰⁹ CBS News transcript, 29 June 1977, Folder 8, Box 54, Sevareid Papers.

³¹⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 297.

³¹¹ For example, Letter from Morris Abram to Carter through Lipshutz, 'Why Portions of the American Jewish Community are Concerned with the Present Posture of U.S./Israeli/Arab Relations,' 5 July 1977, Folder: 'Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 7/77-9/79 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL; and Letter from Kash (B'nai B'rith Women) to White House, 17 June 1977, Folder: 'Correspondence—Jewish Affairs, 1/76-12/778 [O/A 6471],' Costanza Files, Box 52, JCL.

Israel would have to relinquish some of the territory conquered in 1967 as part of a settlement.³¹²

The following week the White House received 359 telephone calls on the same issue; all of them opposed Carter's stance.³¹³

'People thought they had seen a Jewish lobby operate before. They haven't seen anything yet,' a board member of the Zionist Organization of America told *Time*. 'If Carter had said in October what he has been saying this spring, he would not be in the White House,' the same article quoted a New York rabbi as saying.³¹⁴ As *Newsweek* reported, 'What began as a mild concern in the American Jewish community has rapidly escalated to outright worry – and in some cases, genuine alarm – as Jews have sensed what they consider to be a pro-Arab drift in the President's words and deeds.'³¹⁵

As these concerns grew, Carter invited around 50 people – the Presidents' Conference and several lay leaders from key Jewish communities – to the White House in early July to discuss the negotiations. By then, Brzezinski had become anxious about a 'growing impression that Carter would not stand fast and that he would accommodate (on the Middle East) if pressed.' Brzezinski was also mindful of the adverse reaction Carter's earlier forays into public diplomacy had provoked. 'We will see whether we can hold to [the American framework] in the face of domestic pressure,' he noted after a PRC the day before the meeting with Jewish leaders.³¹⁶

In preparing Carter for the meeting, Jordan informed him that these leaders had continually been 'refused' an audience with the president. But with criticism growing in some quarters as to the administration's approach, the president's aides decided such a meeting was necessary before

³¹² The Middle East was the second-most popular topic in the mail report, after Carter's decision to halt production of the B-1 Bomber. Weekly Mail Report from Hugh Carter to Jimmy Carter, 1 July 1977, Folder: 'Carter, Hugh A.—[7/1/77-11/1/77]', Hugh Carter Files, Box 103, JCL.

³¹³ Memo from Jane Simpson to Hugh Carter, 8 July 1977, Folder: 'Weekly Telephone Tallies, 4/77-12/77 [CF, O/A 54]', Powell Files, Box 82, JCL.

³¹⁴ 'Carter, the World and the Jews,' *Time*, 27 June 1977.

³¹⁵ Richard Steele, et al, 'Carter and the Worried Jews,' *Newsweek*, 27 June 1977; Steele, et al, 'Sending Israel a Message,' *ibid.*, 11 July 1977.

³¹⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 97-99.

Begin's visit. The meeting, which would be presided over by Mondale, but would include Carter, Brzezinski, Eizenstat, Jordan and Vance, was intended 'to get the main issues out on the table.'³¹⁷

Jordan stressed that Carter should engage in consultation and information exchange with the visitors. That would contrast the president with the style of Kissinger, who tended to lecture to visiting Jewish groups rather than listen to them, Jordan wrote. He suggested the president deflect, though not necessarily deny, the suspicion that the administration hoped 'to orchestrate public opinion in this country and in Israel in such a way as to hasten Begin's possible downfall.' Generally, Jordan advised Carter to outline his vision for a settlement, with an emphasis on the American commitment to Israel's security.³¹⁸

In a separate memo, Brzezinski advised the president not to use the term 'Palestinian homeland' because it was a 'red flag' due to its vague echoing of the Balfour Declaration. Instead, the president could refer to the need for a 'home' for the Palestinians, preferably linked to Jordan, or even a 'political home.' The key was to avoid the implication that it would be a PLO-dominated state, Brzezinski suggested.³¹⁹

When the meeting finally came, the president and his aides spent nearly 80 minutes attempting to reassure the visitors of U.S. support for Israel. Carter emphasised his emerging definition of a settlement: first, 'real peace' as defined by full diplomatic relations, open communication and travel and free trade; second, withdrawal of 'some territory' occupied by Israel in 1967; and, third, resolution of the Palestinian question, which was 'a cancer that must be cured.' Carter said he foresaw 'a Palestinian entity tied to Jordan,' but that a 'separate Palestinian nation' would pose a threat to peace in the region. 'As long as we have influence, I would certainly not favor an independent Palestinian nation between Israel and Jordan,' he added. Carter conceded that

³¹⁷ Memo from Jordan to Carter, 'Meeting with American Jewish Leaders,' 6 July 1977, Folder: 'Middle East/Panama, [7/1-12/31/1977],' Mondale Donated, Box 206, JCL.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ Memo from Brzezinski to Jordan (for Carter), 'Tomorrow's Meeting with Jewish Leaders,' 5 July 1977, Folder: 'Middle East, 1977 [2],' Jordan Files, Box 35, JCL.

it would be easier politically if he did not oppose Israeli policies, but he emphasised that sometimes that would be necessary to retain the trust of all sides.³²⁰

Still, the attendees registered their concern about both the style and substance of administration policy. ‘We don’t doubt your intentions – you want to act as a catalyst, to shake things up,’ Schindler told the president. ‘But the world isn’t used to your open diplomacy, and your words are interpreted to be a blueprint to be imposed. … [T]his leads to a toughening of the Israeli backbone and raising Arab expectations,’ he complained.³²¹ Schindler left for Israel immediately afterward to reassure Begin about Carter.³²²

Carter was unusual not only in his public candour, but also the readiness with which he confessed to Arab leaders the constraints that domestic opinion placed on his Middle East policy. In May, he told Saudi Crown Prince Fahd that Riyadh should pressure the PLO to accept 242 because it would have a positive effect on American opinion.³²³ In his description of his meetings with Carter in September 1977, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy claimed Carter told him it would be ‘personal political suicide’ for him to apply too much pressure on Israel.³²⁴ For Carter to admit a domestic political weakness in an international diplomatic context was highly unusual.

Carter administration members sometimes met with Arab-American groups. However, they were not as well organised or connected as Israel’s supporters. Middle East staff members on the NSC recommended that the president agree to meet with Arab-American groups in late July³²⁵ and again the following month.³²⁶ Brzezinski responded to the latter memo by writing in the margin, ‘Talk to me. I am skeptical!’ Nevertheless, Brzezinski passed along the request to Jordan with a disclaimer. ‘On foreign policy grounds, I do not recommend that the President meet with this

³²⁰ Minutes, n.a., ‘Meeting with Jewish leaders,’ 6 July 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East Issues—Jewish Community Concerns O/A 6342,’ Eizenstat Files, Box 235, JCL; Memcon from Starr to the Files, ‘Meeting with Jewish Leadership,’ 7 July 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East: Miscellaneous Information, 7/77-9/79 [CF, O/A 712],’ Lipshutz Files, Box 35, JCL; and Handwritten notes, ‘Meeting with Jewish leaders,’ 6 July 1977, Folder 20, Box 3, SEP.

³²¹ Minutes, ‘Meeting with Jewish leaders,’ 6 July 1977.

³²² *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 8.

³²³ Quandt, *Camp David*, 67.

³²⁴ Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 196.

³²⁵ Memo from Quandt and Sick to Brzezinski, ‘Presidential Meeting with Arab-Americans,’ 27 July 1977, Folder: ‘ND16/CO1-7,’ WHCF, Subject, Box ND39, JCL.

³²⁶ Memo with attachment from Quandt and Sick to Brzezinski, ‘Presidential Meeting with Arab-Americans,’ 26 August 1977, Folder: ‘ND16/CO1-7,’ WHCF, Subject, Box ND39, JCL.

group,' he wrote. 'However, the Arab-American community is clearly beginning to organize itself and we will be hearing from them more often (and more effectively) in the future than in the past.'³²⁷

In November, Vance met with representatives of the National Association of Arab Americans and the Association of Arab-American University Graduates. The visitors emphasised the need to include the PLO in the negotiations. Carter himself met with Arab-Americans for the first time on 15 December, six months after he had first conferred with American Jewish groups. According to Terry, although the meeting was devoted to a range of issues, much attention was paid to the role of the Palestinians and the PLO in the peace process. Still, the meetings served mostly as an exchange of views.³²⁸

Begin visits Washington

Meantime, Begin was busy forming Israel's first non-Labour coalition. In presenting his government to the Knesset, Begin emphasised its willingness to go to Geneva, to negotiate with Israel's neighbours, and the Jewish people's 'eternal and inalienable right to the Land of Israel.'³²⁹ Begin believed that between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, there should be only Jewish rule. His view was consistent with that of his ideological mentor, Vladimir Jabotinsky, a militant Zionist who had articulated the concept that a Jewish state would need to construct a metaphorical 'iron wall' of defence to protect against its Arab neighbours.³³⁰

In Washington, however, Begin was largely an unknown entity. 'Begin is highly self-disciplined intellectually [and] he has an excellent memory and a sharp analytical mind,' Ambassador Samuel Lewis wrote to Vance ahead of the premier's arrival. 'He is preparing for his

³²⁷ Memo from Brzezinski to Jordan, 2 September 1977, 'Request for Meeting with Arab Americans,' Folder: 'ND16/CO1-7,' WHCF, Subject, Box ND39, JCL.

³²⁸ Terry, 'Carter Administration and the Palestinians,' 166-67.

³²⁹ Document 1, Begin's statement to the Knesset, 20 June 1977, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook3/pages/1%20statement%20to%20the%20%20knesse%20by%20prime%20minister%20begi.aspx>.

³³⁰ For the influence of Jabotinsky (1880-1940) on Begin: Lenni Brenner, 'Zionist-Revisionism: The Years of Fascism and Terror,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 1 (1983); and Ilan Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy, 1977-1983: Israel's Move to the Right* (London: Greenwood, 1987), 63-73.

meeting with the president by carefully reviewing and familiarizing himself in detail with the historical record, probably to include everything he can find that the president has written or said.³³¹ Lewis also reported on his meeting with Israeli opposition figures Shimon Peres and Abba Eban. ‘What neither can imagine is Begin’s ultimate agreement with either the US or the Arabs on a formula for final resolution of the West Bank and the Palestinian questions,’ he informed Vance starkly.³³²

Meanwhile, *Terror Out of Zion*, a book largely about the Irgun underground and its leader, Begin, in pre-independence Israel, was passed around the White House in an attempt to gain insight into Israel’s new leader.³³³ Brzezinski forwarded excerpts to Carter. He informed the president that it had been well received and the author was respected, thus ‘the book must be fairly close to the mark.’³³⁴

Still, the United States was slow to understand the fundamental difference between the foreign policy approach of Begin’s Likud government and its Labour predecessors. For Labour, policy toward the territories conquered in 1967 was governed by security concerns. But for Likud, these territories were viewed through an ideological lens.³³⁵ Indeed, the ‘cornerstone’ of Begin’s foreign policy was ‘his effort to maintain Israel’s control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. … On the West Bank his beliefs were a matter of theological faith.’³³⁶ In their initial meetings, Begin showed the Americans that he was much more adamant than the previous government in insisting that Israel retain the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Yet it took the administration time to appreciate fully this distinction.³³⁷

As it girded itself for potential strains in the relationship with Israel, the Carter administration kept close tabs on public opinion. It hoped a favourable domestic base would grant

³³¹ Cable from U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv (Lewis) to Vance, 1 July 1977, NLC-5-6-7-14-8.

³³² Cable from U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv (Lewis) to Vance, ‘Opposition Views of Begin and His Government,’ 17 July 1977, Folder: ‘Prime Minister Begin, 7/19-20/77,’ NSA, Brzezinski, VIP Visit, Box 6, JCL.

³³³ Quandt, *Camp David*, note 3, 66. See J. Bowyer Bell, *Terror out of Zion: The Fight for Israeli Independence*, Revised ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996).

³³⁴ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, ‘*Terror Out of Zion*,’ 10 June 1977, Folder: ‘Israel, 4-6/77,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 34, JCL.

³³⁵ Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 352.

³³⁶ Peleg, *Begin’s Foreign Policy*, 95-96.

³³⁷ Quandt, *Camp David*, 84.

the president sufficient political capital to push all sides, especially Israel, toward a settlement. In early July, Brzezinski brought to the president's attention a Gallup survey that found that American attitudes toward Israel were largely unchanged in the wake of Israel's elections.³³⁸

Then, just days before Begin's arrival, Caddell rushed the results of his firm's new survey on American Jewish attitudes toward Carter and Israel. The survey found no indication of diminished support in the population at large or among Jewish Americans for Israel as a result of Likud's victory. It found that Jewish respondents were 'always more definite in their opinions and as expected were more likely to be "hawkish" on territorial questions' than Americans in general. The key findings:

- A majority of Jewish Americans and Americans in general favoured a return of at least some territory held by since 1967, although the former group was more likely to endorse the concept of 'defensible borders.'
- A near majority of all Americans favoured a Palestinian homeland or a return of the West Bank to Jordan, but an overwhelming majority of Jewish Americans favoured its retention by Israel.
- On Jerusalem, most Americans favoured an international city, although most Jewish Americans favoured its retention by Israel.
- A majority of Americans were unsure of the impact of Likud's victory on peace prospects but by a wide margin Jewish Americans felt it would make no difference.
- Jewish Americans gave Carter a 78 percent job approval rating.

As Caddell summed up, 'Despite some disagreements on the Mid East, American Jews give President Carter high personal favorable and job approval marks, although not with the intensity that might be normally be expected' for a Democrat.³³⁹

³³⁸ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Information Items,' 1 July 1977, Folder: '7/1/77-7/10/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, President's Daily Report, Box 2, JCL.

³³⁹ Memo with attachments from Caddell to Carter, 15 July 1977, Folder: 'Middle East—[5/77-12/77],' Brzezinski Donated, Box 12, JCL.

Caddell's survey results underscore the consistency of American public support for Israel. More immediately, however, the figures suggest that despite some U.S. scepticism toward Likud, public opinion did not offer the White House a clear mandate for a 'confrontation' with Israel. Moreover, the disagreements on territorial and Palestinian issues foreshadowed fissures to come. Any strategy of 'confrontation' needed to be developed meticulously and pursued cautiously in order to keep domestic opinion behind the president. Carter would need to marshal his best powers of persuasion in order to retain – and, indeed, bolster – his support at home.

Ahead of Begin's arrival, 'some commentators and officials have been led to predict a tense confrontation, perhaps even worse,' *The New York Times* opined.³⁴⁰ Media speculation was rife about how pivotal the visit would be for peace hopes. For example, a Jerusalem-dated report asserted that Begin's visit would be 'one of the most important and eagerly anticipated meetings ever held between an American President and an Israeli leader.'³⁴¹ *The Washington Post*'s diplomatic correspondent reported the talks could 'determine the future of Carter's Middle East diplomacy'.³⁴²

Yet as Quandt wrote, '*For reasons that are still not clear*, Carter apparently concluded that the best way to deal with Begin was to avoid sharp controversy and be very polite on the personal level.'³⁴³ In a later work, Quandt indicates that the determination to keep the talks respectful stemmed from Carter's advisors' belief that Begin would become more rigid if pressured.³⁴⁴ However, the present account argues that Carter's sensitivity to domestic opinion also helps explain his determination to keep the talks with Begin cordial, and minimise differences in procedure and substance.

When Begin travelled to the United States he brought with him a much-anticipated 'secret plan' for negotiations. Begin preferred for an American-Israeli agreement to help bring the parties

³⁴⁰ 'Mr. Begin Comes to Washington,' *NYT*, 18 July 1977. Also see Ira Handelman and Yoav Peled op-ed, 'Why American Jews Must Offer Constructive Criticism of Israel,' *LAT*, 19 July 1977.

³⁴¹ H.D.S. Greenway, 'Stakes High In U.S. Visit By Begin,' *WP*, 12 July 1977.

³⁴² Don Oberdorder, 'Begin Arrives Carrying Secret Peace Proposals,' *WP*, 19 July 1977.

³⁴³ Quandt, *Camp David*, 78. Emphasis added.

³⁴⁴ _____, *Peace Process*, 184-85.

together, but thereafter only bilateral talks between Israel and each of its adversaries would do. He opposed a unified Arab delegation at Geneva, which would likely lead to negotiations on the Palestinians. Israel would negotiate with ‘accredited delegations of sovereign states’ – Egypt, Jordan and Syria, but not the Palestinians – without preconditions. The conference would open in a plenary but quickly break into three sets of bilateral negotiations between Israel and each of its neighbours. The conference would reconvene once the treaties were ready to be signed. If the Arab states insisted on a PLO role at Geneva, which Israel rejected, Israel offered instead the possibility for negotiations through ‘mixed commissions’ or ‘proximity talks’ established ‘through the good offices of the United States.’³⁴⁵

Begin’s emphasis on the ‘good offices’ of the United States was significant. He believed Washington should limit its role to bringing the parties together, but thereafter have little substantive input. Begin appeared to fear that U.S. positions would be closer to Arab stances. He also firmly believed that the United States should not introduce its own ideas into the negotiations. In this way, Israel’s new government departed from its predecessors, which tended to formulate policy in consultation with Washington. Begin did not feel that need. Still, his proposals offered a procedural starting point for the Americans.

Begin and Carter’s talks were more cordial than the president’s meetings with Rabin in March. Both sides avoided making controversial comments and, on the surface, got along well.³⁴⁶ Begin made clear to Carter that he would accept ‘no foreign sovereignty’ in the West Bank, but he also suggested Israel would consider a unified Arab delegation at Geneva, with some provisions for Israeli concerns, as a face-saving measure. Begin expressed adamant opposition to the establishment of a Palestinian ‘entity,’ which he believed would become a beachhead for Soviet expansionism and would pose a ‘mortal danger’ to Israel, and especially any negotiations with the PLO.

³⁴⁵ ‘Framework for the Peace-Making Process Between Israel and its Neighbors,’ 7 July 1977, Israel State Archives (ISA)/Record Group (RG) 43/A/4313/1. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/CF98E837-B502-4429-A601-C3899ACC5C80/0/Egypt03.pdf>.

³⁴⁶ However, in private Begin reportedly described the president as a ‘cream puff.’ Quandt interview, REP.

In turn, Carter outlined his proposed set of principles: a comprehensive peace through Geneva based on 242 and 338; an extensive peace, including open borders and free trade; Israeli withdrawal from territory to secure boundaries; and a Palestinian ‘entity’ would be created.³⁴⁷ Israel, however, was not prepared to accept the principles calling for Israeli withdrawal from all fronts, which included the West Bank, nor would it accede to a process that led to Palestinian self-determination. Carter also agreed to make a significant arms sale to Israel, allowing the Jewish state for the first time to build its own tanks with U.S. credits.³⁴⁸

Carter also somewhat ironically, given he was the prime example of speaking out, articulated his desire that the negotiations become less public. ‘All the nations and leaders involved in Geneva – including ourselves – you here, the Arab leaders, and, we too, have made strong statements in the past of a controversial nature,’ he told Begin. ‘I would hope that until Geneva convenes restraint will prevail in what we can accept and cannot accept.’³⁴⁹

News coverage³⁵⁰ and commentary³⁵¹ of the Begin-Carter talks and their aftermath was, moreover, generally positive. It shifted the locus of attention from Arab issues generally, and Palestinian issues specifically, to Israeli security concerns. It also showed that, not for the last time, Begin proved a master at controlling the agenda. Attention was focused on his willingness to negotiate at Geneva, rather than the many obstacles that remained between Israel’s vision and the visions held by the Arabs and the United States. Begin shifted the emphasis from issues of

³⁴⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 298.

³⁴⁸ The best account of these talks is in Quandt, *Camp David*, 77-84. Also see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 98-101; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 297-99; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 180-84. Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, who did not attend the talks, offers an Israeli account, Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 18-21.

³⁴⁹ Minutes, n.a., Meeting between Carter and Begin, 20 July 1977, ISA/RG 43/A/4349/4. Retrieved 18 September 2013,

<http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/C06F7A44-FD40-4A22-8108-0891E5A66D3F/0/Egypt06.pdf>. For the first meeting, see Document 52, Memcon, Begin and Carter, 19 July 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 336-353.

³⁵⁰ For examples of positive coverage, see: ‘Mid-East/Carter-Begin Meetings/Begin Plan,’ ‘ABC Evening News,’ 20 July 1977, VTNA 49590; John Maclean, ‘Begin’s peace package “encouraging,”’ Carter says,’ *CT*, 20 July 1977; ‘Mid-East/Carter-Begin Meeting/Conference Plan,’ ‘NBC Nightly News,’ 20 July 1977, VTNA 494579; Oswald Johnston, ‘Carter Reports Basis Is Laid for Mideast Talks,’ *LAT*, 21 July 1977; Bernard Gwertzman, ‘Carter Optimistic on Geneva Meeting After Hearing Begin,’ *NYT*, 21 July 1977; Dial Torgerson, ‘Had “Rapport” With Carter, Begin Says,’ *LAT*, 26 July 1977. As *NYT* diplomatic correspondent Gwertzman noted in a post-talks analysis, ‘The question of whether the Israeli Prime Minister would end up in a confrontation with President Carter was decisively answered in the negative ...’ Gwertzman, ‘Road to Geneva: Israeli Picks Risky Route,’ *NYT*, 22 July 1977.

³⁵¹ For commentary, see Editorial, ‘Begin’s Beginning,’ *WP*, 21 July 1977; Rowland Evans and Robert Novak column, ‘For Israel’s Begin, An Ironic Triumph,’ 25 July 1977; Editorial, ‘Fresh Start in the Middle East,’ *WSJ*, 26 July 1977; Nick Thimmesch column, ‘Begin left ‘em smiling in Washington – but about what?,’ *CT*, 27 July 1977.

substance toward ones of procedure. However, the U.S. team seemed to overlook, or at least underestimate, Begin's determination to keep the Palestinians out of the process and the West Bank under Israeli control.

Nevertheless, from a purely domestic level, the White House's political plan initially appeared to be working. The administration had acted quickly to assuage the concerns of the influential Jewish community after the strains of June. Carter had chosen a conciliatory, rather than confrontational, approach toward Begin and adopted a conservative public posture. In his public comments, the president emphasised points of agreement, such as the determination to go to Geneva, rather than points of divergence, especially Palestinian and West Bank issues. Nevertheless, a poll conducted after Begin's visit found that half of respondents did not think that Carter would be successful in bringing peace to the Middle East.³⁵²

For Carter, any 'feelings of optimism had a short life.'³⁵³ The day after Begin's return to Israel, his cabinet conferred legal status on three settlements established under the preceding government.³⁵⁴ That appeared to have a major impact on the administration. The State Department responded that it was 'deeply disappointed,' that the settlements were 'not ... contrary to the Fourth Geneva Convention' and that their establishment 'constitutes an obstacle to progress in the peace making process.'³⁵⁵

Raising the ante, Carter then became the first president to say publicly that the 'settlements in the occupied territories' constituted an 'illegal action.' Although the three previous administrations had maintained the same position, Presidents Johnson, Nixon and Ford had never

³⁵² Twenty-eight percent believed Carter would be successful. CBS News/NYT Poll, 19-25 July 1977, Roper Center.

³⁵³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 299.

³⁵⁴ Document 23, Government statement on settlements, 26 July 1977. IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 18 September 2013,

<http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/23%20Government%20statement%20on%20recognition%20of%20three%20se.aspx>

³⁵⁵ Document 24, U.S. reaction to Israeli settlements announcement, 26 July 1977, *ibid*. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/24%20US%20reaction%20to%20Israeli%20settlements%20announcement.aspx>. The following year, the State Department's legal advisor articulated the U.S. position thusly: 'Territory coming under the control of a belligerent occupant does not thereby become its sovereign territory. ... While Israel may undertake, in the occupied territories, actions necessary to meet its military needs and to provide for orderly government during the occupation ... the civilian settlements in those territories is inconsistent with international law.' Letter from Hansell to Fraser and Hamilton, 21 April 1978, Folder: 'Middle East: Palestine, 1977-1978,' Box 160, LHP.

uttered the words publicly, adding to the chagrin of Israel and its supporters. Yet Carter also conceded that he ‘did not think about talking to him (Begin) concerning the granting of legal status to those settlements.’³⁵⁶ That ‘oversight,’ among other slipups, again contributed to the image of a president out of his depth with delicate, and complex, issues.³⁵⁷ Moreover, in an illustration of his irritation, Carter noted in his diary the following week that he felt the Arab leaders wanted ‘peace’ but complained the ‘Israelis don’t want a settlement.’³⁵⁸ These two intertwined issues – disagreements over Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and settlements – continually caused profound strains in the American-Israeli relationship throughout the Carter years.

Conclusion

Despite its careful political preparation in the early summer, the White House failed to appreciate the degree to which PLO inclusion in the negotiations, the establishment of a Palestinian ‘entity’ and territorial withdrawal were anathema to Israel’s new government. Yet Carter’s initial meetings with Begin had provided ample evidence that the Israeli premier had no intention to compromise on those issues. In Carter’s drive for cordiality in his relationship with Begin and his overwhelming focus on reconvening Geneva, the president glossed over these significant substantive differences.

By mid-summer 1977, the White House believed it had made inroads politically with American Jewry and had developed a plan of action going forward. Carter also reined in his public remarks, while the administration put other figures forward, most notably Mondale, to act as spokesmen for U.S. policy. The president worked to improve the process of consultation with influential communities on Arab-Israeli issues, and recognised the need to develop a domestic strategy to go hand-in-hand with its diplomacy. Yet the fact that it took nearly six months into his

³⁵⁶ ‘The President’s News Conference,’ 29 July 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II*, 1366-74. The next day, Carter said it was ‘wrong’ for Israel ‘to insinuate that they are legal.’ ‘Question-and-Answer,’ 30 July 1977, *ibid.*, 1387-1395.

³⁵⁷ Hedrick Smith analysis, ‘A President Under Strain,’ *NYT*, 29 July 1977.

³⁵⁸ 5 August 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 78.

presidency to devise such a plan indicates the president had launched his diplomacy without sufficiently appreciating how deeply the negotiations would impact his standing at home.

Jordan's memo in June detailed a plan that was adhered to with alternately greater and lesser intensity as Carter's presidency proceeded. It did not determine all subsequent policy decisions. But it nevertheless provides invaluable insight into how a young administration found its way around a complicated policy. The advice set forth in the document shows the operative assumptions of Carter and his top political aides, and informed their future gestures toward generating domestic support for their Middle East policy.

This period demonstrated that when mobilised, the organised American Jewish community could pressure effectively the administration and compel it to alter its tactics, if not its objectives. It also helped establish the domestic constraints within which Carter could work. These limits were imposed partly by administration concerns of alienating the American Jewish community, but they extended beyond that. Protests from Israel's U.S. supporters over the administration's tactics and objectives in Arab-Israeli diplomacy were reflected negatively in the media. Consequently, these noisy domestic debates contributed to the climate of elite criticism of Carter as a president and statesman.

Analysis of this period provides clues to the administration's subsequent political woes. As July came to a close, Carter likely believed he had regained much of his political equilibrium vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli dispute. Now, he could afford to take greater political risks, including reaching out to the PLO. However, in retrospect, Carter only ever had shallow domestic support for his policy. He had not taken the time to cultivate domestic backing, but seemed to believe that his open style could substitute for dissatisfaction over policy substance. The president failed to consolidate his domestic base and generate fresh momentum before undertaking, from August to October 1977, a political course that proved fatal for his hopes of reconvening Geneva.

Chapter Three – Geneva Roadblock: Fallout from the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué

Introduction

Jimmy Carter had a rude awakening on his 53rd birthday. Despite the administration's summer efforts, Carter found himself on 1 October 1977 again stuck in the nexus between domestic politics and foreign policy. On that day, Washington and Moscow issued the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué on the Middle East, in which the Geneva co-chairmen set forth the principles they believed necessary to convene the conference before the end of the year.³⁵⁹ The Americans and Soviets intended it as a procedural document, in which the rivals outlined their points of agreement.

Yet the political opposition the statement provoked caught the Carter administration flat-footed. Critics were incensed for three reasons. First, anti-Soviet U.S. hardliners felt the Carter administration had invited Washington's global rival into a position of influence in a negotiating process from which it had been recently excluded. Next, the White House and Kremlin appeared to be applying their combined influence to pressure regional actors toward a settlement. Finally, the statement's reference to the 'legitimate rights of the Palestinian people' outraged Israel and its supporters because it mirrored language used by the PLO in demanding the establishment of a Palestinian state.

For Carter, however, the communiqué merely represented the obvious: the Soviet role as Geneva co-chairman had to be acknowledged and the Palestinian issue needed to be addressed. 'When it's confronted frankly, the screams arise immediately,' he observed in his diary.³⁶⁰

The U.S.-Soviet statement and its backlash had immense significance for the development of Carter's approach toward Arab-Israeli peace. The episode effectively terminated the American-led drive toward a comprehensive settlement through Geneva. Moreover, taken together, the Carter administration's gestures toward involving the PLO and the Soviets between August and October 1977 constituted a third rail in American domestic discourse on foreign policy; touching it had

³⁵⁹ 'U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué on the Middle East,' *Department of State Bulletin* (hereafter DSB), 7 November 1977, 639-640.

³⁶⁰ 3 October 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 111.

deleterious consequences for Carter's standing at home. With the communiqué politically artless and diplomatically suspect, Carter came out a loser on both fronts.

This chapter argues that the administration's failure to foresee the troubled diplomatic and political course it was treading represented a searing indictment of its operational acuity. It had just expended considerable effort devising a political plan to match its diplomatic initiative, yet it now appeared to stumble blindly into its predicament. As the present chapter demonstrates, the administration's policymaking changed immediately after the episode to include greater input from the president's political staff.

This chapter does not argue that a Geneva Conference would have been held in the absence of domestic pressure on Carter. Unquestionably, the diplomatic issues – especially the nature of Palestinian participation, the launching of new Jewish settlements in the West Bank and the Soviet role – posed considerable obstacles. Nevertheless, domestic politics played a role – a contributory but not a determinative one – in ending the American drive toward gathering the parties together at Geneva. Moreover, the president's frank admissions to Arab and Israeli officials alike of his domestic constraints undermined their confidence in Carter as a powerbroker and enabled regional actors to tilt events toward their purposes.

In Quandt's telling, Carter gave 'clear priority to domestic political concerns' after the joint communiqué by issuing the U.S.-Israeli Working Paper in order to quell the uproar. However, Quandt's concern is the policymaking process, not specifically the role of the president. His work is replete with references to 'domestic politics,' but he resists analysis of what that means.³⁶¹

Khalidi locates the communiqué episode within the broad arc of U.S. policy toward the Palestinians. He argues the Carter administration genuinely sought a new approach toward the dispute. However, the joint communiqué episode symbolised the societal and systemic constraints it faced, and suspicion of the PLO and antipathy toward the Soviets gravely injured Carter's effort.³⁶²

³⁶¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 96-134. Bard, Spiegel and Stein reach similar conclusions: Bard, *Water's Edge and Beyond*, 220-24; Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 338-40; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 217-18.

³⁶² Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, 4-7.

The joint communiqué represented the zenith of American-Soviet cooperation during the Carter years. Subsequently, its effective abnegation by the United States also spelled the end of an effort toward a multilateral solution in the Arab-Israeli conflict, at least until the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference. U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis contends that the communiqué served as an ‘unintended success’ because its fallout caused the final exclusion of the Soviets from the Middle East negotiating process and indirectly led to Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem, Camp David and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.³⁶³ Saiveiz concludes that the net regional effect of the joint communiqué fallout was to shift U.S.-Soviet rivalry in the Middle East from the Arab-Israeli dispute toward the Persian Gulf and eventually Afghanistan.³⁶⁴

After a relatively quiet previous couple of months, the negotiations again became extremely public, with much of it playing out through the media. Using a content analysis of American network television news coverage, Kern contends that Carter was outmanoeuvred by Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan’s skilful use of media diplomacy. Israeli officials successfully presented their side without major challenge from the networks. Carter, on the other hand, could not reconcile the image of himself he was trying to project (of the leader of an ‘open, honest administration’) with that offered in the media (an ‘inconstant, waffling president’).³⁶⁵ Separately, Cohen contends Israel successfully resisted the power of the United States because it felt that its interests were gravely imperilled by the communiqué and thus no benefit offered by Washington could offset the perceived existential threat.³⁶⁶

The present account is unique in marshalling the growing amount of documentary material available to offer a narrative approach to the episode. Matched with contemporaneous news reports and opinion polls, the new evidence underscores how the Carter administration should have paid

³⁶³ Samuel Lewis, ‘Soviet and American Attitudes toward the Arab-Israeli Peace Process,’ in *The Soviet-American Competition in the Middle East*, ed. Steven Spiegel, Mark Heller, and Jacob Goldberg (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1988).

³⁶⁴ Carol Saiveiz, ‘Superpower Competition in the Middle East and the Collapse of Détente,’ in *The Fall of Détente: Soviet-American Relations during the Carter Years*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1997).

³⁶⁵ Montague Kern, *Television and Middle East Diplomacy: President Carter’s Fall 1977 Peace Initiative*, 1st ed. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, 1983), 27.

³⁶⁶ Raymond Cohen, ‘Israel and the Soviet-American Statement of October 1, 1977: The Limits of Patron-Client Influence,’ *Orbis* 22, no. 3 (1978).

greater heed to the potential fallout not just of the communiqué's sudden announcement, but also of Carter's entire diplomatic course. This study is again focused on Carter's central role in policymaking and the challenges faced by a figure who tried simultaneously to perform the roles of politician and mediator.

Reaching out to the PLO

By August, momentum seemed to be gathering toward Geneva. Having now met all the regional actors, Washington accelerated its efforts. The end of 1977 was looming, and all wanted progress before the year finished.

Despite Israeli objections, the United States still sought a way to include Palestinians in Geneva, and the PLO represented their main organisational body. The Arab parties all agreed on the need for a Palestinian role, although they differed on its precise nature. From the Carter administration's standpoint, however, direct communications could not be held unless the PLO met minimum conditions: acceptance of 242 and recognition of Israel. Otherwise, Washington would not risk violating its Sinai II pledge to Israel regarding the PLO. Nonetheless, in pursuing this course, the Carter administration underestimated Begin's hostility to the PLO.

On 26 July, a PLO message reached the White House. It suggested the group was willing to live in peace with Israel, and that Fatah leader Yasser Arafat would make clear as such in both public comments and private commitments. In return, the PLO wanted the United States to commit to the establishment of a Palestinian 'state unit entity,' possibly linked to Jordan. Carter noted on the message: 'If PLO publicly and privately meets minimum requirement of Kissinger-Israeli agreement, we will begin discussions with them. Get message to them.'³⁶⁷

Secretary of State Cyrus Vance set off in early August for Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria.³⁶⁸ His trip was in large measure intended to work out a formula for direct

³⁶⁷ Document 51, Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Message from Arafat,' n.d. [circa 19 July 1977], *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 335-36

³⁶⁸ For records of Vance's trip see Documents 63-92, *ibid.*, 376-476.

American-PLO contacts.³⁶⁹ Carter instructed Vance to bring with him a revised set of five American principles for the negotiations, as well as four possible ways in which the Palestinians could participate in Geneva. Carter told Vance to keep the Soviets informed of U.S. moves and to consider arranging for discussions with the PLO if the group met American conditions.³⁷⁰

Meanwhile, Carter was souring on Menachem Begin – over the prime minister’s positions on negotiations, Israel’s settlements and military incursions into Lebanon. In an interview, Carter said if any Middle Eastern leader found that his position ‘is in direct contravention to the position of all the other parties involved including ourselves and the Soviet Union … (then) there would be a great impetus on that leader to conform with the overwhelming opinion.’³⁷¹ Carter’s comments were clearly aimed toward Israel’s new premier.

Upon receiving Vance’s reports while the latter was still in the region, Carter concluded in his diary that Israel would be ‘adamant against any sort of progress’ and would probably ‘stir up trouble in Lebanon, with the Palestinians, Syrians, with Arabs in general.’³⁷² He returned to that theme upon receiving Vance’s full post-trip report on 14 August. ‘The Israelis are going to be typically recalcitrant, but the more we go public with a reasonable proposition the more difficult it will be for them not to make an effort,’ the president wrote.³⁷³

During Vance’s talks in the Middle East, he was led to believe the PLO was close to adjusting its stance on 242. He also informed Israel that Washington did not accept the ‘legitimacy’ of its settlements.³⁷⁴ In order to incentivise the PLO, Vance recommended that Carter speak publicly about Washington’s willingness to deal with the group if it accepted 242.³⁷⁵

The president did so on 8 August. He and the reporters posing questions to him used the terms ‘PLO’ and ‘Palestinians’ interchangeably. ‘The biggest obstacle (to convening Geneva in

³⁶⁹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 187-90.

³⁷⁰ Quandt, *Camp David*, 86-87.

³⁷¹ Document 28, Interview with Carter in *Time*, 1 August 1977, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/28%20Interview%20with%20President%20Carter-%20Time%20Magazine-.aspx>.

³⁷² 5 August 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 78.

³⁷³ 14 August 1977, *ibid.*, 83.

³⁷⁴ Memo from Sick to Brzezinski, ‘Summary of Vance’s Middle East Trip,’ 12 August 1977, NLC-SAFE 16-A-13-18-1-2.

³⁷⁵ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 186.

October) that we've detected ... is whether or not the Palestinians would participate in the discussions,' the president said. If the PLO accepted 242 and 338, he continued, that could facilitate its participation in Geneva. 'We've not had any direct conversations with them ... (but) we have a means to contact them and to exchange ideas with them indirectly,' Carter added.³⁷⁶

Generally, Carter attempted to show compassion for the Palestinians' plight. On 10 August, he said that any settlement required 'some solution to the question of Palestinian refugees who have been forced out of their homes and who want to have some fair treatment'.³⁷⁷ Still, the following day, Carter was informed that the PLO leadership remained divided on 242 and recognition of Israel. These issues were the subjects of intense debate within the PLO's inner circle.³⁷⁸

These developments alarmed Israel's American supporters. Alexander Schindler of the Presidents' Conference immediately visited Israel, where he 'assured' Begin 'that U.S. Jewry would mobilize public protests against the Carter Administration's willingness to deal with the PLO' in the event the group complied with U.S. terms. Upon returning, Schindler and colleague Yehuda Hellman handed a letter of complaint directly to Carter, with whom they met on 26 August.³⁷⁹ Carter responded immediately to Schindler's concerns. His position toward the PLO was 'consistent with commitments previously made voluntarily to the Israeli government, with private and public statements made to present leaders in the Middle East, and with my personal beliefs and hopes for permanent peace,' Carter assured Schindler.³⁸⁰

Regardless, from the U.S. standpoint, the outcome of Vance's August trip was mixed. On the one hand, all sides began to develop substantive ideas, while Egypt and Israel had both agreed to draw up draft peace treaties for negotiation. On the other hand, no agreement had been reached

³⁷⁶ 'Plains, Georgia,' 8 August 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II*, 1459-1460.

³⁷⁷ 'ABC News Interview,' 10 August 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II*, 1467-1473.

³⁷⁸ Memo from Hyland to Carter, 'Information Items,' 11 August 1977, Folder: '8/11/77-8/20/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, President's Daily Report, Box 3, JCL. This was also reflected in news leaks and reports. For example: John Maclean, 'Change in PLO policy seen; would pave way for talks,' *CT*, 9 August 1977; Oswald Johnston, 'PLO on Verge of Policy Shift, Vance Is Told,' *LAT*, 9 August 1977.

³⁷⁹ *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 11-12.

³⁸⁰ Letter from Carter to Schindler, 26 August 1977, Folder: 'ND16/CO 1-7 7/16/77-8/31/77,' WHCF, Subject, Box FO-39, JCL; and Letter from Schindler to Carter, *ibid*.

on PLO representation at Geneva.³⁸¹ Washington favoured including a unified Arab delegation that included Palestinians, but Israel insisted it would only accept non-PLO Palestinians as part of Jordan's national delegation. Other Arabs, however, wanted PLO representation in some form.³⁸²

Publicly, the PLO called for the United States to 'take the initiative ... by launching talks with the Palestinians, who represent the root of the Middle East conflict.'³⁸³ However, the group continually rejected the minimum U.S. requirements for direct contact. At a meeting of the PLO's Palestinian Central Council in August, the group voted 11-4 against accepting a revised formulation of 242 to help facilitate participation in Geneva.³⁸⁴ It claimed Washington was 'submitting to Zionist pressure' by not talking directly to the PLO. 'The Human Rights issue of President Carter is only for local and international consumption and stops where politics and US interests start,' it added. The PLO dismissed 242 as 'outdated.'³⁸⁵

Brzezinski informed Carter that the result was a victory for the 'rejectionists' and a defeat for the 'moderates.' However, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy had informed the Americans that Arafat, considered by the United States to be a 'moderate,' sought clarification on what Washington meant by a Palestinian 'homeland' or 'entity.'³⁸⁶ Carter's public comments had piqued Arafat's interest, it seemed. Neither side had yet decided to give up completely the possibility of some agreement.

Meanwhile, the administration's latest diplomatic moves caused domestic problems for Carter – if not with the public at large, certainly with the media and elite opinion. For example, the disputes between Israel and the United States over the procedures for Geneva as well as Israeli settlements reflected poorly on the White House.³⁸⁷ Conservative commentators, such as columnists

³⁸¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 84-95.

³⁸² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 104.

³⁸³ 'Palestine is the Core' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 11 (11 August 1977), 3, IPS.

³⁸⁴ 'Abu Lutf Declaration on "242,"' WAFA, 27 August 1977, IPS. U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts said he drafted the U.S. compromise declaration, which the PLO's Central Council rejected. Eilts interview, ADST

³⁸⁵ 'The Palestinian People and 242' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 12 (1 September 1977), 3, IPS.

³⁸⁶ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Information Items,' 27 August 1977, Folder: '8/21/77-8/31/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, President's Daily Report, Box 3, JCL.

³⁸⁷ Kern, *Television and Middle East Diplomacy*, 10-12.

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, criticised Carter's approach as consisting of 'intricate stratagems that seem preposterous for normal diplomacy.'³⁸⁸

Additionally, the media largely characterised Vance's August Middle East trip negatively.³⁸⁹ Furthermore, reporting and analysis of the administration's possible work with the PLO was replete with references to impending problems between Washington and Jerusalem.³⁹⁰ After a meeting of Carter's top advisors on the Middle East – Defense Secretary Harold Brown, Brzezinski, Vice President Mondale, Press Secretary Jody Powell and Vance – the national security advisor felt that both the president and secretary of state had become 'extremely tough-minded' toward Israel and were prepared for a confrontation.³⁹¹ However, editorial opinion suggested the time was ripe for quiet Middle East diplomacy, carefully prepared.³⁹²

Meanwhile, however, the domestic constraints on his foreign policy irked the detail-oriented president. 'Although we've done a lot of things, we're not moving fast enough to suit me ...' Carter wrote in his diary. 'It would be easier if I was a dictator and didn't have to worry about Congress or other foreign leaders who don't agree with us.'³⁹³

In early August, Carter had a contentious meeting with the leaders of the anti-Soviet, pro-Israel Committee on the Present Danger.³⁹⁴ The meeting was focused on the administration's policy toward the Soviet Union and arms control, but nonetheless underscored the extraordinary access enjoyed by the group. According to pre-meeting talking points, Eugene Rostow would stress that the CPD's 'purpose is to be helpful in promoting a disciplined and responsible public discussion of

³⁸⁸ Evans and Novak column, 'Carter's Maneuver To Bring in the PLO,' *WP*, 11 August 1977.

³⁸⁹ Howard Smith, 'Commentary (Vance's Failures),' 'ABC Evening News,' 15 August 1977, VTNA 49908; Joseph Kraft column, 'Vance Comes Home Empty-Handed – Again,' *WP*, 16 August 1977; 'Washington Wire,' *WSJ*, 19 August 1977; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 104.

³⁹⁰ For example, Robert Keatley, 'U.S. Move for Direct Dealings With PLO Could Bring a Confrontation With Israel,' *WSJ*, 9 August 1977; Terence Smith analysis, 'The Special Relationship Is Intact but Under Strain,' *NYT*, 28 August 1977.

³⁹¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 105-06.

³⁹² For example: Editorial, 'The Dizzy Pace in the Middle East,' *NYT*, 10 August 1977; Editorial, 'A time for words, not deeds,' *CT*, 23 August 1977.

³⁹³ 10 August 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 81.

³⁹⁴ An account of the secret meeting sympathetic to the CPD leaked to Evans and Novak. Evans and Novak column, 'A Touchy Carter: Shades Of Former Presidents?' *WP*, 13 August 1977.

the issues as we perceive them.³⁹⁵ Afterward, Carter asked for regular meeting with the group so he could 'have our advice and, where we could give it, our support' on aspects of 'foreign and defense policy,' according to the CPD.³⁹⁶ In his diary, Carter called it simply 'an unpleasant meeting.'³⁹⁷

This meeting did not directly focus on the Arab-Israeli dispute, but it demonstrated one of the many domestic pressures Carter faced over his foreign policy. It also showed the tremendous influence enjoyed by the CPD, whose co-founder Paul Nitze believed the Middle East to be the 'strategic fulcrum' in the U.S.-Soviet rivalry.³⁹⁸ For the neoconservative-led CPD, U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union was intertwined with its position in the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Still, Carter's public ratings remained relatively strong. In September a Roper poll found the president's approval ratings stood at 66 percent, similar to his standing at the start of his term, and higher than the two succeeding Democratic presidents at the same time. 'One explanation by experts is that we hadn't backed down on any of the hotly disputed issues,' Carter wrote in his diary notes.³⁹⁹ However, the same propensity Carter had for agitating on controversial issues alienated elite opinion, which in turn led to a gradual erosion of his broad public support and thus his political mandate.

Secret U.S. emissary to Arafat

That month, the United States also launched a fresh bid to open a dialogue with the PLO. On 6 September, Brzezinski met with Landrum Bolling, an American educator who was known to Arafat and trusted by Carter, to brief him on instructions for a meeting with the Palestinian leader. Bolling was to stress that he was acting in a private capacity, but that he could 'indicate that he has some personal and direct knowledge of the predispositions of the highest level policy makers in the

³⁹⁵ 'Talking Points for Opening Statement by E.V. Rostow, Chairman of the Executive Committee, at a Meeting with President Carter,' 4 August 1977, Folder 5, Box 70, Paul Nitze Papers (hereafter PNP), LOC.

³⁹⁶ Letter from Rostow to the CPD Executive Committee, 10 August 1977, Folder 5, Box 70, PNP.

³⁹⁷ In the notes accompanying this entry, Carter wrote that the CPD 'created serious problems for me whenever we attempted to do anything that related even remotely to a weapons system, the Soviet Union, Cuba, China, or Israel.' 4 August 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 76-77.

³⁹⁸ Letter from Nitze to Brzezinski, 26 March 1976, Folder 5, Box 70, PNP.

³⁹⁹ 12 September 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 96-97. However, Gallup put his approval rating lower – at 54 percent. Gallup Poll (AIPO), 9-12 September 1977, Roper Center.

US.' Bolling was to emphasise the Americans' sense of urgency: 'Arafat should see that a dialogue with the US would transform his position. Timing is essential. If he holds out too long, events may pass him by.' Ultimately, Carter's message to Arafat came down to this: Washington would agree to meet with the PLO if the group accepted 242 with a statement of reservation about its inadequacy at addressing the Palestinian question.⁴⁰⁰ Quandt believes that had Arafat and the PLO been prepared to accept 242 – even with reservations⁴⁰¹ – the United States 'would have tried to make the case that they should be allowed into the diplomatic arena.'⁴⁰² That was not to be.⁴⁰³

Nevertheless, Arafat heralded as a 'positive step'⁴⁰⁴ the State Department's 12 September statement that 'the Palestinians must be involved in the peacemaking process' at Geneva for the 'Palestinian question to be solved.'⁴⁰⁵ WAFA also praised it: 'If peace begins in Palestine, so then, peace cannot be reached except with the Palestinians and the achievement of their legitimate rights in Palestine.'⁴⁰⁶ Yet the group's refusal to accept or modify its position on 242 largely scuttled chances of an imminent PLO role in the negotiations.

The American statement on the Palestinians displeased Israel. Dayan delivered a 'vehement protest' to Ambassador Lewis after it was issued. Still, Brzezinski noted that despite Israel's objections, Begin's government had 'sought to avoid ... any semblance of confrontation with the U.S.' The premier, in fact, had said in an interview that the statement did not represent a 'disaster' in the relationship because every party had a right to express its opinion.⁴⁰⁷ AIPAC also criticised the statement, believing it insinuated further courtship of the PLO.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁰ Notes of Brzezinski-Bolling meeting, 6 September 1977. Also see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 105; Quandt, *Camp David*, 100-04.

⁴⁰¹ The PLO's objection to 242 was that it only referred to Palestinians as 'refugees,' rather than as a people with national rights. 'Abu Lutf Declaration on "242,"' WAFA, 27 August 1977, IPS.

⁴⁰² Quandt correspondence.

⁴⁰³ Whatever his own reservations, Arafat did not gain majority PLO support for the provisions. Document 103, Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, 'Full set of notes from Landrum Bolling,' 19 September 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 498-517.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Arafat Comments on US State Department Statement,' WAFA, 13 September 1977, IPS.

⁴⁰⁵ 'Status of Palestinians in Peace Negotiations,' *DSB*, 11 October 1977, 463.

⁴⁰⁶ 'Editorial: No Peace Without Legitimate Palestinian Rights,' WAFA, 13 September 1977, IPS.

⁴⁰⁷ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Information Items,' 15 September 1977, Folder: '9/1-77-9/15/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, President's Daily Report, Box 3, JCL.

⁴⁰⁸ 'Palestinian Representation,' *NER*, XXI: 37, 14 September 1977.

The president shrugged off the criticism. Vance informed Carter that the United States had told Israel that it issued the statement merely to express its position, which was necessary because in Washington's view, 'the Israeli Government had been leaking every day its negotiating strategy, which inevitably created pressures for us to clarify our views.' Carter responded: 'The statement was OK.'⁴⁰⁹ Informed later by Vance of 'cries of distress' from Congress over the call for a Palestinian role, Carter replied simply: 'So be it.'⁴¹⁰

Of this frustrating period for U.S. diplomacy Brzezinski later observed, 'Our inability to modify PLO demands was matched by our impotence in stopping new settlements.'⁴¹¹ Carter noted the consensus in a 16 September foreign policy breakfast was that 'the Israelis are deliberately trying to block an agreement by creating disturbances in Lebanon, being adamant on Palestinian representation, and supporting their settlements.'⁴¹²

However, the domestic criticism Carter's outreach on the Palestinian issue generated seemed to be taking a toll on the president. During a question-and-answer session, he became defensive when a journalist asked about his 'embracement' of the PLO. 'With all due respect, that's one of the most distorted assessments of my own policy that I've ever heard,' the president replied. 'I've never endorsed the PLO. Our Government has had no communication, at all, directly with the PLO. ... We have never called on the PLO to be part of the future negotiations.' Carter carefully spelled out the principles he believed necessary to lead to peace, including a Palestinian 'entity,' probably 'associated' with Jordan. 'We are not just an uninterested intermediary or mediator,' he added. 'Our country has a direct, substantial interest in a permanent peace in the Middle East.'⁴¹³

Secret Egyptian-Israeli contacts

Israel submitted its first draft peace plan to the United States on 2 September. In his cover letter, Dayan informed Vance that Israel believed its draft applicable to peace with Egypt and could

⁴⁰⁹ Memo from Vance to Carter, 12 September 1977, NLC-12-12-7-6.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 17 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-0.

⁴¹¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 105.

⁴¹² 16 September 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 99.

⁴¹³ 'Interview with the President,' 16 September 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II*, 1615-1624.

serve as the basis for bilateral negotiations with Jordan, Syria and possibly Lebanon. Its emphasis was on security and territory, but it left the borders and settlements in Sinai – the recovery of which was Sadat's absolute priority – vague. 'In seeking a solution to the outstanding problems of territorial delimitation, the partition should be guided by the general principle that the respective national and security interests of all of them should be equally taken into account,' Dayan wrote. The Palestinians were not mentioned by name, but he noted that 'a comprehensive peace settlement must also make full provisions for the refugees, both Arabs and Jewish.'⁴¹⁴ Jordan and Syria also later submitted draft principles for negotiation.⁴¹⁵

Regardless, both Egypt and Israel remained uneasy about Washington's Geneva orientation, and began considering ways to bypass U.S. mediation.⁴¹⁶ Israel sought to deal directly with Egypt because it feared Washington's pressure to conclude a comprehensive peace deal through Geneva might jeopardise its security and include a role for the PLO. Egypt was deeply sceptical of the hard bargaining that the United States envisioned at Geneva because it did not want its negotiating options limited by other Arab states, particularly Syria.⁴¹⁷

In late August, Begin visited Romanian President Nicholae Ceausescu, a friend of Sadat's, to convey his interest in peace with Egypt. Ceausescu passed the message to Egypt's president. In doing this, Israel was responding to signals emanating from Cairo earlier in 1977 about direct contacts.⁴¹⁸ Next, Moshe Dayan travelled to Morocco, where he asked King Hassan II to help facilitate a parley with Egypt. For the trip, Dayan, the famous one-eyed soldier-statesman, was disguised in makeup, the fake 'mane of a beatnik,' a 'mustache of a dandy' and large sunglasses.⁴¹⁹

Hassan accordingly set up the meeting. On 16 September, Sadat bypassed his own foreign ministry and sent Deputy Prime Minister Hassan Tuhami to confer with Dayan in Morocco. The talks remained general, but both sides established their willingness to negotiate directly. Dayan and

⁴¹⁴ Letter from Dayan to Vance, 2 September 1977, ISA/RG 43/A/4313/3. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/2E42A22C-3D17-4FE5-B096-98BA2CBDAB1A/0/Egypt07.pdf>.

⁴¹⁵ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 186.

⁴¹⁶ Dayan also met secretly with Jordan's King Hussein in London that summer, but concluded he was unprepared to negotiate directly with Israel in any substance. Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 35-37.

⁴¹⁷ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 28.

⁴¹⁸ Anwar el Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (London: Collins, 1978), 306-07; Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 358.

⁴¹⁹ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 38.

Tuhami also agreed to exchange draft treaties and set up another meeting. According to Israel's account, Tuhami did not want the United States to know of the Egyptian-Israeli contacts. If an understanding were reached, then 'it should be made out as if our agreement was the Americans' initiative, and then it should be handled as an American peace effort, as a "Face Saving" operation.'⁴²⁰

Both Egypt and Israel were content to sidestep the United States at this phase in order to prod the negotiations toward a course more to their liking. Begin, in particular, only ever wanted bilateral negotiations – first with Egypt, then Syria and finally Jordan. He appeared willing to consider Geneva to appease Washington, but it was not his preference.⁴²¹ He also felt U.S. policy under Carter was fundamentally pro-Palestinian. Begin's diplomacy at this stage seemed predicated on the premise that the best way for the West Bank to remain under total Israeli control was to remove Egypt from the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴²² Sadat, for his part, was most interested in regaining Sinai and feared Syria's potential as a spoiler if Geneva proved to be a substantive negotiating forum; the Soviet role as co-chair also worried him. At the appropriate moment, however, both Cairo and Jerusalem would again seek U.S. influence to help secure an agreement.⁴²³

Involving the Soviets

Despite their rivalries, Washington and Moscow needed to work together at some point in order to act as Geneva co-conveners. According to Vance, he and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko first discussed the possibility of issuing a joint communiqué in May.⁴²⁴ Carter's penchant

⁴²⁰ 'Main Points from the Meeting of Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan with Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister Hassan Tuhami in Rabat,' 17 September 1977, ISA/RG 43/A/4313/4. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/7BFFC442-E877-4377-989E-DE3ED63389AA/0/Egypt12.pdf>. Also see: Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 38-54; Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process, 1977-1982: In Search of Legitimacy for Peace* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 23-28. The next week, Dayan informed Vance of the secret meeting. Quandt, *Camp David*, 111.

⁴²¹ Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 358.

⁴²² Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy*, 99.

⁴²³ In this regard, it is worth noting the conventional wisdom on the U.S. role in Arab-Israeli negotiations as relayed to the incoming administration: 'Our policy has been based on the belief that the gap between the two sides is so wide that, if left to their own devices, the Arabs and Israelis could not even initiate negotiations looking toward a settlement of the dispute between them.' Intelligence assessment, n.a. (CIA), 'Arab-Israeli Dispute,' 18 January 1977, NLC-17-111-6-2-2.

⁴²⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 191.

for going on the record with new, apparently improvised diplomatic formulations during his first year in office did not make the painstaking process of finding areas of agreement any easier. Carter later wrote that he and his aides ‘were determined that *none of my previous public statements or private commitments could be changed* as we worked out with the Soviets the rules for commencing the peace talks.’⁴²⁵

As with so much of the Geneva preparations, the difficulty for U.S. diplomacy was in striking the balance between procedure and substance. While the Soviets had been present at the 1973 conference, subsequent American diplomacy excluded them from the Kissinger-brokered disengagement agreements. Now the White House needed to determine to what extent it should attempt to work with the Kremlin on substance, or whether their respective roles as co-chairmen would be largely procedural and ceremonial, providing cover for behind-the-scenes talks.

U.S. intelligence experts expressed scepticism about Soviet motives. A CIA assessment in June concluded Moscow wanted to reconvene Geneva in order to demonstrate that it still played a central role in Arab-Israeli negotiations. However, it also believed that Moscow had neither the desire nor the ability to force Arabs and Israelis to the negotiating table. Rather, the Soviets had their greatest influence ‘during periods of tension and “no-war-no-peace.”’ Moscow ‘should not be expected to play an effective, positive role’ in any negotiating forum, it cautioned.⁴²⁶ Such an assessment of Soviet thinking did not bode well for superpower cooperation at Geneva.

Nevertheless, the Carter administration accelerated efforts to arrive at a modus operandi with the Kremlin. In September, Vance and Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin exchanged several drafts of a possible statement as the two sought to develop mutually acceptable language. Vance kept Carter informed throughout the process.⁴²⁷

Separately, Carter and Gromyko discussed the complicated nature of the pre-Geneva negotiations. According to Carter, Gromyko told him on 23 September that ‘if we would just

⁴²⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 301. Emphasis added.

⁴²⁶ ‘Soviet Role in the Middle East,’ n.a. (CIA), June 1977, NLC-6-50-2-9-9.

⁴²⁷ For example, see Memo from Vance to Carter, 10 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-6-7; Ibid., 13 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-8-5; Ibid., 16 September 1977, NLC-128-12-12-11-1.

establish a miniature state for the Palestinians ‘as big as a pencil eraser,’ that would lead to a resolution of the PLO problem for the Geneva conference.⁴²⁸ Gromyko may not have been serious, but his remark nonetheless underscores the frustration the outside powers felt about the intractability of the issues at stake.

The domestic pressure Carter felt on the Middle East question was again wearing on the president. On 19 September, two White House political advisors, Edward Sanders and Roger Lewis, warned of a possible ‘explosion’ in administration-Jewish relations over Arab-Israeli policy. Carter had temporarily alleviated the community’s concerns following their 6 July meeting. However, concern was rising again, especially over the president’s comments on settlements, Geneva and the Palestinians. ‘No issue is more controversial than the question of the Palestinians,’ the authors warned.⁴²⁹

In his account of his talks with Carter in Washington on 21 September, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy writes that his delegation was ‘shocked’ by the frankness with which Carter admitted to his domestic political constraints.⁴³⁰ However, Fahmy’s account differs markedly from the U.S. version of the conversation. Carter did, in fact, confess to domestic constraints on his Arab-Israeli policy, but not nearly to the degree cited by Fahmy, who was not a disinterested participant.⁴³¹

The Egyptian foreign minister claims that Carter said that for him to ‘exercise major pressure on Israel’ would ‘be a personal political suicide.’⁴³² However, the American notes of the meeting contain no such emotive language. In the U.S. notes, the president did say:

My influence is based on the support of the American people, the support of Congress, and the support of the Jewish community. … It would be a mistake for the Arabs to believe that we can control Israel. … I have influence that can be used, but I need the support of Congress, the American people and the American Jewish community.⁴³³

⁴²⁸ 23 September 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 106.

⁴²⁹ Memo from Sanders and Lewis to Jordan and Lipshutz, ‘Reasons Why the Jewish Community and Other Israeli Supporters are Disturbed by Administration Actions and Inactions Since the July 6 Meeting,’ 19 September 1977, Folder: ‘Israel, 8-9/77,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 35, JCL.

⁴³⁰ Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 196-205.

⁴³¹ Fahmy later resigned over Sadat’s November 1977 decision to visit Jerusalem.

⁴³² Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 196-205.

⁴³³ Document 107, Memcon, Carter, Fahmy and U.S. delegation, 21 September 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 547-558.

Nevertheless, Sadat, who was in Cairo, read Fahmy's reports of this meeting. Fahmy implies that experience contributed greatly to Sadat's conviction that Carter lacked the political strength to exact concessions from Israel.⁴³⁴

However, virtually simultaneously an incident occurred in September that provided the United States with, in Brzezinski's words, 'an opportunity to assert itself over Israel.'⁴³⁵ Carter had grown increasingly irritated by Israel's military activities in southern Lebanon. Washington felt that Israel's actions might undermine Carter's credibility with other Arab leaders and harden PLO opinion, thereby marginalising the 'moderate' leaders it hoped could be persuaded to accept 242 and 338.⁴³⁶

In late September, Washington discovered that Israel had deployed U.S.-manufactured armoured personnel carriers into Lebanon to support Christian militiamen. Such use violated the Arms Export Control Act of 1976, which prohibited American-made weapons from use by another party for offensive purposes.

Carter was furious. He informed Begin that he was 'very disappointed' and demanded that Israeli forces be withdrawn from Lebanon 'immediately.' If not, Carter said he would inform Congress and that 'further (weapons) deliveries will have to be terminated.'⁴³⁷ According to Quandt, Begin grew 'mildly hysterical,' but responded to Carter's demands. For U.S. policymakers, Begin's retreat suggested that such dire threats could affect Israeli behaviour.⁴³⁸ The administration may have assumed that such pressure on Israel would work again. 'I was much encouraged by this incident, for I felt that it indicated that a firm and clear position by the United States could be sustained, provided that we persisted,' according to Brzezinski.⁴³⁹ But the White House did not yet appreciate Begin's willingness to show flexibility on issues not central to his ideology, like Lebanon. The West Bank proved another matter entirely.

⁴³⁴ Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 195-96.

⁴³⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 107.

⁴³⁶ Quandt, *Camp David*, 100-03.

⁴³⁷ Document 110, Telegram from State Department to U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv (from Carter for Begin), 24 September 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 564-66.

⁴³⁸ Quandt, *SHAFR*.

⁴³⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 107.

Carter delivered that message to Begin privately, but the diplomatic process was still unfolding in public view. One analysis found that from mid-September to mid-October 1977, U.S. networks each averaged more than a minute and a half of coverage nightly on the Middle East.⁴⁴⁰ This is an impressive figure for picture-reliant television news because this coverage generally featured diplomatic manoeuvring and bargaining in New York and Washington, rather than dramatic conflict on the ground in the region.

In a 29 September press conference, Carter again stated ‘there can be no Middle Eastern peace settlement without adequate Palestinian representation’ and that the United States was working to establish a Geneva format acceptable to all parties. The question of whether the PLO would serve as the Palestinians’ representatives ‘has not been answered in my mind,’ Carter said. He also suggested that the Soviets had increasingly shown a ‘cooperative attitude’ on a range of issues.⁴⁴¹ Carter’s words foreshadowed impending diplomatic moves.

The following day, in a tactic that became common during the Carter administration, Israel’s Dayan appealed to American Jewish leaders as the ‘key and lever’ to gain U.S. public support for Begin’s policies. ‘They should go and explain to the Senate, the Congress, the press, the communities, on television and to their gentile friends,’ he said the day before the communiqué was issued but after Vance had already informed him of its content. Dayan then set off on a speaking tour of American Jewish communities.⁴⁴²

Vance and Gromyko issued the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué on 1 October. The key paragraph:

The United States and Soviet Union believe that, within the framework of a comprehensive settlement of the Middle Eastern problem, all specific questions of the settlement should be resolved, including such key issues as withdrawal of Israeli Armed Forces from territories occupied in the 1967 conflict; the resolution of the Palestinian question, including insuring the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people; termination of the state of war and establishment of normal peaceful relations on the basis of mutual recognition of the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence.⁴⁴³

⁴⁴⁰ Kern, *Television and Middle East Diplomacy*, 9.

⁴⁴¹ ‘The President’s News Conference,’ 29 September 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II*, 1684-1693.

⁴⁴² Tillman, *United States and the Middle East*, 158.

⁴⁴³ ‘U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué on the Middle East,’ *DSB*.

The statement ‘set forth the principles which *I had decided to pursue*, but which *neither the Israelis nor the Arabs were ready to accept*,’ Carter later wrote.⁴⁴⁴ These remarks suggest the president had slipped beyond the role of mediator. Instead, he felt the onus was on the regional parties to accede to his formulations.

Three major issues provoked critics’ ire. First, the use of the phrase ‘legitimate rights,’ rather than ‘legitimate interests,’ of the Palestinians dismayed Israel and its supporters. They felt that formulation was a recapitulation of PLO demands and served as diplomatic code for a Palestinian state. Second, many observers felt the statement implied Washington had invited the Kremlin back into a position of influence in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. Such criticism was compounded by the fact that Carter’s stance toward the Soviets and SALT II was already under attack by hawkish Americans of all political persuasions. Finally, Israel and its backers were upset that the outside powers seemed to be applying pressure on regional parties for a settlement. Thus, the statement seemed to confirm Carter’s critics’ suspicions.

Israel, despite having been consulted about the draft ahead of time,⁴⁴⁵ reacted angrily to what it saw as unwarranted pressure.⁴⁴⁶ Although one former American official claims that Sadat praised the statement as a ‘brilliant maneuver’ for applying pressure on the recalcitrant Arab parties Syria and the PLO,⁴⁴⁷ others have argued that the Egyptian president viewed the U.S.-Soviet statement with a ‘mixture of contempt and confusion.’⁴⁴⁸ ‘We kicked the Russians out of the door and now Mr. Carter is bringing them back through the window,’ Sadat reportedly said.⁴⁴⁹ Regardless, even after his November trip to Jerusalem, Sadat publicly insisted he still wanted to

⁴⁴⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 301. Emphases added.

⁴⁴⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 192.

⁴⁴⁶ Document 52, Israeli reaction to communiqué, 2 October 1977, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 19 September 2013, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook3/pages/52%20israel%20government%20reaction%20to%20joint%20us-soviet%20s.aspx>.

⁴⁴⁷ Quandt, *Camp David*, 123. Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy describes the communiqué in generally positive terms. Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 234-36.

⁴⁴⁸ Melvin Friedlander, *Sadat and Begin: The Domestic Politics of Peacemaking* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983), 65.

⁴⁴⁹ Mohamed Heikal, *Secret Channels: The Inside Story of Arab-Israeli Peace Negotiations* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 253.

convene Geneva.⁴⁵⁰ He believed it offered the best mechanism for incorporating the Palestinians into a settlement, but he insisted on a preparatory stage of talks under American stewardship.⁴⁵¹

Reaction to the communiqué was not universally negative. The PLO lauded it.⁴⁵² In a *New York Times* op-ed on 6 October, Palestinian-American Edward Said, a professor at Columbia University, commended its mention of Palestinian rights, which suggested a recognition that more than mere strategic advantage was at stake in the Middle East.⁴⁵³

However, the domestic criticism proved to be especially virulent and once again put Carter on the defensive. ‘The American Jewish [community] went bonkers. We had a very serious political problem off that, and we needed to get bodies and people out getting our side of the thing on record,’ Powell recalled.⁴⁵⁴ The handling of the communiqué ‘left much to be desired,’ he confessed. ‘The press and political operations in the White House had not been brought into the picture until just before the statement was to be released, and we made no serious effort to get a delay so the proper groundwork could be laid.’⁴⁵⁵

Many lawmakers seized on the appearance of American collusion with the Soviets on a crucial geopolitical issue. Three House members co-signed a letter of complaint to Carter that itself was co-sponsored by 150 others.⁴⁵⁶ Staunchly anti-Soviet members of Carter’s own party like Senators Henry Jackson and Daniel Patrick Moynihan came out against the statement. Moynihan labelled it ‘disturbing in the extreme that the United States government has clothed Soviet purposes in the Middle East with the cloak of respectability implicit in the assertion of shared interests.’⁴⁵⁷ It also enraged the Committee on the Present Danger, members of which came out against the

⁴⁵⁰ el Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 301.

⁴⁵¹ Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 243-44.

⁴⁵² ‘U.S.-Soviet Communiqué’ (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 14 (1 October 1977), 3, IPS; and ‘Communiqué of PLO Executive Committee: “No Peace Without Complete Withdrawal and Palestinian Rights,”’ WAFA, 22 October 1977, IPS.

⁴⁵³ Edward W. Said, ‘Palestinians’ (1977), in Edward Said, ed. *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969-1994* (London: Vintage, 1994), 30-32.

⁴⁵⁴ Jody Powell interview, 17-18 December 1981, CPP, 57. Retrieved 19 September 2013, http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_1981_1217_powell.pdf.

⁴⁵⁵ Powell, *Other Side*, 57.

⁴⁵⁶ Letter from Bingham, Anderson and Yates to Carter, 4 October 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East, 10/6/77 [O/A 10550],’ Bourdeaux Files, Box 107, JCL.

⁴⁵⁷ Moynihan statement, 3 October 1977, Folder 1, Box 2828, Daniel Patrick Moynihan Papers (hereafter DPMP), LOC. Also see: Address at the Alvin Johnson Awards Ceremony, 9 October 1977, *ibid.*, and Address before the State of Israel Bonds Testimonial Dinner, 25 October 1977, *ibid.*

statement.⁴⁵⁸ The communiqué seemed inimical to Cold War orthodoxy, which suggested an American strategy predicated on ‘containing,’ not collaborating with, the Soviets.

Unsurprisingly, AIPAC expressed similar disapproval. It argued the ‘statement marks a major shift in U.S. policy and a victory for the Soviet Union and the PLO.’ The phrase ‘legitimate rights of the Palestinian people,’ according to AIPAC, was ‘a euphemism for the creation of a Palestinian state and the dismemberment of Israel.’⁴⁵⁹ The American Jewish Congress and Anti-Defamation League also denounced it.⁴⁶⁰

Schindler of the Presidents’ Conference immediately sent Vance a telegram. The group was ‘profoundly disturbed’ over the statement, which ‘represents an abandonment of America’s historic commitment to the security and survival of Israel and imperils our country’s interests by giving a major role to the USSR, no merely at Geneva but in the Middle East itself,’ he wrote.⁴⁶¹ Schindler later pointed to the communiqué as ‘an explosion … something that shattered the (Jewish) community an awful lot.’⁴⁶²

The Presidents’ Conference held an emergency meeting on 3 October to coordinate its response. Schindler joined Israel’s Dayan on a speaking tour to Atlanta, Chicago and Los Angeles to assess public reaction. In mid-October, the group issued a four-point programme of ‘political action and public education’ to ‘serve American interests and the cause of Middle East peace.’ It called on its members to oppose openly a PLO role in the negotiations, to reject the idea of a Palestinian state, to insist that an agreement must come from direct talks, and to emphasise a firm repudiation of the principles embodied in the U.S.-Soviet communiqué. The group told its members that their role lay in ‘interpreting these vital issues to our fellow Americans.’⁴⁶³

⁴⁵⁸ Eugene Rostow, ‘Down the Slippery Slope: Carter’s Middle Eastern Policy’ (draft), 17 October 1977, Folder 11, Box 70, PNP.

⁴⁵⁹ ‘Carter’s Blunder,’ *NER*, XXI: 40, 5 October 1977. AIPAC also issued a four-and-a-half page memo that elaborated its objections to the statement. AIPAC memo, ‘The United States, the Soviets and a Middle East Peace,’ October 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East, 1977 [2],’ Jordan Files, Box 35, JCL.

⁴⁶⁰ Robert Kaiser and Murray Marder, ‘U.S. and Israel at Odds Over Carter’s Mideast Stance,’ *WP*, 4 October 1977.

⁴⁶¹ *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 12-13.

⁴⁶² Alexander Schindler interview, 28 April 1992, Folder 8, Box 65, SEP.

⁴⁶³ *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 12-13.

Newspaper opinion was also negative. ‘If there is strength or wisdom in this kind of diplomacy, it eludes us. If there is long-range good for U.S. interests, we can’t see it,’ *The Los Angeles Times* wrote.⁴⁶⁴ *The Washington Post* wrote that ‘on its face this joint statement suggests ... a change in American emphasis in favor of the Arab side of the argument.’⁴⁶⁵ Harshest of all was *The Wall Street Journal*, which labelled the statement an ‘extraordinarily mischievous document’ and accused the administration of ‘sheer carelessness’.⁴⁶⁶

The bitter response surprised Vance.⁴⁶⁷ Brzezinski conceded that they had ‘erred in not consulting our domestic political advisers about its likely internal impact.’⁴⁶⁸ Neither Jordan, Carter’s top political advisor, nor Mark Siegel, his Jewish community liaison, knew about the communiqué until after it came out. ‘After that – people like me, Hamilton Jordan, Stu Eizenstat and others in the domestic political operation ... were more directly involved in the (Middle East policymaking) process. It was much easier to gain access after’ the fallout from the communiqué, Siegel said.⁴⁶⁹

According to Quandt, Mondale, so often the administration’s bellwether on domestic politics, also became more actively involved. ‘I think that he was appalled at the political handling of it, not the content of it. You didn’t brief anybody in advance. It caught everybody by surprise. It dropped out of the sky. ... I think it was a stupid thing to handle that way,’ Quandt said. ‘Mondale got a little more concerned after that and he generally worried that pushing Israel too hard would have domestic consequences and would be counterproductive.’⁴⁷⁰

Spiegel argues that the administration’s central failure in this period was not communicative, or because it failed to lay the political ‘groundwork’ before issuing the statement. Rather, the policy, not the communiqué’s sudden unveiling, was problematic. The White House subsequently involved more political advisors in policymaking, but according to Spiegel the

⁴⁶⁴ Editorial, ‘What’s Going On?’ *LAT*, 4 October 1977.

⁴⁶⁵ Editorial, ‘The Mideast: A U.S. Policy Shift?’ *WP*, 4 October 1977. Emphasis in original. In a similar vein is Editorial, ‘The Geneva Express (Via Moscow),’ *NYT*, 4 October 1977.

⁴⁶⁶ Editorial, ‘Bungling the Peace,’ *WSJ*, 5 October 1977.

⁴⁶⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 191–94.

⁴⁶⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 110.

⁴⁶⁹ Siegel interview.

⁴⁷⁰ Quandt interview, REP.

changes were procedural, not substantive, and the consultations ‘perfunctory rather than genuine.’⁴⁷¹

As domestic criticism over the joint statement grew, the White House attempted to exercise damage control. On 3 October, Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz expressed his government’s disappointment to a contingent of Carter’s political advisors. Dinitz stressed that the joint communiqué ‘undercuts’ and ‘neutralizes’ Dayan’s diplomatic efforts, particularly the contacts with Egypt, according to handwritten notes taken by Carter advisor Stuart Eizenstat. Dinitz told the Americans that Israel’s ‘best chance is to sit down with Egyptians and we can be forthcoming with them. Get them out of (the) game.’ Nothing would be accomplished if all states were pressured into meeting together, Dinitz said. Washington should not be ‘trying (to) settle all and get nothing. We should be trying (to) cut (a) deal with Egypt,’ he said, adding no agreement would be reached if all parties had to sign at once.⁴⁷²

Later that day, members of the communications, NSC and political staffs gathered in the White House’s Roosevelt Room to coordinate the administration’s message. Again according to Eizenstat’s notes, Brzezinski emphasised that Egypt needed ‘cover’ on the Palestinian issue to make a deal with Israel. The national security advisor also stressed that the term ‘legitimate Palestinian rights’ should not be so controversial because it ‘backs off … “entity” or “homeland.”’ Meanwhile, Hamilton Jordan expressed concern over the possibility of a ‘breach with (the) Jewish community.’⁴⁷³ The administration’s taking points on the communiqué stated that it did not constitute a full statement of U.S. policy, did not foreshadow a U.S.-Soviet effort to force a settlement and did not violate previous American commitments to Israel.⁴⁷⁴

Siegel complained about the communiqué in a forceful three and-a-half-page memo. ‘I’m used to the role of loyal soldier, and will continue to speak out in support of the President in the American Jewish community, despite what it has done, and will continue to do, to my personal

⁴⁷¹ Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 338-40, 48.

⁴⁷² Notes of meeting with Eizenstat, Dinitz, Jordan, Bell and Siegel, 3 October 1977, Folder 25, Box 4, SEP.

⁴⁷³ Notes of meeting with Eizenstat, Brzezinski, Aaron, Quandt, Jordan, Lipshutz, Butler, Siegel, Powell, Inderfurth and Schechter, 3 October 1977, Folder 25, Box 4, SEP.

⁴⁷⁴ ‘Notes on US-Soviet Joint Statement,’ October 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East, 1977 [2],’ Jordan Files, Box 35, JCL.

reputation,’ he wrote to his boss, Jordan. ‘At the very least, a good soldier can expect to see the battle plan *before* he is sent out as cannon fodder.’ Siegel informed Jordan that the ‘talk in the American Jewish community is getting very ugly. The word “betrayal” is being used more and more.’ Siegel said he was ‘confused by the policy, and certainly think we can do better in selling it to the American people.’⁴⁷⁵

U.S.-Israeli Working Paper

As criticism grew, Carter spent several hours on 4 October meeting with Moshe Dayan to allay Israel’s concerns. Brzezinski has written that Dayan ‘in effect blackmailed’ Carter by warning him that unless he had assurances on Israeli concerns, the Israeli foreign minister would take his case to the American people through public statements.⁴⁷⁶ The American notes of the meeting confirm that Dayan threatened to make the disagreement public. ‘[I]f we say anything about the PLO or about the Palestinian state, and that this is bad for Israel, there will be screaming here and in Israel,’ Dayan said. ‘We need to have some agreed formula, but I can go to Israel and to the American Jews. I have to say that there is an agreement and not a confrontation.’ Carter sought to avoid any confrontation. ‘... [A] confrontation would be very damaging to Israel and to the support of the American public for Israel. If we proceed in good faith, we can avoid a confrontation,’ he said.⁴⁷⁷

According to Carter’s handwritten notes, Dayan insisted that any public statement on reconvening Geneva omit references to Palestinian ‘national rights,’ the PLO and the pre-1967 war borders. Moreover, peace would not be the ‘mere termination of war.’⁴⁷⁸ Ultimately, the United States and Israel agreed to issue a public statement that reiterated their friendship, the centrality of 242 and 338 to the peace process, and that parties need not accept the U.S.-Soviet communiqué as a

⁴⁷⁵ Memo from Siegel to Jordan, ‘Middle East,’ 3 October 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East, 1977 [2],’ Jordan Files, Box 35, JCL. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁷⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 108.

⁴⁷⁷ Document 124, Memcon, Carter, Dayan and U.S. delegation, 4 October 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 652-77.

⁴⁷⁸ Notes, Carter, 4 October 1977, Folder: ‘10/4/77,’ Presidential Handwriting File, Box 53, JCL.

precondition for participating in Geneva.⁴⁷⁹ Israel and the United States also agreed on a Working Paper, which was issued publicly. It said nothing about the PLO, but stated that ‘Palestinian Arabs’ would take part in Geneva as part of a ‘unified Arab delegation,’ and that the negotiations would be broken into a series of bilateral sessions between Israel and its neighbours. It also referred explicitly to 242 and 338 and addressed Jewish refugees from Arab states.⁴⁸⁰

The United States felt Dayan had shown flexibility by agreeing for Palestinians to be part of a unified Arab delegation rather than ‘buried’ in national delegations. Quandt believed it constituted ‘a significant step’ toward reconvening Geneva.⁴⁸¹ Indeed, Dayan faced criticism upon his return to Israel for that concession.⁴⁸² Nevertheless, the PLO felt the U.S.-Israeli Working Paper ‘exerts massive pressure on the Arabs to accept and submit to it.’ The group announced it ‘rejects’ the working paper ‘part and parcel.’⁴⁸³

While the U.S.-Israel Working Paper mitigated some domestic criticism, it also helped paint a picture of a U.S. administration susceptible to pressure, a president willing to retreat publicly from his position and a White House prepared to sacrifice its often-stated diplomatic goals partly for political expediency. Sam Donaldson, ABC’s White House correspondent, ended his 5 October report with an acerbic bit of commentary, casting doubt on Carter’s motives. His diplomacy on SALT II and the Middle East was conducted for personal political reasons, Donaldson opined, so

⁴⁷⁹ U.S.-Israel Joint Statement, 5 October 1977, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6862/5. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/1A4B0050-7EF8-403E-AAEA-2F538CD99C4E/0/Egypt08APP1.pdf>. The best account of these talks is in Quandt, *Camp David*, 125-31. Also see Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 108-10; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 301-02; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 70-71; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 192-94.

⁴⁸⁰ ‘Working Paper on Suggestions for the Resumption of the Geneva Peace Conference,’ 5 October 1977, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6911/2. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/F97B44C2-363A-4410-B08C-D0EACB97B7C/0/Egypt08APP2.pdf>.

⁴⁸¹ Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, ‘Significance of U.S.-Israeli Agreement on Procedures for Geneva,’ 5 October 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East—Negotiations: 10/77–12/77,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 13, JCL.

⁴⁸² Document 54, Israel radio interview with Dayan, 15 October 1977, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/57%20Interview%20with%20Foreign%20Minister%20Dayan%20on%20Israel.aspx>.

⁴⁸³ ‘The U.S.-Israeli Working Paper,’ (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 15 (15 October 1977), 3, IPS.

that the ‘disappointments for Mr. Carter’s first year in office won’t stand out so much. … Blessed are the peacemakers is a hard line to criticize.’⁴⁸⁴

In a meeting with Jewish lawmakers the following day, the embattled Carter said he was ‘willing to take heat’ on his Middle East policy. He stressed that the parties could not get to Geneva without the Soviet Union ‘at the end of it.’ Carter said he would ‘commit (political) suicide before abandon[ing] Israel.’ Additionally, the president emphasised that he had never advocated a ‘separate P[alestinian] state’ and conceded that he should have briefed Congress about the U.S.-Soviet communiqué beforehand.⁴⁸⁵

The U.S.-Israeli Working Paper did not completely silence the American Jewish community’s criticism. On 26 October, Vance sat down with a group of Jewish leaders, led by Schindler, to discuss Middle East policy. However, Schindler later boasted that he steered the gathering toward the issues he wanted discussed by organising a pre-meeting to enable attendees to coordinate their positions. ‘I took that meeting away from Vance, in a sense, because we had everything planned in advance – every conceivable point of view that we would take,’ he said. To Vance, that coordination was ‘fairly obvious.’ ‘It was naïve of me to think it could happen – that I could bring together a large number of Jewish leaders and talk over our policies.’⁴⁸⁶

In his report back to Carter, Vance wrote, ‘The questioning was vigorous to say the least,’ and admitted, ‘I don’t know how many people I was able to persuade.’ The president responded: ‘I’m grateful for your patience.’⁴⁸⁷ Schindler said the attendees had ‘read that (meeting) as an attempt to break the hold of the Presidents’ Conference and to divide the community … and we countered that to the best of our ability. … I think we succeeded.’⁴⁸⁸

The administration continued its on-again, off-again courtship of the American Jewish community. In autumn 1977, the White House Press Office initiated mass mailings targeted

⁴⁸⁴ ‘Carter/New York City/United Nations/Human Rights/Mid. East/Israel,’ ‘ABC Evening News,’ 5 October 1977, VTNA 46402.

⁴⁸⁵ Notes of meeting between Carter and Jewish congressmen, 6 October 1977, Folder 25, Box 4, SEP. The president also took notes of the meeting. Notes, Carter, ‘Mtg with Congress re: M. East,’ 6 October 1977, Folder: ‘10/6/77 [1],’ Presidential Handwriting File, Box 53, JCL.

⁴⁸⁶ Tivnan, *The Lobby*, 125-26. Also see: *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 13-14

⁴⁸⁷ Memo from Vance to Carter, 26 October 1977, NLC-128-13-1-17-6.

⁴⁸⁸ Schindler interview, SEP.

specifically at Jewish publications. The material consisted of administration statements, press releases and policy positions on Jewish and Arab-Israeli issues.⁴⁸⁹

Still, by late October Hamilton Jordan believed the administration's largest domestic challenge on the Middle East was not the American Jewish community, but rather Congress. The United States faced a dilemma over a new U.N. General Assembly resolution condemning Israeli settlement activity.⁴⁹⁰ Washington typically abstained or voted against such resolutions despite its official view that Israel's post-1967 settlements were illegal. The administration wanted to be tough on Israel, but did not wish to disrupt the negotiations.

Jordan felt controversy over the U.N. vote could 'precipitate a political confrontation in the Congress that could be unfavorable to the Administration' and divert attention from Carter's energy bill. 'I am no longer concerned with the support of American Jews – that is lost until we show some tangible results from our peace efforts,' Jordan wrote. 'I continue to be concerned that our efforts at peace in the Middle East will be undermined by a Congressional resolution or letter. This vote on the upcoming UN resolution could be the catalyst for such an effort.'⁴⁹¹ In the end, the United States abstained on the resolution, which passed 131-1-7.⁴⁹²

The White House also continued its targeted polling on the Middle East in a bid to determine Carter's base of support for diplomacy. However, the results of a survey conducted by Patrick Caddell for the White House in late August and early September found that little had changed since April, despite administration efforts at explaining its policy. Carter's performance on the Middle East earned him a 34 percent positive and 52 percent negative rating, which was about the same as the spring survey. Only 48 percent of respondents believed his principles for a Middle East settlement represented a fair basis for a deal. Among Jewish voters, that figure dropped to 20 percent, with 57 percent opposed to Carter's terms. Caddell noted that among those who opposed

⁴⁸⁹ See the chronological folders in Press – Jewish Media Mass Mailings, Box 16, JCL.

⁴⁹⁰ U.N. General Assembly A/RES/32/5, 28 October 1977, QOP. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/CCB3661A0F5F7D4C852560DD006B5F93>.

⁴⁹¹ Memo from Jordan to Carter, 'UN Resolution on Illegal Settlements,' 26 October 1977, Folder: 'Middle East, 1977 [1],' Jordan Files, Box 35, JCL. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹² 'Resolutions adopted by the General Assembly at its 32nd session,' U.N. Documentation: Research Guide. Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.un.org/depts/dhl/resguide/r32.htm>.

Carter's plan, most did so on an "instinctual" basis rather than because of any 'reasoned' judgment. That pointed to a deep-rooted problem for Carter. Most Americans based their positions on their pre-existing beliefs, rather than through a fresh engagement with the issues.⁴⁹³

Still, the overall political aspects of the diplomacy exasperated Carter. 'It was very difficult for people to realize that, if successful, our efforts would bring significant results,' he wrote later.⁴⁹⁴ Carter's choice of language hints at his impatience for critics who he believed obstructed the course he thought best in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué episode tapped into three emerging, and politically damaging, narratives in Carter's foreign policy: that he was naïve about the Soviet Union, that he was anti-Israel and that his policymaking process was confused. It severely undermined Carter's credibility at home and abroad. Quandt believes domestic criticism impacted the development of U.S. policy after the joint communiqué because Carter for the first time realised his Arab-Israeli policy was causing him domestic problems: 'From then on, I think his own views began to move in the direction of the separate Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, if that is all we could get.'⁴⁹⁵

Although Carter's approval rating average for his first seven months reached 66 percent – higher than Nixon and Ford, but lower than Johnson, Kennedy and Eisenhower – results suggested that was mostly based on Carter's personality, not performance, and the downward trend had already commenced.⁴⁹⁶ A survey taken the week before the joint communiqué found the public's rating of Carter on 'inspiring confidence in the White House' had plunged from 75 percent in March to just 50 percent in September. Carter's handling of foreign policy matters, which enjoyed a

⁴⁹³ Memo with attachments from Caddell to Carter, 'Foreign Policy Questions,' 21 October 1977, Folder: 'Caddell, [Patrick] [1],' Jordan Files, Box 33, JCL.

⁴⁹⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 302.

⁴⁹⁵ Quandt correspondence.

⁴⁹⁶ George Gallup, 'The Gallup Poll: President Receives 66 Pct. Approval After Seven Months,' *WP*, 11 September 1977.

narrow 43 to 40 percent positive rating in July, had already dropped to a 52 to 34 percent negative rating.⁴⁹⁷

Nevertheless, Carter continued for a time to cling to the notion of achieving a comprehensive settlement. Yet the backlash over the U.S.-Soviet statement suggested that he could not afford the political cost of working toward that goal. Even absent Carter's domestic political constraints, Arab and Israeli disagreements may still have precluded a Geneva Conference. Yet it was the administration's political ineptitude at home that brought the U.S.-spearheaded effort to an early halt.

Carter later said that he had been warned by U.S. lawmakers about the 'adverse consequences' of applying pressure on Israel or otherwise 'negotiating in a way that might result in Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories. I understood that, and I just finally said to hell with it.'⁴⁹⁸ However, if that were so, Carter's willingness to buck convention had disastrous consequences for his own policy preferences. His style – publicly confronting tough issues – undermined the chances of achieving his goals.

The political plans developed by the administration showed that it was aware of the political liabilities, but its tactical execution was dismal. It erred in believing that explication alone could ease domestic concerns about its policy. Carter devoted scant attention to covering himself politically on such controversial issues as involving the PLO and the Soviets in Arab-Israeli peacemaking. This failure came despite warnings that both could undermine his best efforts at peacemaking and his position at home.

The resultant weakness of the American diplomatic position helped compel Sadat to seize the initiative and travel to Jerusalem. Consequently, the communiqué led indirectly to a diplomatic breakthrough that was consummated a year and a half later with the formal signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. In the near term, however, it sidelined the president from the peace process.

⁴⁹⁷ Louis Harris, 'Harris Survey: Carter has ground to make up,' *CT*, 3 October 1977.

⁴⁹⁸ Miller, *Much Too Promised Land*, 184.

Chapter Four: Tuned out – “Cronkite Diplomacy,” Sadat’s Jerusalem Initiative and U.S. Policy Response

Introduction

As Anwar Sadat prepared to make history by travelling from Egypt to Israel on 19 November 1977, Jimmy Carter climbed to the pulpit at Washington’s First Baptist Church, delivered a prayer in support of the Egyptian president’s trip, ‘and then the congregation adjourned so we could return to our homes in time to watch the arrival ceremonies on television.’⁴⁹⁹ Accustomed to the central role in Arab-Israeli peacemaking, the American president joined millions of spectators as the leader of the largest and most powerful Arab state offered the Jewish state effective recognition as a permanent feature of the Middle East.

The White House conceded it had little part to play in Sadat’s initiative. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski betrayed a sense of jealousy in a wistful diary entry: ‘My only regret is that Carter is not doing it. My guess is that until he decides not to follow cautious advice he will not play the preeminent role which he could be playing, given his intelligence and the position of America in the world.’⁵⁰⁰ In Israel, the White House delegation consisted of one: Mark Siegel, Carter’s American Jewish community liaison.⁵⁰¹

Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem took the lead in peacemaking away from the United States and placed it in the hands of regional actors. The Egyptian president engaged in masterful ‘media diplomacy’.⁵⁰² He leveraged the global interest in his initiative into a media spectacle that forced the Carter administration to shift its aims away from a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement and toward a U.S.-mediated bilateral agreement. However, Sadat’s decision to talk to the Israelis in

⁴⁹⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 305.

⁵⁰⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 111.

⁵⁰¹ Siegel interview.

⁵⁰² Gilboa defines media diplomacy as ‘the uses of media by leaders to express interest in negotiation, to build confidence, and to mobilize public support for agreements. … (It includes) spectacular media events organized to usher in a new era.’ Eytan Gilboa, ‘Global Communication and Foreign Policy,’ *Journal of Communication* 52, no. 4 (2002). Others have referred to Sadat’s tactics as ‘shock diplomacy.’ Michael Handel, *The Diplomacy of Surprise: Hitler, Nixon, Sadat* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, 1981), 325-35.

Jerusalem threatened to render useless Carter's personal effort to achieve a comprehensive settlement and play into a growing public perception of his ineffectiveness.

This chapter argues that the U.S. media's role in Sadat's initiative highlighted Carter's weakness as both a diplomat and politician. The press stepped into a diplomatic void left by the president after the failure of the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué. As Sadat seized on his role as a darling of the American news media, Carter became a casualty of the open diplomacy that he had in fact initiated and advocated, but over which he no longer had control.⁵⁰³

Despite the contemporaneous American popular perception, the U.S. media was not responsible for Sadat's Jerusalem trip. However, the narrative that it had indeed spurred the trip gained traction among elite opinion because of its consonance with the growing U.S. political narrative that Carter was an ineffective leader. Moreover, saturation media coverage of the initiative highlighted the absence of an American role in Jerusalem. This episode again demonstrates that central presidential involvement in diplomacy activates domestic political actors that interpret policy fluctuations as political losses.

Carter found himself in the delicate position of reorienting and justifying his Arab-Israeli policy in public. Recently released American documents detail how the Carter team attempted to develop a fresh approach by capitalising on the enthusiasm generated by Sadat's initiative and perceptions of American public scepticism toward Menachem Begin's government. That culminated in a short-lived effort to forge a 'secret strategy' of U.S.-Egyptian collusion to pressure Israel.

This section examines U.S. reaction to the events in the Middle East. As such, it does not purport to offer a complete history of Sadat's initiative.⁵⁰⁴ Nor does this chapter seek to provide a history of Egyptian-Israeli negotiations during Sadat's nearly two days in Israel.⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰³ For example, *Time* named Sadat 'Man of the Year' in 1977. 'Anwar Sadat: Architect of a New Mideast,' *Time*, 2 January 1978.

⁵⁰⁴ Useful accounts on the origins of Sadat's decision from members of Egypt's Foreign Ministry include Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 12-26; Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 283-90; Kamel, *A Testimony*, 13-20. Also el Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 302-29.

⁵⁰⁵ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 18-26, offers an account of these talks.

The standard argument about Sadat's initiative in relation to the American role contends that Sadat intended to divert U.S. diplomacy from its Geneva in favour of bilateral Egyptian-Israeli negotiations under American auspices.⁵⁰⁶ According to Stein, Sadat's trip was of extraordinary significance, but ultimately it 'proved again that in order to resolve problems for the next step, American intervention was necessary.'⁵⁰⁷ At Carter's White House, Quandt described a 'twinge of jealousy' over its being relegated to the role of spectator. Carter subsequently sought to renew his push toward Geneva while reasserting American primacy in the negotiations.⁵⁰⁸

However, others criticise the scholarship of Sadat's initiative on the ground that it is American-centric and lacks understanding of the Egyptian system and the inter-Arab context.⁵⁰⁹ Fahmy, who resigned as Egyptian foreign minister over the initiative, contends Sadat decreased the chances for peace by undermining the drive toward Geneva, reveled in Western adulation and was too naïve to avoid being 'in the end a facilitator of Israeli policies.'⁵¹⁰ Heikal insists Sadat never seriously intended to visit Israel but only followed through once he realised the U.S. media's interest.⁵¹¹ Shemesh points out that Sadat's trip was the conclusion of an initiative he had begun with proposals made to Israel in 1971, but which the latter had rejected.⁵¹²

The present account is unique in the literature by analysing Sadat's initiative in terms of the interaction of U.S. media, public opinion and diplomacy. Domestic factors did not determine American policy following Sadat's trip. Yet the cumulative impact of decisions made partly on the basis of domestic considerations significantly influenced the policy reorientation.

Geneva preparations stall

⁵⁰⁶ Martin Indyk, *"To the Ends of the Earth": Sadat's Jerusalem Initiative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1984).

⁵⁰⁷ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 264-65.

⁵⁰⁸ Quandt, *Camp David*, 143-67.

⁵⁰⁹ See Ibrahim Karawan, 'Sadat and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Revisited,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 2 (1994); Adel Safty, 'Sadat's Negotiations with the United States and Israel: From Sinai to Camp David,' *American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 50, no. 3 (1991); Shibley Telhami, *Power and Leadership in International Bargaining: The Path to the Camp David Accords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁵¹⁰ Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, 283-90; Shoukri's conclusions are similar. Ghali Shoukri, *Egypt: Portrait of a President, 1971-1981* (London: Zed Press, 1981).

⁵¹¹ Heikal, *Secret Channels*.

⁵¹² Moshe Shemesh, 'The origins of Sadat's strategic volte-face (marking 30 years since Sadat's historic visit to Israel, November 1977),' *Israel Studies* 13, no. 2 (2008).

The political fallout from the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué, followed by the issuing of the U.S.-Israeli Working Paper, suggested pressure could make Carter back down. The drive toward Geneva had stalled. However, Sadat credited a letter from Carter, in which he pleaded, ‘I need your help’ to maintain momentum in negotiations, for inspiring his decision to visit Israel.⁵¹³ Sadat felt political pressures hamstrung Carter. ‘President Carter’s capacity for movement was governed by the current international situation,’ he wrote. ‘Furthermore, the extent of U.S. assistance in this connection was determined by the special relationship between the United States and Israel.’⁵¹⁴

The Americans dismissed Sadat’s first proposal – a multiparty summit in East Jerusalem as a precursor to Geneva⁵¹⁵ – as ‘farfetched’,⁵¹⁶ ‘doomed to failure’,⁵¹⁷ and ‘crazy’,⁵¹⁸ ‘We worried about Sadat and wondered whether he was not losing his sense of reality.’⁵¹⁹ The prospect of bringing together the leaders of the Soviet Union, China and the PLO, among others, was also not something to which Israel would have acceded.

Despite his frustrations with Israel, Carter had positive words for Jerusalem in his address to the World Jewish Congress to mark the Balfour Declaration’s 60th anniversary. He continued to insist on the multilateral conference. ‘For serious peace talks to begin, a reconvening of the Geneva conference has become essential,’ Carter said.⁵²⁰

Yet the speech’s early drafts suggest the president had sought to criticise Israel more sharply and emphasise his commitment to the Palestinians. The NSC’s Quandt sent two different drafts to Brzezinski on 31 October. His first option featured a strongly worded paragraph condemning Israeli settlements and another on the need for a Palestinian ‘entity.’ The alternate draft featured toned

⁵¹³ Quandt, *Camp David*, 138-41.

⁵¹⁴ el Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 304.

⁵¹⁵ Document 141, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Cairo (Eilts) to State Department, 3 November 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 741-744.

⁵¹⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 194.

⁵¹⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 303.

⁵¹⁸ Note from Brzezinski to Carter, n.d. [circa early November 1977], Folder: ‘Middle East – [5/77-12/77],’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 12, JCL.

⁵¹⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 111.

⁵²⁰ ‘World Jewish Congress: Remarks at the Meeting of the General Council,’ 2 November 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II, 1952-1957*.

down language, removing the Palestinian ‘entity’ reference and only including one sentence criticising Israeli settlements.⁵²¹

Quandt believed Carter’s speech should be delicately crafted because it could affect the negotiating climate. He also raised ‘the question of domestic opinion. I can see little but trouble from the Jewish community if the President gives a speech along the lines’ of the first version. ‘There may be a time when it makes sense to lay our policy on the line and to point the finger at intransigent parties, but I fail to see why that should be done now,’ Quandt wrote. He suggested Brzezinski ‘urge the President to reconsider his approach’ and deliver the second, milder version.⁵²² Quandt’s recommendation that Carter should ‘reconsider his approach’ suggests the president had been leaning toward the more critical speech.

In a revised draft sent the following day, Quandt omitted the Palestinian reference – leaving that as a ‘trump card’ to be played later, he wrote – and left only a single sentence on settlements.⁵²³ Carter’s final speech came together after receiving further input from domestic policy advisor Stuart Eizenstat and White House Counsel Robert Lipshutz. It offered a generally muscular affirmation of the U.S.-Israeli relationship.⁵²⁴

The same month, Vance met with Nahum Goldmann, the head of the World Jewish Congress. During a discussion of the Arab-Israeli negotiations, Goldmann urged the secretary of state ‘not to pay too much attention to criticisms from the American Jewish community for whom [Goldmann] expressed great disapprobation.’ Israel, Goldmann believed, needed to be pressured into concessions.⁵²⁵ However, Vance later said he felt the administration would have been unable to neutralise domestic pressure from pro-Israel factions through confrontation. ‘Rather, we had to

⁵²¹ Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, ‘President’s Speech to World Jewish Congress, November 2, 1977,’ 31 October 1977, Folder: ‘Israel, 10/77,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 35, JCL.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, ‘Revised Presidential Speech to World Jewish Congress,’ 1 November 1977, Folder: ‘Israel, 11-12/77,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 35, JCL.

⁵²⁴ Draft, ‘World Jewish Congress,’ n.a., n.d. [circa 2 November 1977], Folder: ‘Israel, 11-12/77,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 35, JCL.

⁵²⁵ Document 138, Memcon, Goldmann and Vance, 27 October 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 729-32.

recognize that it would continue to exist, that you could contain it so it didn't thwart what was good for our country,' he said.⁵²⁶ This basic thinking contributed to later attempts to pressure Israel.

Sadat expresses willingness to visit Jerusalem

Shortly afterward, however, Sadat surprised his audience in the Egyptian parliament when he went off-script and said he was willing to travel 'to the ends of the Earth,' even to speak before Israel's Knesset, for the sake of peace.⁵²⁷ Egypt's foreign policy bureaucracy was shocked.⁵²⁸ U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts did not think Sadat meant his words literally. 'Sadat's offer to go to Knesset is a first for an Arab leader and should be seen as his way of dramatizing [the] lengths to which he [is] prepared to go to achieve peace, not as [a] serious possibility,' he wrote back to Washington.⁵²⁹

From the beginning, the media, especially the television news corps, featured prominently in Sadat's initiative. Sadat's trip also boosted the U.S. public's image of Egypt, a land it had previously known mostly through stereotypes and images of war. For example, Bagnied and Schneider's analysis highlights the favourable American television coverage of Sadat's initiative. They conclude that 'Sadat emerged in American television as the first Arab leader able to validate as worthy of discussion most of the key Arab complaints about the state of Israel.'⁵³⁰ This, in turn, affected Carter's role in the peace process.

Several days passed after Sadat's speech to Egyptian lawmakers with vague statements on the prospect of a visit to Israel. Nothing concrete was established.⁵³¹ Finally, on 14 November CBS

⁵²⁶ Tivnan, *The Lobby*, 120-21.

⁵²⁷ 'Speech by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to the Egyptian Parliament, November 9, 1977 [Excerpts],' in 'Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 2 (1978). The U.S. ambassador to Egypt noted that Sadat's comment 'drew strong approval from [the] Assembly.' Document 144, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Cairo (Eilts) to State Department, 'Arab-Israeli Aspects of Sadat Nov 9 Speech,' 9 November 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 748-49.

⁵²⁸ Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 12-16; Kamel, *A Testimony*, 15.

⁵²⁹ Document 145, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Cairo (Eilts) to State Department, 'Sadat's Nov 9 Speech: Geneva or Bust,' 10 November 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 750-53.

⁵³⁰ Magda Bagnied and Steven Schneider, 'Sadat Goes to Jerusalem: Televised Images, Themes and Agenda,' in *Television Coverage of the Middle East*, ed. William C. Adams (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981).

⁵³¹ For example, after Sadat's speech Begin told a visiting group of American lawmakers he would be willing to host Sadat. That was communicated to Sadat, who repeated that he was willing to travel to Israel. However, no plans were established. 'Meeting between the Prime Minister, Mr. Menachem Begin, and delegation from Armed Services

News anchor Walter Cronkite extracted separate, on-camera promises from both Begin and Sadat: Begin would issue an official invitation through the United States, and Sadat would accept.

ABC, CBS and NBC all carried interviews with both Begin and Sadat on their 14 November newscasts. However, only CBS edited and broadcasted the interviews in such a way as to suggest the developments unfolded on air. CBS achieved this effect by dramatically presenting Cronkite's interviews, via satellite, with Begin and Sadat back-to-back, implying they had actually been conducted within moments of each other on live television. However, in reality Cronkite conducted his conversations with the two leaders hours apart earlier in the day. This episode injected the news media into a central role in foreign policy and suggested the ineptitude of the Carter administration's diplomacy.

In opening his broadcast, Cronkite immediately heightened the sense of drama, telling viewers:

Not since the founding of the modern state of Israel ... has a leader of Israel met with a leader of Egypt. But now, all obstacles appear to have been removed for peace discussions in Jerusalem between Egyptian President Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Begin. It happened this way, earlier today, in CBS News interviews with the two leaders.⁵³²

In his interview with Sadat, Cronkite got the Egyptian leader to establish the seriousness of his intent to travel to Israel and a timeframe for his visit. Sadat initially outlined familiar Arab demands, but Cronkite probed for a breakthrough. Asked if he had any preconditions, Sadat said he had none.⁵³³

Armed with what appeared to be a scoop in the making, CBS quickly arranged an interview with Begin. He then similarly went further publicly than he had before, saying he was prepared to issue the invitation to Sadat through the United States.

Cronkite sensed that the two leaders were on the verge of a breakthrough and pushed until he got it. His interviews accomplished what Carter's foreign-policy team could not: extract public

Committee of the US House of Representatives,' 10 November 1977, ISA (no archival location listed). Retrieved 18 September 2013,

<http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/6C13A8F8-D26F-468D-B0BE-74D72F7D71CA/0/Egypt18APP.pdf>

⁵³² Transcript, 'CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite,' 14 November 1977, Folder: 'Middle East,' Box 2M733, WCP.

⁵³³ Ibid.

promises from both leaders to move the peace process forward. This was the positive side of open negotiations. Although in drawn-out sessions, public statements can create a rhetorical straitjacket for leaders who then feel they cannot back away from positions for fear of looking weak, public negotiations can have firmer short-term goals.

According to Cronkite, ‘the important point is that television journalism … speeded up the process, brought it into the open, removed a lot of possibly obstructionist middlemen, and made it difficult for the principals to renege on their very public agreement.’⁵³⁴ Cronkite demurred on his role of diplomatic catalyst. ‘As for Cronkite diplomacy, I’m sure that it initiated nothing the two principals were not already prepared to undertake. If I dropped the strategic handkerchief, they chose the time and manner of picking it up,’ he wrote.⁵³⁵

Although Washington had been in touch with both the Egyptians and Israelis privately about a possible Sadat trip, the State Department only learned the visit would become a reality after CBS called to notify it that it was about to air Cronkite’s scoop.⁵³⁶ ‘We were all sitting in Washington playing catch up ball. It took a while for us to accept that the whole ball game had changed,’ Assistant Secretary of State Alfred Atherton recalled.⁵³⁷ Still, Washington’s role remained significant. For instance, Israel delivered its invitation to Sadat through the U.S. Embassies in Cairo and Tel Aviv.⁵³⁸

To be clear, Cronkite neither bore responsibility for Sadat’s initiative nor Begin’s invitation. Egyptian-Israeli contacts had already been initiated. Egyptians and Israelis had both discussed with the Americans the possibility of a high-level, bilateral meeting for months.⁵³⁹ However, the

⁵³⁴ Walter Cronkite, *A Reporter’s Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 354.

⁵³⁵ Cronkite, ‘Media Played Role in ‘70s Mideast Peace Process,’ NPR, 15 January 2007. Retrieved 19 September 2013, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6861044>.

⁵³⁶ Siegel interview.

⁵³⁷ Alfred Leroy Atherton, Jr., interview, Summer 1990, ADST. Retrieved 19 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004ath01\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004ath01)).

⁵³⁸ Letter from Begin to Sadat with covering letter to Carter, 15 November 1977, ISA/RG 43/A/4155/5. Retrieved 20 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/B6141B0C-38B2-4542-9640-FE66138132B8/0/Egypt21.pdf>; and Letter from Sadat to Begin, 19 November 1977, ISA/RG 43/A/4313/5. Retrieved 19 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/087008E3-B965-4966-BD44-7D69DECA67EF/0/Egypt26.pdf>; and Appendix, Covering Letter from U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv to Begin, 14 December 1977, ISA (no archival location listed). Retrieved 18 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/FBA11065-4B9D-4330-BB91-4B882FE349B3/0/Egypt26APP.pdf>.

⁵³⁹ Zahid Mahmood, ‘Sadat and Camp David Reappraised,’ *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15, no. 1 (1985).

significance of ‘Cronkite diplomacy’ for this study is that it underscored the administration’s diplomatic weakness. By obtaining on-camera commitments from both sides, Cronkite’s interviews likely accelerated Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem.⁵⁴⁰ It also provoked U.S. critics who felt it showed decisiveness that Carter himself lacked.

Conservative columnist William Safire praised Sadat’s initiative and criticised the Carter administration for having ‘fretted and dithered’ rather than facilitated Sadat’s desire to visit Israel.

It took Walter Cronkite of CBS, placing an electronic hand on the backs of Israel and Egypt, to bring them together. … When it comes to accepting the good offices of an inexperienced President or an experienced journalist, [Arab leaders are] better off with Cronkite diplomacy.⁵⁴¹

Liberal columnist Mary McGrory concurred.⁵⁴² On its editorial page, the conservative *Wall Street Journal* opined, ‘Mr. Sadat’s independent initiative has shown how seriously the Carter administration has eroded our reputation in the Mideast …’⁵⁴³ In relegating the United States to the sidelines, Sadat’s initiative had thrown its role into question, *The New York Times* diplomatic correspondent wrote in an analysis.⁵⁴⁴

Editorial cartoonists also took shots at the White House. For example, a *Washington Star* cartoon portrays Sadat on the telephone with Begin next to him; Carter and Vance loom in the background, looking on expectantly. Sadat says into the mouthpiece, ‘Ok, Walter Cronkite … What should we do next?’⁵⁴⁵

The public aspects of the diplomatic process careened out of the Carter administration’s control. The White House did not oppose Sadat’s initiative, but nor did it enthusiastically embrace it. The administration fretted that a bilateral peace would be ‘inherently unstable.’⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁰ Cronkite’s scoop also generated envy from his rivals. ABC’s Peter Jennings sent him a telegram after the interviews aired: ‘Walter: I’m sure Sadat would disagree but, damnit [sic], I’d wish you retire.’ Telegram from ABC News Cairo to CBS News, 15 November 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East. Sadat-Begin Interviews – 1977,’ Box 2M831, WCP.

⁵⁴¹ William Safire column, ‘Cronkite Diplomacy,’ *NYT*, 17 November 1977.

⁵⁴² Mary McGrory column, ‘Walter Cronkite, TV’s diplomat,’ *CT*, 23 November 1977. Also see David Alpern with Betsy Carter, ‘The Cronkite Summit?’ *Newsweek*, 28 November 1977.

⁵⁴³ Editorial, ‘Peace Through Ineptitude?’ *WSJ*, 18 November 1977.

⁵⁴⁴ Bernard Gwertzman, ‘Sadat-Begin: The U.S. View,’ *NYT*, 17 November 1977.

⁵⁴⁵ Clipping, *The Washington Star*, n.d. [circa 1 December 1977], Folder: ‘Middle East,’ Box: 2M733, WCP.

⁵⁴⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 112.

Washington hoped Israel would meet Sadat's initiative with something in return. A memo from Quandt to Brzezinski provides an indication of what the Americans felt would be a commensurate gesture for Begin to offer Sadat. The NSC analyst devised a proposed statement that Begin could deliver at the end of Sadat's visit. The Americans felt that 'Sadat's reputation would be enhanced' if Begin said publicly that Israel was 'not afraid of confronting' the Palestinian issue in negotiations and would 'not inspect the credentials of any Palestinians that come to Geneva.'⁵⁴⁷

Carter prodded Begin in a telephone conversation the same day. 'There is the need for some tangible contribution for Sadat to take home. He has run high risks. There should be something tangible that he can take as a success,' Carter said. The prime minister, however, provided little detail about what he was prepared to offer.⁵⁴⁸

American news people flooded into Israel for Sadat's visit, constituting one-third of international journalists and the largest single national contingent.⁵⁴⁹ From 9 November, when Sadat announced his willingness to visit Israel, to his presence there from 19-21 November, and for a considerable period afterward, print and television outlets gave his initiative saturation coverage.

Skilfully using his moment in the limelight, Sadat lavished attention on journalists. Beginning with his 28-minute flight to Israel, during which he granted interviews to all three American network news programmes, the Egyptian president played not just to the Israelis in person but through the media to the world beyond. Sadat attempted to present the Arab point of view – or, at least, the Egyptian one – to the Western public more forcefully than he believed it had been. However, it also isolated him from other Arab leaders, who felt that for the most powerful Arab state to negotiate directly with Israel betrayed the Palestinian and pan-Arab causes.⁵⁵⁰

Sadat in Jerusalem

⁵⁴⁷ Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, 'What Begin Could Give Sadat,' 17 November 1977, Folder: 'Israel, 11-12/77,' NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 35, JCL. Begin did not, in fact, issue such a statement.

⁵⁴⁸ Memorandum of conversation between Carter and Begin, 17 November 1977, NLC-128-6-2-1-0.

⁵⁴⁹ Allen Alter, '580 U.S. news people cover Sadat's visit,' *Editor & Publisher*, 25 November 1977.

⁵⁵⁰ The PLO was furious. See 'Fateh Communiqué: Fateh Rejects Sadat's Visit to Knesset,' WAFA, 17 November 1977, IPS; 'P.L.O. Executive Committee: Sadat's Decision Apostasy and Blow to Arab Nation,' *ibid.*, 18 November 1977, *ibid.*

Sadat's visit centred on his speech to Israel's Knesset. In his address, he emphasised that 'there can be no peace without the Palestinians,' whose cause was 'the crux of the entire problem.' Sadat declared his trip was intended to break down the 'psychological barrier' that represented '70 percent' of the problem, but he had no desire to forge a separate peace.⁵⁵¹

Watching from the gallery that day was Siegel, Carter's Jewish community liaison, who had happened to be in the region. Although Brzezinski had asked that Siegel be recalled because Sadat's visit seemed to be at cross purposes to U.S. policy, Carter and Hamilton Jordan allowed him to stay. Having a deputy assistant to the president would be a way for the White House to avoid 'snubbing' the initiative, while ensuring it 'didn't look like too much of an endorsement of the process.'⁵⁵²

U.S. intelligence analysts assessed that Sadat's speech contained 'no departures' from known positions, but his 'boldest statements' affirmed Arab demands for a Palestinian homeland.⁵⁵³ Nevertheless, the fact of the Egyptian president standing in front of Israeli lawmakers was groundbreaking in itself.

Begin's speech in response disappointed the Americans, who felt it did not offer concessions commensurate with the risk taken by Sadat. U.S. analysts posited that 'the immediate impact of Begin's speech may be to dampen expectations that a dramatic breakthrough on the negotiating front' would occur during Sadat's visit. The premier pointedly did not mention the Palestinians.⁵⁵⁴

The PLO called Sadat's speech 'senseless' and declared 'there shall be no peace at the expense of the Palestinian people.'⁵⁵⁵ In a statement to the U.N. General Assembly, the PLO's Farouk Kaddoumi denounced Sadat's initiative as a betrayal. 'That visit was accompanied by a

⁵⁵¹ 'Egyptian President Anwar Sadat: Peace with Justice (November 20, 1977)', Laqueur and Rubin, *Israel-Arab Reader*, 207-15.

⁵⁵² Siegel interview.

⁵⁵³ Cable from CIA/OPS/CTR to White House, 'Sadat's Speech to the Knesset,' 20 November 1977, NLC-43-4-8-17-4.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ 'Sadat's Visit' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 3, no. 17 (30 November 1977), 3, IPS. Also see: 'Editorial: Sadat in Posture of Capitulation, Begging for Peace,' WAFA, 21 November 1977, IPS.

wide press campaign orchestrated by the Zionists in order to make it appear as something of great importance for peace,' he claimed.⁵⁵⁶

Begin and Sadat's end-of-visit communiqué stated the two parties' desire to use bilateral contacts to lead to 'the signing of peace treaties in Geneva with all the neighbouring Arab states' and Israel.⁵⁵⁷ However, the regional fissures that Sadat's initiative deepened made it unlikely that an Arab consensus could be reached before sitting down with Israel in Geneva. When Iraq, Libya and Syria froze ties with Egypt over Sadat's initiative, the Egyptian president angrily responded by breaking off relations entirely.

The United States had no direct role in the events unfolding in Israel, but virtually every step Sadat took was beamed into American living rooms through remarkable television coverage. U.S. networks broadcast nearly 17 hours of live, satellite-dependent reporting and two hours-worth of special reports during the roughly 48 hours that Sadat spent in Israel.⁵⁵⁸ As ABC News correspondent Ted Koppel reported, the Begin and Sadat's 'television images alone created a new diplomatic reality and what was said is of far less importance at the moment than what was seen.'⁵⁵⁹

Indeed, in the eyes of many observers, the television cameras played a role that extended beyond the reportorial. 'At times it was hard to decide whether the networks were reporting history or shaping it,' *The Washington Post*'s ombudsman wrote.⁵⁶⁰ The media's insertion into the diplomatic process, which began with Cronkite's scoop, blurred the line between observer and participant. ABC News' diplomatic correspondent Barbara Walters, who flew from Cairo to Tel Aviv with Sadat, neatly captures the fluid movement between observer and participant. 'I felt I was part of history. Realize that mine was the first flight from Israel in thirty years to land in Egypt.'⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁶ Document 12, 'General Assembly, 84th meeting: statement by PLO Executive Committee member Qaddumi,' 28 November 1977, *International Documents on Palestine, 1977*, 94-98.

⁵⁵⁷ Document 77, Begin-Sadat press conference and text of communiqué, 21 November 1977, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 20 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/77%20Joint%20press%20conference%20Begin-Sadat%20and%20text%20of.aspx>.

⁵⁵⁸ Bagnied and Schneider, 'Sadat Goes to Jerusalem: Televised Images, Themes and Agenda,' 57.

⁵⁵⁹ 'Sadat Visit/Aftermath,' 'ABC World News Tonight,' 23 November 1977, VTNA 46645.

⁵⁶⁰ Charles Seib, 'A (Televised) Mission to Jerusalem,' *WP*, 25 November 1977.

⁵⁶¹ Marvin Barrett, 'TV Diplomacy and other Broadcast Quandaries,' *Columbia Journalism Review* 18, no. 1 (1979).

A *New York Times* analysis labelled Sadat's 'mass diplomacy' an 'innovation' that ensured 'the American people had become engaged' in the process.⁵⁶² The intense coverage served to focus the American public's attention on the Middle East, highlighting the absence of a direct Carter administration role in the dramatic events in Israel and helped affect a shift in public attitudes.

It is impossible to establish a causal relationship between the media coverage and public opinion, but some correlative observations can be inferred. The images of Sadat and the glowing words the U.S. press had for the Egyptian leader put a new face for Americans on the Arab-Israeli dispute. One columnist wrote that Sadat had transformed Americans' perceptions of Arabs and their cause: 'Unlike the set pieces to which we have become accustomed – the oil-rich sheik, the terrorist, the undulating crowd – Sadat was neither alarming nor strange. He was politically plausible and humanly familiar.'⁵⁶³

Indeed, Asi argues that Sadat's trip served as a 'pivot point' for American coverage of the Middle East; it helped usher in a new era of news treatment of Egypt, Israel and the PLO. Asi's analysis finds that American television news' pro-Israel coverage decreased significantly during the 1970s, while coverage of the Arab side of the conflict became less negative.⁵⁶⁴

American opinion overwhelmingly supported Sadat. Caddell, Carter's pollster, found that 80 percent of U.S. respondents believed Sadat's visit to Israel was good for peace. The drama of Sadat in Israel, played out on television screens and splashed across front pages, constituted visible evidence of progress on the seemingly intractable dispute. Nearly as many people (26 percent to 29 percent) felt the Arabs had matched Israel's willingness to make concessions.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶² Flora Lewis column, 'A New 'Mass' Diplomacy, Using Television and the Press, Is Emerging in Middle East,' *NYT*, 23 December 1977. Also see William Sexton, 'TV Summity Is Not Without Its Perils ...,' *Newsday*, 23 November 1977; J.F. terHorst column, 'The media's role: a public searchlight, *Detroit News*, *ibid.*; and Thomas Collins, 'Cameras Leave, Issues Remain,' *Newsday*, 24 November 1977, clippings in Folder: 'Middle East,' Box: 2M733, WCP.

⁵⁶³ Meg Greenfield column, 'Our Ugly Arab Complex,' *WP*, 30 November 1977.

⁵⁶⁴ Morad Asi, 'Arabs, Israelis, and TV News: A Time-Series, Content Analysis,' in *Television Coverage of the Middle East*, ed. William C. Adams (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1981).

⁵⁶⁵ 'CSR: Analysis of Political Attitudes in the United States, January 1978,' January 1978, Folder: 'CSR: Analysis of Political Attitudes in the United States,' Powell Donated, Box 15, JCL.

The American Jewish community showed even stronger support for Sadat's initiative than the general population.⁵⁶⁶ Additionally, publications such as *Commentary Magazine*, published by the American Jewish Congress, extolled the virtues of bilateral negotiations.⁵⁶⁷ AIPAC was cautiously optimistic, but chided the administration that it 'must not remain doctrinaire in its insistence on a comprehensive settlement at Geneva. ... Washington should keep all options open.'⁵⁶⁸

American public opinion toward Israel remained positive, but throughout the 1970s it became increasingly nuanced and receptive to Egypt, the Arabs and the Palestinians.⁵⁶⁹ For example, a Gallup survey in June 1976 found 46 percent of Americans were favourable toward Egypt, with 39 percent unfavourable. By January 1980, however, 71 percent of Americans polled said they had a favourable view of Egypt, with 23 percent reporting a negative view. In addition, Gallup polls showed that the number of Americans who held a 'highly favourable' view toward Egypt had more than doubled between 1976 and 1980, from 14 percent to 34 percent.⁵⁷⁰ Moreover, a 9 February 1978 Gallup poll found that 32 percent of respondents believed Egypt was doing all 'it should to bring about peace in the Middle East.' By comparison, only 25 percent felt Israel was doing all it could.⁵⁷¹

The year 1977 appears crucial in this evolution. For example, Gallup in 1977 began polling on whether Americans supported the establishment of a Palestinian 'nation.' Less than a week before Sadat touched down in Israel, Gallup found that 47 percent of American respondents favoured the establishment of a Palestinian 'nation,' with only 29 percent believing they should continue living as they were at the time, scattered among Arab states and Israel.⁵⁷² Sadat was also a

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid. Also see *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 14-16.

⁵⁶⁷ Robert Tucker, 'The Middle East: For a Separate Peace,' *Commentary Magazine* 65, no. 3 (1978).

⁵⁶⁸ 'Sadat and Begin – A Start,' *NER*, XXI: 47, 23 November 1977.

⁵⁶⁹ Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, 'Carter vs. Israel: What the Polls Reveal,' *Commentary Magazine* 64 no. 5 (1977).

⁵⁷⁰ Adams and Heyl, 'From Cairo to Kabul with the Networks, 1972-1980.'

⁵⁷¹ George Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1978* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1979), 57-73. A Harris Survey released on the eve of Sadat's trip found a similar trend. Louis Harris, 'U.S. Heavily Pro-Israeli But Arabs Register Gains,' *WP*, 18 November 1977.

⁵⁷² _____, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1972-1977, Vol. 1, 1972-1975* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1978), 1220-25.

popular figure with Americans. A 1 January 1978, poll found that Americans listed Sadat as the second-most admired man alive. Only Carter notched a higher ranking.⁵⁷³

Caddell's poll concluded that Carter's improved rating on the Middle East was one of the survey's 'few bright spots.' However, in his analysis Caddell argued 'events have to be shaped in such a way that the American people come to feel secure in the idea that Jimmy Carter can do the job as President.' Overall, the percentage of people who judged Carter's job performance as 'excellent' or 'good' had slid from a high of 69 percent (and 84 percent of Democrats) in the honeymoon period of February 1977 to 50 percent (and 62 percent of Democrats) in December 1977.⁵⁷⁴ In this context, the prospect of Carter backing away from his primary foreign-policy initiative unsettled his advisors.

U.S. recalibrates

The opening of the bilateral Egypt-Israel channel forced Washington to contend with a shifting diplomatic landscape. Although Jordan and Saudi Arabia eventually offered tepid support for Sadat's initiative, the other Arab actors as well as Moscow remained implacably opposed. For leaders such as Syria's Hafiz al-Assad and the PLO's Yasser Arafat, Sadat's decision to deal directly with the Israelis betrayed the Arab cause and, they feared, dealt a blow to Palestinian aspirations.⁵⁷⁵

Following Sadat's trip, Washington began to recalibrate its strategy. The next steps, however, were less than clear. 'There's general confusion in the Middle East about specifically what we should do next; the same confusion exists in the White House,' Carter confided to his diary.⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ _____, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1978*, 1. Begin ranked seventh.

⁵⁷⁴ 'CSR: Analysis of Political Attitudes in the United States, January 1978,' January 1978, Folder: 'CSR: Analysis of Political Attitudes in the United States,' Powell Donated, Box 15, JCL.

⁵⁷⁵ Algeria, Libya, the PLO, South Yemen and Syria formed an 'Arab Confrontation Front' in response to Sadat's initiative. 'PLO: Six-Point Program (December 4, 1977),' Laqueur and Rubin, *Israel-Arab Reader*, 215; and 'Arab League: Summit Declaration (December 5, 1977),' *ibid.*, 216-18.

⁵⁷⁶ 23-27 November 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 141.

Initially, that meant acknowledging a shift in the U.S. role to that of supporting actor. In a telephone conversation, Begin gave Carter credit for facilitating Sadat's visit. 'I want to thank you for all that you have done. This is your achievement,' Begin flattered the president. Begin told Carter that he and Sadat 'agreed to negotiate and we want to go to Geneva. Sadat was not interested in such matters as a unified delegation or any other procedural questions.' Carter praised the leaders' 'courage and sensitivity.' He added: 'We are very interested in helping in whatever way we can.'⁵⁷⁷ Meanwhile, Sadat told U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts that he felt his initiative helped create a new dynamic, one that would 'not require the type of US "pressure process" that he had once thought necessary. US pressure on Israel no longer requires a US-Israeli confrontation.'⁵⁷⁸

Carter opened his 30 November press conference with a statement intended to assuage critics who felt he had been lukewarm toward Sadat's initiative.

The road toward peace has already led through Jerusalem, will now go to Cairo and ultimately, we believe, to a comprehensive consultation at Geneva. ... When there has been no progress being made, the United States has taken the initiative. Now that progress is being made, a proper role for the United States is to support that progress ...⁵⁷⁹

The White House still favoured a multilateral deal negotiated through Geneva, but signs suggested that a bilateral agreement might be a precursor to any broader peace. After meeting with Begin, U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis commented: '... [I]t looks as though our Geneva scenario has been considerably modified and the new track has, obviously, a heady odor of Israeli-Egyptian bilaterals.'⁵⁸⁰

Sadat's initiative led to a change in American tactics, but not (initially) in goals. Washington continued to work toward a comprehensive settlement, but now it would use Egypt to anchor the negotiations and provide the basis for developing a common Arab front, regardless of objections

⁵⁷⁷ Memorandum of conversation between Carter and Begin, 21 November 1977, NLC-126-6-2-2-9. Also see: Letter from Begin to Carter, 23 November 1977, ISA/RG 43/A/4313/5. Retrieved 20 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/E4536B4F-5A69-4008-A624-25D7D7317B4D/0/Egypt35.pdf>.

⁵⁷⁸ Document 155, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Cairo (Eilts) to State Department, 'Sadat's Assessment of His Visit to Israel and Where Do We Go From Here?', 23 November 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 769-75.

⁵⁷⁹ 'The President's News Conference,' 30 November 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II*, 2053-2061.

⁵⁸⁰ Document 157, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv (Lewis) to State Department, 'Meeting with Begin on Sadat Visit,' 23 November 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 777-80.

from Syria, the PLO and others.⁵⁸¹ Progress toward an Egypt-Israel deal would come on a parallel track as movement on the status of the Palestinians.⁵⁸² Carter poured increasing effort into working with Sadat rather than trying to achieve agreement with other Arabs.

In late November, Brzezinski urged Carter to retake the initiative.⁵⁸³ Meanwhile, Cyrus Vance sent a memo to Carter in which he acknowledged that the U.S. role as mediator had become less central, a Geneva conference was unlikely to be convened soon and continued Egyptian-Israeli bilateral contacts should be encouraged.

I believe strongly that it would be wrong at this particular moment to try any high-level shuttle in the Middle East. There is no way in which that could serve either our basic interests, influence the situation constructively, or bring the negotiation track under our control. It would look as if we were trying too hard to control a situation which has developed a momentum of its own without any necessity to do so or any assurance of succeeding. Such a political involvement without useful results would not reflect well on the Administration.⁵⁸⁴

Still, in the margins Carter suggested sending a U.S. envoy to the region 'to keep together what seems to be coming apart.'⁵⁸⁵

The State Department was also wary of the impact of Sadat's trip. 'By seizing the initiative in the peace process, Sadat has created very serious problems for all of the states involved,' officials argued. They worried Egypt would be isolated in the region, the 'moderate' Arabs such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and moderate Palestinians would be unable or unwilling to join the broader peace effort, and Moscow would use the divisions to tighten its links with Iraq, Syria and the PLO.⁵⁸⁶

In a December trip, Vance met with leaders in Egypt, Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, but little was said that altered the American line.⁵⁸⁷ First, the United States would try to play a constructive role in forging an Egyptian-Israeli agreement on bilateral issues. Second, Washington would attempt to help devise an interim solution dealing with a Palestinian homeland in the West Bank and Gaza. Achieving success on these two paths was an 'indispensable

⁵⁸¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 150-51.

⁵⁸² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 196-203.

⁵⁸³ Quandt, *Camp David*, 149.

⁵⁸⁴ Memo from Vance to Carter, 26 November 1977, NLC-128-13-2-17-5.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁶ Memo from Atherton and Saunders to Vance, 28 November 1977, NLC-SAFE 39-B-35-5-3-4.

⁵⁸⁷ For records of Vance's meetings, see Documents 167-76, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 807-60.

precondition,' Vance believed, to attain U.S. goals.⁵⁸⁸ 'Our objective remains a comprehensive settlement. ... The Geneva meetings will be the ultimate meeting at which that could be arrived ...' he said.⁵⁸⁹

A slight ambivalence in aims thus influenced U.S. policy over the succeeding few months. On the diplomatic side stood the pragmatic processes pursued by Vance, who sought to adjust to the new dynamic forged by Sadat's trip. However, on the strategic side, the White House felt a need to re-establish American primacy to a peace process to which it now seemed peripheral. For Brzezinski, this meant Carter needed to reassert American power and, not incidentally, for the president to demonstrate strong leadership. Still, what began to emerge was that although limited progress could be made in bilateral talks, any breakthrough would need U.S. involvement.

The only parties to accept Sadat's invitation to attend a December conference in Cairo were Israel and the United States, along with a U.N. representative. The White House delayed 72 hours to respond to Sadat's proposal.⁵⁹⁰ The conference achieved little, however, with Israel failing to set forth any proposals that the Americans believed commensurate with Sadat's initiative. Although the conference enabled Egyptian and Israeli officials to get to know each other better, it was 'more of a PR event,' recalled Atherton, the U.S. delegate to the parley.

The opening of the conference was one of the most spectacular photo opportunities I have ever witnessed. There were so many photographers that they couldn't all get in the great big plenary room at one time. The photo opportunity went on for more than an hour, because they brought in one group and took them out, then brought in another group.⁵⁹¹

At the time of the conference, Begin abruptly travelled to Washington to present his ideas to Carter. The Israeli premier outlined his vision for a phased Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and limited autonomy for the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.⁵⁹²

⁵⁸⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 195.

⁵⁸⁹ 'Middle East: Visit of Secretary Vance,' *DSB*, January 1978, 40.

⁵⁹⁰ AIPAC criticized this delay as 'puzzling to many and disappointing to others.' 'Rethinking Policy Objectives,' *NER*, XXI: 48, 30 November 1977.

⁵⁹¹ Atherton interview, ADST.

⁵⁹² 'Israel's Self-Rule Plan,' 28 December 1977, Documents: Peace Process, Israeli Knesset. Retrieved 20 September 2013, http://www.knesset.gov.il/process/docs/autonomy1977_eng.htm. Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy*, 95-142.

Begin's vision of autonomy applied to the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza, but not the territories themselves. 'The proposal deals with human beings,' he told Carter. Israel would retain control of security issues in case the PLO 'tries to take over,' he said, but the local inhabitants would be in charge of their daily life through administrative councils, which would offer a sort of cultural autonomy. Because of competing claims of sovereignty, that question would be left unaddressed for the moment. 'If we say that we demand sovereignty over the land, the Arabs will not agree. And we don't agree if they claim sovereignty. ... We will leave the question of sovereignty open, undecided,' he said. In his presentation to the White House, Begin insisted that his proposals offered 'a humane solution' for the Palestinians.⁵⁹³

Nevertheless, Vance believed Begin's plan was 'far short' of what he envisioned.⁵⁹⁴ Brzezinski was less critical, although he feared it would create a Palestinian 'Basutoland' that had little power and authority. Advocating a robust carrot-and-stick approach toward Begin, Brzezinski told Carter that he sensed a 'real opportunity' that should be 'exploited with as much personal force and drama as possible.' Presidential-level involvement in the negotiations remained imperative, he believed. '... [M]ovement is more likely as long as the grand decisions are made by people like yourself, Sadat, and Begin – individuals more likely to be interested in the big picture than in nitpicking details,' Brzezinski advised. 'Once negotiations are handed over to negotiators, progress will be tortured and slow.'⁵⁹⁵ However, Brzezinski's advice failed to anticipate the political drag and domestic controversy caused by Carter's involvement.

Sadat also sought to bring Carter more intensively into the negotiations. During his February visit to the United States, the Egyptian leader said for the first time that the United States was 'a full partner in the establishment of peace.'⁵⁹⁶ By September's Camp David Summit, Carter had also

⁵⁹³ Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, 'West Bank Portion of Memcon of President's Meeting with Begin, December 16, 1977,' 17 December 1977, Folder: 'Middle East—Negotiations: 10/77-12/77,' Brzezinski Donated, Box 13, JCL. Also see Document 177, Memcon with attachments, U.S. and Israeli delegations, 16 December 1977, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 861-72. WAFA called Begin's proposals 'a ridiculous joke.' 'Editorial on Begin's Proposal,' WAFA, 19 December 1977, IPS.

⁵⁹⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 199.

⁵⁹⁵ NSC Weekly Report #40 from Brzezinski to Carter, 16 December 1977, Folder: 'Weekly Reports [to the President], 31-41,' Brzezinski Donated, Box 41, JCL.

⁵⁹⁶ Laurence Stern, 'Sadat's Bold Act of Courting America for His Vision of Peace,' *WP*, 7 February 1978.

begun using the phrase ‘full partner,’ although Israel pointedly never used that formulation.

However, such a phrase again demonstrated the nebulousness of Carter’s role in the negotiations as both mediator and participant.

Meanwhile, a Begin-Sadat meeting in Ismailia, Egypt, on Christmas Day, achieved little. No American representative attended. Still, the two sides agreed to continue talking, with bilateral committees to discuss military and political issues. Expectations began to dampen. Carter expressed frustration over Arab opposition to Sadat. In the margin of a memo from Vance, he wrote, ‘It’s time for (Jordan’s King) Hussein to get off his a--.’⁵⁹⁷

By this time, the negotiations had dominated news coverage for months. Columnist James Reston suggested that the world was ‘now seeing a strange kind of airport and television diplomacy in which personalities dominate policies and compete with one another for the attention of the President of the United States.’⁵⁹⁸ Conservative commentators Evans and Novak lamented how Carter’s style had impacted Arab-Israeli peacemaking. ‘Even if “spontaneity” and the drive to be different from Nixon – not sheer clumsiness – truly explain the President’s verbal pratfalls, that does not mitigate the consternation his repeated mistakes have caused in Mideast capitals,’ they opined.⁵⁹⁹ A *Wall Street Journal* columnist similarly criticised Carter’s approach, writing, ‘... [T]here are times when open covenants are best secretly arrived at.’⁶⁰⁰ If Sadat seemed to be scoffing at the traditional channels of negotiation, Carter’s style alone aroused criticism from the American elite who felt he disregarded diplomatic protocol.

The day before departing on a seven-country trip in late December, the president acknowledged that the U.S. position had changed. ‘We are now in a role of supporter. We encourage them to continue with their fruitful negotiations,’ he said. ‘This is a better role for us.’ Additionally, despite his initial tepid response to Begin’s self-rule plan, Carter called the proposals

⁵⁹⁷ Memo from Vance to Carter, 17 December 1977, NLC-128-13-3-12-9.

⁵⁹⁸ James Reston column, ‘The Day After Tomorrow,’ *NYT*, 16 December 1977.

⁵⁹⁹ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak column, ‘Impromptu Diplomacy,’ *WP*, 9 January 1978.

⁶⁰⁰ Vermont Royster column, ‘Negotiating Peace,’ *WSJ*, 11 January 1978.

‘a long step forward.’⁶⁰¹ Still, subsequent events indicated that Carter’s views were more in line with Sadat’s than Begin’s.

Carter met with Sadat in Aswan, Egypt, in January.⁶⁰² Carter publicly reiterated his views: a ‘true peace’ based on ‘normal relations’; withdrawal of Israel to ‘secure and recognized borders’ based on 242 and 338; and, finally, a resolution of the ‘Palestinian problem in all its aspects. The solution must recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people and enable the Palestinians to participate in the determination of their own future.’⁶⁰³

This statement showed the closeness of Carter and Sadat’s positions. Moreover, by including the phrase ‘legitimate rights’ of the Palestinians, Carter’s Aswan declaration used language that only months before, in the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué, had caused controversy. In the new context provided by Sadat’s initiative, however, this formulation had become less objectionable to Israel.

Year-end reviews

Meanwhile, in an end-of-year summary, Stuart Eizenstat again demonstrated an overestimation of the administration’s power to rally public support for its policies through talking *at*, rather than consulting *with*, it. Invoking Theodore Roosevelt’s description of the presidency as a ‘bully pulpit,’ Eizenstat wrote: ‘The President should tell the public what it must know and condition it to accept the views that the President is putting forward.’ Eizenstat advocated a robust strategy of ‘public education’ whereby the president would deliver at least one speech per month on a major topic.⁶⁰⁴ However, this approach ensured the influence flowed only one way. Eizenstat did not address modes of persuasion or how to capitalise on existing opinion. As was often the case,

⁶⁰¹ ‘Conversation With the President,’ 28 December 1977, *PPP: Carter, 1977, II*, 2187-2202.

⁶⁰² For a U.S. summary of these talks, see Document 185, Telegram from Vance to U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv, ‘President Carter’s Meeting With President Sadat,’ 5 January 1978, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 916-18.

⁶⁰³ ‘Remarks of the President and President Anwar el-Sadat Following Their Meeting,’ 4 January 1978, *PPP: Carter, 1978, I*, 19-20.

⁶⁰⁴ Carter wrote ‘excellent’ on the memo and ordered it distributed to Jordan, Mondale and Powell. Memo from Eizenstat to Carter, ‘Year-End Summary,’ 27 December 1977, Folder 28, Box 4, SEP.

Carter did not strike the balance of listening to the public while also trying to lead it in his preferred direction.

In early 1978, the NSC sent Carter a review of the administration's first year performance. In summarising its accomplishments, the report, written predominantly by Brzezinski aide David Aaron, included 'generation of genuine momentum for comprehensive peace in the Middle East,' and among its shortcomings listed 'underestimation of domestic reaction to some aspects of our Middle Eastern policy.' It noted that the idea of a Palestinian homeland proved to be the most controversial point in Carter's approach. Indeed, Aaron acknowledged the 'very intense domestic reaction' provoked by Carter's stance toward the Palestinians. 'Part of the fault was of our own making, and part of the media and the American Jewish community. Nonetheless, it seems fair to conclude that the Palestinian issue was introduced too early and without adequate care to keep it in perspective,' the report noted.⁶⁰⁵

Moreover, the report argued, the Joint Communiqué served as the administration's second major difficulty. The statement 'compounded our problems on the domestic front' by 'bringing together traditional anti-Soviet forces and supporters of Israel.' Developments at the end of 1977 were more encouraging, though. Sadat's Jerusalem trip brought the negotiations 'into a new phase,' Aaron noted, and allowed all parties to embark on a course that 'enjoyed much wider support among the American public and which seemed once again to hold good promise of moving the parties toward a peace settlement.' Among the priorities for 1978, Aaron listed 'progress in Middle East negotiations' as one of three 'must win issues.'⁶⁰⁶

Toward a "secret strategy"

Frustrated by the lack of progress in bilateral talks in early 1978, Carter contemplated inviting Begin and Sadat for a joint meeting.⁶⁰⁷ The Americans recognised that for any deals to be

⁶⁰⁵ NSC Weekly Report #42 with attachments from Brzezinski to Carter, 13 January 1978, NLC-128-9-14-2-3.

⁶⁰⁶ The Panama Canal Treaty ratification and SALT/Comprehensive Test Ban were the other two 'must win issues.' Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Notes of meeting, n.a., 23 January 1978, Folder: 'Egypt 11/77-11/81,' Plains File, Box 1, JCL.

made, they would likely have to come at the highest levels. Yet the dynamic between Begin and Sadat had become unworkable. Washington needed to assert a forceful role in the peace process.

Although Carter and Brzezinski initially liked the idea of a tripartite summit, Vance opposed it. Its most vocal advocate was Hamilton Jordan. ‘I don’t think *anyone* made a very convincing argument against the joint summit,’ Jordan wrote. ‘By just having Sadat over, you help him. But Sadat is *not* the problem. Begin is the problem, and a frank talk with him *before the crunch* is also needed.’⁶⁰⁸ However, Carter decided against the three-country summit and instead only invited Sadat to Camp David in February 1978.

The White House began to formulate a ‘secret strategy’ by which Carter and Sadat would coordinate policy moves in order to pressure Begin for concessions.⁶⁰⁹ The goodwill in the West generated by Sadat’s Jerusalem trip helped make this strategy possible. At the NSC, Brzezinski and Quandt were its most forceful proponents. Although stopping short of a full confrontation with the Begin government, Washington would take a tougher line toward perceived Israeli intransigence. The plan was later shelved, but the thinking had an important impact on American policy.

The evolving strategy neutralised two political irritants for Carter. As the emphasis shifted to Egyptian-Israeli bilateral contacts, the need to reach an accommodation with the PLO diminished.⁶¹⁰ Similarly, with neither the Egyptians nor the Israelis desirous of a Soviet role in the peace process, Washington had little reason to coordinate policy with Moscow.

In place of these irritants, the administration focused on two issues it believed would encounter less domestic opposition: the Begin government’s support for Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Gaza and Sinai, and its interpretation of territorial withdrawal in 242.⁶¹¹ Begin’s

⁶⁰⁸ Memo from Jordan to Carter, n.d. [circa 23 January 1978], Folder: ‘Egypt 11/77-11/81,’ Plains File, Box 1, JCL. Emphases in original.

⁶⁰⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 239-47.

⁶¹⁰ In early 1978, Brzezinski characterised U.S. policy toward the PLO in the wake of Sadat’s Jerusalem trip as ‘bye bye PLO.’ His remark, made to *Paris Match*, angered the PLO and further rendered unlikely an imminent U.S.-PLO dialogue. Raymond Carroll et al, ‘Bye-Bye PLO?’ *Newsweek*, 16 January 1978.

⁶¹¹ Quandt, *Camp David*, 162.

settlements policy was unpopular among American supporters of Israel, as was the prime minister's belief that 242 did not require Israel to withdraw from the West Bank.⁶¹²

As part of this effort, Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-Minn.) sent, with Carter's encouragement, a letter to Begin urging him to alter policy on those issues.⁶¹³ Later in the month, Carter pushed a plan to send prominent Jewish Americans to Israel to help persuade the government to moderate its stance. 'We must act on the Israeli settlements,' Vance advised Carter. 'My suggestion is that – at the highest level – we get a group of American Jews to help us ... to the point of sending them to Israel as emissaries.' In the margins, Carter wrote, 'Let's plan a strategy.'⁶¹⁴

Ahead of Sadat's February visit, an NSC-State working group wanted Carter to tell the Egyptian leader that he was working under tight political constraints and needed help pressuring Begin. The NSC wanted Sadat to put forward a proposal that would address issues of transition for the West Bank and Gaza, but which would also contain elements that were considered unacceptable to both Israel and the United States. By doing so, Sadat would enable the United States to confront both Egypt and Israel publicly over their competing proposals without appearing too one-sided against Israel. However, as part of the collusion, Washington would at some point make its own suggestions, which Sadat would accept. At this point, Carter would turn 'the full burden of American influence' on Begin to extract a compromise.⁶¹⁵ 'Brzezinski liked the idea; Vance was embarrassed by it ... Carter didn't like it,' according to Quandt.⁶¹⁶ Whatever the reservations, they proceeded with the plan.⁶¹⁷

Carter and Sadat took steps in February to devise a way to pressure Begin on settlements and the West Bank. Although it was questionable how clearly either Egypt or the United States

⁶¹² Arthur Samuelson, 'The Dilemma of American Jewry,' *The Nation*, 1 April 1978.

⁶¹³ Memo from Vance to Carter, 10 January 1978, NLC-128-13-4-3-8. Encouraged by Carter, Humphrey's office released the letter to the media later that month. The senator died on 13 January. Hedrick Smith, 'Humphrey Urged Begin To Be Flexible in Talks,' *NYT*, 25 January 1978.

⁶¹⁴ Memo from Vance to Carter, 31 January 1978, NLC-126-13-4-18-2.

⁶¹⁵ Quandt, *Camp David*, 171; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 242-43.

⁶¹⁶ Quandt interview, REP.

⁶¹⁷ Quandt floated this idea to Brzezinski in January. As part of this strategy, Quandt suggested Carter consider publicising the U.S. positions toward the negotiations via 'a fireside chat to the American people.' Document 190, Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, 'The Approaching Moment of Truth,' 12 January 1978, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 926-28.

understood the agreements that were made, it led to a period of increased pressure on Israel. The intention was to ‘hammer away at the Israelis and put them in a corner on things that we thought were important,’ Quandt said.⁶¹⁸

In February, the State Department released to the media a chronology of recent American objections to Israeli settlement activity, including three direct messages from the president to Begin that January.⁶¹⁹ Closely mirroring these points, a *Washington Post* editorial commented: ‘A policy of sneaking new settlements in between the lines of assurances to the United States is offensive to the United States, and to Jimmy Carter personally.’⁶²⁰

By late 1977, Carter’s relationship with the American Jewish community was parlous.⁶²¹ The open disagreements with Begin on the contours of an agreement and about Jewish settlements had frayed relations between the White House and American Jewry. The Carter administration was thus forced to expend time and energy alternately wooing and confronting Israel’s supporters.

In an effort to avoid the kind of political fallout that followed the Joint Communiqué, the White House by early 1978 had taken a proactive approach toward cultivating support for its Middle East policies among the American Jewish community. Domestic and foreign policy staff held consultations with Jewish groups and other pro-Israel constituencies that had ‘at times become heated’ to explain policy.⁶²²

Eager to head off potential problems, in January the administration’s Jewish community liaison, Mark Siegel, proposed bringing a group of Jewish leaders to the White House to meet with members of the NSC and the administration’s political staff. Siegel endorsed an ‘offensive in the Jewish community to give the President his proper credit for the positive developments’ in the Middle East. A White House meeting ‘would be a logical kick-off for this kind of endeavor, and

⁶¹⁸ Quandt interview, REP.

⁶¹⁹ ‘Israeli Settlements,’ *DSB*, March 1978, 37.

⁶²⁰ Editorial, ‘Settlements or Settlement?’ *WP*, 2 February 1978.

⁶²¹ Editorial, ‘The Jews and Jimmy Carter,’ *NYT*, 6 November 1977.

⁶²² Memo from Starr to Lipshutz, Eizenstat and Jordan, ‘Middle East Roundtable Briefings,’ 14 November 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East Issues—Jewish Community Concerns [O/A 6342],’ Eizenstat Files, Box 235, JCL.

might also serve to [defuse] negative comments based on ignorance of the current situation,' Siegel suggested.⁶²³

The subsequent 'offensive' had mixed success. On 8 February, Carter dined with nine Jewish leaders, for whom he 'spelled out the relative flexibility of Sadat's position and the intransigence of Israel.' He focused on Israel's settlements, the urgency of negotiations and 'the need for Israel to recognize that UN 242 applied to the West Bank/Gaza Strip.' The president said his guests were 'constructive,' with the exception of Alexander Schindler, 'who always acts like an ass.'⁶²⁴

Vance angered Israel on 10 February by saying that the Sinai settlements were 'contrary to international law and ... therefore, they should not exist.'⁶²⁵ He also told reporters that briefings had been held so that members of Congress and American Jewish leaders 'can understand the actual condition of the negotiations at this point and the obstacles and problems that remain, in order to make continuing progress in the talks.'⁶²⁶ A meeting later that month between White House officials and the Presidents' Conference broke down in acrimony, according to Siegel.⁶²⁷

Sadat also believed in the importance of winning the support of the American Jewish community. Shortly before his February trip, Sadat wrote an 'open letter to American Jews' at the invitation of the *Miami Herald*. 'We need your understanding,' he wrote. Many Jewish leaders, however, felt Sadat's efforts at currying their favour were misguided and that he should direct his energies toward negotiating with Israel.⁶²⁸

After meeting with Carter at Camp David, Sadat met with prominent Jewish Americans at Blair House. However, the Presidents' Conference spurned Sadat's invitation, insisting it did not want to interfere with the negotiations.⁶²⁹ Vance informed Carter that the meeting seemed to have

⁶²³ Memo from Siegel to Jordan, 'Meeting with Jewish Leaders on Mideast Situation,' 6 January 1978, *ibid*.

⁶²⁴ 8 February 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 171.

⁶²⁵ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 116.

⁶²⁶ 'The Secretary: News Conference, February 10,' *DSB*, March 1978, 13-18.

⁶²⁷ Siegel interview.

⁶²⁸ 'Sadat Appeals Directly to American Jews to Support His Efforts for Peace,' *LAT*, 30 January 1978. Also see: 'Sadat's Chutzpah,' *NER*, XXII: 5, 1 February 1978.

⁶²⁹ *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1977-1978*, 17-18.

gone ‘well,’ that Sadat had ‘downplayed the Palestinian problem’ and the Egyptian president urged the Jewish leaders to transmit their impressions of his sincere desire for peace to Begin.⁶³⁰

About his trip to Jerusalem, Sadat told Carter he had done so to surprise Israel by acceding to its demands and also because he recognised ‘that there are strong lobby groups in the United States and that this makes it difficult for an American President to act. He thought he might be able to build strong support among Americans for the Arab position in favor of peace.’ In their meetings, Carter also spoke plainly of his view that American public opinion would be important to any progress. ‘I won’t mislead you, but without you and your support in American public opinion, I can’t force Israel to change. With your support, I can put pressure on Israel to change. This is a new thing,’ he told Sadat. ‘My hope has been that some key Congressional leaders and American Jewish leaders could join me to press Begin on a settlement.’⁶³¹

Regardless, Carter’s 7 February diary entry suggests he was satisfied with Sadat’s public relations offensive in the United States after the decision to pursue a joint strategy.⁶³² That sentiment was not universally shared. ‘The news from the United States of Sadat’s success in his public appearances, followed by official statements of Carter and Vance, and, in particular, reports of Carter’s meeting with the Jewish leaders, provoked widespread anger in Israel,’ Moshe Dayan later wrote.⁶³³

Israel also recognised the importance of winning the support of American constituencies. On 8 February, the day of Sadat’s departure from the United States, Dayan arrived for a nationwide speaking tour. In an analysis, *The Washington Post*’s diplomatic correspondent described Dayan’s visit as part of a ‘battle for American public opinion.’ The effort was necessary because as a result of Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem, ‘an Arab competitor for the first time is seriously challenging Israel for the favor and support of the U.S. public.’⁶³⁴

⁶³⁰ Memo from Vance to Carter, 6 February 1978, NLC-128-13-5-3-7.

⁶³¹ Document 211, Memcon, Carter and Sadat, 4 February 1978, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 988-1002

⁶³² 7 February 1978, Carter, *Diary*, 170.

⁶³³ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 116.

⁶³⁴ Don Oberdorfer, ‘Moshe Dayan, the Famous War General, Takes Aim at U.S. Public Opinion,’ *WP*, 16 February 1978.

Yet when Dayan arrived, he ‘was immediately made to feel the cold wind in the wake of the “Sadat festival.” The Israeli Government had been placed in the dock both by the American press and by some of the Jewish leaders.’ Despite his best efforts, Dayan felt he ‘made no converts’⁶³⁵ *The New York Times* wrote that ‘Egypt and Israel are … asking the American people and Government to throw the weight of their opinion against the terms of one side or the other.’⁶³⁶

Carter was not immune to pressures from Arab-American groups. ‘I met with the Arab American leaders, who have given all my advisors a hard time. … I was fair and staunch with them, gave the same responses as to the Middle East heads of state,’ Carter confided to his diary in December.⁶³⁷ Arab-Americans were mostly sceptical of the abandonment of the multilateral track in favour of an Egypt-Israel negotiating channel.⁶³⁸

Conclusion

The U.S. media’s role in facilitating the peace process during and after Sadat’s Jerusalem initiative served to highlight the Carter administration’s shortcomings. Open diplomacy, much heralded and practiced by Carter, came to characterise the entire peace process, not solely the American side. Yet the American media opinion’s disdain for Carter’s methods of open diplomacy ran counter to its appreciation of Sadat’s initiative. These factors combined to paint a picture of an amateurish president who did more harm than good to the peace process – and American prestige.

The administration for too long held out hope that ultimately it would be in a position to reinsert itself into the peace process to steer negotiation back toward a comprehensive settlement. By the time the White House crept toward a ‘secret strategy’ with Egypt, it had become bogged down in other sensitive foreign-policy issues such as fighter-jet sales to Egypt and Saudi Arabia and the Panama Canal treaties.

⁶³⁵ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 117-18.

⁶³⁶ Editorial, ‘The West Bank Imperatives,’ *NYT*, 10 February 1978.

⁶³⁷ 15 December 1977, Carter, *Diary*, 149.

⁶³⁸ Youssef Ibrahim, ‘Arabs in the U.S. Stunned, Puzzled By Sadat’s Action,’ *NYT*, 18 November 1977.

The aftermath of Sadat's trip represented the opening of a narrow window in which the Carter administration had political leverage to pressure Israel. Yet Carter's preoccupation with convening Geneva prevented him from recognising that such a moment had arrived. Begin and Sadat continued to pay lip service to Geneva, but Carter, as the power broker, should have realised sooner that procedural obstacles were prohibitive.

American public opinion had grown more sympathetic to the Arab cause, but the White House failed in its attempt to use this advantage to pressure Israel. The administration still felt the effects of the fallout from the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué. Thus, it was wary of alienating further parts of Carter's domestic base. In the end, that wariness curtailed what was achievable in American policy.

Chapter Five: Jimmy and the Jets – Capitol Hill Fight Over Carter’s Airplane Sales to Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia

Introduction

For Israel and its American supporters, 14 February 1978, proved to be a bitter Valentine’s Day. It was then that Secretary of State Cyrus Vance announced the administration’s intention to sell 200 advanced warplanes to Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia in a ‘package,’ whereby congressional rejection of sales to any country meant a veto of the entire deal. ‘Any new aircraft sales to this region must be seen in the context of both the negotiating process and our objective of a peace settlement,’ he said.⁶³⁹

The sales to Egypt and Israel were relatively uncontroversial, but the decision to sell F-15s to Saudi Arabia aroused intense opposition from Israel and its friends in the United States. ‘This was to be the first occasion in my administration when members of both the House and Senate had to withstand [AIPAC’s] political pressure, and I was determined not to lose,’ President Carter recalled.⁶⁴⁰ National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski said the ‘package’ was ‘designed to paralyze the powerful Israel lobby on the Hill.’⁶⁴¹ Carter shepherded it to approval, relying on Republican support to defeat an effort to quash the sales, but at significant political cost to his vision for a peace settlement.

This chapter argues that Carter was so eager to demonstrate he had the strength to overcome domestic opposition to pursue his international agenda that the means used to gain support for the package virtually eclipsed the end itself. The White House based its decision to pursue the sales on strategic imperatives. However, the tactics employed to push the package through Congress stemmed as much from Carter’s domestic political imperatives as from the need to meet the Saudis’ request.

⁶³⁹ Vance, ‘Middle East Aircraft Sales,’ 14 February 1978, *DSB*, March 1978, 37.

⁶⁴⁰ Carter, *Diary*, 195.

⁶⁴¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 248.

The fight was undertaken for diplomatic purposes: to show Israel, in particular, that Carter could withstand domestic pressure to pursue his international goals. ‘Had we lost this vote, my ability to make progress in Mideast peace would have been almost terminated because it would have proven that Begin’s intransigence was what the Senate preferred, and moderate Arabs rebuffed,’ Carter believed.⁶⁴² It was also done for domestic political purposes: it partly stemmed from the administration’s preoccupation with answering critics who charged it was insufficiently ‘tough.’⁶⁴³

After the sales were announced, Brzezinski invoked Machiavelli when he advised Carter to demonstrate toughness to foreign leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin:

A President must not only be loved and respected; he must also be feared. . . . I think the time may be right for you to pick some controversial subject on which you will deliberately choose to act with a degree of anger and even roughness. . . . The central point is to demonstrate clearly that . . . obstructing the United States means picking a fight . . . in which the President is prepared . . . to hit the opponent squarely on the head and to knock him down decisively.⁶⁴⁴

This pugilistic spirit pervaded Carter’s approach to generating support for sales. When, the following day, Vance informed Carter of congressional opposition, the president counselled fortitude: ‘Good – Stick with it – We’ll fight it out.’⁶⁴⁵

On the surface, the debate centred on how the sales would affect regional security, but its essence was how they reflected U.S. interests in the post-oil embargo Middle East.⁶⁴⁶ The episode underscored the domestic repercussions of the reorientation of American strategic interests in the Middle East away from the Arab-Israeli dispute and toward the Persian Gulf.⁶⁴⁷

The involvement of lobbyists and congressional hearings ensured the debate generated maximum media visibility. The lobbying worked on three levels: administration members urged

⁶⁴² 15 May 1978, Carter, *Diary*, 194-95.

⁶⁴³ Cabinet meeting notes, 17 April 1978, *ibid.*, 185-88. NSC Weekly Report #42 from Brzezinski to Carter, 13 January 1978, NLC-128-9-14-2-3.

⁶⁴⁴ NSC Weekly Report #48 from Brzezinski to Carter, 24 February 1978, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 42-52,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 41, JCL.

⁶⁴⁵ Note in margins, Memo from Vance to Carter, 25 February 1978, NLC-128-13-5-16-3.

⁶⁴⁶ Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed the five-month embargo in an effort to shift American policy following the 1973 war. See Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 570-94.

⁶⁴⁷ Njolstad, ‘Shifting Priorities.’

lawmakers to back the sales, members of pro-Israel factions sought to defeat the Saudi portion of the package, and pro-Arab forces worked to clear the way for sales to Riyadh. Lobbying was fierce: Senators cumulatively received around 40,000 letters and telegrams both in favour of and against the sale.⁶⁴⁸ ‘There were literally days when you could not walk in the halls (of Congress) because of people and groups clamoring for one side or the other on the F-15 thing,’ a congressional aide recalled.⁶⁴⁹

The debate garnered significant attention at the time, but subsequent studies of Carter’s foreign policy have largely ignored it. Most accounts of this affair have focused on congressional relations and lobbying.⁶⁵⁰ The most detailed analysis of the episode, written without access to archives, argues that Washington pursued the F-15 sales to cement its new ‘special relationship’ with Saudi Arabia at the expense of its relationship with Israel.⁶⁵¹ However, these studies have failed to contextualise the debate within Carter’s foreign policy and the trajectory of his personal involvement in Arab-Israeli diplomacy.⁶⁵² The present account is unique in using archival sources from Carter’s domestic and foreign policy staffs, congressional materials, and media and public opinion reports.

The omission of this episode from the literature on the peace process has implications for the understanding of American policy. The bitterness engendered by the F-15 debate neither determined the outcome of the Camp David peace process, nor explains the subsequent strains between Carter and Begin. Yet further exploration of the resultant dynamic lends nuanced understanding to the state of Carter’s political capital at home and how it narrowed his political options on a range of issues, including pressuring Israel on settlements. The reasons for the package

⁶⁴⁸ David Ottaway, *The King’s Messenger* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 36.

⁶⁴⁹ Hoag Levins, *Arab Reach: The Secret War Against Israel* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 12-13.

⁶⁵⁰ Bard, *Arab Lobby*, 108-36; Ghassan Bishara, ‘The Middle East Arms Package: A Survey of the Congressional Debates,’ *Journal of Palestine Studies* 7, no. 4 (1978): 126-28; Thomas Franck and Edward Weisband, *Foreign Policy By Congress* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 106-11 and 84-85; David Howard Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups: American and Canadian Jews Lobby for Israel* (London: Greenwood Press, 1990), 64-70; Daniel Price, ‘Presidential Power as a Domestic Constraint on Foreign Policy: Case Studies Examining Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia,’ *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 26, no. 4 (1996); Tivnan, *The Lobby*, 98-134.

⁶⁵¹ Rehavia Uami Yakovée, ‘Arms for Oil -- Oil for Arms: An Analysis of President Carter’s 1978 Planes ‘Package Deal’ Sale to Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia’ (PhD dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 1983).

⁶⁵² An exception is Tillman, *United States and the Middle East*, 98-106. He did not, however, have access to archives and therefore was unable to link Carter’s domestic and foreign policy advice.

– and the tactics pursued to get it through Congress – cannot be separated from the domestic context.

Confidence boosted

The debate overlapped with the bruising ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties. That episode provided the first opportunity for the administration to put into practice Hamilton Jordan's strategy for cultivating domestic support – based largely on face-to-face contact with lawmakers and opinion leaders – for foreign policy initiatives.⁶⁵³ The victory left Brzezinski bristling with confidence. Success on the treaties 'shows [Carter] takes on the hard issues, sticks to it, and prevails. ... Others should take note – we're going to deal with other issues the same way,' he said.⁶⁵⁴ The White House applied lessons learned on Panama to push the airplane sales through Congress.⁶⁵⁵

The sales to Saudi Arabia, promised by Ford and reaffirmed by Carter,⁶⁵⁶ had been continually pressed on visiting U.S. delegations of lawmakers.⁶⁵⁷ The airplanes for Egypt and Israel were tied to the negotiations. Washington wanted to reward Sadat for the risks he had taken, and to buttress him against regional isolation. Israel had a longstanding request for airplanes, which Washington wanted to satisfy without widening its regional military superiority to such an extent as to anger Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The administration proposed to sell Israel 15 F-15s, in addition to 25 previously sold, and 75 F-16s, totalling around \$1.98 billion; to Egypt, 50 F-5Es, amounting to \$400 million; and to Saudi Arabia, 60 F-15s, which together carried a \$2.5 billion price tag. The F-15s, capable of flying up to

⁶⁵³ Memo with attachments from Jordan to Carter, 'Overall Foreign Policy Consultation,' 29 June 1977, Folder: 'Foreign Policy Issues/Work Plans, 6/77,' Box 34A, Jordan Files, JCL.

⁶⁵⁴ George Moffett, *The Limits of Victory: Ratification of the Panama Canal Treaties* (London: Cornell University Press, 1985), 204.

⁶⁵⁵ Jordan interview, CPP, 45-46.

⁶⁵⁶ Memo with attachments, Jones to Senate Foreign Relations Committee (hereafter SFRC), 10 March 1978, Folder: 'F-15 bomber, 1978,' Box 32, JJP.

⁶⁵⁷ *Peace in the Mideast: A Delicate Balance. Report of a study mission to the Mideast and Ireland, 2-20 January 1978*, House International Relations Committee (hereafter HIRC), 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 17; 'Summary of findings,' 23 April 1978, 'Study Mission to the Middle East and Ireland,' Box ZME 1, HIRC, 95th Cong., RG 233, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

2,000 mph in combat, were considered the world's most advanced long-range fighter aircraft.⁶⁵⁸

The F-16s lacked the same radar technology as the F-15s, and thus were slightly less sophisticated.

The United States developed the F-5E short-range fighter-bombers for export to allies.⁶⁵⁹

The arms package came at a time when members of Congress perceived the administration to be 'uninspiring, indecisive, disorganized, and undisciplined.'⁶⁶⁰ Carter sent the sale to lawmakers in April. Congress then had 30 days to reject the \$4.8 billion package by passing a resolution of disapproval.⁶⁶¹ The 'package' tactic meant that Israel's supporters could not approve the sales without simultaneously making the less popular decision of arming Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Those who favoured the sales stressed three themes.⁶⁶² First, Saudi Arabia needed the airplanes to protect its oil fields against attack from surrounding Soviet-linked 'radical' states. Second, both Egypt and Saudi Arabia should be encouraged for their 'moderation' on the Arab-Israeli dispute. Finally, Riyadh deserved a reward for its role in maintaining stable oil prices.

Opponents similarly emphasised three issues.⁶⁶³ First, the sales would hinder peace talks by boosting the Arab side's confidence that it could resort to force if talks failed or increasing Israel's insecurity to the extent that it would become less willing to compromise in negotiations. Second, the package approach infringed on Congress' right to review arms deals and could set a precedent whereby future transfers to Israel were tied to sales to Arab states. Third, the balance of airplanes favoured the Arab states collectively, potentially endangering Israel.

⁶⁵⁸ 'Backgrounder: F-15E Strike Eagle,' Boeing. Retrieved 21 September 2013, http://www.boeing.com/defense-space/military/f15/docs/F-15E_overview.pdf; 'Factsheets: F-15 Eagle,' U.S. Air Force. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.af.mil/information/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=101>.

⁶⁵⁹ Vance, 'Middle East Aircraft Sales,' DSB; 'Congress Backs Jets Sales to Arabs,' in *CQ Almanac 1978* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1979).

⁶⁶⁰ Weekly Legislative Report from Moore to Carter, 3 April 1978, Folder: 'Congressional Liaison Weekly Reports, 1-4/78,' Plains File, Box 20, JCL.

⁶⁶¹ Under the Arms Export Control Act, weapons sales in excess of \$20 million could be killed if both houses of Congress voted to disapprove them.

⁶⁶² SFRC, *Middle East Arms Sales Proposals: Hearing before the Foreign Relations Committee*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 4 May 1978, 127-140; Assistant Secretary of State Douglas Bennet, Jr.'s letter to HIRC, 16 February 1978, *Congressional Record*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., vol. 124, part 3, 3900-3905, and part 6, 6894-6895; Brown's letter to SFRC Chairman Sparkman, 15 May 1978, *ibid.*, part 10, 13627.

⁶⁶³ AIPAC made the clearest arguments against the Saudi and Egyptian sales: 'F-15s to Saudi Arabia – A Threat to Peace,' n.d. [circa January 1978], Folder: 'Middle East Issues—Jewish Community Concerns [O/A 6342],' Eizenstat Files, Box 235, JCL; 'F-5Es to Egypt,' February 1978, Folder: 'F-15 bomber, 1978,' Box 32, JJP.

The administration responded to the first point by insisting that the goal of the deal was to grant the ‘security and confidence’ necessary to make concessions in peace talks.⁶⁶⁴ Next, the White House maintained that the sales were packaged together with an eye toward regional balance: they would help modernise the Egyptian and Saudi fleets while simultaneously allow Israel to retain its military superiority.⁶⁶⁵ Finally, the administration distributed to Congress a paper reflecting the intelligence community’s assessment that the proposed deliveries would ‘not reduce Israel’s military superiority over its Arab adversaries,’ but rather that ‘Israel’s air superiority may even be enhanced.’⁶⁶⁶ This conclusion stemmed from the timing of the deliveries, how the new warplanes fit into existing arsenals and U.S. restrictions on the aircrafts’ use.⁶⁶⁷

Unlike with the Panama Canal Treaties, the administration did not engage in a public education campaign. Nor did it make the direct appeals to the public characteristic of Carter’s first year. Instead, the White House espoused a disciplined, unified message to woo Congress and opinion leaders. Between December 1977 and May 1978, the administration deployed Cabinet officials to meet with members of Congress, invited lawmakers to the Oval Office for consultations, and the president sent letters or telephoned every senator to explain the White House’s position.

Vance took the lead in rallying members of Congress. In consultations with small groups of congressmen, he outlined the administration’s case: the Saudis had ‘carried the day’ on containing oil prices, Saudi support for Sadat’s regime was critical for peacemaking and Riyadh was ‘getting very impatient’ about the F-15s.⁶⁶⁸ The administration also called in big names to support it publicly, including: Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, Ronald Reagan, former New York Governor Averell Harriman, President of DuPont Irving Shapiro and President of Chase Manhattan Bank David Rockefeller.⁶⁶⁹

⁶⁶⁴ SFRC, *Middle East Arms Sales Proposals*, 3 May 1978, 16-17.

⁶⁶⁵ HIRC, *Proposed Aircraft Sales to Israel, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia: Hearing before the International Relations Committee*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 May 1978, 35-45.

⁶⁶⁶ Memo, n.a., ‘US Aircraft and the Middle East Military Balance,’ 7 March 1978, NLC-25-1-7-3-3.

⁶⁶⁷ However, an SFRC study concluded the package ‘may be disruptive’ to negotiations and ‘regardless of which choice the Congress makes on the F-15 sale, some U.S. objectives in the Middle East might suffer and others might be enhanced.’ SFRC, *Sales of F-15’s To Saudi Arabia*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 May 1978, 236-259.

⁶⁶⁸ Memo from Vance to Carter, 21 December 1977, NLC-128-13-3-15-6; *Ibid.*, 11 March 1978, NLC-128-13-6-9-0.

⁶⁶⁹ AIPAC memorandum, ‘Middle East Arms Package,’ 22 May 1978, Folder 4, Box 1, Sanders Papers.

Despite those efforts, however, House lawmakers caustically criticised the sales. In March, Representative Jonathan Bingham (D-N.Y.) gained majority support of the HIRC for a letter of disapproval of the sales.⁶⁷⁰ The opposition encountered in the House convinced the administration thenceforth to focus on the Senate.

There, too, the White House met resistance. Senator Frank Church (D-Id.) sent the administration a strident letter signed by seven members of the SFRC opposing the sales even prior to their announcement.⁶⁷¹ In April, a letter from three other senators urged Carter to delay the proposal until mediating an Egypt-Israel treaty.⁶⁷²

AIPAC leads opposition

AIPAC led the opposition to the sales on Capitol Hill, but it also mobilised the grass-roots American Jewish community for support. The airplane sales deepened the split between the Carter administration and American Jewry. ‘During this period all of us were under severe attack from the Jewish lobby, and much time was consumed in meetings and explanations. These were rarely pleasant ...,’ Brzezinski recalled.⁶⁷³

In early 1978, the White House renewed its push to win over American Jewish leaders to its position on Israel’s settlements in the hope they could apply pressure on Begin’s government.⁶⁷⁴ However, Carter denied allegations that his package approach was meant to punish Israel for its settlement activity. ‘The two were not interrelated in my decision-making process,’ he insisted.⁶⁷⁵

On 8 February, Carter hosted nine Jewish leaders for a dinner in which he pushed the case against Israel’s settlements and the applicability of 242 to the Palestinian territories. Philip Klutznick, the president of the American Jewish Congress who later became Carter’s commerce secretary, suggested that Jewish leaders pressure Begin to restart negotiations with Sadat; the others

⁶⁷⁰ Memo from Vance to Carter, 11 March 1978, NLC-128-13-6-9-0.

⁶⁷¹ Letter from Biden, Case, Church, Clark, Pell, Sarbanes and Stone to Carter, 24 January 1978, Folder: ‘F-15 bomber, 1978,’ Box 32, JJP.

⁶⁷² Letter from Jackson, Nunn and Moynihan to Carter, 25 April 1978, WHCF, Jackson Name File, JCL.

⁶⁷³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 249.

⁶⁷⁴ Memo, Lipshutz to Carter, ‘Your Dinner this Evening,’ 8 February 1978, Folder: ‘Jewish Leaders [CF, O/A 414],’ Jordan Files, Box 48, JCL.

⁶⁷⁵ ‘President’s News Conference,’ 17 February 1978, *PPP: Carter, 1978, I*, 331-39.

rejected that.⁶⁷⁶ Underscoring the personal enmity, Carter described Alexander Schindler, head of the Presidents' Conference, as having acted 'like an ass' but otherwise thought the meeting was 'constructive.'⁶⁷⁷

Dozens of American Jewish leaders visited the White House two weeks later for further consultations. According to Schindler, who leaked his version of the meeting to journalists, and Siegel, who had invited the leaders, the gathering ended in acrimony because of Brzezinski's 'antagonistic, blustering, threatening' manner.⁶⁷⁸

However, other accounts did not paint the meeting in such a negative light. According to one summary, Brzezinski took a tough line on settlements and was described as 'very upset' as he responded to the leaders' questions. Yet the notes indicate that Brzezinski consistently reiterated that he believed 'Israel's security needs were of the utmost importance' and that the meeting was not as tough 'as some of the participants' believed.⁶⁷⁹

Moreover, after Schindler's version surfaced, Jerold Hoffberger, who had chaired the gathering, distributed his own minutes to 200 Jewish groups. He wrote to the national security advisor that he disagreed with Schindler and would denounce any suggestion that Brzezinski displayed any anti-Semitism. Hoffberger's version did not include the incendiary language suggested by Schindler, but did note the administration's 'unequivocal opposition to the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Sinai.'⁶⁸⁰

Nevertheless, the Israeli government recruited American Jews to campaign against the linkage of the aircraft sales.⁶⁸¹ The Israeli Embassy in Washington regularly briefed prominent members of the American Jewish community on policy. Likewise, Jewish leaders informed Israeli

⁶⁷⁶ Meeting notes, n.a., 15 February 1978, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6865/3. The author is deeply grateful to Sara Palmor, who shared this and the other ISA documents in this chapter.

⁶⁷⁷ 8 February 1978, Carter, *Diary*, 171.

⁶⁷⁸ Bernard Gwertzman, 'Jewish Leader Says Mideast Policy Makes a "Question Mark" of Carter,' *NYT*, 10 March 1978; Siegel interview.

⁶⁷⁹ Summary, n.a., Meeting between administration and Jewish leaders, 23 February 1978, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6865/5.

⁶⁸⁰ Memo with attachments from Brzezinski to Eizenstat and Lipshutz, 23 March 1978, Folder: 'Middle East Issues—Jewish Community Concerns [O/A 6342],' Eizenstat Files, Box 235, JCL.

⁶⁸¹ Weizman, *Battle for Peace*, 288.

officials of the content of their discussions with the White House.⁶⁸² Israeli officials made their *preferences* abundantly clear in their public statements, but left their *official* position slightly ambiguous. According to the Carter administration, Israeli officials had told it that the most important thing for them was to get their planes, even if that meant Egypt and Saudi Arabia would receive their aircraft.⁶⁸³

However, Begin told the Knesset that the sales to Egypt would harm peace negotiations, while those to Saudi Arabia would make that country ‘an absolute and immediate confrontation state.’ He asked the administration to reconsider the proposal but stopped short of advocating that Congress reject the package.⁶⁸⁴ In a meeting with Vance, Weizman ‘strongly criticized’ the administration’s approach and suggested adding 25 more planes for Israel.⁶⁸⁵ Later, when Dayan indicated Israel would prefer that Congress defeat the package so that neither Arab country would receive any jets, even if that meant Israel would not get its request, the Israeli Embassy in Washington disavowed the statement.⁶⁸⁶

Both Brzezinski and Vance warned Dayan in April that Israeli lobbying against the package would be construed as interference in U.S. affairs.⁶⁸⁷ Still, Dayan hosted a ‘private rump session’ of the SFRC in which he outlined Israeli policy.⁶⁸⁸ Upon encountering Amitay on Capitol Hill, the NSC’s Quandt described him as ‘very jumpy’ when Quandt reminded him that Weizman had said he would ‘rather have the package than nothing if that was what it took to get his planes.’⁶⁸⁹

Israel’s embassy attempted to clarify matters shortly before the vote. It called on Washington to fulfil ‘commitments’ made to Israel and said the package did not meet Israel’s needs.

⁶⁸² Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 115-16.

⁶⁸³ SFRC, *Middle East Arms Sales Proposals*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 3 May 1978, 43-46.

⁶⁸⁴ Document 124, Begin’s statement to the Knesset, 15 February 1978, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/124%20Statement%20to%20the%20Knesset%20by%20Prime%20Minister%20Beg.aspx>.

⁶⁸⁵ Memo from Vance to Carter, 9 March 1978, NLC-128-13-6-7-2.

⁶⁸⁶ Don Oberdorfer and Mary Russell, ‘Despite Hill Plea, Carter Bars Delay on Mideast Jets,’ *WP*, 26 April 1978; Robert Kaiser, ‘Top Aide Grilled on Jets,’ *ibid.*, 4 May 1978.

⁶⁸⁷ Oberdorfer, ‘Dayan’s Talks End on Note of Progress,’ *WP*, 28 April 1978; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 248-249.

⁶⁸⁸ James Reston column, ‘The New Diplomacy,’ *NYT*, 28 April 1978.

⁶⁸⁹ Amitay replied, ‘That’s not government policy.’ Evening Report from Middle East Desk to Brzezinski, 11 April 1978, NLC-10-10-5-20-2.

‘We continue to reject the linkage of commitments made to Israel with arms sales to any other country,’ it said. ‘Under these circumstances, we continue to oppose the supply of aircraft as submitted in the proposed package.’⁶⁹⁰

Israeli officials parsed their words in an attempt to retain flexibility. This was likely because if Congress voted the package down, then Israel could resubmit its request for airplanes without accusations of hypocrisy. With the sales no longer linked, passage would have been almost certain.⁶⁹¹

AIPAC lobbied members of Congress and sent Amitay to testify before committees. In addition, AIPAC ‘participated in the congressional caucus organised to oppose the sale, drafted the sale disapproval resolution, and prepared questions for committee hearings.’⁶⁹² Pro-Israel groups also mobilised allies from the civil rights movement, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, the largest U.S. federation of unions, and interfaith groups to support their position.⁶⁹³

AIPAC began notifying contacts of the dangers of U.S. sales to Saudi Arabia in at least September 1977, when it warned that ‘the presence of the F-15s in Saudi Arabia will tilt the military balance against Israel.’⁶⁹⁴ Early in 1978, AIPAC contacted members of Congress to voice further opposition to the sales as ‘contrary to a rational arms control policy’ and U.S. objectives.⁶⁹⁵

AIPAC also distributed a memorandum on the Saudi sales to the media, members of Congress and the White House. It warned that the F-15 ‘would enable Saudi Arabia to strike deep inside Israel’ and suggested that a coup in Riyadh would allow the planes to fall into ‘radical

⁶⁹⁰ Israeli Embassy press release, 11 May 1978, Folder 5, Box 4, Frank Church Papers, Boise State University (hereafter FCP).

⁶⁹¹ After the sales, AIPAC noted inconclusively: ‘There was confusion as to whether … Israel would prefer Congressional approval of *all* three sales in order for Israel to receive her aircraft or Congressional rejection of the entire package …’ AIPAC memorandum, ‘Middle East Arms Package,’ 22 May 1978, Folder 4, Box 1, Sanders Papers.

⁶⁹² Franck and Weisband, *Foreign Policy By Congress*, 184-85, 90.

⁶⁹³ Memo from Vance to Carter, 2 May 1978, NLC-128-13-8-2-5; SFRC, *Middle East Arms Sales Proposals*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 May 1978, 222-223; Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups*, 67.

⁶⁹⁴ AIPAC memorandum from Amitay and Wollack, ‘Legislative Update,’ September 1977, Folder: ‘F-15 bomber, 1978,’ Box 32, JJP.

⁶⁹⁵ Letter from Amitay and Wollack to Javits, 23 January 1978, Folder: ‘F-15 bomber, 1978,’ Box 32, JJP.

hands.⁶⁹⁶ It garnered significant attention in Congress: Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.) entered the memo into the *Congressional Record*, eliciting a point-by-point State Department rebuttal.⁶⁹⁷ AIPAC distributed a similar memorandum on the sales to Egypt, although the organisation focused most of its activities on the Saudi portion.⁶⁹⁸

AIPAC railed against the sales – and administration policy – for its ‘pro-Arab tilt’ and attempts to bring ‘evenhandedness’ to the Middle East.⁶⁹⁹ AIPAC called the package a ‘crude tactic’⁷⁰⁰ that was ‘extremely disturbing’ and added an implicit threat: ‘The bitter disappointment of Israel’s friends in the United States will undoubtedly be translated into action in the coming weeks as Congress considers its course of action – and responsibility.’⁷⁰¹

AIPAC also invoked a widely watched miniseries about Hitler’s death camps that aired in April to help its lobbying effort.⁷⁰² ‘The television drama and book by Gerald Green furnished 6 million reasons why the Jewish state’s leaders insist upon defensible borders. The message of Holocaust is contemporary as well as historical,’ it wrote.⁷⁰³ AIPAC sent complimentary copies of the associated book to members of Congress, administration officials and journalists.⁷⁰⁴

AIPAC derived its power from its ability to translate its positions on Israel into ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ democratic action: political and financial support to receptive candidates and politicians.⁷⁰⁵ Many of the members of Congress who were especially sensitive to the concerns of Israel’s supporters represented New York, the state with the largest Jewish population in the country. It was not merely a question of ethnic identity, however. Senators Frank Church (D-Idaho) and Henry Jackson (D-Wash.) were two of Israel’s strongest supporters, yet neither was Jewish nor

⁶⁹⁶ AIPAC memorandum, ‘F-15s to Saudi Arabia.’

⁶⁹⁷ *Congressional Record*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., vol. 124, part 3, 3900-3905.

⁶⁹⁸ AIPAC memorandum, ‘F-5Es to Egypt,’ February 1978, Folder: ‘F-15 bomber, 1978,’ Box 32, JJP. The State Department also responded to AIPAC’s Egypt memo: Letter with attachments from Bennet to Hamilton, ‘Comments on AIPAC’s Memorandum re Proposed Sale of F-5 Aircraft to Egypt,’ 9 March 1978, Folder: ‘Saudi Arabia—F-15 Sales 1978,’ Box 15, Howard Baker Papers, University of Tennessee, Knoxville (hereafter HBP).

⁶⁹⁹ ‘Upsetting the Peace Process,’ *NER*, XXII: 7, 15 February 1978.

⁷⁰⁰ ‘Dangerous Blunder,’ *ibid.*, XXII: 9, 1 March 1978.

⁷⁰¹ ‘Washington Arms Clash,’ *ibid.*, XXII: 8, 22 February 1978.

⁷⁰² Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 209-14.

⁷⁰³ ‘Lessons of the Holocaust,’ *ibid.*, XXII: 16, 19 April 1978.

⁷⁰⁴ William Claiborne, ‘“Holocaust” Book Is Tool in Arms Lobbying,’ *WP*, 22 April 1978.

⁷⁰⁵ Mark Siegel interview, 12 June 1978, EGAFF, 205; Memo with attachments from Jordan to Carter, June 1977, Folder: ‘Foreign Policy/Domestic Politics Memo, HJ Memo, 7/77,’ Jordan Files, Box 34A, JCL.

did they hail from states with large Jewish populations. Instead, they backed Israel on moral and strategic grounds.

The “oil weapon”

Publicly, the White House cited Riyadh’s willingness to support U.S. policy in the region, resist Soviet penetration and back a negotiated settlement to the Arab-Israeli dispute as the chief reasons for the sales to Saudi Arabia. However, as sales critics pointed out, Saudi oil reserves underpinned the F-15 offer. Oil and energy preoccupied Carter like no other previous president, and he considered Saudi Arabia the lynchpin to a stable policy. Conventional wisdom believed the Gulf states could blackmail Western countries by deploying the ‘oil weapon.’⁷⁰⁶

By 1978, Saudi Arabia was fast becoming the dominant member of OPEC, which accounted for 62 percent of ‘free world’ oil production.⁷⁰⁷ Saudi production rose from 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) in 1965 to 8.6 million bpd in 1974, when the embargo was lifted. Until late 1978 the Saudis kept to a self-imposed cap of 8.5 million bpd. American oil consumption, meanwhile, rose from 11.5 million bpd in 1965 to 18.7 million in 1978 and 18.4 million the following year.⁷⁰⁸ By May 1978, Saudi Arabia provided 23 percent of American crude imports and eight percent of total consumption.⁷⁰⁹

The incoming administration was advised to show support for Saudi oil policy by demonstrating ‘movement toward a Middle East peace settlement’ and giving a ‘favorable response to further requests for arms.’⁷¹⁰ ‘The Saudi role in oil prices and supply is crucial in both the short and long term,’ a State Department paper noted. ‘It alone has the capacity to ensure that sufficient

⁷⁰⁶ The soon-to-be U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia articulated this argument in an influential article prior to the 1973-1974 embargo. James Akins, ‘The Oil Crisis: This Time the Wolf Is Here,’ *Foreign Affairs* 11(1973).

⁷⁰⁷ Yergin, *The Prize*, 662-714.

⁷⁰⁸ ‘BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2012: Historical Data,’ BP. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.bp.com/statisticalreview>.

⁷⁰⁹ SFRC, *Middle East Arms Sales*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 3 May 1978, 1-20.

⁷¹⁰ Document 116, Telegram from U.S. Embassy Kuwait to State Department, 12 January 1977, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Volume XXXVII: Energy Crisis, 1974-1980*, 405-406.

oil supply is available to meet essential world demand in the 1980s.⁷¹¹ Carter frequently argued that a resolution to the Arab-Israeli dispute provided the best opportunity to prevent another war that could disrupt oil supplies.⁷¹²

The Saudis were willing to keep down oil prices, expand production and help protect the dollar against inflation. In return, they expected security guarantees, including weapons. Materially, the Saudis wanted aircraft to protect their oil fields from Soviet aggression. As Saudi oil profits rose, so did the desire for American arms.⁷¹³ The intangible benefit was to cement U.S.-Saudi ties.

The Saudi government officially denied a link between oil and weapons. Yet ministers remained vague and sometimes sent contradictory signals. As the debate hit its peak, Saudi Oil Minister Sheikh Zaki Yamani told a newspaper that refusal to sell Riyadh the F-15s would adversely affect Saudi oil policy and support for the American dollar.⁷¹⁴ Although the Saudis later denied that assertion, Foreign Minister Prince Faisal nevertheless intimated a connection when he told the same publication that the U.S.-Saudi relationship was based on interrelated issues such a security, oil and the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁷¹⁵

In February, U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia John West notified Carter of Saudi delight over the F-15 proposals. An attached memo said that the ‘Saudis have, unilaterally, put us on warning that they will expect “helpful” American policies in a number of areas’ in exchange for increasing oil production. These included, foremost, ‘the Middle East peace effort’ and ‘U.S. readiness to transfer arms and technology.’ ‘We cannot evade responsibility in those fields ...’ the memo cautioned.⁷¹⁶

Publicly, however, the administration put it differently. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher said Washington had been ‘assured’ by Saudi policymakers that there was ‘no direct

⁷¹¹ Paper, ‘The Saudi Role in Meeting World Energy Requirements,’ n.a. (State), May 1977, Folder: ‘Middle East: Saudi Arabia 10/77—6/78, [CF, O/A 712]’, Lipshutz Files, Box 36, JCL

⁷¹² ‘University of Notre Dame,’ 22 May 1977, *PPP: Carter 1977, I*, 954-962.

⁷¹³ Saudi purchases of U.S. weapons rose from less than \$300,000 in 1972 to a cumulative total of \$16 billion in arms and \$10 billion in military construction projects from 1974-78. ‘Fiscal Year Series as of September 30, 2012,’ Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 336. Retrieved 21 September 2013, http://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/fiscal_year_series_-_30_sep_2012.pdf.

⁷¹⁴ Peter Osnos and David Ottaway, ‘Yamani Links F15s to Oil, Dollar Help,’ *WP*, 2 May 1978.

⁷¹⁵ _____, ‘Saudi Minister Calls for Arab Reappraisal of Peace Effort,’ *WP*, 3 May 1978.

⁷¹⁶ Letter with attachment from West to Carter, 19 February 1978, DDRS CK3100099224.

linkage' between the F-15 sales and petroleum policy.⁷¹⁷ Nevertheless, the Saudis left sufficient ambiguity to suggest that even if there were no direct *quid pro quo*, the outcome of the debate would impact U.S.-Saudi cooperation in other areas.

The Saudis – and the Arabs – did not have a large ethnic constituency inside the United States. However, they cultivated influence through professional lobbyists and contacts by Saudi dignitaries, especially Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, a former military pilot and son of the Saudi defence minister; Prince Turki Faisal, the country's chief intelligence officer; Ambassador to the United States Ali Alireza; Minister of Industry and Electricity Ghazi al Gosaibi; and Commerce Minister Sulayman Sulaym. Their presence caused a stir in Washington's media and political fishbowl.⁷¹⁸

Saudi Arabia enlisted American advisors to help create a new 'political-corporate counterforce coalition' to offset the traditional advantage enjoyed by pro-Israel forces in Washington.⁷¹⁹ This coalition consisted of the Arab embassies, which were served by American lawyers, consultants and former government officials; aeronautics and oil companies; pro-Arab intellectuals; and groups representing the estimated 2 million Arab-Americans. The Saudis employed 25 agents to lobby on Capitol Hill. Frederick Dutton, a former Kennedy administration aide headed the Washington operation. West returned temporarily to Washington in 1978 to help gain approval for the sales. The Saudis also cultivated contacts with State Department officials, who provided advice on politics and deal making.⁷²⁰

Riyadh hired the consulting firm of Cook, Reuf, Span and Weiser to pursue its congressional strategy, while also putting a down payment for the firm to implement a long-term strategy to bolster Saudi Arabia's image in the United States. As a reward for the success on the F-15s, the firm was granted an increase in the size of its contract to \$470,000 annually.⁷²¹

⁷¹⁷ SFRC, *Middle East Arms Sales*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 3 May 1978, 67. However, a General Accounting Office staffer conceded: 'The Saudi Arabian government has associated its continued restraint with respect to oil availability and stable prices, with a favorable decision on the F-15 sale.' *Ibid.*, 4 May 1978, 127-140.

⁷¹⁸ Richard Harwood and Ward Sinclair, 'Lobbying for Warplane Brings Saudis Out of Isolation,' *WP*, 7 May 1978.

⁷¹⁹ Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups*, 68.

⁷²⁰ Ottaway, *King's Messenger*, 30-36.

⁷²¹ Bard, *Arab Lobby*, 122.

Arab-American groups also emerged as a prominent lobbying bloc on Capitol Hill for the first time. The debate represented a sort of coming out for the National Association of Arab Americans and other groups.⁷²² NAAA officials arranged for pro-Arab witnesses to appear at Congressional hearings, provided information to journalists, and met with members of Congress and the administration to convey their perspectives.⁷²³

Nevertheless, the Saudi government had primacy in the fight.⁷²⁴ The Carter administration fully expected Riyadh's assistance. Vance 'encouraged (Ambassador) Alireza to continue his contacts with Senators interested in the F-15 issue.' Carter concurred. 'The Saudis and their friends will have to go all-out to help us in the Senate,' he wrote on Vance's memo.⁷²⁵

In March, Alireza sent to all members of Congress a letter and statement to appeal on behalf of the F-15s. '...[P]ostponement of the decision on the sale would be extremely harmful because it would be taken as a sign by Communists and radicals that the U.S. was reconsidering its support for Saudi Arabia,' he wrote. Alireza reminded lawmakers of the importance of Saudi oil to the American economy.⁷²⁶ Later, Riyadh bought full-page advertisements in newspapers boasting of Saudi financing of U.S. solar-power projects to mark Sun Day on 3 May.⁷²⁷

Saudi lobbyists created a constituency inside the United States to mitigate AIPAC's advantage. In addition to making himself available to the media and Congress, Bandar contacted F-15 manufacturer McDonnell Douglas and other contractors, sub-contractors, and unions that had a stake in the airplanes. Bandar mobilised union members' relatives to flood Congress with telegrams and telephone calls in support of the deal,⁷²⁸ and lobbied Reagan to back the package.⁷²⁹

⁷²² John Maclean, 'American Arabs strive to improve public image,' *CT*, 9 May 1978.

⁷²³ SFRC, *Middle East Arms Sales Proposals*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., 8 May 1978, 171-190.

⁷²⁴ The Saudi government was eager to influence coverage, often paying for journalists' visits. During the F-15 debate, *The New York Times* sought to repay a \$4,400 bill after the Information Ministry insisted on covering a reporter's tab. Letter with attachments from Semple to Alireza, 15 February 1978, Folder: 'Coverage of Iran, Saudi Arabia (1975-79)', Box 73, *New York Times* Foreign Desk Records, New York Public Library.

⁷²⁵ Memo with Notes from Vance to Carter, 2 February 1978, NLC-128-13-5-1-9.

⁷²⁶ Letter with Attachment from Alireza to Javits, 15 March 1978, Folder: 'F-15 bomber, 1978,' Box 32, JJP.

⁷²⁷ Harwood and Sinclair, 'Lobbying for Warplane Brings Saudis Out of Isolation.'

⁷²⁸ Ottaway, *King's Messenger*, 32.

⁷²⁹ William Simpson, *The Prince* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 56.

Shortly before the Senate vote, Dutton sent senators a booklet in defence of the sales. The material is less forcefully argued but just as carefully researched as AIPAC's anti-package memos. 'It is dangerous and self deluding for Americans to look at the Saudis' need for F-15s mainly in terms of the Arab-Israeli conflict ... rather than in the context of the overall strategic realities' of the region, the memo stated. The material emphasised that Saudi Arabia did not pose a threat to Israel and that U.S. policy should reflect the strategic situation in the Middle East to include the Gulf.⁷³⁰

Resignation in the White House

The divisions over the airplane sales policy were most dramatically illustrated by the resignation of Jewish community liaison Mark Siegel. Siegel complained to Jordan that his role – defending policies with which he disagreed – had turned him into a 'political whore.'⁷³¹ In his letter of resignation, Siegel wrote that his decision was 'an action of personal conscience' and was driven by the package proposal. He also complained that Jordan, the NSC and the State Department had not given him 'accurate information' on policy.⁷³²

The primary policy aspect to which Siegel objected was the sale to Saudi Arabia, which he called 'dysfunctional' and an 'unnecessary irritant.' 'If that arms sale was necessary they could have waited a year until there was real progress in the peace process,' he insisted.⁷³³

Siegel's resignation prompted a flurry of critical coverage on White House decision-making and its Arab-Israeli policy.⁷³⁴ His decision also prompted Schindler to call the president a 'question

⁷³⁰ Booklet, n.a. (Dutton), 'Questions and Comments on the President's Pending Authorization of U.S. Sale of F-15 Planes for the Defense of Saudi Arabia,' n.d. (circa May 1978), Folder: 'Saudi Arabia—F-15 Sales 1978,' Box 15, HBP.

⁷³¹ Letter from Siegel to Jordan, 1 March 1978, Folder: 'Siegel, Mark, 1977-78,' Jordan Files, Box 35, JCL.

⁷³² Letter from Siegel to Carter, 8 March 1978, *ibid.*

⁷³³ Siegel interview. In his final meeting with the president, Siegel said he did not feel Carter had the 'fullest range of opinion' on the 'policy consequences of each course of action. ... Specifically, I want you to understand that my people, the Jewish people, are insecure, and we are insecure for very good and substantial reasons.' Document 227, Record of meeting between Carter, Jordan and Siegel, 9 March 1978, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII, 1051-1054.*

⁷³⁴ Judy Bacharach, 'The Man Who Walked Out the White House Door,' *WP*, 24 March 1978; Dom Bonafede, 'A Resignation in the White House,' *National Journal*, 18 March 1978; Don Holt, et al, 'Painful Exit,' *Newsweek*, 20 March 1978.

mark' on Middle East policy. Those accusations provoked a stern denial from Brzezinski, who decried suggestions that he was 'an anti-Semite.'⁷³⁵

Tensions between the administration and American Jewry became especially acute in the days before Begin travelled to Washington in March. Edward Sanders, a White House consultant who later became Carter's Jewish community liaison, warned that a 'pronounced drift' in policy could lead to a 'potentially irreversible confrontation with the Jewish community.' He added that the airplane package spurred a conviction that the White House was 'deliberately provoking an open conflict with the American Jewish community.'⁷³⁶

AIPAC believed the NSC, especially Brzezinski and Quandt, was the 'source of all that they dislike[d]' about Carter's policy.⁷³⁷ Israel's supporters felt that the 'confrontation' strategy originated in the NSC as a way of demonstrating to Israel that it did not have the support inside the United States that it once had. After leaving the administration, Siegel charged that the administration had wanted 'to provoke ... and win' a showdown with Begin.⁷³⁸ Faced with fresh criticism after Siegel's resignation, Carter remained undeterred. 'I have no apology at all to make for this (airplane) proposal,' he said.⁷³⁹

The notes from a March meeting between AIPAC's Amitay and Begin aide Eliyahu Ben-Elissar underscore Israel's supporters' concerns about Brzezinski. Amitay insisted that Brzezinski had made the F-15 issue a 'plebiscite' between the White House on the one side, and the American people and Congress on the other. Amitay also asserted that Brzezinski had said the administration believed it needed 'an outright crisis' with Israel and that the F-15 sales were 'a test between the Jewish lobby and Carter.' Ben-Elissar also raised the possibility that Begin cancel his forthcoming U.S. trip to defuse 'the attack being planned' by the White House.⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁵ Gwertzman, 'Jewish Leader Says Mideast Policy Makes a "Question Mark" of Carter'; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 249.

⁷³⁶ Memo from Sanders and Lewis to Carter and Mondale, 6 March 1978, Folder: 'Middle East—[1/78—9/78]', Brzezinski Donated, Box 12, JCL.

⁷³⁷ Evening Report from Middle East Desk to Brzezinski, 11 April 1978, NLC-10-10-5-20-2.

⁷³⁸ Siegel interview, EGAPP, 195.

⁷³⁹ 'President's News Conference,' 9 March 1978, *PPP: Carter, 1978, I*, 489-98.

⁷⁴⁰ Notes, Elissar-AIPAC meeting, 9 March 1978, ISA/RG 43/A/7370/8.

Still, attempts were made to find a compromise. Whatever his public comments, Schindler privately informed Begin that the settlements issue had undermined ‘our support’ in the United States. Shortly before Begin’s Washington visit, Schindler asked the premier to consider halting settlement activity ‘on tactical grounds and without any alteration of fundamental policy.’ ‘I cannot sufficiently underscore how this matter has impaired our ability to fight the more substantive issues confronting us – such as the arms sale,’ he wrote.⁷⁴¹ Begin rejected his advice.⁷⁴²

In any event, a PLO-linked attack on an Israeli civilian bus and Israel’s response briefly delayed Begin’s visit. The PLO praised the attack as ‘historic’ and ‘daring.’⁷⁴³ In retaliation, Israel launched Operation Litani, a massive offensive in southern Lebanon. Around 1,100 Lebanese and Palestinians, most of whom were civilians, perished in the Israeli invasion. Carter condemned the attack on the bus, which killed dozens,⁷⁴⁴ but viewed Israel’s assault as an overreaction.⁷⁴⁵ Vance felt the bus attack shifted the focus of Israel’s supporters from the peace process to concern for Israel’s security.⁷⁴⁶

Begin and Carter’s 21-22 March talks focused on Begin’s autonomy plan, not the package, but achieved little. On the first day, Carter confessed feeling stymied by failed attempts to find linguistic compromises between Egypt and Israel. ‘I can tell you that all this is very frustrating to us,’ he admitted. Later, Begin objected to Brzezinski’s suggestion that his plan sought to create politically meaningless Palestinian ‘Basutolands.’⁷⁴⁷

The talks grew testier the following day. Carter admitted he was discouraged over the lack of movement, though he was not prepared to quit. Later, Begin and Dayan objected to what they

⁷⁴¹ Schindler’s use of ‘our’ indicates linkage between Israeli and American Jewish leadership interests. Telegram from Schindler to Begin, 2 March 1978, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6865/5.

⁷⁴² Telegram from Begin to Schindler, 3 March 1978, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6865/5.

⁷⁴³ ‘Kalam Adwan Operation,’ *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 6 (1-15 April 1978), 5-7, IPS.

⁷⁴⁴ Document 29, Telegram from State Department to U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv (from Carter for Begin), ‘Message of Condolence From President Carter for Prime Minister Begin,’ 11 March 1978, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 1056.

⁷⁴⁵ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East*, 3rd ed. (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 96-97.

⁷⁴⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 209.

⁷⁴⁷ Minutes, Meeting between American and Israeli delegations, 21 March 1978, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6867/7.

perceived as the president's 'negative' characterisation of their autonomy proposal. They repeatedly urged Carter to use 'positive' terms when describing Israel's plan.⁷⁴⁸

According to Brzezinski, the tensions over the F-15 sales disrupted the administration's plan to pressure Israel on settlements and territorial withdrawal.⁷⁴⁹ Moreover, the perception that Begin and Carter's talks went poorly, and that the White House appeared to be pressuring Israel unevenly, likely hardened congressional opposition to the package.⁷⁵⁰

Before returning to Israel, Begin appealed to the American public, especially Jewish Americans, to support Israel's policies. 'The last three days in Washington were the most difficult of my life,' Begin, a former prisoner in the Soviet gulag, said.⁷⁵¹ Begin and Carter both indicated willingness to engage in public diplomacy in order to gain the support of the citizens of each other's countries.⁷⁵²

Begin was not entirely successful in rallying American support, however. A poll taken during his visit found that Sadat's approval rating was about twice as high as Begin's. Nearly the same number of Americans (38 percent) favoured Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories as were opposed to it (39 percent). Similarly, 42 percent favoured (with 46 percent opposed) cutting off U.S. aid to Israel unless it signed a peace agreement.⁷⁵³

A few weeks later, another survey noted growth in support for Sadat and the Arabs, and a slight fall for Begin and Israel. Additionally, a greater percentage of Americans (50 percent) felt that Israel should make more concessions to bring about a lasting peace than Egypt (43 percent).⁷⁵⁴ Shortly afterward, dozens of prominent Jewish Americans signed a letter expressing support for Israel's peace movement, implicitly dissenting from Begin's policies.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., 22 March 1978, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6865/6.

⁷⁴⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 247.

⁷⁵⁰ Weekly Legislative Report from Moore to Carter, 3 April 1978, Folder: 'Congressional Liaison Weekly Reports, 1-4/78,' Plains File, Box 20, JCL.

⁷⁵¹ Bernard Gwertzman, 'Begin Bids U.S. Public Back Israel's Policy After Seeing Carter,' *NYT*, 24 March 1978.

⁷⁵² 'Out in the Open With Israel,' *NYT*, 24 March 1978.

⁷⁵³ 'Mideast Poll,' 'NBC Nightly News,' 23 March 1978, VTNA 498027.

⁷⁵⁴ 'Public Opinion Poll: Mideast/Carter/Canal Treaty,' 'CBS Evening News,' 13 April 1978, VTNA 257350.

⁷⁵⁵ Linda Charlton, '36 Jews in U.S. Applaud Israelis Who Urged Flexibility on Peace,' *NYT*, 21 April 1978.

U.S. publications noted the strains between American Jewry and Begin's government.⁷⁵⁶

Schindler said that American Jews could criticise Israel's government as long as they kept it among themselves. 'Because, to a large extent, the strength of Israel depends on the strength of the American Jewish community, on its perceived strength and its unity in support of Israel,' he said.⁷⁵⁷ Whether or not that was valid, it was a common American perception: in an editorial, *The New York Times* argued that Israel needed to court Jewish Americans' support, 'on which Israeli security depends.'⁷⁵⁸

In April, attorney Max Kampelman floated a compromise: If the administration would agree not to send the sales to Congress until an Egypt-Israel peace deal was 'at hand,' the organised American Jewish community would support the whole package. Domestic advisor Stuart Eizenstat offered support for the 'potentially attractive compromise' that would 'avoid a divisive and debilitating Congressional fight.'⁷⁵⁹ Carter ignored the proposal.⁷⁶⁰

Three interrelated themes dominated the media narrative at this time. First, Carter looked to test his mettle – with pro-Israel groups, Israel and Congress.⁷⁶¹ Second, the debate reflected the new climate of American opinion following Sadat's Jerusalem trip and his growing esteem in the United States.⁷⁶² Third, outlets covered the role of entrenched pro-Israel forces versus the emerging potency of Saudi petrodollars and pro-Arab voices in Washington.⁷⁶³ This discourse helped frame the debate as a zero-sum-game.

Many outlets ran side-by-side features on both the 'Arab lobby' and the 'Israel lobby' in an attempt to shed light on Capitol Hill machinations.⁷⁶⁴ Journalists and officials contrasted the

⁷⁵⁶ -----, 'Jews in America Now Worried By Both U.S. and Israeli Policies,' *NYT*, 5 April 1978; Arthur Samuelson, 'The Dilemma of American Jewry,' *The Nation*, 1 April 1978; Sol Stern, 'Menachem Begin vs. the Jewish Lobby,' *New York*, 24 April 1978.

⁷⁵⁷ Samuelson, 'Menachem Begin vs. the Jewish Lobby.'

⁷⁵⁸ Editorial, 'Mr. Begin's Jewish Critics,' *NYT*, 23 April 1978.

⁷⁵⁹ Memo from Eizenstat to Carter, 'Middle East Arms Sales,' 13 April 1978, Folder: 'Middle East Issues—Jewish Community Concerns [O/A 6342],' Eizenstat Files, Box 235, JCL.

⁷⁶⁰ Quandt, *Camp David*, 188.

⁷⁶¹ Norman Kempster, 'Jet Deal Tests Carter Policy in Middle East,' *LAT*, 30 April 1978.

⁷⁶² 'Mideast/United States Arms Sales,' 'ABC Evening News,' 15 February 1978, VTNA 52627.

⁷⁶³ Robert Kaiser, 'A Showdown on Carter's Arms Package,' *WP*, 8 March 1978.

⁷⁶⁴ Sanford Ungar, 'Jewish and Arab Lobbyists,' *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1978; 'After 30 Years, Arab Cause Gets a Hearing,' *U.S. News & World Report*, 27 March 1978; 'Israel's Potent Lobby Faces Biggest Test,' *ibid.*, 27 March 1978; William Lanouette, 'The Many Faces of the Jewish Lobby in America,' *National Journal*, 13 May 1978;

‘Western-educated, sophisticated, low-key’ approach taken by the Saudi royal family⁷⁶⁵ with the more aggressive stance of, in particular, AIPAC’s Amitay.⁷⁶⁶ This coverage highlighted the confluence of oil and corporate influences, ethnic and religious allegiances, and different concepts of national interests.

The editorial boards of major newspapers supported the sales, although they expressed reservations about their timing and the administration’s willingness to wage war on their behalf.⁷⁶⁷ Conversely, surveys showed that the public opposed the deal. Public opposition to the package sale to all three countries consistently ran to about two-thirds. The polls found that opposition to the sales to Israel was slightly weaker than to Egypt or Saudi Arabia, but nevertheless a majority opposed the sales individually to any of the three countries.⁷⁶⁸

Carter was well aware of the doubts. Brzezinski noted broad opposition to the sales when he forwarded the president the results of a Harris poll. He highlighted that support was slightly stronger among those with higher salaries and a university education than the rest of the public. Yet a majority in those brackets still opposed the package (61 percent opposed; 58 percent in favour) and also each of the sales to individual countries (to Israel, 58 percent opposed; to Egypt, 69 percent opposed; to Saudi Arabia, 71 percent opposed).⁷⁶⁹

This is significant because it demonstrates that Carter was content to calibrate his pitch to Congress and the elite, regardless of the general public’s attitude. Moreover, these surveys showed that opponents of the sales held views more in line with the American public than did the administration. Carter’s desire to earn a tough political victory thus made him willing to swim against the current of popular opinion.

⁷⁶⁵ ‘Representing the Arab Point of View,’ *ibid.*, 13 May 1978; ‘Mideast/Arms Lobby,’ ‘CBS Evening News,’ 10 March 1978, VTNA 256800; ‘Arab Lobby,’ *ibid.*, 29 March 1978, VTNA 257125; ‘Mideast and Israel/United States Policy and Jewish Lobby,’ *ibid.*, 19 December 1977, VTNA 249969; ‘Jewish Lobby,’ *ibid.*, 20 December 1977, VTNA 250017.

⁷⁶⁶ Harwood and Sinclair, ‘Lobbying for Warplane Brings Saudis Out of Isolation.’

⁷⁶⁷ Lanouette, ‘Many Faces of the Jewish Lobby.’

⁷⁶⁸ Editorial, ‘Sell jets to Saudi Arabia,’ *CT*, 3 May 1978; Editorial, ‘Of Planes and Policy,’ *LAT*, 17 February 1978; Editorial, ‘Eagles to Arabia,’ *NYT*, 16 February 1978; Editorial, ‘Mideast Arms-Sales Bind,’ *WP*, 28 April 1978; Editorial, ‘The Arms Sale Morass,’ *WSJ*, 12 May 1978.

⁷⁶⁹ NBC News Poll, 21-22 February 1978, Roper Center; Roper Report 78-4, March 18-25, 1978, *ibid.*; ‘Majority in Poll Opposed to More U.S. Arms in Mideast,’ *LAT*, 6 April 1978; Harris Survey, 19-20 April 1978, Roper Center; *Time/Yankelovich Skelly & White*, 30 May-5 June 1978, *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁹ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Information Items,’ 5 May 1978, NLC-1-6-2-19-2.

On 1 May Carter hosted Begin for celebrations marking Israel's 30th anniversary and announced the formation of the President's Commission on the Holocaust, which led to the creation of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.⁷⁷⁰ Nevertheless, Carter noted that he 'still had serious political problems among American Jews, and a few days later we had to postpone two major Democratic fund-raising banquets in New York and Los Angeles because so many members had canceled their reservations ...',⁷⁷¹

Shortly afterward, around 800 AIPAC members gathered for what an NSC staffer described as a 'truly vitriolic' annual policy conference dinner.⁷⁷² The audience booed and heckled White House Counsel Robert Lipshutz, who had come to explain administration policy. Senator Lowell Weicker (R-Conn.) charged that Brzezinski had 'singled out American Jews as an impediment' to U.S. policies, intimated that the national security advisor had found it 'convenient' to blame the administration's problems 'on the Jews,' and hinted that it echoed 'historical proclivities' toward anti-Semitism. Newspapers reported that the audience applauded Weicker's remarks.⁷⁷³ Senator Moynihan, who later voted against the package, nevertheless ascended to the podium and defended Brzezinski. By this time, Saudi officials were in a 'near panic' over the possibility the sales would be rejected.⁷⁷⁴

Still, most members of Congress wanted to avoid a 'bloody battle'.⁷⁷⁵ The administration offered concessions on two points. First, it softened its language on the 'package.' In a letter to Church, Vance said the White House no longer insisted that the sales be treated as a whole.⁷⁷⁶ It amounted to a rhetorical shift with no substantive change, but the move mitigated some

⁷⁷⁰ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 207-38. For a record of Begin and Carter's meeting, see Document 242, Memcon, Begin and Carter, 1 May 1978, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 1129-32.

⁷⁷¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 321.

⁷⁷² Evening Report from Middle East Desk to Brzezinski, 9 May 1978, NLC-10-11-3-19-5.

⁷⁷³ Don Oberdorfer and Hobart Rowen, 'Lipshutz Heckled for Defense of Carter's Middle East Policies,' *WP*, 10 May 1978.

⁷⁷⁴ Memo from Saunders and Bowdler to Vance, 'Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments,' 2 May 1978, NLC-SAFE 17-B-10-52-5-1.

⁷⁷⁵ Weekly Legislative Report from Moore to Carter, 6 May 1978, Folder: 'Congressional Liaison Weekly Legislative Reports, 5-6/78,' Plains File, Box 20, JCL.

⁷⁷⁶ Bernard Weinraub, 'Carter Eases Stand on Plane "Package,"' *NYT*, 29 April 1978.

opposition.⁷⁷⁷ Carter then sent letters to HIRC Chairman Clement Zablocki (D-Wis.) and SFRC Chairman John Sparkman (D-Ala.) to give a ‘firm assurance’ that he would send Congress in 1979 a request to sell Israel 20 more F-15s, separate from the 1978 deal.⁷⁷⁸

However, these concessions failed to defeat a motion of disapproval in the SFRC, where an 8-8 deadlock led to the Senate debate. The Friday before the floor vote, Carter personally spoke to at least 18 senators.⁷⁷⁹ He also pleaded his case to senators in a letter, in which he insisted the sales to Egypt and Saudi Arabia were necessary to serve the cause ‘of moderation and peace’ in the region. Carter did not directly reference oil, but noted that Riyadh was a ‘moderating and conciliatory force’ on many issues.⁷⁸⁰ On 10 May the Presidents’ Conference sent telegrams to every senator and representative ‘expressing … unremitting opposition’ to the package.⁷⁸¹

That weekend the administration also laid the groundwork for a strategy to recoup political losses. Jordan recommended that Carter offer U.S. reassurances to Israel and that it was

important that we make a gesture toward both the American Jewish community and those friends of Israel in Congress who opposed the sale. If we win, it will be the first time the Israeli lobby has been defeated in the Congress. The press will be looking for signs that the White House is gloating over the victory and will be reading subtle signs of anti-Semitism into our reactions.⁷⁸²

Emotional debate

The 15 May Senate debate featured stark emotional pleas from all sides. Virtually every speaker stressed two themes: U.S. commitment to Israel’s security and the American national

⁷⁷⁷ However, shortly afterward a note from Carter to Vance suggested that he still treated the sales as a unit: ‘Hold firm – No changes in our “package.”’ Note in margins, Memo from Vance to Carter, 2 May 1978, NLC-128-13-8-2-5. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁷⁸ Letter from Carter to Zablocki, 9 May 1978, Folder 4, Box 4, Clement Zablocki Papers, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Letter from Carter to Sparkman, 9 May 1978, *Congressional Record*, 95th Cong., 2nd sess., vol. 124, pt. 10, 13628.

⁷⁷⁹ ‘President’s Daily Diary,’ 12 May 1978, JCL. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/diary/1978/d051278t.pdf>.

⁷⁸⁰ ‘Letter to Members of Congress,’ 12 May 1978, *PPP: Carter, 1978, I*, 896-897. In turn, anti-sales senators tried to rally colleagues: Letter with attachments from Case and Sarbanes to Senators, 15 May 1978, Folder: ‘Saudi Arabia—F-15 Sales 1978,’ Box 15, HBP.

⁷⁸¹ *Report of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations for the Year Ending March 31, 1979*, 5-6, LOC.

⁷⁸² Memo from Jordan to Carter, n.d. [circa May 1978], Folder: ‘Arms Sale Package (Israel-Egypt-Saudi Arabia) [CF, O/A 646],’ Jordan Files, Box 39, JCL.

interest. On the first point, lawmakers were unanimous that the United States must remain firmly supportive of Israel, but were divided over what that alliance meant for Americans relations with Arab states. On the second point, senators debated the respective roles of the Executive Branch, Congress and lobbyists in determining foreign policy.⁷⁸³

When the vote finally came, the resolution to disapprove the sales failed. The vote, a 54-44 victory for the administration, cut across party and ideological lines, with no obvious constituency for or against the package. Ultimately, the White House relied on the support of Republicans, a majority of whom (26-11) backed the sales. Conversely, only 28 Democrats supported the deal, with 33 opposed to it. Carter believed his personal lobbying changed 10-12 votes.⁷⁸⁴

Key supporters of the sales included Baker, Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.), Abraham Ribicoff (D-Con.), John Glenn (D-Ohio) and John Sparkman (D-Ala.). Both senators – Democrat Lloyd Bentsen and Republican John Tower – from Texas, the state with largest energy industry, voted for the sales. Aides to George McGovern (D-S.D.) blamed his 1980 defeat partly on AIPAC, which launched a campaign against him over his favourable vote on the sales.⁷⁸⁵ Typically, Republicans had been more receptive to the argument that the Soviets posed an expansionist threat, which helps explain their support for Riyadh's F-15s.

The most prominent opponents included Joseph Biden (D-Del.), Clifford Case (R-N.J.), Church, Jackson, Javits, Moynihan, and Richard Stone (D-Fla.). Most of the leading opponents to the sale either represented states with large Jewish populations or held presidential ambitions. Nine of the 12 Democratic senators facing 1978 re-election voted against the package.

Carter did not have to face voters until 1980, but many fellow Democrats on the ballot that autumn did not appreciate the president's willingness to alienate an important party constituency. Pro-Israel lobbyists emerged from the F-15 defeat stronger and better organised.⁷⁸⁶ Carter's blunt

⁷⁸³ *Congressional Record*, vol. 124, Pt. 10 (Washington: GPO, 1978), 13623-710; Bishara, 'Middle East Arms Package.'

⁷⁸⁴ 15 May 1978, Carter, *Diary*, 195. According to Quandt, several other Democrats told the administration they would support the package if it needed their votes for its approval, but otherwise would prefer to disapprove it for political reasons. Consequently, the final tally of Democrats supporting the package was not reflective of the administration's support. Quandt, SHAFR.

⁷⁸⁵ Tivnan, *The Lobby*, 127-28.

⁷⁸⁶ Goldberg, *Foreign Policy and Ethnic Interest Groups*, 70-79; Tivnan, *The Lobby*, 135-36.

advocacy for the package may have paid dividends in the near term, but by deepening rifts among his supporters and identifying the president with an ‘even-handed’ Middle East policy, it undermined him in the long term.

The administration moved quickly to repair relations with lawmakers and other U.S. backers of Israel.⁷⁸⁷ However, the following week, policymakers ‘heard the anger and sense of betrayal’ from Jewish Democratic lawmakers who ‘came to the White House to tell us off concerning our Middle East policy,’ Quandt reported. The administration’s explanations did not ease their anger.⁷⁸⁸

Begin also expressed distress. ‘Every friend and every citizen of Israel must understand that the conditions of peace are trying to be dictated to us,’ he said.⁷⁸⁹ In a 22 May letter to Carter, Begin insisted that ‘in order to offset the possible danger to Israel in the future, a substantial increase of supply of arms to Israel is essential.’⁷⁹⁰ Elsewhere, more than 1,000 Jewish students protested the sales outside the White house, where one demonstrator said the vote would ‘be written in the annals of history in blood.’⁷⁹¹ However, West reported back to Washington on Riyadh’s ‘euphoric reaction’ to the package’s approval.⁷⁹²

The bitter nature of the debate led some pro-Israel groups to reconsider their tactics.⁷⁹³ Not AIPAC, however. It defended Israel’s supporters and their attempts to block the sales, argued that a wide cross-section of U.S. opinion had opposed the package anyway and noted disapprovingly that some administration members ‘seemed to welcome a confrontation with Congress and the American Jewish community.’⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁸⁷ Memo from Brzezinski to Eizenstat, ‘Talking Points on Middle East,’ 15 May 1978, Folder: ‘Middle East, 5/78,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 50, JCL; Terence Smith, ‘Carter Leads Drive to Mollify Jewish Opponents of Arms Deal,’ *NYT*, 17 May 1978.

⁷⁸⁸ Evening Report from Middle East Desk to Aaron, 23 May 1978, NLC-10-11-7-7-4.

⁷⁸⁹ Document 153, Begin’s statement on airplane sales, 16 May 1978, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/153%20Statement%20by%20Prime%20Minister%20Begin%20on%20US%20arms%20s.aspx>.

⁷⁹⁰ Document 251, Note 2, Telegram from State Department to U.S. Embassy Tel Aviv (from Carter to Begin), 1 June 1978, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII, 1150-51*.

⁷⁹¹ Lawrence Meyer, ‘Jews Protest Sale of Jets,’ *WP*, 18 May 1978.

⁷⁹² Document 152, Note 4, ‘Summary of Conclusions of Special Coordinating Committee Meeting,’ 6 June 1978, *FRUS, 1969-1976, XXXVII, 485-488*.

⁷⁹³ John Maclean, ‘Jewish groups to review tactics on jet lobbying,’ *CT*, 14 May 1978.

⁷⁹⁴ ‘Unbreakable Support,’ *NER, XXII: 21, May 24, 1978; ‘What the Vote Means,’ ibid., XXII: 2, 17 May 1978.*

Media commentators also noted the bitterness. James Reston believed that that airplane sales left deeper scars than ratification of Panama Canal Treaties.⁷⁹⁵ Fellow pundit Megan Greenfield opined that the sales had generated the greatest polarisation in Washington since the ‘the most ragged days of the Vietnam debate.’⁷⁹⁶ Still, journalists praised the Carter team’s political acumen in overcoming opposition.⁷⁹⁷

An official with the largest pro-Arab U.S. group felt that the ‘political conclusion to be drawn from the vote is that the Israeli lobby lost its major fight and its apparently veto over American policy toward the Arab world. The vote confirmed that the Israeli lobby is subject to political limits.’⁷⁹⁸

Underscoring the fraught atmosphere, several outlets reported that a Carter aide made ‘anti-Semitic’ comments and boasted that the administration’s success had ‘broken the back’ of the ‘Jewish lobby.’ The administration vigorously denied that any such remark was made.⁷⁹⁹ Whatever their merit, the reports further damaged the administration’s standing in Israel and among the American Jewish community.

Conclusion

Brzezinski believed the sales were ‘a costly diversion, yet winning the battle was absolutely necessary to retain American credibility with … Egypt and Saudi Arabia.’⁸⁰⁰ Quandt and Vance concurred.⁸⁰¹ Yet at a time when the administration could have been building domestic support for its strategy of pressuring Israel on settlements and territorial withdrawal, instead it became embroiled in a vituperative public debate. That debate inspired Israel’s U.S. supporters to close

⁷⁹⁵ James Reston column, ‘Time For Waiting,’ *NYT*, 19 May 1978.

⁷⁹⁶ Megan Greenfield column, ‘Turning Point for Israel,’ *WP*, 17 May 1978.

⁷⁹⁷ Robert Kaiser, ‘Jet Deal: “Gang That Couldn’t Shoot Straight” Wins One,’ *WP*, 18 May 1978.

⁷⁹⁸ Robert Healy and Margaret Thompson, *The Washington Lobby*, 3rd ed. (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1979)., 150

⁷⁹⁹ Powell, *Other Side*, 114-17.

⁸⁰⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 247.

⁸⁰¹ Quandt called it a ‘big distraction.’ Quandt, SHAFR; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 213.

ranks in support of Begin. After the sales, ‘we were a little more reluctant to wade into Arab-Israeli issues,’ Quandt conceded.⁸⁰²

Despite the success, advisors increasingly advised Carter to limit his Middle East involvement. The following month, Brzezinski argued that failing progress, Carter should consider disengaging from the negotiations and indicating to Israel that Washington would no longer support it in U.N. votes.⁸⁰³ The following week, several Democratic ‘wise men’ urged Carter ‘to stay as aloof as possible from direct involvement in the Mideast negotiation’ because ‘it was a losing proposition.’⁸⁰⁴

By aiming his political pitch at Congress and the elite, not the general public, Carter achieved success by using tactics counter to his political instincts. Yet by provoking battles he also burned bridges and lost intra-party support. For a president struggling with an image of weakness and indecision, the temptation to take on domestic and international opponents had proven irresistible.

The bitterness over the airplane debate also bled into other areas. In 1978, Carter simultaneously worked on the F-15 sales, Panama Canal Treaties, SALT II and normalisation of relations with China. These controversial foreign policy issues all required congressional consultation and approval. Carter’s F-15 battle further eroded support from his party and among a traditional Democratic constituency. ‘Still a serious problem with the American Jewish community,’ Carter noted in June. ‘We’re having to reach out for new contributors ...’⁸⁰⁵ These dynamics added to the angry debate about Carter’s foreign policy, weakened his Democratic support, and fed the distrust between Begin’s government and the administration.

The airplane affair did not determine U.S. policy toward the Arab-Israeli dispute during this period. Ultimately, Carter never developed a strategy to overcome Begin’s ideological commitment to retaining the West Bank and limiting Palestinian aspirations for self-determination. Yet the F-15

⁸⁰² Quandt, SHAFR.

⁸⁰³ NSC Weekly Report #64 from Brzezinski to Carter, 23 June 1978, Folder: ‘Weekly Report [to the President], 61-71: [6/78-9/78],’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 41, JCL.

⁸⁰⁴ 28 June 1978, Carter, *Diary*, 203.

⁸⁰⁵ 15 June 1978, *ibid.*, 201.

fight elucidates an instance in which Carter coupled domestic and international political strategies, ultimately coming up short in both.

Chapter Six: “Getting Control” – Message management and the domestic politics of the Camp David Summit

Introduction

Jimmy Carter, soon to immerse himself in the Egypt-Israel summit at the presidential retreat of Camp David, Maryland, paused to deliver remarks to reporters as he crossed the White House South Lawn on 4 September 1978. He would act as ‘a full partner’ in the talks, the president said, ‘not trying to impose the will of the United States on others, but searching for common ground.’ Carter, Anwar Sadat and Menachem Begin and would be ‘almost uniquely isolated from the press and from the outside world. My hope is that this degree of personal interchange, without the necessity for political posturing or defense of a transient stand or belief, will be constructive.⁸⁰⁶ With that, Carter climbed into presidential helicopter Marine One, barely to be seen or heard from publicly for nearly two weeks as the U.S. commander-in-chief devoted himself full-time toward resolving one of the world’s most intractable disputes.

Carter’s unprecedented personal involvement in the 13 days of ensuing negotiations, which culminated in the Camp David Accords, forced him to navigate the space between politician and mediator, president and peacemaker, as never before. The accords, signed by Sadat and Begin with Carter as a witness on 17 September 1978, represented at that moment the most significant Middle Eastern diplomatic development since the foundation of the modern state of Israel. The agreements paved the way toward the 1979 Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty and outlined a step-by-step approach for offering Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza a degree of autonomy. Often described as the high point of Carter’s presidency, the summit served as an unprecedented demonstration of presidential authority, leadership and secrecy in international negotiation.

U.S. officials maintained strict controls on the flow of information to the media. ‘We had seen too often the damaging effects of press leaks on negotiations. We were determined to prevent

⁸⁰⁶ ‘Camp David Meeting on the Middle East,’ 4 September 1978. *PPP: Carter, 1978, II*, 1496-97.

this from happening at Camp David,' Secretary of State Cyrus Vance wrote.⁸⁰⁷ According to Carter, his aides 'complained bitterly' about his decision to exclude the press, and repeatedly offered alternate plans that would provide greater contact between the media and delegations: 'I rejected them all, in what became an unpleasant confrontation.'⁸⁰⁸

The present account focuses on an often mentioned, but little studied aspect of the meeting – the summiteers' relationship with the news media – to draw out the American domestic politics of the Camp David Summit. It argues that Carter had both a diplomatic and political need to establish 'control' over the proceedings. Unquestionably, Carter saw a Middle East agreement as his primary objective. Yet to the president and his advisors the summit also offered an ancillary benefit: a positive outcome could deliver a boost to the president's political fortunes at home. This study contributes to the literature by devoting greater attention to the influence of domestic politics, especially the media and public opinion, on Carter at Camp David. It again reveals the confluence of advice from Carter's domestic, foreign policy and media advisors.

This account does not intend to offer a blow-by-blow analysis of the Camp David Summit.⁸⁰⁹ Much of the literature on the accords broadly praises Carter's role, especially for reducing the risk of another war in the Middle East and minimising the chances of a U.S.-Soviet confrontation.⁸¹⁰

The verdict on the Palestinian dimension of the accords is more complicated, however. Dumbrell, Hargrove and Tessler broadly praise Carter for achieving the most that was possible at

⁸⁰⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 219.

⁸⁰⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 325.

⁸⁰⁹ The literature on Camp David is voluminous. Examples of the day-by-day approach include Glad, *Outsider in the White House*, 142-53; David Reynolds, *Summits: Six Meetings that Shaped the Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 257-316. A number of participants have also written accounts, including Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 132-52; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 252-72; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 326-412; 4-17 September 1978, —, *Diary*, 216-45; Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 255-90; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 149-90; Kamel, *A Testimony*, 294-378; Powell, *Other Side*, 61-85; Anwar el Sadat, *Those I Have Known* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1985), 107-12; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 219-28; Weizman, *Battle for Peace*, 340-77.

⁸¹⁰ Bard, *Water's Edge and Beyond*, 228-30; Brinkley, 'The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter.'; Glad, *Outsider in the White House*, 142-53; Strong, *Working in the World*, 183-207; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 252-68; Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 353-64. Kaufman and Smith see both positive and negative aspects to Carter's role: the accords represented a breakthrough, but remained vague on the Palestinian issue. Kaufman, *Plans unraveled*, 81-85; Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power*, 157-79.

the time.⁸¹¹ Yet an increasingly large coterie of scholars assails the accords for sacrificing the Palestinians' future for the sake of an Egypt-Israel peace while legitimising Israeli occupation and expansion.⁸¹² However, in Pressman's estimation, Carter 'got what he could get' at Camp David: he set up the Egypt-Israel treaty and initiated a process on Palestinian autonomy that could outlast Begin's government.⁸¹³

Quandt provides the most thorough treatment of the conference. Although focused on the Americans, he adeptly describes the intersection of domestic pressures and international diplomacy for all protagonists. However, Quandt's concern is the policymaking process. As for American domestic politics, he confines himself to structural rather than specific constraints. Quandt is largely silent on the roles of the media and public opinion.⁸¹⁴

The news blackout and secrecy surrounding the summit represented a retreat from Carter's attempts to engage in open diplomacy, vows to formulate foreign policy in the open and pledges to make the American people a consultative partner in the process. For Carter, diplomatic imperatives trumped his ideals of openness, but domestic politics were never far from the proceedings.

Deciding to convene the summit

By summer 1978 the peace process had reached an impasse. Following the airplane sales debate, the United States hosted high-level talks between Egypt and Israel at Leeds Castle, outside London, in July. Those negotiations ended without significant agreement.⁸¹⁵ State Department officials partly blamed the failure to make progress on 'the nonstop leaking of comments and positions from the negotiations' by participants for their respective domestic imperatives.⁸¹⁶

⁸¹¹ Dumbrell, *American Foreign Policy: Carter to Clinton*, 28-30; Hargrove, *Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good*, 127-30; Tessler, *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 511-19.

⁸¹² Khalidi, *Brokers of Deceit*, 5-7; Mahmood, 'Sadat and Camp David.'; Donald Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy towards Palestine and Israel since 1945* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995), 117-19; Fayed A. Sayegh, 'The Camp David Agreement and the Palestine Problem,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 2 (1979); Said, 'The Acre and the Goat.'; Terry, 'Carter Administration and the Palestinians.'

⁸¹³ Pressman, 'Explaining the Carter administration's Israeli-Palestinian Solution.'

⁸¹⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, 206-58.

⁸¹⁵ For records of these meetings, see Documents 266-273, *FRUS, 1977-1980, VIII*, 1191-1236. Also Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 138-48; Kamel, *A Testimony*, 208-19; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 215-16.

⁸¹⁶ Powell, *Other Side*, 60.

The Egyptians and Israelis recognised the need for secrecy. In July, Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan put forward to the U.S. negotiators ‘three keys to movement’ in the peace process, the first of which was that ‘the negotiations must become private rather than public.’ Simultaneously, Sadat told Washington that ‘he was concerned about the publicity that now was so much a part of the diplomacy of the peace process. … He wondered how we could negotiate in a more private way, how a less public approach could be developed.⁸¹⁷

Meanwhile, the administration was concerned that it had failed to communicate effectively to Congress, the media and the public. In summer 1978, the administration brought Gerald Rafshoon formally into the White House to help formulate the ‘themes’ of the presidency, including what he termed ‘media events.’⁸¹⁸ The administration began for the first time to set a ‘line-of-the-day’ for cabinet members and develop effective long-range communications. Thus, Rafshoon’s role was the centrepiece of a fresh effort to create a coherent image and message.⁸¹⁹ Many of these issues came together at Camp David.

Nevertheless, in the days before the summit, Press Secretary Jody Powell was ‘damn close’ to clinical ‘despondency’ over the media’s coverage of Carter and of his declining poll numbers.⁸²⁰ In June, a survey conducted for the Democratic National Committee found that Americans liked Carter personally, but prospective voters

find the President weak and wishy-washy, vague and indecisive. They criticize his record and blame him increasingly for not keeping his campaign promises. … By a 42% to 32% margin voters say “not in control” describes Carter better than “in control.” … (The) biggest reasons for disappointment were a feeling that the President had failed to keep campaign promises and a feeling that he has been ineffective as a leader.⁸²¹

⁸¹⁷ Memo from Quandt and Clift to Mondale, ‘Middle East Developments,’ 10 July 1978, Folder: ‘[Vice President’s Lunch With the President: Talking Points, 7/78-12/78],’ Mondale Donated, Box 3, JCL. Cohen offers an intriguing interpretation of the role played by culture in the Camp David peace process, particularly in terms of the patron-client relationship between Carter and Sadat. Raymond Cohen, *Negotiating Across Cultures: International Communication in an Interdependent World*, Revised ed. (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 35, 39-40, 54, 71.

⁸¹⁸ Rafshoon interview, CPP, 9; ‘Assistant to the President for Communications,’ n.a., n.d. [circa May 1978], Folder: ‘Office Procedures: Memos (1),’ Rafshoon Files, Box 29, JCL.

⁸¹⁹ John Anthony Maltese, *Spin Control: The White House Office of Communications and the Management of Presidential News*, 2nd, revised ed. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 149-77.

⁸²⁰ Powell, *Other Side*, 71.

⁸²¹ CSR, ‘A Brief Analysis of Public Attitudes Toward President Carter,’ June 1978, Folder: ‘Analysis of Political Attitudes toward Jimmy Carter, 6/78,’ Powell Donated, Box 16, JCL.

By August, Carter's Gallup approval rating had fallen to 40 percent (with 43 percent disapproval),⁸²² while Roper found that those who identified themselves as 'strong' Carter supporters had dropped to 11 percent.⁸²³ In yet another survey, 66 percent of respondents said Carter was 'not tough enough' for the job.⁸²⁴

After Leeds Castle, Brzezinski advised Carter to consider how to manage potential strains in the U.S.-Israeli relationship caused by the president's position in negotiations: '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?' To achieve a desirable result, the White House would need to expend 'major' domestic and international efforts, Brzezinski believed. He also asked Carter whether he was prepared to 'see this matter through to the very end?'.⁸²⁵

On 20 July, Carter told his advisors he was reconsidering hosting a summit with Begin and Sadat, which had been shelved in early 1978.⁸²⁶ Talks at the level of foreign ministers had been insufficient. 'We basically went into [Camp David] as an act of desperation,' the NSC's Quandt said. 'The thing was falling apart.'⁸²⁷

Carter said 'for political reasons he would like to have a rather dramatic meeting, perhaps somewhere abroad,' according to Brzezinski. The president sought a 'historically proper setting.' Recalling the 1943 Churchill-Roosevelt Casablanca meeting, Brzezinski floated the idea of Morocco. Nevertheless, Carter decided by 30 July that Camp David would be the ideal location 'because he thought that we could have more effective control over the flow of information.'⁸²⁸

Camp David sits 110 kilometres northwest of Washington. Situated on a wooded mountaintop, the fenced-in compound of 11 cabins is controlled completely by the military, including 200 sailors and Marines. In the late 1970s, all phone calls went through a central

⁸²² Gallup Poll (AIPO), 14 August 1978, Roper Center.

⁸²³ Roper Report 78-8, 19-26 August 1978, *ibid.*

⁸²⁴ NBC News/AP Poll, 7-8 August 1978, *ibid.*

⁸²⁵ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'The Middle East,' 18 July 1978, Folder: 'Middle East—Negotiations: (1/78-7/28/78)', Brzezinski Donated, Box 13, JCL.

⁸²⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 250; Quandt, *Camp David*, 201. 'The President's Schedule,' 20 July 1978, Folder: 'Presidents Daily Schedule with Notes, 12/77-1/81 [1-7]', Plains File, Box 34, JCL.

⁸²⁷ Quandt interview, REP.

⁸²⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 250-51.

switchboard, run by the Army Signal Corps. Marines guard the perimeter of the grounds, which are dotted with lakes and ponds. Equipped with a landing pad, the 134-acre compound in the Catoctin Mountains is a 30-minute helicopter ride from the White House.⁸²⁹ The director of the White House Military Office described it as ‘a retreat for the President and is … an extension of his Oval Office at the White House.’⁸³⁰ It served as an ideal setting in which to isolate two antagonists hoping for a breakthrough.

Preparing to manage the message

By summer 1978, the administration’s relations with the media had become ‘frayed and tattered.’⁸³¹ U.S. officials decided to not just restrict access to the summit principals, but also to speak through one spokesperson – a decision to which both the Egyptians and Israelis ultimately acceded.⁸³² Vance suggested, and Carter approved, the single-spokesman strategy as ‘a specific reaction to the problems that had developed at Leeds Castle when all three governments briefed reporters in one fashion or another almost every day.’⁸³³

However, the administration only decided to exclude the media from the proceedings shortly before the summit began. A memo concluded that, ‘Politically, of course, we need a good shot of the President and the two leaders in deep discussion. But statesmanship wise, this meeting is much too important for world peace to interrupt the atmosphere’ with cameras.⁸³⁴ Less than a week before the conference, the Press Office noted that interest in the summit was ‘at a zenith.’ It continued to

⁸²⁹ Michael Kernan, ‘Inside the Mountain Hideaway: Taking the Tensions of the Mideast To the Serenity of Camp David,’ *WP*, 6 September 1978. Also Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 330-31.

⁸³⁰ Letter from Marvin Beaman, Jr., to Senator Charles Mathias, Jr., 22 December 1977, Folder: ‘Camp David, 6/77-9/78,’ Lipshutz Files, Box 6, JCL.

⁸³¹ Powell, *Other Side*, 55-56.

⁸³² Ibid., 65-70.; also Evening Report from Press/Congressional Relations Desk to Brzezinski, 29 August 1978, Folder: ‘8/78,’ NSA, Staff, Press and Congressional Relations, Chron, Box 3, JCL.

⁸³³ Powell, *Other Side*, 64-65.

⁸³⁴ Memo from Purks to Granum and Leibach, ‘Camp David—The News Media,’ 10 August 1978, Folder: ‘Camp David Summit—Press Coverage Concerns, 8/10/78-9/21/78,’ Press, Granum Files, Box 80, JCL.

propose broader access to photo opportunities and other press contacts during the meeting, the duration of which at that time remained unclear.⁸³⁵

The Press Office felt strongly about making provisions for picture coverage partly as a function of domestic politics, with an eye toward Carter's 1980 campaign: 'If we get lucky ... and a settlement is reached we want to be in a position to visually remind a quickly-forgetful American public when the President runs again.'⁸³⁶

Similarly, Rafshoon insisted Carter use the summit not only to achieve substantive diplomatic results, but also to fortify his image:

[T]he theme that we should project at the meeting is that of GETTING CONTROL. In control of the meeting ... in control of his staff ... in control of the coverage. ... I agree with your wishes to keep the expectations as low as possible and to handle the publicity in a low key manner, but at the same time we must get our story out and not allow Begin and/or Sadat steal the media initiative from you.⁸³⁷

The president's advisors sought a way to capitalise on the media and public interest, without jeopardising the negotiations. Nevertheless, Carter overruled Rafshoon and personally made the decision to keep the summit principals out of the public eye.⁸³⁸

Ultimately, the administration decided to corral hundreds of journalists at an American Legion post about 10 kilometres from the summit site.⁸³⁹ 'From a journalist's standpoint it was a bad situation, in the sense that ... you could get no access. ... Jody Powell was a very savvy guy – savvy in his relations with the media, how to control the situation,' *The New York Times'* Hedrick Smith said.⁸⁴⁰

An example of how reporting could have diplomatic reverberations occurred shortly before the meeting. Powell lambasted the affair as a story 'virtually created out of whole cloth' that took

⁸³⁵ Memo from Edwards to Rafshoon and Powell, 'Proposal for Press Coverage of the Camp David Summit,' 30 August 1978, Folder: 'Camp David Summit—Press Coverage Concerns, 8/10/78-9/21/78,' Press, Granum Files, Box 80, JCL.

⁸³⁶ Letter from Shaddix to Rafshoon, 11 August 1978, Folder: 'Camp David Summit 9/78,' Press (Advance), Edwards Files, Box 3, JCL. Emphasis in original.

⁸³⁷ Memo from Rafshoon to Carter through Powell, 25 August 1978, Folder: 'Camp David Summit,' Rafshoon Files, Box 24, JCL. Emphases in original.

⁸³⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 325; Powell, *Other Side*, 65-66.

⁸³⁹ _____, *Other Side*, 66. Also Notice to the Press, 'Coverage Details for the Camp David Summit,' 4 September 1978, Folder: '9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit,' NSA, Brzezinski, Schechter-Friendly, Box 14, JCL.

⁸⁴⁰ Smith interview.

away from the business of the summit.⁸⁴¹ Yet a closer look reveals greater nuance and is instructive on the difficulty of controlling the message once it enters the public domain.

Powell criticised a 30 August ABC report about the possibility that Carter would offer to station American forces in the Middle East to guarantee any agreements made at Camp David. Carter's response to the question – which was shouted to him as he boarded Air Force One while on vacation – was noncommittal: 'I'd be reluctant to do that. We'll just have to wait and see.' Carter, by refraining from saying anything conclusive or of substance, was already trying to play his role as a mediator and 'full partner' in the talks.⁸⁴² However, ABC played the comments sensationalistically. The correspondent claimed Carter had 'confirmed, in effect, that he may offer American forces for use in the Mideast at the summit at Camp David.' He also opined that such considerations showed how grim Carter felt the chances for success were.⁸⁴³ In fact, Carter's comments had offered no such confirmation.

Subsequently the topic began to dominate other outlets' coverage. The following night, ABC led its broadcast with a follow-up to the story. Its diplomatic correspondent reported Israel had 'shot down' a 'trial balloon' that was 'leaked' by the White House: Israeli officials had publicly opposed the idea.⁸⁴⁴ By 31 August, CBS and NBC both led their broadcasts with the story, ensuring it had maximum exposure at the moment the White House had hoped to focus on how best to achieve diplomatic success.⁸⁴⁵ By 2 September, The Associated Press reported that 'among the scores of proposals Carter is taking with him to Camp David is one that would establish an American air base in Sinai and post U.S. troops on the West Bank.'⁸⁴⁶ On 11 September, *Newsweek* commented that summit preparations had been 'sidetracked somewhat' by the troops story. ABC

⁸⁴¹ Powell, *Other Side*, 63-64.

⁸⁴² In fact, Begin objected to the term 'full partner,' which was used by the Americans and Egyptians. He told a reporter he preferred that Carter perform more modestly as an 'honest broker.' Milan Kubic, 'On to Camp David,' *Newsweek*, 28 August 1978.

⁸⁴³ 'Carter/Mideast/United States Troops,' ABC 'World News Tonight,' 30 August 1978, VTNA 55468.

⁸⁴⁴ 'Mideast/Hussein Interview,' *ibid.*, 31 August 1978, VTNA 55513.

⁸⁴⁵ 'Camp David Meeting,' 'CBS Evening News,' 31 August 1978, VTNA 259420; 'Mideast,' 'NBC Nightly News,' *ibid.*, VTNA 500448.

⁸⁴⁶ Barry Schweid analysis, AP, 2 September 1978, Nexis.

revisited the story that evening. Its correspondent reported that Carter was setting out his own proposals in the summit, and added ‘perhaps offering the use of U.S. forces – we don’t know.’⁸⁴⁷

However, ABC’s story on the prospect of U.S. troops in the Middle East did have some, albeit weak, foundation. Powell had sought to make the issue about media irresponsibility, but it actually stemmed from an administration that had trouble managing its own message.

In fact, the information appears to have trickled out from various sources. On 21 August – nine days before the ABC story that Powell criticised – a prominent newspaper column reported ‘the United States will act as Israel’s guarantor for West Bank security safeguards.’⁸⁴⁸ On 28 August, the *Chicago Tribune* ran an item on the possibility of U.S. forces being deployed in the region.⁸⁴⁹ Similarly, *U.S. News & World Report* ran a 70-word blurb on 28 August that said that Brzezinski had been ‘floating’ the idea of American troops as security guarantors. On 30 August, both *The New York Times* – citing the State Department – and *The Washington Post* ran stories on the subject.⁸⁵⁰ The ABC story may have been the first to gain traction, but the issue had surfaced earlier.

Earlier in August, two SFRC members had queried Vance in a closed-door briefing about U.S. forces being involved in Middle East security arrangements. Vance replied that Washington was ‘prepared to consider various security arrangements, if necessary, in the course of negotiations’ but did not anticipate a major U.S. presence on the ground. Informed about this exchange, Carter wrote, ‘Do not close any options.’⁸⁵¹ Then, in a final pre-summit NSC meeting, Defense Secretary Harold Brown, Brzezinski and Carter all concurred that they did not favour an ‘American military presence in the area’ on strictly military grounds, but that such an offer could have political value in

⁸⁴⁷ ‘Mideast Summit,’ ABC ‘World News Tonight,’ 11 September 1978, VTNA 55627; Powell, *Other Side*, 79.

⁸⁴⁸ Rowland Evans and Robert Novak column, ‘Last-Minute Maneuvers For the Mideast Summit,’ *WP*, 21 August 1978.

⁸⁴⁹ ‘Carter prepared to suggest U.S. presence on West Bank,’ *CT*, 28 August 1978.

⁸⁵⁰ Jim Hoagland, ‘U.S. Air Base is One Proposal for Mideast Talks,’ *WP*, 30 August 1978.

⁸⁵¹ Memo from Christopher to Carter, 14 August 1978, Folder: ‘State Department Evening Reports, 8/78,’ Plains File, Box 39, JCL.

the negotiations.⁸⁵² These exchanges indicate that the president, though perhaps reluctant, had not entirely foreclosed the possibility of such an arrangement.

No evidence exists that U.S. troops were ever offered as a guarantor during the summit. Yet this incident demonstrates how tensions in the government-press relationship could distort news coverage, which could have diplomatic consequences. The White House's failure to handle the story allowed it to fester: Initial denials came through unnamed officials off camera. Not until the summit had already begun did Powell vigorously rebut the story, calling it 'hogwash.'⁸⁵³

The administration's inability to quash the story allowed it to become a distraction at the summit, as well as an issue with the American public, which opposed the idea. In a two-week period beginning 26 August, 95 percent of the 431 letters received by the White House on the issue opposed the use of American forces for peacekeeping.⁸⁵⁴ Separately, a poll found that 65 percent of respondents opposed (as opposed to 21 percent who favoured) the use of American forces even 'if Arab forces invaded Israel.'⁸⁵⁵

Regardless, from the beginning Carter faced a media suggesting a contradiction between his campaign promises and governing realities, and warning of the consequences of a failed summit.⁸⁵⁶ Carter was aware of the perils involved in hosting the two leaders: 'It is a very high-risk thing for me politically because now I think if we are unsuccessful at Camp David, I will certainly have to share part of the blame for that failure.'⁸⁵⁷

Although Carter had already made the Middle East his top foreign policy priority, his intimate identification with the process only crystallised at Camp David. Regardless, in late summer 1978, the public's approval of Carter's handling of issue was only marginally higher than his

⁸⁵² Minutes, 'Middle East—Camp David Summit,' n.a., 1 September 1978, NLC-17-2-1-5-5. Also Quandt, *Camp David*, 217-18.

⁸⁵³ Transcript, News conference, 7 September 1978, Folder: '9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit,' NSA, Brzezinski, Scheeter-Friendly, Box 14, JCL.

⁸⁵⁴ Memo from Kite to Lipshutz, 15 September 1978, 'Mail concerning the Middle East,' Folder: 'Middle East: American Policy, 6/77-9/78 [CF, O/A 712],' Lipshutz Files, Box 34, JCL.

⁸⁵⁵ Roper Report 78-7, 8-15 July 1978, Roper Center.

⁸⁵⁶ For example, 'Special Report: High Stakes at Camp David,' CBS News, 5 September 1978, VTNA 837719.

⁸⁵⁷ 'The President's News Conference of August 17, 1978,' *PPP: Carter, 1978, II*, 1438-1447.

overall job performance ratings.⁸⁵⁸ Americans felt pessimistic about the summit's prospects: according to one poll, only 26 percent felt a 'peace settlement' was likely in the summit; 60 percent felt it was unlikely.⁸⁵⁹

Americans continued to harbour pro-Israeli sympathies, but some nuance crept into poll results. For example, back-to-back Gallup surveys found that 37 percent of respondents reported their 'sympathies were more with Israel' than the 'Arab nations,' for whom no more than 11 percent reported sympathies. Yet in both cases, a plurality reported they did not favour either side or that they did not have an opinion. Moreover, in both cases, a strong plurality – 51 percent in August and 49 percent in September – felt Israel was not doing all it should to achieve peace.⁸⁶⁰ A separate survey found that 36 percent disapproved (compared to 21 percent who approved) of Begin's handling of 'the Middle East situation,' 62 percent felt Israel should permit a Palestinian homeland either right then or after five years and nearly one-fifth of respondents felt Israel had been 'unreasonably difficult' in peace negotiations.⁸⁶¹ Carter thus did not have a robust political mandate to push Israel for concessions, but nor did he face such one-sided pressure as to make his stance a foregone conclusion.⁸⁶²

American Jewish organisations welcomed the decision to call the summit.⁸⁶³ Jewish community Edward Sanders provided Carter with a summary of attitudes of American Jewish leaders. 'They were said to be more restrained than we had expected, and this encouraged me greatly in my later arguments with Begin,' according to Carter.⁸⁶⁴ Even so, in Brzezinski's account, Carter told Begin at one particularly tense moment during the summit, 'My reelection is not nearly

⁸⁵⁸ One poll gave Carter a plurality of 44 percent approval. Roper Report 78-8, 19-26 August 1978, Roper Center. A separate survey gave him a 6.1 rating (out of 10) on the Middle East. *WP Poll*, 1 September 1978, *ibid*.

⁸⁵⁹ Roper Report 78-8, 19-26 August 1978, *ibid*.

⁸⁶⁰ Gallup Poll (AIPO), 4-7 August 1978, *ibid*; *Ibid*, 8-11 September 1978, *ibid*.

⁸⁶¹ Roper Report 78-8, 19-26 August 1978, *ibid*.

⁸⁶² American public opinion occupied a significant place in the Egyptian president's strategy. According to Boutros-Ghali, 'Sadat frequently said that if he could only expose the Israeli position before American public opinion, the United States would favor Egypt over Israel.' Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 145.

⁸⁶³ For example, Release, 'Presidents' Conference Leader Hails Forthcoming Begin-Sadat Meeting in Camp David Under Carter's Auspices,' n.d. [circa early August 1978], Folder 13, Box 5, Sanders Papers, AJA; Release, 'Statement by Howard Squadron, President, American Jewish Congress, On the Sadat-Begin Meeting in Camp David,' *ibid*. AIPAC showed more circumspection and criticized the phrase 'full partner.' 'Looking to Camp David,' *NER*, XXII: 33, 16 August 1978.

⁸⁶⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 329.

as important to me as the resolution of the Middle East issue.⁸⁶⁵ This example shows again Carter's rare willingness to discuss openly his domestic political fortunes with foreign leaders.⁸⁶⁶

Nevertheless, White House aides warned the president against applying too much pressure on Israel because it 'would create nearly insurmountable political problems. In the Jewish community, the Administration will gain if the talks end successfully and it will not be hurt if Egypt is blamed for the breakdown.' Whatever happens, the memo cautioned, the administration should avoid the appearance of 'ganging up' with Egypt against Israel at the summit.⁸⁶⁷

The month before the summit, Carter's Middle East experts decamped to Middleburg, Virginia, to compile the president's briefing book. These policymakers believed that most of the hard work of the summit would be on the Palestinian issue. They deemed the negotiations on Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai to be relatively straightforward. At best, a framework for further talks would be established, after which the details could be handled at the foreign minister level. A broad agreement should not be expected.

Quandt details both the Middleburg meeting and the resultant briefing book.⁸⁶⁸ However, one section – an eight-and-a-half page 'Public Affairs Strategy' – is particularly germane to the present study. It reflects the inevitable intersection of diplomacy, politics and the press. Recognising that 'these issues have already begun to emerge in the media and will be the center of the inevitable public debate,' the authors attempt to define the administration's strong points. 'By pinpointing the issues, and translating our established assets into public themes for addressing them, we lay the groundwork now for undercutting the critics,' they wrote.⁸⁶⁹

The authors attempt to clarify the American role in the negotiations:

⁸⁶⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 257.

⁸⁶⁶ Similarly, in convincing Sadat not to walk out of the summit at one particularly contentious moment, Carter reportedly said that if Camp David failed, he would be a one-term president. But if something were signed, he would devote his second term to achieving a comprehensive solution. Boutros-Ghali, *Egypt's Road to Jerusalem*, 142.

⁸⁶⁷ Memo, 'Talking Points for Camp David Summit Meeting,' n.a., n.d. [circa early September 1978], Folder: 'Camp David—Speeches and Statements, 8/8/78-10/20/78,' Moses Files, Box 4, JCL.

⁸⁶⁸ However, Quandt concedes they underestimated how tenaciously Begin would insist on clinging to the Sinai settlements. Quandt, *Camp David*, 209-17. Also Quandt and Atherton, 'Talking Points—Press Backgrounder,' 3 September 1978, Folder: 'Camp David Summit—Press Coverage Concerns, 8/10/78-9/21/78,' Press, Granum Files, Box 80, JCL.

⁸⁶⁹ 'Appendix E1: Briefing Book for President Carter at Camp David, August 1978,' ———, *Peace Process*, Retrieved 2 September 2013, http://www.brookings.edu/press/books/chapter_1/peaceprocess_appendixE1.pdf.

President Carter will be a “full partner” in the sense that that United States, like the parties themselves, as well as the whole international community, has a *vital interest* in achieving peace in the Middle East. … As a *full partner*, the President remains a *middleman with the trust of both parties*. In that role, he will *help talk the parties* through their problems to *new solutions*.

Secondly, the memo attempts to highlight the ways in which the Americans could create a public perception of balance in its Camp David suggestions. ‘Whatever happens,’ the plan concludes, ‘the Administration should come away from Camp David prepared to *go public with the themes* listed above for spelling out the *United States’ ideas* for reaching a settlement.⁸⁷⁰ This advice underscores the significance attached by the administration to public relations and its willingness to make the negotiations public in order to gain support for its positions.

As with the Middleburg briefing book, Brzezinski’s pre-summit memo emphasised the West Bank rather than the Sinai. However, Brzezinski also echoed Rafshoon’s image memo. ‘For the talks at Camp David to succeed, *you will have to control the proceedings from the outset* and thereafter pursue a *deliberate political strategy* designed to bring about significant changes in both Egyptian and Israeli substantive positions,’ he advised Carter.⁸⁷¹

Brzezinski also strongly suggests Carter should be prepared to make disagreements public and not be afraid to cast blame for the breakdown of negotiations. He is especially insistent in regard to Israel. If Begin proved ‘responsible for blocking progress toward peace,’ Brzezinski wrote, Carter should make clear he would have to take the following steps: ‘Go to the American public with a *full explanation of US national interests in the Middle East*,’ explain the scale of U.S. aid to Israel, publicise American views on a fair settlement, and Washington would be unable to defend Israel’s position if the negotiations shifted to the United Nations or Geneva. ‘The consequences of a failure should be publicly explained by you, and Sadat and Begin should understand from the outset that this will be the case,’ Brzezinski emphasised.⁸⁷²

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid. Emphases in original.

⁸⁷¹ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Strategy for Camp David,’ 1 September 1978, DDRS CK3100466153. Emphases in original.

⁸⁷² Ibid.

As a mediator, Carter employed tactical threats with greater frequency than his predecessors. Throughout the negotiations, the president made clear that if talks failed, Washington would blame Israel. Carter would go to Congress and explain Israel's intransigence, thereby imperilling U.S. aid to Israel.⁸⁷³ Indeed, Dayan recalled that during the summit Carter threatened to tell Congress that Israel had blocked an agreement.⁸⁷⁴ This threat is significant because Israel's power base resided in Congress; any diminishment of pro-Israel sentiment among lawmakers could threaten economic and military support for Israel.

Regardless, the pre-summit briefing material dissatisfied Carter. His advisors 'had set our expectations too low,' he believed. He felt the summit needed to achieve more than a declaration of principles leading to further negotiations. 'If we can't resolve anything at this summit level, it's highly unlikely that foreign ministers and others can do so later on,' he believed.⁸⁷⁵

The Middleburg meeting was held among foreign policy specialists, but 'knowledgeable people,' including AIPAC's Morris Amitay, asked Jewish community liaison Edward Sanders why he did not attend. These people 'drew negative conclusions from my absence,' Sanders informed Hamilton Jordan. Jordan responded that only specialists attended Middleburg. 'You, I, the V.P., the [President] and others will have our say when they come in. I don't think we should be at all apologetic or defensive about you or I not being included in [Vance's policy] group,' Jordan wrote. '... [T]hey do most of the initial work there (at the State Department) on substance. We review and comment on it [in the White House].'⁸⁷⁶

At the summit

⁸⁷³ Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers: Mediators in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1948-1979* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 284-320.

⁸⁷⁴ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 173.

⁸⁷⁵ 31 August 1978, Carter, *Diary*, 215-16.

⁸⁷⁶ Memo from Sanders to Jordan, 15 August 1978, Folder 13, Box 5, Sanders Papers.

Once the summit began, Camp David's claustrophobic confines affected all the participants. 'It's hard to recreate the atmosphere,' Quandt said. 'After 13 days up there, people were really going crazy and wanted to get out.'⁸⁷⁷

The negotiations *inside* Camp David have been covered in detail elsewhere. The press remained strictly on the *outside*, however. According to Powell, 'the relationship between the White House and the press during the summit would be dominated by our attempts to prevent the unauthorized or premature disclosure of information.'⁸⁷⁸ As the summit progressed, the press operation faced 'an increasingly frustrated media starving for some hard news.'⁸⁷⁹ The administration had to maintain a flow of information to prevent the development of a news vacuum, in which rumours and false stories might take hold.

Powell spent considerable energy verbally jousting with reporters in an attempt to provide as little information as possible:

Under the mutually agreed, but never written out, rules for the (daily) briefing, I was to describe the meetings that had taken place since the last briefing and provide a little "color" on the nonsubstantive activities of the participants. ... The goal was to avoid any step-by-step, blow-by-blow analysis, to resist the pressure for daily temperature taking, and it was hoped, with only one briefer, to keep conflicts between the parties out of the news. ... Any question as to the positions of either party on the issues under discussion simply could not be answered.⁸⁸⁰

The only images the networks could use were the still photos handed out by the White House. They had to be cleared by all three sides in order to avoid publicising 'pictures that showed more of Begin than Sadat or that placed one or the other in a more favorable perspective.'⁸⁸¹ Consequently, the networks had little choice but to show Powell's words on the screen and sometimes supply imagined dialogue for the official photos.⁸⁸²

⁸⁷⁷ Quandt interview, REP.

⁸⁷⁸ Powell, *Other Side*, 60.

⁸⁷⁹ Wolf Blitzer, *Between Washington and Jerusalem: A Reporter's Notebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 219.

⁸⁸⁰ Powell, *Other Side*, 69-70.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁸² 'Mideast Summit,' ABC 'World News Tonight,' 7 September 1978, VTNA 55968. White House correspondent Sam Donaldson even suggested that an exchange between Begin and Sadat upon entering a cabin for talks with Carter *could have been* as follows: "No, no, after you, President Sadat." "No, Mr. Begin, I insist, after you, sir."

Powell's briefings delivered meeting rundowns – what people had been doing, what they had been wearing, where they had met and for how long. These details were intended to substitute for substance. Powell, for example, would describe Sadat's daily walk and Begin's morning paperwork as news, while adding bits of colour.⁸⁸³ Powell told reporters in a typical statement on 9 September: 'Progress does seem to have been made in some areas. However, substantial differences still remain on other important issues.'⁸⁸⁴

Two photo opportunities were arranged to allow the press chances to report something beyond the briefings. On 7 September, journalists viewed from a distance as Begin, Carter and Sadat watched a Marine parade. This event allowed for photographs of the leaders together, but no questions were possible. On 10 September, the delegations toured the Civil War battlefield of Gettysburg, which again afforded journalists the chance to see the protagonists. Most of the reports focused on interpreting the body language and tone of voice of the members of the delegations for clues as to the state of the talks.⁸⁸⁵

Deprived of the standard avenues for newsgathering, the press corps resorted to interviewing one another.⁸⁸⁶ Indeed, frustration at the blackout was a feature of nearly every report. One correspondent wrote that the summit resembled 'a warmed-over version of the endless obscurity of "Waiting for Godot."'⁸⁸⁷ Virtually all the major outlets ran at least one story specifically or mostly about the blackout.

Many editorial cartoons also took aim at the news restrictions. One that caught Carter's eye came from the *Dallas Times-Herald*. It features a drawing of Powell mulling over the saying that

⁸⁸³ For example, Transcript, News conference, 7 September 1978, Folder: '9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit,' NSA, Brzezinski, Schechter-Friendly, Box 14, JCL.

⁸⁸⁴ Transcript, News conference, 9 September 1978, Folder: '9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit,' NSA, Brzezinski, Schechter-Friendly, Box 14, JCL.

⁸⁸⁵ Don Irwin, 'President Escorts Sadat, Begin on Gettysburg Tour,' *LAT*, 11 September 1978; Edward Walsh, 'In the Mideast Peace Search, a Pause For a Somber Reminder at Gettysburg,' *WP*, *ibid*.

⁸⁸⁶ Edward Walsh, 'Journalists, With Very Little to Do, Wait for Any Tidbit of Information,' *WP*, 8 September 1978; 'Camp David Summit/Oil/Reactions,' ABC 'World News Tonight,' 6 September 1978, VTNA 55947.

⁸⁸⁷ Jim Hoagland analysis, 'The stage is set for decisive action in Camp David political mystery-thriller,' *WP*, 11 September 1978.

‘no news is good news,’ before proudly announcing to journalists: ‘Gentlemen … there is nothing but good news coming out of Camp David!’,⁸⁸⁸

The sharpest questions at Powell’s briefings pertained to the relationship between Begin and Sadat. ‘I am not in a position to characterize or go into substance,’ he insisted in one typical exchange. ‘It is my impression that the personal relationships among all three of the principals are good.’⁸⁸⁹ However, because one of the core ways of communicating to the media was through posting a list of the meetings, the journalists attempted to gauge the relationship through how many face-to-face contacts the two leaders had with one another. The fact that the initial meeting between Begin and Sadat was so vituperative that they did not meet directly after the third day therefore was revealing.

Nevertheless, frustration and confusion often reigned. On Thursday, 14 September, a journalist demanded of Powell whether he was offering another ‘non-news briefing.’ Powell responded, ‘That would be my assessment of it, yes.’⁸⁹⁰ That night, NBC reported that the summit would end Friday or over the weekend, while CBS said the meeting was foundering and would likely limp along until Monday.⁸⁹¹

The situation nearly came to a head on 15 September. Reporters asked Powell 13 questions on the Begin-Sadat relationship.⁸⁹² ‘Don’t tell us this is normal; don’t give us the normal Camp David ----,’ one correspondent fumed.⁸⁹³ Although the spokesman was determined not to give a direct answer, he also ‘felt an obligation to give the press at least a hint that they might be on the

⁸⁸⁸ The White House later requested the original, and many similar cartoons, for its collection. Letter from Granum to Bob Taylor, 1 February 1979, Folder: ‘Camp David Summit—Cartoons,’ Press, Granum Files, Box 80, JCL.

⁸⁸⁹ Transcript, News conference, 8 September 1978, Folder: ‘9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Schechter-Friendly, Box 14, JCL.

⁸⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 September 1978, *ibid.*

⁸⁹¹ Reynolds, *Summits*, 306-07. ‘Mideast Summit/Mondale’s Duties,’ ‘NBC Nightly News,’ 14 September 1978, VTNA 500626; ‘Mideast Summit,’ ‘CBS Evening News,’ *ibid.*, VTNA 259574.

⁸⁹² Transcript, News conference, 15 September 1978, Folder: ‘9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Schechter-Friendly, Box 14, JCL. Also Powell, *Other Side*, 79-82. It turns out that Sadat had indeed nearly walked out of the conference, but Powell did not know that at the time.

⁸⁹³ Transcript, News conference, 15 September 1978, Folder: ‘9/5-17/78 Camp David Summit,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Schechter-Friendly Series, Box 14, JCL. The expletive is not specified in the transcript.

right track.' Powell then attempted to give reporters 'a clear indication that what I said in the past and was about to say now should be taken with a grain of salt.'⁸⁹⁴

The summit probably generated more stories than any other event blanketed by a news blackout. A poll conducted after the summit found that more than three in four people had heard or read something about the summit.⁸⁹⁵ The hundreds of journalists from around the world filed innumerable stories based on Powell's vague briefings, as well as features and analysis. U.S. newspapers and newsmagazines saturated their readers with coverage.

Meanwhile, throughout September the three American broadcast networks each devoted around 25 percent of total news time to the summit.⁸⁹⁶ An analysis of the television reporting found that the 'coverage was more substantive and analytical than it is usually given credit for being. Perhaps in part because of the news blackout, a number of solid background stories were broadcast.'⁸⁹⁷

However, despite the multitude of stories filed, Powell succeeded in obfuscating and keeping substance mostly out of the briefings. Although the Press Office distributed more than 100,000 pages of 'transcripts, schedules, notices, and statements,' only about five paragraphs of that contained 'good hard news,' according to Powell.⁸⁹⁸

Even while at Camp David, Carter asked his staff collating his mail for a 'selection of the Camp David ones' to be forwarded to him.⁸⁹⁹ As the summit neared its crucial hour, Brzezinski sent Carter the results of a Gallup poll of American opinion. More than half of Israeli sympathisers wanted Israel to be more forthcoming, and about the same percentage of those expressing pro-Arab sentiments wanted Egypt to be more flexible, Brzezinski wrote. 'It therefore appears that either side

⁸⁹⁴ Powell, *Other Side*, 80-81.

⁸⁹⁵ CBS News Poll, 19 September 1978, Roper Center.

⁸⁹⁶ William Spragens and Carole Ann Terwood, 'Camp David and the Networks: Reflections on Coverage of the 1978 Summit,' in *Television Coverage of International Affairs*, ed. William C. Adams (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex Publishing Corp., 1982).

⁸⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁸⁹⁸ Powell, *Other Side*, 69.

⁸⁹⁹ Weekly Mail Report from Hugh Carter to Jimmy Carter, 15 September 1978, Folder: '9/18/78,' Presidential Handwriting File, Box 101, JCL

could lose support by sticking rigidly to its pre-summit position,' he noted.⁹⁰⁰ Such evidence suggests Carter and his aides sought to keep tabs on domestic opinion as a means to help fortify his negotiating position.

Agreements reached

The summit produced two agreements. The first, 'The Framework for Peace in the Middle East,' outlines a step-by-step approach for Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, as well as broader principles for peace. The goal of this agreement was to set up a 'self-governing authority' in the territories, which would lead to 'final status' talks after a transitional period. The negotiations were to include Egypt, Israel, Jordan and 'representatives of the Palestinian people.'

However, neither of the latter two was party to the agreements and never joined the process.⁹⁰¹

The second agreement, the 'Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel,' is a plan for Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai and outlines steps for working toward an Egypt-Israel treaty.⁹⁰² This agreement is particularly noteworthy because it represented the first official recognition of Israel by an Arab state. In order to obtain these agreements, several issues – most notably the status of Jerusalem – were omitted from the frameworks and instead contained in a series of letters exchanged between Carter, Begin and Sadat from 17 to 22 September.⁹⁰³

However, shortly after the signing of the accords, a major dispute broke out over differing interpretations over Israel's agreement on a settlement freeze. Carter and Vance believed they had obtained Begin's commitment not to construct any new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza during the Palestinian autonomy negotiations. Begin disagreed, however. He believed the

⁹⁰⁰ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Information Items,' 15 September 1978, NLC-1-7-8-33-9.

⁹⁰¹ 'The Camp David Accords: The Framework for Peace in the Middle East,' JCL. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/campdavid/accords.phtml>.

⁹⁰² 'The Camp David Accords: Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel,' JCL. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/campdavid/frame.phtml>.

⁹⁰³ In effect, Egypt and Israel agreed to disagree on the Holy City: Egypt demanded Arab rights in East Jerusalem and Israel insisted that Jerusalem would never be divided and would remain 'the capital of the State of Israel.' 'The Camp David Accords: Annex to the Framework Agreements,' JCL. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/campdavid/letters.phtml>.

agreement was to freeze settlement building solely for the duration of the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations.⁹⁰⁴

Carter later conceded that failing to clarify Begin's promise on freezing settlements was the most serious omission in the accords.⁹⁰⁵ As Lenczowski argues, perhaps the major weakness of the American delegation was that, unlike Egypt and Israel's delegations, it did not have an expert in international law. Thus, some 'imprecisions or omissions' crept into the final documents.⁹⁰⁶

Regardless, the settlements dispute proved particularly corrosive. Arab states and the Palestinians considered the U.S. inability to stop Israeli building indicative of a lack of American seriousness. Conversely, Israel and its American supporters objected to subsequent American pressure on Israeli activity in the West Bank and Gaza.

The outcome did not please the Palestinians, whose interests were at the centre of much of the conference but who lacked representation. 'The results of the Camp David Summit represent the most dangerous conspiracy against the Arab Nation since 1948,' the PLO said.⁹⁰⁷ In its bulletin, the group editorialised, 'Whether Sadat will survive or not ... the Middle East will remain a hot and explosive point in the world.'⁹⁰⁸ Non-PLO leaders in the occupied territories expressed similar sentiments and reaffirmed their support for the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people everywhere.⁹⁰⁹

The news restrictions appeared to have had the intended effect. 'We didn't know anything,' recalled diplomatic correspondent Bernard Gwertzman. 'Even the Israeli press, which always got fed leaks, didn't know anything.'⁹¹⁰ Afterward, Rafshoon commended the president's decision to

⁹⁰⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 406; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 184-86; Quandt, *Camp David*, 247-51; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 225, 28-29.

⁹⁰⁵ Carter, *Blood of Abraham*, 169.

⁹⁰⁶ Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, 171.

⁹⁰⁷ 'PLO Communiqué on Results of Camp David Summit,' WAFA, 19 September 1978, IPS.

⁹⁰⁸ 'Sadat's Appeasement Policy' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 4, no. 17 (30 September 1978), 3, IPS.

⁹⁰⁹ Document 300, Communiqué issued by West Bank and Gaza leaders rejecting the Camp David Accords, 1 October 1978, *International Documents on Palestine, 1978*. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1980), 537-38.

⁹¹⁰ Bernard Gwertzman telephone interview with author, 3 November 2011.

overrule his advice and bar the media from the summit as ‘the best way’ to conclude an agreement.

‘I hate to say “you told me so” but you did,’ he wrote.⁹¹¹

The U.S. ambassador to Israel called Carter’s decision to keep the press away from the negotiators one of the president’s ‘ingenious innovations’ because it minimised the domestic political pressure on both Begin and Sadat.⁹¹² ‘It was a smart press operation from the standpoint of the White House and it was a very difficult access problem for good reporters,’ according to *The New York Times’* Smith.⁹¹³

The press was fairly docile under the circumstances, which underscored the relative lack of rancour on an issue where the stakes seemed so high.⁹¹⁴ ‘I think there was a recognition that these were very high-level talks and that any leaks might damage the result,’ Gwertzman said.⁹¹⁵ Based on his TV news analysis, Spragens argues that the ‘importance of the Summit and the perception of the stakes involved promoted the acceptance of the temporary news blackout.’⁹¹⁶ The news leaks were few, mostly trivial, and had little impact on the negotiations.⁹¹⁷

After the agreement was reached, the signing ceremony was the first time, other than brief glimpses, the American, Egyptian and Israeli people saw their leaders in nearly two weeks. The three networks carried the event from next to the White House live from 10:30 p.m. to 11:03 p.m. local time, when it was watched by an estimated 43.6 million households.⁹¹⁸

The following night, Carter addressed a joint session of Congress, with Begin and Sadat both in attendance, on the accords. The speech attracted fewer viewers – an estimated 28.6 million

⁹¹¹ Note from Rafshoon to Carter, n.d. [circa 19 September 1978], Folder: ‘9/19/78,’ Presidential Handwriting File, Box 101, JCL.

⁹¹² Samuel Lewis, ‘Discussant,’ in Herbert Rosenbaum and Alexej Ugrinsky, eds., *Jimmy Carter: foreign policy and post-presidential years* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), 158.

⁹¹³ Smith interview.

⁹¹⁴ Powell ascribes to this view. However, he believes that had Carter been unsuccessful, the press would have been less forgiving. Powell, *Other Side*, 80-81.

⁹¹⁵ Gwertzman interview.

⁹¹⁶ Spragens and Terwood, ‘Camp David and the Networks,’ 126.

⁹¹⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 338; Powell, *Other Side*, 65.

⁹¹⁸ That corresponds to a rating of 58.5, or an estimated 58.5 percent of all U.S. televisions. Telegram from A.C. Nielsen Company to Jagoda, 29 September 1978, Folder: ‘Address to Joint Session on Middle East 9/18/78,’ Rafshoon Files, Box 10, JCL.

households – than the previous evening.⁹¹⁹ Nevertheless, it was a triumphant moment for the president. ‘It’s been more than 2,000 years since there was peace between Egypt and a free Jewish nation,’ he began. ‘If our present expectations are realized, this year we shall see such peace again.’⁹²⁰

Yet Carter’s decision to deliver the speech on Capitol Hill, in front of lawmakers with whom he rarely had a close relationship, is intriguing. Congressional approval would be needed to meet the economic pledges made to both Egypt and Israel as part of the deal, but fundamentally the accords were, for the United States, a non-legislative matter. They did not constitute a treaty and therefore did not require ratification. Congress had little to do with the American side of the negotiations during the Carter administration, the vast majority of which was handled by the executive branch.

In fact, Carter’s communications chief had counselled the president not to deliver the speech in Congress. ‘I believe that you would have more control of the situation, do a better job, and dominate the news more’ if the speech were delivered to a smaller audience in the White House, Rafshoon argued, because

you are not going to Congress for approval of what you have done; ... [and] you are basically reporting to the American people. You have made your decisions at Camp David and you have controlled the situation. You deserve to keep it (the results) as your own at Camp David.⁹²¹

Carter’s decision to overrule Rafshoon is a sign that Carter the politician saw political value in showcasing his success on Capitol Hill. It suggests that Carter sought to stamp his authority vis-à-vis Congress on this success following a difficult six months in which his leadership in foreign policy had been questioned after the debates over the Panama Canal Treaties and the Middle East

⁹¹⁹ That corresponds to a rating of 38.4, or an estimated 38.4 percent of all U.S. televisions. Telegram from A.C. Nielsen Company to Rafshoon, 6 October 1978, Folder: ‘Address to Joint Session on Middle East 9/18/78,’ Rafshoon Files, Box 10, JCL.

⁹²⁰ ‘Camp David Meeting on the Middle East,’ 18 September 1978, *PPP: Carter, 1978, II*, 1533-1537.

⁹²¹ Rafshoon clearly missed in his prediction: ‘Viewers are used to seeing speeches to Congress punctuated with applause; I doubt if you would see a lot of this, if any.’ Lawmakers interrupted Carter’s 19 September speech with applause 14 times. Memo from Rafshoon to Carter, ‘Summit Wind-Up Speech,’ n.d. [circa 18 September 1978], Folder: ‘9/18/78,’ Presidential Handwriting File, Box 101, JCL.

airplane sales.⁹²² To House and Senate Democrats, Carter's speech also likely represented an attempt to showcase a Democratic success six weeks before the midterm elections.

Praise for Carter

On the back of his performance at the summit, assessments of Carter soared.⁹²³ Rozell finds that the press broadly concluded that Carter's presidency was 'dramatically revived' as a result of the summit, and that the media environment was 'nearly euphoric.'⁹²⁴ 'It was in truth Jimmy Carter's conference. We salute him: He did a beautiful piece of work,' one editorial gushed.⁹²⁵ Even the conservative *Wall Street Journal* offered cautious praise, opining 'Carter did revive hopes for peace in an atmosphere from which those hopes had all but disappeared, and that is no small cause for gratitude.'⁹²⁶

Polls measured a spike in Carter's popularity.⁹²⁷ One survey conducted the day after the summit found that a plurality (43 percent) believed Carter was 'most responsible' for the accords, compared to 13 percent Sadat and 6 percent Begin.⁹²⁸ A separate poll found that 92 percent of respondents felt Carter's role in achieving an agreement was either 'very important' or 'fairly important,' compared to just seven percent who felt it was 'not too important.'⁹²⁹ A few days later, the White House registered that an astounding 95 percent of the 1,235 letters received over the previous week praised the president.⁹³⁰

⁹²² William Lanouette, 'Who's Setting Foreign Policy – Carter or Congress?,' *National Journal*, 15 July 1978; Joseph Fromm, 'Tug of War Over Foreign Policy,' *U.S. News & World Report*, 19 June 1978.

⁹²³ TRB [Richard Strout], 'Jimmy Parts the Red Sea,' *The New Republic*, 30 September 1978, Folder: 'Carter, Jimmy, 1976-1984,' Box 13, Richard Strout Papers, LOC.

⁹²⁴ Rozell, *Press and the Carter Presidency*, 95-96.

⁹²⁵ Editorial, "'The Jimmy Carter Conference,'" *WP*, 19 September 1978.

⁹²⁶ Editorial, 'Mr. Carter's Milestone,' *WSJ*, 19 September 1978.

⁹²⁷ William Greider and Barry Sussman, 'Post Poll Finds Carter's Popularity Soaring After Summit,' *WP*, 24 September 1978; Evans Witt, AP-NBC poll results, AP, 21 September 1978, Nexis. Also Robert Kaiser, 'After the Summit: A Wave of Bipartisan Euphoria for Carter,' *WP*, 19 September 1978; 'The Mood After the Summit,' *Public Opinion* (1978).

⁹²⁸ CBS News Poll, 19 September 1978, Roper Center.

⁹²⁹ Gallup Poll, 19 September 1978, *ibid*.

⁹³⁰ Weekly Mail Report from Hugh Carter to Jimmy Carter, 22 September 1978, Folder: 'Weekly Mail Reports, 1/78-11/78 [CF, O/A 161],' Press, Powell Files, Box 82, JCL.

To that end, Carter's association with the peace process emerged as a feature of much of the coverage.⁹³¹ As a result, it magnified Carter's role in the negotiations. Subsequently, credit for each success, and blame for each setback, could increasingly be laid at the president's feet. Carter was unable to sustain the initial post-Camp David glow, however, and his popularity soon began to slide down as 'the unflattering press views of the Carter administration reemerged.'⁹³²

Between the two Middle Eastern leaders, the American public gave Sadat more credit than Begin. A survey found that 40 percent (a plurality) of respondents felt the Egyptian leader had made more concessions toward a peace agreement at Camp David, compared to 27 percent for Begin.⁹³³ For their efforts, Begin and Sadat were awarded the 1978 Nobel Peace Prize.

Immediately upon the summit's end, Carter complained in his diary that Begin 'was making an ass of himself with his public statements.' Carter believed the Israelis 'should have left a nursemaid' with Begin to prevent him making controversial remarks.⁹³⁴ In a speech on 20 September, Begin insisted that he had not agreed to withdraw Israeli forces from the West Bank or Gaza within five years, as Washington claimed. He repeated that Israel claimed sovereignty over those territories, but that did not interfere with autonomy for Palestinians there. 'Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip are integral parts of Eretz Yisrael,' he declared to applause.⁹³⁵ The Carter administration felt such statements cast doubt on Israel's commitment to the accords and would make it difficult for Sadat to carry through with his agreements, much less be joined by other Arab leaders.

Following Begin's speech, Sanders reported to Carter that he had received calls from Jewish leaders, 'who uniformly expressed their displeasure and unhappiness with the Prime Minister's

⁹³¹ For example, Jim Hoagland analysis, 'Carter Has Moved Into Center of Arab-Israeli Chessboard,' *WP*, 24 September 1978.

⁹³² Rozell, *Press and the Carter Presidency*, 101.

⁹³³ NBC News/AP Poll, 19-20 September 1978, Roper Center.

⁹³⁴ 18 September 1978, Carter, *Diary*, 245-46.

⁹³⁵ 'Behind Camp David,' Speech by Begin before Presidents' Conference in New York, 20 September 1978, Menachem Begin Heritage Center, Jerusalem. Retrieved 21 September 2013,

<http://www.begincenter.org.il/uploads/articles/english/Behind%20Camp%20David%20September%2020%201978.pdf>

remarks. ... I believe it is safe to say that the statements by Prime Minister Begin do not reflect the attitudes of the American Jewish community.⁹³⁶ Still, it pointed to conflicts ahead.

The Carter administration immediately went about trying to consolidate gains in the American Jewish community. The morning following his speech to Congress, the president met with seven Jewish leaders to discuss the summit outcome.⁹³⁷ Indeed, the American Jewish community roundly praised the accords.⁹³⁸ Even AIPAC expressed admiration for Carter's achievement.⁹³⁹

The Arab-American community displayed less enthusiasm. Although the American Lebanese League assured the administration of its support for the accords, the larger NAAA expressed dissatisfaction over the Palestinian dimensions.⁹⁴⁰

Assessing the political outcome

Carter officials differed as to whether Camp David offered a genuine boost to the administration. 'There was something about how we had slipped in the eyes of the American people that prevented us from getting what should have been an enormous lift out of this incredible diplomatic feat,' Vice President Walter Mondale said. 'We thought, boy this shows that we can get things done, it does bring peace to a crucial area. (But) There was no movement at all. ... It was very dispiriting.'⁹⁴¹

Brzezinski believed that Camp David constituted 'almost the only' Carter administration foreign policy success that was 'a political benefit.'⁹⁴² In Jordan's recollection, however, internal polling indicated that Camp David only boosted Carter's popularity by one percentage point.⁹⁴³

⁹³⁶ Memo from Sanders to Carter, 'Reactions to Prime Minister's New York Speech,' 20 September 1978, Folder 13, Box 1, Sanders Papers.

⁹³⁷ 'President's Daily Diary,' 19 September 1978, JCL. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/diary/1978/d091978t.pdf>.

⁹³⁸ For example, *Report of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations for the Year Ending March 31, 1979*, 11-13, LOC.

⁹³⁹ 'Giving Peace a Chance,' NER, XXII: 38, 20 September 1978.

⁹⁴⁰ Memo from Middle East Desk to Brzezinski, 'Evening Report,' 19 September 1978, NLC-10-15-3-1-0.

⁹⁴¹ Adriana Bosch, 'Jimmy Carter: American Experience,' (United States: PBS, 2002).

⁹⁴² Zbigniew Brzezinski interview, CPP, 87. Retrieved 1 October 2013, http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_1982_0218_brzezinski.pdf.

Perhaps Powell assesses the problem best. Camp David ‘was a tremendous boost at the time when it happened, although the road to it had been somewhat painful politically,’ he said. ‘But the road beyond it was even more painful and more costly because of things that we felt we had to do to keep the thing moving along, and in fact keep it on the road and make some progress on the road.’⁹⁴⁴

Conclusion

The president’s ability to ‘control’ the situation rapidly diminished once he left Camp David. Carter hoped to secure an Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty ‘in a few days of negotiations – not a few weeks.’⁹⁴⁵ Instead, it took six months and almost fell apart several times. That achievement only came after another ‘high-risk’ diplomatic and political plunge by Carter – one in which he had none of the advantages of the ‘control’ conferred to him at Camp David.

Consequently, the media and public impressions of Carter returned to one of a generally inept politician with poor leadership skills. Carter was able to achieve what he did in the Arab-Israeli dispute because of his personal involvement. However, his diplomatic achievement sowed the seeds of his later political difficulties. Camp David raised expectations that Carter’s chief foreign policy initiative was on the verge of fruition. Yet the inability of all sides to fulfil the promise of the accords with alacrity allowed previous interpretations of the president as a nice and intelligence man, but one not tough enough for the job, to resurface. Carter’s greatest diplomatic achievement thus also became a source of political weakness.

Carter made three major contributions to the summit that proved imperative to its success. First, he decided to exclude the media from the proceedings. Second, Carter insisted on a single negotiating text, whereby he maintained control of the document on which all alterations were made while shuttling between delegations. Third, he separated out the bilateral issues from the Palestinian ones.

⁹⁴³ Jordan interview, CPP, 16.

⁹⁴⁴ Powell interview, CPP, 107.

⁹⁴⁵ Letter from Carter to Sadat, 25 September 1978, NLC-128-11-18-7-1.

U.S. domestic politics did not determine the outcome of the Camp David Summit, nor did it dictate Carter's negotiating position. However, Carter's domestic constraints influenced the development of the U.S. position and the tactics the president employed to reach agreement. American public opinion also featured in both Egypt's and Israel's strategies. Understanding Carter's domestic political constraints sheds light on Carter's performance at the negotiating table as a self-described 'full partner.' Moreover, Carter's performance at Camp David was, for 13 days, the ultimate demonstration of presidential control.

Chapter Seven: Desperate Diplomacy – Carter’s Trip to the Middle East to Conclude the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, March 1979

Introduction

With millions of people watching on live television, thousands of officials and dignitaries gathered on the North Lawn of the White House on 26 March 1979 to mark the signing of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. In his speech, President Carter appeared to defend the tactics he had used to conclude the pact. He quoted a passage that hinged on the metaphor that peace, like war, is ‘waged.’ ‘Peace is active, not passive; peace is doing, not waiting,’ he declared.⁹⁴⁶ During the lavish dinner afterward, Prime Minister Menachem Begin joked darkly about Carter’s re-election, indicating awareness of the link between the peace effort and the president’s electoral prospects.⁹⁴⁷

The outward circumstances of Carter’s final deep-dive into Arab-Israeli diplomacy could not have been more different than his experience at Camp David. He was on foreign soil during his weeklong Cairo-Jerusalem-Cairo shuttle to negotiate the final treaty agreement. Consequently, Carter could not limit news leaks, control the message or exert maximum psychological pressure on Sadat and Begin.

Yet underlying similarities remained. For political reasons, Carter needed the trip to turn out a success more than did either Begin or Sadat. The administration’s handling of the news media also became tightly intertwined with the outcome of the negotiations. And once again, the president bucked protocol to participate in high risk, open-ended diplomacy that, although successful, yielded little, if any, political benefits.

Carter’s 7-13 March mission demonstrated the inherent conflict between the office of president and the role of peacemaker. Three factors collided in this episode to undermine the salutary political effects of Carter’s signature foreign-policy achievement: the president’s

⁹⁴⁶ ‘Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty,’ 26 March 1979, *PPP: Carter, 1979, I*, 517-527.

⁹⁴⁷ Ibid. Carter made changes to his speech until the final moments, including the last line about a ‘comprehensive peace.’ ‘Draft Signing Statement,’ 26 March 1979, JCL. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/campdavid25/cda23.pdf>.

determination to mediate Israel's first-ever peace treaty with an Arab state, the administration's poor relationship with the media, and the White House's conflation of foreign policy and domestic politics.

The six months of haggling over terms following the Camp David Accords drained the peace process of momentum, depleted Carter's political capital and made the 26 March signing of the pact a relief rather than a triumph. 'We have a problem with the U.S. public in not bringing this thing (treaty) to a conclusion,' Carter noted before his trip. 'It's sapping away our strength.'⁹⁴⁸

Carter described his journey as 'an act of desperation.'⁹⁴⁹ To Hamilton Jordan, the 'wild dash' epitomised the president's willingness – even eagerness – to achieve results by going against conventional wisdom. 'If you had asked the hundred wise men of Washington what Carter should do ... they would have advised him to do exactly the opposite,' he said.⁹⁵⁰ The trip represented a remarkable episode in the annals of presidential diplomacy, as Carter negotiated directly with the Israeli cabinet on behalf of Egypt during his mission.

Many first-hand accounts exist of the negotiations leading up to, and during, Carter's time in Egypt and Israel.⁹⁵¹ However, these works reflect the authors' proximity to the talks and thus lack critical distance. Scholarly accounts tend to depict Carter's decision to risk his prestige as an act of political recklessness, boldness, or both, made by a president desperate for a success on the issue that had consumed more of his time than any other.⁹⁵²

The present analysis differs from those views in at least three ways. It compares recently released documents with previously published accounts, demonstrates how Carter's poor press relations helped undermine his best efforts at achieving political gains from his diplomatic success, and reveals the interaction between advice offered by his domestic and foreign policy aides.

⁹⁴⁸ 2 March 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 298.

⁹⁴⁹ _____, *Keeping Faith*, 425.

⁹⁵⁰ Jordan interview, CPP, 12.

⁹⁵¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 281-87; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 424-35; 8-14 March 1978, _____, *Diary*, 300-04; Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 268-78; Powell, *Other Side*, 91-102; Quandt, *Camp David*, 302-11; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 245-52; Weizman, *Battle for Peace*.

⁹⁵² The best scholarly accounts are Quandt, *Camp David*, 302-11; Strong, *Working in the World*, 189-207; Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 370-72.

Camp David to Blair House and beyond

The Carter administration struggled with a confluence of strains in early 1979. First, it was confronted with numerous major foreign policy issues: Iran's revolution; normalisation of relations with China; SALT II ratification; and the Egypt-Israeli negotiations. Second, Carter faced challenges from both within and without his own party as his re-election campaign loomed. Finally, executive branch—media relations had plummeted, and the administration had become fixated on preventing leaks.⁹⁵³

The Camp David Accords stipulated that Egypt and Israel finalise their peace treaty by the end of 1978. Yet conclusion of the pact took twice that three-month time frame. The accords did not constitute final agreement, but rather described general principles. Afterward, the national leaders stepped back from direct involvement in the negotiations, letting their subordinates haggle over details. U.S.-Israel relations worsened again after Begin's government announced immediately after Camp David that Israel would build new settlements and 'thicken' existing ones in the West Bank and Gaza during negotiations; Washington and Jerusalem disagreed over whether that violated the accords.⁹⁵⁴

Egyptian and Israeli delegations – without Sadat and Begin – met at Blair House on 12 October to discuss the nature of Palestinian autonomy and finalise treaty details. As Egypt and Israel pressed for a bilateral agreement in subsequent months, Palestinian issues gradually receded from view. During this period, U.S. officials demonstrated little patience over the two sides' 'quibbling.'⁹⁵⁵

The administration sought to balance the diplomatic and political imperatives driving presidential involvement. Carter's advisors recommended that he personally open the negotiations. 'Win or lose you are identified with this effort,' Powell argued. 'An appearance by you would serve

⁹⁵³ 26 January, 6, 7 February, 14 March 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 283, 88-89, 89 and 304; Powell, *Other Side*, 55.

⁹⁵⁴ Document 200, Begin statement to the Knesset, 25 September 1978, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/TABLE%20OF%20CONTENTS.aspx>. For an examination of the opposition Begin faced from his colleagues on the right following the Camp David Accords, see Colin Shindler, *Israel, Likud and the Zionist Dream: Power, Politics and Ideology from Begin to Netanyahu* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 96-108.

⁹⁵⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 422; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 236.

to underscore your determination to see it through for the domestic audience. Diplomatically it would seem to re-affirm your commitment to “full partnership” for the U.S. to the Arab world.⁹⁵⁶

Carter delivered remarks at the opening of the negotiations and, shortly afterward, conferred with Egyptian and Israeli delegations to break a deadlock. In those meetings, both sides enumerated the issues that bedevilled negotiations over the next six months. The first sticking point was over the Egypt-Israel treaty and Cairo’s pacts with Arab states, which called on Egypt to join them in the event of war with Israel. Egypt preferred a general formula, but Israel wanted a specific clause stating that it had priority over earlier obligations. Secondly, Egypt sought, but Israel resisted, linkage between normalisation of relations and Palestinian autonomy negotiations. Also, Israel wanted immediate normalisation, while Egypt sought to do it gradually. Finally, each side wanted to negotiate with Washington the nature of U.S. economic, political and security guarantees following the treaty.⁹⁵⁷

Administration hopes were dashed when both sides failed to agree on a treaty in time for the Arab League Summit or the U.S. midterm elections. In the meeting, the League threatened to expel Egypt if it made a separate peace with Israel and confirmed the designation of the PLO as the ‘sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.’⁹⁵⁸

Camp David also failed to give Carter’s party a boost in the midterms. Democrats retained a large congressional majority, but they lost three seats in the Senate and 15 in the House. Contrary to Carter’s hopes, the Arab-Israeli dispute had failed to gain public traction. A Caddell survey conducted between Camp David and the midterms found that among foreign-policy issues Americans believed that ‘the Middle East problem’ should rank fourth on Carter’s list of priorities, after human rights, relations with allies and U.S.-Soviet ties.⁹⁵⁹

⁹⁵⁶ Memo from Powell to Carter, ‘Opening of Israel-Egyptian Peace Talks on Oct. 12,’ 5 October 1978, Folder: ‘Memoranda: President Carter 9/22/78—12/6/78 [CF, O/A 160],’ Powell Files, Box 37, JCL.

⁹⁵⁷ Summaries, Carter’s meetings with Israeli and Egyptian delegations, n.a., 17 October 1978, DDRS CK3100129736.

⁹⁵⁸ Document 326, Arab League Summit statement, 5 November 1978, *International Documents on Palestine, 1978*. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1980), 592-594.

⁹⁵⁹ Memo and report from Caddell to Jordan, ‘Election Prospects and Voter Turnout,’ 28 October 1978, Folder 4, Box 72, SEP.

Meanwhile, Camp David did not mitigate high-profile opposition to Carter's foreign policy. Although the CPD's Eugene Rostow praised Camp David as 'the most important event so far' in the Carter administration's foreign policy, he doubted the president could achieve the 'full-scale revival of American foreign and defense policy' he believed was needed to counter Moscow's policy in the Middle East.⁹⁶⁰ Similarly, Moynihan, a Democrat, believed the accords were encouraging, but that overall Carter had enabled Soviet influence to re-enter the Middle East.⁹⁶¹ However, the only lawmakers to criticise the accords, and subsequent treaty, because they did not address adequately the Palestinian question were Abourezk and Rep. Paul Findley (R-Ill.).⁹⁶²

Arguments for bolder action

Most of Carter's aides voiced concern about his continued intimate involvement in the negotiations for fear of domestic backlash. However, in November two of the president's top advisors – Brzezinski and Jordan – argued for bolder action.

'The Middle Eastern issue can be devastating to you politically if it drags out throughout your first term,' Brzezinski warned following the party's poor election performance. He suggested Carter consider phasing out U.S. efforts after the signing of the treaty before handing the Palestinian issue to the United Nations. Brzezinski urged the president 'to do whatever has to be done very early in 1979' so Carter could reap the benefits in the 1980 election.⁹⁶³

Hamilton Jordan had grown convinced that only Carter's 'personal and dramatic intervention' could resolve the outstanding issues. He lamented that leaks and all sides' engagement in open diplomacy – dynamics that were impossible at Camp David – had undermined subsequent talks. He believed the administration's failure to fulfil Camp David's promise had created a 'psychological logjam' for Carter's foreign policy. As a remedy, Jordan floated the idea of a Middle

⁹⁶⁰ Transcript, Eugene Rostow's remarks at CPD annual dinner, 9 November 1978, Folder: 'Third Annual Meeting,' Box 163, CPDP.

⁹⁶¹ Transcript, Moynihan's address at the Labor Zionist Alliance's National Convention, 19 February 1979, Folder 1, Box 2828, DPMP.

⁹⁶² Terry, *U.S. Foreign Policy in the Middle East*, 120.

⁹⁶³ NSC Weekly Report #79 from Brzezinski to Carter, 9 November 1978, Folder: 'NSC Weekly Reports, 6-12/78,' Plains File, Box 29, JCL.

East trip to resolve differences. ‘It would be a risky, risky business,’ he admitted. ‘... [Y]ou should be prepared to play all of your cards. I had rather go on and have the showdown than to be bled slowly over the weeks and months ahead.’⁹⁶⁴

Still, Carter was not ready to attempt such a journey. On 9 December, he sent Vance to the region. The president instructed him to pressure Israel, even at the consequence of losing the support of the Jewish community and the 1980 election.⁹⁶⁵ However, Israel did not accept Egypt’s new proposals on the timing for the exchange of ambassadors, priority of obligations and the nature of self-government in Gaza.⁹⁶⁶ Adding to the strain, the United States for the first time endorsed Egypt’s proposals in front of the Israelis, stoking Jerusalem’s fear that Cairo and Washington were colluding against it.⁹⁶⁷

During his return journey, Vance received the response from the Israeli cabinet, which said it rejected ‘the attitudes and interpretation of the U.S. Government with regard to the Egyptian proposals.’⁹⁶⁸ The normally unflappable Vance grew, in Carter’s words, ‘extremely bitter.’⁹⁶⁹ A ‘senior official’ on the secretary’s plane told reporters that Israeli intransigence was blocking an agreement and accused the Israeli cabinet of mischaracterising the rejected proposals.⁹⁷⁰ In turn, Israel’s Foreign Ministry took the rare step of formally and publicly protesting the U.S. accusation.⁹⁷¹ Begin told the Knesset that Egypt, not Israel, had prevented conclusion of the treaty

⁹⁶⁴ Memo from Jordan to Carter, 30 November 1978, Folder: ‘Middle East [CF, O/A 414],’ Jordan Files, Box 49, JCL. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁶⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 277-78.

⁹⁶⁶ Quandt, *Camp David*, 285-89.

⁹⁶⁷ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 250-51.

⁹⁶⁸ Document 221, Israeli government communiqué, 15 December 1978, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/221%20Israel%20Cabinet%20Communique%20on%20the%20Peace%20Treaty-.aspx>.

⁹⁶⁹ 15 December 1978 Carter, *Diary*, 266.

⁹⁷⁰ ‘Angered by Israel, U.S. Officials Allege Inaccuracies in its Case,’ *WP*, 16 December 1978. Vance later conceded he had been the ‘senior official.’ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 242.

⁹⁷¹ Document 223, Israel Foreign Ministry statement, 16 December 1978, IFRSD: 1977-1979. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/223%20Israel%20Foreign%20Ministry%20statement%20on%20American.aspx>.

by 17 December. ‘Not only our own people throughout the world are behind us, but enlightened public opinion says that … in vain … Israel been accused, in vain it has been blamed …’⁹⁷²

A domestic backlash against the administration ensued. Pro-Israel factions alleged that Vance had pressured Israel to accept Egypt’s demands, and thus Washington had forfeited its role as an ‘honest broker.’ In statements, articles and letters, Israel’s friends moved quickly to counter Carter administration criticisms of Israel.⁹⁷³

AIPAC complained that the administration’s recent ‘remarks cap a period of one-sided pressure on Israel and are extremely disturbing …’⁹⁷⁴ The American Jewish Committee’s Hyman Bookbinder expressed ‘outrage’ over what he felt were unfair accusations that Israel had prevented agreement. ‘I urge the immediate review of the present stance of the White House and a modification of this anti-Israeli campaign,’ Bookbinder concluded in a note to Ed Sanders, Carter’s liaison to the American Jewish community.⁹⁷⁵ On 15 December, Ted Mann, chairman of the Presidents’ Conference argued that the United States should push for a bilateral treaty, and resist attempts to link the Egypt-Israel pact with Palestinian autonomy or a comprehensive settlement. The following week, Mann and other Jewish leaders met with Vance as the administration tried anew to allay concerns. Mann also wrote to Carter behalf of his organisation, complaining about Washington’s position.⁹⁷⁶ The criticism did not alter administration policy, but clearly irritated Carter.⁹⁷⁷

Full agenda

The 17 December deadline passed without agreement. In a year-end review Vance and Carter judged that the Arab-Israeli issue was ‘the heaviest political burden’ and that the

⁹⁷² Document 225, Begin’s statement to the Knesset, 19 December 1978, *ibid*. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/MFADocuments/Yearbook3/Pages/225%20Statement%20to%20the%20Knesset%20by%20Prime%20Minister%20Beg.aspx>.

⁹⁷³ William Safire column, ‘Carter Blames the Jews,’ *NYT*, 18 December 1978.

⁹⁷⁴ AIPAC memorandum, 15 December 1978, Folder 4, Box 1, Sanders Papers.

⁹⁷⁵ Memo with attachments from Sanders to Carter, ‘Status of Israeli-Egyptian Peace Negotiations,’ 14 December 1978, Folder: ‘Middle East: Peace Talks Between Egypt and Israel, 11-12/78,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 55, JCL.

⁹⁷⁶ *Report of the Conference of Presidents, 1978-79*, 15-17.

⁹⁷⁷ 15 December 1978 Carter, *Diary*, 265-66.

administration would have been relieved to end its role in the ‘thankless’ talks. However, they decided to ‘continue to move aggressively’ and ‘not postpone the difficult decisions, even though they were costly to us in domestic politics’ by alienating the Jewish community and contributing to an image of an administration unable to achieve results.⁹⁷⁸

Brzezinski suggested that Carter’s ‘direct and deep involvement’ would be necessary to fulfil Camp David. He also argued that the ‘deep suspicion’ felt by American Jewry toward the administration could only be overcome by conclusion of the treaty. Brzezinski believed that the wisest move would be to phase out Carter’s involvement after the treaty was signed and Palestinian autonomy talks initiated.⁹⁷⁹

In a separate memo, Brzezinski stressed that little time was left for movement on the Palestinian issue:

... [F]or the good of the Democratic Party we must avoid a situation where we continue agitating the most neuralgic issue with the American Jewish community (the West Bank, the Palestinians, the PLO) without a breakthrough to a solution. I do not believe that in the approaching election year we will be able to convince the Israelis that we have significant leverage over them, particularly on those issues.⁹⁸⁰

Mondale also viewed any discussion of U.S. contacts with the Palestinians – not necessarily the PLO – ‘with abhorrence,’ according to Carter.⁹⁸¹

According to the vice president’s midterm prescription, the administration needed to improve its presentation of its interpretations of foreign events and its own policies. He stressed that Camp David was insufficient for domestic advantage. Conclusion of the peace treaty was imperative. Mondale also urged the president to weigh the need for progress on Palestinian autonomy against the potential domestic fallout of appearing to pressure Israel unevenly.⁹⁸²

Of all the foreign policy challenges faced by the administration in early 1979, the overthrow of Shah Reza Pahlavi’s pro-American regime in Iran had the most direct impact on Arab-Israeli

⁹⁷⁸ _____, *Keeping Faith*, 421.

⁹⁷⁹ NSC Weekly Report #86 from Brzezinski to Carter, 26 January 1979, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 82-90,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 42, JCL.

⁹⁸⁰ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 23 January 1979, Quandt, *Camp David*, 295.

⁹⁸¹ 12 January 1979 Carter, *Diary*, 277

⁹⁸² Memo from Mondale to Carter, ‘Managing Foreign Policy Over the Next Two Years,’ 22 January 1979, Folder: ‘Foreign Affairs Policy, [1/1-12/31/79],’ Mondale Donated, Box 204, JCL.

policy. The shah had been Sadat's closest regional ally and his ouster did not bode well for other U.S.-friendly regimes in the region.⁹⁸³ Sadat saw an opportunity for Egypt to fill the security void left by Iran in the Gulf. However, in order to do that, Cairo needed to retain good relations with the oil-producing Gulf states – and that meant insisting on linking the treaty with Palestinian issues. Second, Israel would no longer receive oil shipments from Iran, which under the shah had been its chief supplier. Consequently, Israel grew more insistent on compensation for giving up its Sinai oil wells, and sought oil supply guarantees from Egypt and the United States. Finally, U.S. analysts were concerned that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism could spill into Egypt, stiffening Sadat's resolve against making concessions.⁹⁸⁴

Meanwhile, American officials were sceptical that Saudi Arabia could replace Iran as Washington's main Gulf ally. In February 1979, Adm. David Jones, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, suggested for the first time the need for a 'Carter Doctrine' that would facilitate American projection of power into the Gulf as necessary.⁹⁸⁵ With the fall of the shah's regime, Washington feared it could not ward off Soviet encroachment. This concern added to Carter's desire to cement ties with Sadat, even if the peace treaty might fall short of what he had originally envisioned.⁹⁸⁶ Politically, Carter needed a success to rebut criticism that under his watch, the United States had fallen into decline.

Brzezinski warned Carter that the United States was, 'at home and abroad,' seen as 'indecisive, vacillating and pursuing a policy of acquiescence.' Due to what Brzezinski felt to be unfair press coverage, Carter was now seen as being buffeted by the philosophical differences

⁹⁸³ On the strengthening of the U.S.-Iranian bond immediately prior to Carter's term, see Roham Alvandi, 'Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf,' *Diplomatic History* 36, no. 2 (2012).

⁹⁸⁴ Memo from Quandt to Brzezinski, 'Studies of Islamic Fundamentalism,' 13 February 1979. DDRS CK3100668723. The PLO immediately allied with the new Iranian regime. 'Iran and Palestine: One Revolution' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 3 (16-28 February 1979), 3, IPS.

⁹⁸⁵ Minutes, PRC on Southwest Asia and Saudi Arabia, 23 January 1979, NLC-15-3-6-8-8. The president announced the Carter Doctrine the following year. 'State of the Union,' 21 January 1980, *PPP: Carter, 1980-81*, I, 114-180.

⁹⁸⁶ According to Brzezinski, Sadat called Saudi Arabia a 'scarecrow' for U.S. interests. Cable from U.S. Embassy Cairo to White House, 6 March 1979, NLC-25-16-3-3-1.

within his administration, rather than orchestrating them. He recommended Carter move quickly to combat the perception that he lacked control of his agenda.⁹⁸⁷

Against this backdrop, public pessimism over the peace process grew. In January, a poll found that less than a quarter of Americans believed Camp David would lead to a lasting treaty.⁹⁸⁸ Later that month, a separate survey found that a plurality – 47 percent – of Americans disapproved of the way Carter was handling foreign policy and a majority – 53 percent – did not believe he displayed strong leadership.⁹⁸⁹

The White House decided ministerial-level talks would not suffice; the president needed to deal directly with the leaders. Sadat, insisting that Prime Minister Mustapha Khalil had full authority to negotiate on his behalf, refused an invitation of another Begin-Carter-Sadat summit. Begin, however, came to Washington on 1 March.

In their meetings, Begin made a significant concession on the priority of obligations issue. Compromises were also made on language indicating linkage between the peace treaty and the Palestinian autonomy negotiations – wording that Israel felt was sufficiently ambiguous to accept.⁹⁹⁰ Major disagreements lingered, however, over future Egyptian oil sales to Israel and the timing for the exchange of ambassadors after signing of the treaty.

Carter decides

Carter recalled that the trip provoked ‘the biggest argument’ of his presidency between him and his advisors because of the perils involved in travelling to the Middle East with the successful conclusion of a treaty in doubt.⁹⁹¹ Only Brzezinski and Jordan believed the president should take the

⁹⁸⁷ NSC Weekly Report #89 from Brzezinski to Carter, 24 February 1979, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 82-90,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 42, JCL.

⁹⁸⁸ Gallup Poll (AIPO), 5-8 January 1979, Roper Center.

⁹⁸⁹ CBS News/NYT Poll, 23-26 January 1979, *ibid*.

⁹⁹⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 243-45.

⁹⁹¹ Carter interview, CPP.

risk.⁹⁹² Carter realised that 'a nonproductive trip by the President of the United States to the Middle East would greatly dramatize the failure,' but proceeded anyway.⁹⁹³

Carter's decision appears to have had at least two immediate triggers. According to Brzezinski, Carter made his final decision 5 March after Sadat informed him that he wanted to come to the United States to denounce Israel's positions in front of Congress, the media and American public.⁹⁹⁴ Moreover, Begin's comments to the press while in the United States that talks were near collapse also likely influenced Carter's final decision.⁹⁹⁵ In his diary, Carter expressed frustration with Begin. 'I've not been able to penetrate past him to other members of the cabinet, the Knesset, or the Israeli people. He deliberately distorts our position and spreads lies through the news media.'⁹⁹⁶

In both cases, the president was concerned that public recriminations would destroy what goodwill remained between the parties. Rather, Carter sought to increase pressure on both sides by intensifying his involvement and trying to speak directly to the (Israeli) public, whose support he believed would lead Begin's government toward agreement. Thus, despite Brzezinski's periodic advice for Carter to limit his personal role in the negotiations, the president again decided to risk political embarrassment by negotiating directly with both leaders.

Regardless, before returning to Israel, Begin again appealed to Jewish leaders to support his aims. In New York, he told an audience of members of Jewish organisations that the American Jewish community wielded great influence. 'When the time comes don't hesitate to use that influence,' he urged.⁹⁹⁷ Begin's words served as a reminder to the White House of the connection between the negotiations and Carter's own political fortunes.

Indeed, Carter's domestic position had become increasingly difficult. He had grown acutely concerned about attacks on him by members of his own party, especially Sen. Edward Kennedy

⁹⁹² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 281; Quandt, *Camp David*, 310-11.

⁹⁹³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 425.

⁹⁹⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 281.

⁹⁹⁵ O'Heffernan, *Mass Media and American Foreign Policy*, 15-16.

⁹⁹⁶ 2 March 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 298.

⁹⁹⁷ 'Begin Tells U.S. Jews His Visit Was Success,' *NYT*, 8 March 1979.

(Mass.), who was preparing for a campaign to challenge Carter for the Democratic nomination in 1980, as well as Church, who was trying to use Carter's strains with Israel for his own domestic advantage.⁹⁹⁸ In January, the president's brother drew unwanted attention for allegedly making an anti-Semitic remark while hosting a Libyan delegation.⁹⁹⁹

Ahead of his own departure, Carter sent Brzezinski to Cairo to lay the groundwork with Sadat. Carter asked Brzezinski to present Sadat with a strategic review of the situation, outline the new proposals and to inform the Egyptian leader 'very privately that the President's domestic political situation was becoming more difficult and that Begin might even wish to see the President defeated.'¹⁰⁰⁰ Brzezinski cabled back to Washington that Sadat was 'extraordinarily eager' to make Carter's visit a 'massive success.'¹⁰⁰¹

Only days before Carter's departure, a new poll found that a plurality – 48 percent – of respondents disapproved of the way Carter was handling his job as president.¹⁰⁰² Although the mission to Cairo and Jerusalem involved political perils, if successful, it would provide an opportunity for Carter to look presidential and generate political capital at home.

Carter planned his trip to be open-ended, with the hope that agreement could be reached and the treaty signed while he was in the region.¹⁰⁰³ Most news outlets shared the assumption that Carter sought a media spectacle to boost his sagging political performance.¹⁰⁰⁴ Most of the reporting and editorials prior to Carter's arrival in Cairo noted that the president was staking not only his prestige, but also that of the entire United States, on the outcome of his trip. Moreover, reporters and commentators saw a threefold urgency for Carter: to conclude bilateral negotiations, to reverse the tide of U.S. foreign policy setbacks in the region, and to help revive the president's political

⁹⁹⁸ 26 January, 5, 8 February 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 283, 88, 90.

⁹⁹⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 555-56.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 282.

¹⁰⁰¹ Cable from U.S. Embassy Cairo to White House, 6 March 1979, NLC-25-16-3-3-1.

¹⁰⁰² Gallup Poll (AIPO), 2-5 March 1979, Roper Center.

¹⁰⁰³ Memo from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Middle East Scenario,' 3 March 1979, Folder: 'Middle East—President's and Brzezinski's Trips: [2/27/79-3/15/79],' Brzezinski Donated, Box 14, JCL.

¹⁰⁰⁴ David Butler et al, 'The Extra Mile,' *Newsweek*, 19 March 1979.

fortunes at home.¹⁰⁰⁵ AIPAC similarly supported Carter's trip, but noted his trip was not merely to conclude the treaty, 'but because of his need for a foreign policy success.'¹⁰⁰⁶ Still, *The New York Times*' editorial board wrote disapprovingly, 'This is not our idea of model diplomacy.'¹⁰⁰⁷

The news media, which had acquiesced to the Camp David restrictions, were less accommodating six months later. Some journalists accused the White House of releasing information on the status of the talks in such a way as to present a dramatic victory for the president or to apply pressure on Israel. Subsequently, several outlets appeared to temper their coverage of the diplomatic achievement, which administration officials claimed damped its political benefits.¹⁰⁰⁸

Linger ing issues

In Egypt and Israel, Carter sought to address three issues. First, Egypt was reluctant to grant Israel preferential access to Sinai oil, as sought (along with U.S. guarantees) by Jerusalem. Second, Egypt wanted Israel to grant self-government first to Gaza and to permit an Egyptian political-consular presence there. Finally, Israel wanted a prompt exchange of ambassadors upon the signing of the peace treaty, but Egypt wanted to defer that until Israel's withdrawal from Sinai.

Carter's first stop was Egypt, where most of the time was devoted to showcasing the intimacy of U.S.-Egyptian relations. 'I hope we will never let you down. You are probably the most admired statesman in the United States,' Carter told Sadat. Sadat's advisors, however, pressed Carter and Vance to persuade Israel to allow for greater linkage between the treaty and autonomy,

¹⁰⁰⁵ John Maclean, 'Carter flies to Mideast in his biggest gamble,' *CT*, 8 March 1979, and Editorial, 'The politics of peace,' *ibid.*, 7 March 1979; Oswald Johnston and Don Irwin, 'Carter Going to Israel, Egypt for Peace Talks,' *LAT*, 6 March 1979, and Editorial, 'A Venture of Hope,' *ibid.*; Karen Elliot House, 'Carter to Put Prestige on the Line in Trip To Mideast Described as Do-or-Die Effort,' *WSJ*, 6 March 1979, and Editorial, 'The Cairo Gamble,' *ibid.*, 7 March 1979; Edward Walsh and Martin Schram analysis, 'Mideast Trip: Major Gamble for Carter,' *WP*, 6 March 1979, and Editorial, 'Toward Peace in the Middle East ...,' *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁶ 'Ray of Hope,' *NER*, XXIII: 10, 7 March 1979.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Editorial, 'Mr. Carter Flies to the Brink,' *NYT*, 7 March 1979

¹⁰⁰⁸ Carl Leubsdorf, 'The ruffled Mideast press corps,' *Columbia Journalism Review* 18, no. 1 (1979).

especially in Gaza. As Carter departed on 10 March for Israel, Sadat took the unusual step of granting him authority to negotiate on Egypt's behalf.¹⁰⁰⁹

In Jerusalem, the first Begin-Carter meeting was tense and unproductive. The prime minister informed the president that he would not sign an agreement until proposals had been submitted to the cabinet for approval, followed by an eight-to-10 day Knesset debate. Carter 'couldn't believe it. I stood up and asked him if he thought it was necessary for me to stay any longer.' Carter was convinced that Begin would risk failure on an Egyptian-Israeli deal in order to block progress on autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁰¹⁰

The following day, Sunday, featured three meetings between the American delegation and the Israeli cabinet. Carter restated that he would like to 'conclude the negotiations and all of the terms of the peace treaty today.' If agreement was not reached during his visit, Carter added, it likely never would be. Begin again deflated the president's hopes: any proposals would need to be approved by the cabinet and presented to the Knesset.¹⁰¹¹ Further discussions centred on specifics of language, leading U.S. officials to suspect that Begin was merely stalling to gain the upper hand. When Begin remarked that it might take a couple of days for negotiators to agree on suitable language, Carter interjected: 'But I don't have two days.'¹⁰¹²

For the president, the situation only worsened. During a state dinner that evening, Begin announced that Israel remained unhappy. 'It's my duty to say that we have serious problems to solve until we can sign the peace treaty with Egypt,' he said.¹⁰¹³ Carter visibly blanched.¹⁰¹⁴ 'There's been some discussion about whether to send [Carter] back to Washington or back to Atlanta,' an Israeli official said.¹⁰¹⁵

¹⁰⁰⁹ Summary of Meetings from Brzezinski to Carter, 25 March 1979, NLC-128-11-18-15-2; 8, 10 March 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 300.

¹⁰¹⁰ 10 March 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 300-01.

¹⁰¹¹ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel and the Peace Process*, 176-77.

¹⁰¹² Minutes, Meeting between U.S. and Israeli delegations, 11 March 1979, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6868/7. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/B6A36669-0BBD-4943-8F07-644CC0288AE8/0/CarterVisit04.pdf>.

¹⁰¹³ 'Toasts at Dinner Honoring Carter,' 11 March 1979, *PPP: Carter, 1979, I*, 419-423.

¹⁰¹⁴ Hedrick Smith, 'Begin, With a Dinner Comment, Turns Carter Grim and Ashen,' *NYT*, 12 March 1979; Karen Elliot House, 'Carter's Efforts to Salvage a Peace Treaty Between Egypt, Israel Is At Critical Stage,' *WSJ*, *ibid*.

¹⁰¹⁵ Smith, 'Begin, With a Dinner Comment, Turns Carter Grim and Ashen.'

The tensions between Begin and Carter openly erupted during Monday's meetings. Carter, frustrated by Begin's interruptions while discussing access to Palestinians in the territories, at one stage said testily to the premier: 'Let me finish.' This issue was 'crucial,' the president believed, for the success of the talks and for maintaining the integrity of the United States. Begin, feeling pressured by the president, responded: 'Mr. President, we shall sign only what we agree to and we shall not sign anything to which we do not agree.'¹⁰¹⁶ Carter lamented: 'It was a fruitless session.'¹⁰¹⁷

On Monday afternoon, Carter went to the Knesset for a live, televised speech. Here was his opportunity to speak directly to the people of Israel – but one turn of phrase nearly torpedoed Carter's entire mission. 'The people of the two nations are ready now for peace. The *people* of the two nations are ready now for peace,' Carter repeated with careful emphasis. 'The leaders have not yet proven that we are also ready for peace, enough to take a chance.'¹⁰¹⁸ According to Ambassador Lewis, White House speechwriters and the embassy's political officer collaborated on the speech, but Carter personally added that phrase about 'the people'.¹⁰¹⁹ It offended Begin. In his diary, Carter defended the comment, which he insisted was 'accurate and needed to be said'.¹⁰²⁰

Shortly afterward, Begin told Vance that after discussion, the government stood by its position. Begin also complained that Washington showed sympathy for Egypt's positions, but never for Israel's. Desperate for movement, Vance proposed that two issues holding up negotiations – Israeli access to Egyptian oil from Sinai and the presence of an Egyptian consular officer in Gaza during autonomy talks – 'that were not rooted' in Camp David be dropped from the treaty. Begin then handed Vance a copy of a draft joint communiqué, which stated that 'further important

¹⁰¹⁶ NLC-128-11-18-15-2; Minutes, Meeting between U.S. and Israeli delegations, 12 March 1979, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6868/7. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/A4BE0E33-79A5-4B15-9E24-F60E982851D5/0/CarterVisit05.pdf>.

¹⁰¹⁷ 11 March 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 301-02.

¹⁰¹⁸ 'Jerusalem, Israel,' 12 March 1979, *PPP: Carter, 1979, I*, 424-428. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰¹⁹ Samuel Lewis interview, 9 August 1998, ADST. Retrieved 29 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004lew03\)](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004lew03)).

¹⁰²⁰ 12 March 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 302.

progress' had been achieved and that all sides agreed to keep talking.¹⁰²¹ Israel appeared ready to end the talks without agreement, but Vance's proposal planted a seed.

After the meeting, Carter ordered preparations to depart the following day. He scheduled a final breakfast meeting with Begin but his trip had apparently failed. Still, although it had not reproduced the claustrophobic pressure of Camp David, Carter's visit created a fresh imperative. By co-opting both countries into his initiative, failure would have damaged all involved, as well as their alliances with Washington. This dynamic raised the stakes for all sides.

Unbeknownst to the Americans, a number of Israeli ministers remained dissatisfied with the outcome. Following the last meeting involving Begin and Vance, Dayan convened a rump session of the cabinet, without the prime minister, to find a way around the impasse.

Breaking the news

Powell had the task of briefing reporters on the status of the talks. Begin's spokesman had just characterised the negotiations in generally positive terms, further irritating the Americans, who felt Israel did not understand the depth of disagreement between it and the United States and Egypt. 'The need to put things back into perspective was apparent,' according to Powell. Although by then aware that Dayan had convened a meeting, Powell decided not to raise hopes.¹⁰²²

Powell's briefing was successful for what it did not say. He refused to respond to leading questions as to whether he was personally 'happy' with the outcome. 'I hope you understand the position I am in, in the sense that it is certainly not appropriate for me to say that I see very little possibility that these issues are going to be resolved,' he said.¹⁰²³ Powell also told reporters that the situation remained fluid, 'so you'd better cover your ass.'¹⁰²⁴

¹⁰²¹ Minutes, Meeting between U.S. and Israeli delegations, 12 March 1979, ISA/RG 130/MFA/6868/7. Retrieved 21 September 2013,

http://www.archives.gov.il/archivegov_eng/publications/electronicpirsum/cartervisit/cartervisitdocumentslist.htm.

¹⁰²² Powell, *Other Side*, 94-5.

¹⁰²³ Transcript, Press conference, 12 March 1979, Folder: '3/7-13/79 President's Trip to Egypt and Israel, Press Releases [1], 3/79,' NSA, Brzezinski, Trips/Visits, Box 15, JCL.

¹⁰²⁴ Powell, *Other Side*, 96.

Most of the outlets attempted to hedge their coverage. Still, reports dramatised the mission, suggesting that Carter's 'gamble apparently came up a loser,' that he was 'abandoning' hopes for a peace treaty, while also referencing the likely damage inflicted on the president's prestige and possibly his political career.¹⁰²⁵ Among the more judicious stories was that of *The New York Times'* diplomatic correspondent, whose reporting held out the possibility of a 'breakthrough' in the morning talks. He had incorporated information given to him by an Israeli aide rather than relying entirely on White House sources.¹⁰²⁶

Other journalists were less circumspect. CBS' Cronkite led into that evening's report by saying, 'All indications now are that President Carter's high-stakes gamble in the Middle East has failed'¹⁰²⁷ In the next day's *Wall Street Journal*, its White House correspondent reported that Carter's peace mission had 'failed. ... While he may be given credit at home for trying, this failure undoubtedly will be cited by his critics as one more example that the President, though well meaning, simply can't produce results.'¹⁰²⁸ The AP's White House correspondent also wrote a bleak piece: 'President Carter is flying home via Cairo today, denied the triumph he had hoped to achieve

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...

The distortions in the coverage stemmed from various factors. Deadlines were one issue. Broadcasters went on air in the evening, but newspapers had at least several more hours before going to press. Correspondents for West Coast publications typically had a few more hours to file, while wire reporters often had to file one story simultaneously for both morning and afternoon clients. Consequently, some correspondents sought to stretch the scanty information provided by Powell further than it could cover.

¹⁰²⁵ 'Carter/Israel Visit,' ABC 'World News Tonight,' 12 March 1979, VTNA 58395; John Maclean, 'Carter peace bid failing; blames leaders on both sides,' *CT*, 13 March 1979; Oswald Johnston, 'President Ending His Mission to Mideast,' *LAT*, 13 March 1979; NBC, 'The Middle East: The Sticking Points,' 12 March 1979, VTNA 837945; Bernard Gwertzman, 'Carter, Nearing End Of Visit, To See Begin and Sadat Again; Obstacles Still Block A Pact,' *NYT*, 13 March 1979; William Claiborne and Martin Schram, 'Carter Trip Nears End Without Treaty,' *WP*, 13 March 1979. For a roundup: *White House News Summary*, 12 March 1979, 2-16, JCL.

¹⁰²⁶ Gwertzman interview.

¹⁰²⁷ 'Carter/Israel Visit,' 'CBS Evening News,' 12 March 1979, VTNA 262500.

¹⁰²⁸ Karen Elliot House, 'Carter, Failing in Trip for Peace Treaty Between Israel and Egypt, Heads for U.S.,' *WSJ*, 13 March 1979.

¹⁰²⁹ *White House News Summary*, 12 March 1979, 2-16.

Structural factors also led to problems. For example, many of the negative reports emanated from the White House press corps rather than from diplomatic or foreign correspondents. White House reporters, as political correspondents versed in horse-race journalism, tend to focus their coverage on ‘winners’ and ‘losers.’ That frequently led journalists to cover diplomatic negotiations in the same way as political campaigns: who was up and who was down, with the need for a clear victor. This tendency, compounded by the need for journalists to fill the information void left by Powell’s briefings, contributed to the distorted coverage.

‘Any foreign policy initiative and any foreign policy trip by an American leader is not only diplomatic but political in nature, and … not only has foreign policy implications but clearly has domestic implications,’ according to a former White House and foreign correspondent. ‘You couldn’t write a story going into a summit meeting … without being aware that Jimmy Carter was in a lot of trouble (domestically).’¹⁰³⁰ Journalists use this device because it helps frame issues for their domestic audience. However, in this case it magnified Carter’s difficulties by conflating his domestic struggles with his diplomatic challenges.

However, while some journalists formed their own conclusion on the state of the talks on 12 March, Powell deserves much of the blame. By his own admission, he attended a party thrown for a correspondent after the briefings rather than enquire about Dayan’s meeting.¹⁰³¹ If he had done so, Powell could have learned of the ongoing contacts and thus helped those journalists with later deadlines. Such an act could have mitigated some of the criticism levied toward Carter by providing a more accurate picture of the negotiations.

Regardless, by the time the accounts of 12 March’s disappointing surfaced in American outlets, the situation in Jerusalem was already changing. Ahead of Carter’s breakfast meeting with Begin, Vance sent the president a memo outlining the remaining issues and suggested formulations developed by the American delegation at Dayan’s suggestion.¹⁰³² The Israeli foreign minister had

¹⁰³⁰ Smith interview.

¹⁰³¹ Powell, *Other Side*, 101.

¹⁰³² Memo with attachments from Vance to Carter, 13 March 1979, Folder: ‘Middle East—President’s and Brzezinski’s Trips: [2/27/79-3/15/79],’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 14, JCL.

told Vance the cabinet would accept American guarantees of Israel's oil supply and an accelerated timetable for Israeli withdrawal from Sinai. In exchange, Dayan suggested the side letter neither mention Gaza as a special case nor refer to an Egyptian officer there.¹⁰³³

The breakthrough came the morning of 13 March, first in a meeting between Begin and Carter, followed by a larger gathering involving Brzezinski, Dayan, Vance and Weizman. Carter presented the proposals recommended by Dayan and Vance as his own; Begin agreed to recommend them to the Knesset. Carter also suggested that Israel consider taking unilateral steps to ease conditions for Palestinians in the territories. Begin replied that he would sympathetically consider the request. For the Americans, that was as good as an agreement.

The next step was to take the agreements to Sadat for approval. Greeting Sadat, Vice President Mubarak and Khalil at the Cairo airport later Tuesday, Carter told them his 'assignment has been carried out satisfactorily. You'll be pleased.' In response to a request by Khalil to change one more word, Carter's patience ran out: 'For the last 18 months I, the President of the most powerful nation on earth, have acted the postman. I am not a proud man – I have done the best I could – but I cannot go back and try to change the language.'¹⁰³⁴ Sadat agreed and approved the new proposals.

Before Air Force One departed Egypt for the United States, Powell gathered journalists for one last briefing. Several reporters, concerned they had been used as instruments of diplomacy, expressed frustration over what they had felt had been Powell's misleadingly pessimistic briefing the evening before. 'Any time you think you can do better getting the news without any help from me, you are welcome to it,' Powell said. 'But I did the best I could to give an accurate portrayal of the situation last night ...',¹⁰³⁵

However, Powell's 13 March briefing provided hardly more information than the one the previous evening. 'The problem was that I did not know exactly what had happened that morning to

¹⁰³³ Quandt, *Camp David*, 309-10.

¹⁰³⁴ NLC-128-11-18-15-2.

¹⁰³⁵ Transcript, Press conference, 13 March 1979, Folder: '3/7-13/79 President's Trip to Egypt and Israel, Press Releases [1], 3/79,' NSA, Brzezinski, Trips/Visits, Box 15, JCL

turn defeat into victory,’ Powell later admitted. As a consequence, most journalists understood little about what had changed, except that the American delegation’s mood had brightened and success seemed at hand. Powell described a diplomatic success, but left the details scanty. He later noted with a touch of pride that rereading that briefing’s transcript, he found it ‘a model of double-talk and noninformation.’ On the plane ride back to Washington, one correspondent accused Powell of lying.¹⁰³⁶

This animosity helps explain some of the subsequent negative coverage. In their evening broadcasts on 13 March, both CBS and NBC cited Israeli officials’ complaints that the pessimistic American reporting on the status of the negotiations the previous day.¹⁰³⁷ CBS’ White House correspondent also reported that “many” reporters speculated that the gloomy picture painted by U.S. officials was a campaign orchestrated by Rafshoon to make Carter ‘look as if he had accomplished a miracle in Jerusalem, something that might boost his ratings in the polls,’ once agreement came. A separate CBS report stated (erroneously) that the treaty would likely cost the taxpayer \$10-20 billion, perhaps ‘the single most costly mediation effort in American history.’¹⁰³⁸

On 14 March, the *Wall Street Journal*’s White House correspondent similarly emphasised the treaty’s cost to American taxpayers. The reporter also speculated that despite Carter’s ‘apparent success … his sagging popularity isn’t likely to soar as sharply as it did after Camp David’ because of doubts that the treaty would bring lasting peace.¹⁰³⁹ On 14 March UPI’s White House correspondent was more direct:

[W]as the defeat-turned-victory a public relations coup? Some reporters who traveled with Carter believe White House press secretary Jody Powell painted an unnecessarily bleak picture during negotiations – either out of caution or hope that Carter might reap greater political benefit from a surprise agreement.¹⁰⁴⁰

¹⁰³⁶ Powell, *Other Side*, 98-100.

¹⁰³⁷ ‘Carter Arrival,’ ‘CBS Evening News,’ 13 March 1979, VTNA 262522; ‘Mideast Peace Developments/Begin Interview,’ ‘NBC Nightly News,’ *ibid.*, VTNA 503252.

¹⁰³⁸ Transcript, CBS News spots, 14 March 1979, Folder: ‘Middle East—Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty Signing, 3/26/79,’ Press, Granum Files, Box 87, JCL; ‘Mideast Peace Developments,’ ‘CBS Evening News,’ 14 March 1979, VTNA 262535.

¹⁰³⁹ Karen Elliot House, ‘Persistent Carter Again Brings Israel, Egypt to Verge Of a Treaty as Begin and Sadat Accept U.S. Proposals,’ *WSJ*, 14 March 1979.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Leubsdorf, ‘Ruffled Mideast press corps.’

The coverage appeared to reflect journalists' scepticism toward Carter, while showing only modest reservations about his role in the negotiations.

These examples suggest that the outlets that produced the most pessimistic stories based on Powell's 12 March briefing were also the ones most likely to frame the agreement in negative terms.¹⁰⁴¹ This dynamic likely stemmed in part from an attempt at editorial continuity: these media organs sought to report on the negotiations in a consistent manner, without allowing their stories to contradict flatly the previous day's pieces.

However, a more persuasive explanation may be that this coverage reflected a wider fissure in the White House—media relationship. The press, which had become antagonistic to a president whose competency it doubted, was primed for conflict, and failure. Consequently, most journalists were not predisposed to interpret the administration's statements positively.

Still, complaints by Carter and his advisors that the coverage played a prominent role in undermining domestic approval for the president's achievement do not withstand scrutiny.¹⁰⁴² They imply that the negative tone diminished public appreciation for their accomplishments, and helped lead to lower poll ratings. Outlets indeed reported on the agreement from several angles. These reports tended to focus on the predicted negative reaction from other Arab states, concern that the pact did not deal adequately with the fate of the Palestinians and the cost of the treaty for U.S. taxpayers.¹⁰⁴³ However, the vast majority of the reporting, opinion and analysis of Carter's role was overwhelmingly positive.¹⁰⁴⁴

Taking a wider approach, *The New York Times*' editorial board praised the president's performance as having electrified the country. 'Thanks to Jimmy Carter, the making of a peace

¹⁰⁴¹ House, 'Besides Its Promise, Mideast Accord Holds Pitfalls for the U.S.', *WSJ*, 23 March 1979; ----, 'Prospect of Cordial Egyptian-Israeli Ties In Doubt as Pact Signing Is Slated Today,' *ibid.*, 26 March, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 435; Powell, *Other Side*, 102.

¹⁰⁴³ Jim Hoagland, 'Treaty Seen Straining U.S. Relationships With Other Arab Countries,' *WP*, 15 March 1979; Don Oberdorfer, 'The Price of Peace: Treaty Seen Casting U.S. \$5 Billion in Aid,' *ibid.*; Iver Peterson, 'Arab-Americans Attack Treaty Over Issue of Palestinian Rights,' *NYT*, *ibid.*; John Maclean, 'A U.S. burden: Peace is not at hand yet,' *CT*, 28 March 1979. Editorials devoted greater attention to the treaty's costs. Editorial, 'Paying the price for peace,' *CT*, 27 March 1979; Editorial, 'Dollars for Peace in the Middle East,' *LAT*, 25 March 1979. AIPAC defended the guarantees to Israel. 'The Price of Peace,' *NER*, XXIII: 12, 21 March 1979.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Martin Schram, 'A Daring Shuttle Summity,' *WP*, 14 March 1979; Jack Nelson, 'Pact Seen Giving Carter "a Little Running Room,"' *LAT*, 15 March 1979; Terence Smith analysis, 'Winning Trust Was Carter's Principal Aim, And He Did It,' *NYT*, 18 March 1979; James Reston column, 'The Uses of History,' *NYT*, 23 March 1979.

treaty has become as exciting for Americans as the waging of war.¹⁰⁴⁵ Even AIPAC praised Carter, calling his mediation ‘masterful,’ although it warned the administration against trying to include the PLO in talks.¹⁰⁴⁶ While the media viewed Carter’s tactics sceptically, ultimately the ends seemed to justify the means.

Meanwhile, the administration said 93 percent of the telephone calls, telegrams and letters about the negotiations received by the White House supported Carter’s role in the talks and their outcome. However, the tally before the 13 March announcement that a preliminary deal had been reached revealed greater fissures: only 35 percent of those who contacted the White House supported the president’s decision to travel to the region to push both sides toward an agreement.¹⁰⁴⁷ These figures suggest that public opinion roughly accorded with the press assessment that the result justified Carter’s personal involvement in the talks – but it perhaps would have been unforgiving had agreement not been reached.

Carter later complained that he received only a single-point boost in approval ratings after the treaty was concluded.¹⁰⁴⁸ Although the specific numbers depended on the survey, most polls did register a temporary jump. For instance, the president’s Gallup approval rating went from 37 percent in February, to 47 percent immediately after the treaty deal was announced, and then back to 41 percent in early April.¹⁰⁴⁹ In the CBS News/NYT poll, his approval rating moved from 37 percent in late February to 42 percent one month later.¹⁰⁵⁰ NBC News/AP polls similarly established a modest uptick in positive assessments of Carter’s overall performance.¹⁰⁵¹

The low ratings were likely a factor of three dynamics. First, and perhaps most significantly, foreign policy rarely ranks highly among public concerns. Therefore, in any instance the treaty was unlikely to affect a major shift. The administration thus attached outsized political significance to Carter’s policy. Second, the dragged-out conclusion of the treaty likely wore out the American

¹⁰⁴⁵ Editorial, ‘The Theater of Peace,’ *NYT*, 14 March 1979.

¹⁰⁴⁶ ‘The Treaty Breakthrough,’ *NER*, XXIII: 11, March 14, 1979.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Notice to the press, 15 March 1979, Folder: ‘Middle East—Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty Signing, 3/26/78,’ Press, Granum Files, Box 87, JCL.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 435.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Gallup Polls (AIPO), 23-26 February, 16-19 March, 6-9 April 1979, Roper Center.

¹⁰⁵⁰ CBS News/NYT Polls, 27-28 February, 26-27 March 1979, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵¹ NBC News/AP Polls, 5-6 February, 19-20 March 1979, *ibid.*

public. For the six months after Camp David, as well as the 10 months prior to that, it had been reading headlines about incremental progress. By March 1979, the issue had exhausted the public's patience and attention. Finally, Carter's popularity among the public and the media had begun its downward spiral long ago; nothing short of a politically seismic event could have arrested it. Whatever its significance, a peace treaty did not affect the lives of most Americans and therefore mattered little in their overall assessment of their president.

For now, the administration survived the virtual fusing together of Carter's political fate with the resolution of a diplomatic crisis without major ill effects. Even the president himself fell into this trap upon his return to Washington on 14 March. 'There were risks involved. They were pointed out to me by many people, political risks to me as President, therefore perhaps a risk even to the United States,' he said.¹⁰⁵²

Carter's statement again demonstrated the tensions that dogged him as a peacemaker-politician. His dramatic, central involvement was sealed two weeks later when the treaty was signed in Washington rather than the Middle East. Carter had enmeshed the country more deeply in the peace process than ever before. Later, this tendency whereby every major international success or failure could be laid at the feet of the president created political problems for Carter, most notably with Iran.¹⁰⁵³

Brzezinski remained concerned about the president's political exposure 'in any post-peace follow-up. That follow-up is likely to be messy, and your accomplishment should stand on its own.' The appointment of an envoy to conduct the autonomy negotiations on Carter's behalf would allow the president to diminish his role, Brzezinski believed. Additionally, in order to limit negative Arab reaction, the president should emphasise three points: first, the goal remained a comprehensive peace; second, the Americans would seek to 'resolve the Palestinian problem in all its aspects'; and, finally, that Washington still disapproved of Israeli settlement activity and would consider voting

¹⁰⁵² 'The President's Trip to Egypt and Israel,' 14 March 1979, *PPP: Carter, 1979, I*, 430-432. Carter's handwritten edits indicate he added the remark about the 'political risks' to himself and the United States. 'Andrews Arrival Statement,' 14 February 1979, JCL. Retrieved 21 September 2013, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/documents/campdavid25/cda21.pdf>.

¹⁰⁵³ Philip Seib, *Headline Diplomacy: How News Coverage Affects Foreign Policy* (Westport: Praeger, 1997), 31-38.

against Israel at the United Nations on the issue.¹⁰⁵⁴ These issues loomed large in the subsequent year.

Nevertheless, the lingering issues were resolved in final talks in Washington, where the signing ceremony was held 26 March. The treaty served as a specific implementation of the principles developed at Camp David. The preamble indicates that the treaty was intended as a first step toward a ‘comprehensive’ peace and a resolution of the ‘Arab-Israeli conflict in all its aspects.’ Per Article One, Israel would withdraw from the Sinai to the international border, thereby restoring full Egyptian sovereignty, within three years. Full diplomatic relations would be established following the initial Israeli withdrawal. The other articles dealt with Sinai security, the deployment of U.N. troops, freedom of navigation through the Suez Canal, and further aspects of diplomatic normalisation, including the exchange of ambassadors 10 months after treaty ratifications.¹⁰⁵⁵

In two accompanying memoranda of agreement, Washington provided Israel with economic and military commitments, including a guarantee of Israel’s oil supplies for 15 years, in the event the pact was violated.¹⁰⁵⁶ Egypt received no such guarantees.

Finally, a joint letter from Sadat and Begin to Carter committed them to start talks on autonomy for the inhabitants of the West Bank and Gaza within one month of treaty ratification. That allowed Begin to keep the Palestinian issue out of the treaty itself, while conversely Sadat clung to this letter as proof of linkage between the bilateral deal and Palestinian autonomy.¹⁰⁵⁷

The signing ceremony finally represented the media-friendly event that the White House had craved. The administration invited a reporter to shadow Carter as he went about his daily business, an effort to dramatise the moment and showcase the president at his most statesmanlike.¹⁰⁵⁸ U.S. networks devoted saturation coverage to the signing ceremony on the White House Lawn. ‘This is a day we hope will be remembered throughout history,’ ABC News’ anchor said as he opened his

¹⁰⁵⁴ NSC Weekly Report #91 from Brzezinski to Carter, 23 March 1979, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 91-101,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 42, JCL.

¹⁰⁵⁵ For the full treaty text, including annexes, an appendix, agreed minutes, maps and six letters: ‘Egypt and Israel Sign Treaty of Peace,’ *DSB*, May 1979, 1-15.

¹⁰⁵⁶ ‘U.S. and Israel Sign Memoranda of Agreement,’ *ibid.*, 60-61.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Jordan and Palestinian representatives rejected invitations to join the autonomy talks.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Martin Schram, “‘It Will Make Him Look Presidential’,” *WP*, 27 March 1979.

network's broadcast.¹⁰⁵⁹ NBC covered the event with the greatest restraint, reminding viewers not to be overly optimistic because of the thorny nature of Middle East diplomacy.¹⁰⁶⁰

TV coverage had nearly come to define the peace process. 'No one from any of the network news departments was asked actually to sign the Middle East peace treaties ... but in a way the networks were parties to them,' wrote one TV critic, who called the signing 'an impressively staged theatrical production.'¹⁰⁶¹ This result was perhaps a logical climax of the year and a half since Begin and Sadat made an on-air agreement for the Egyptian leader to visit Israel.

Although Carter's objective in Arab-Israeli negotiations had been scaled back in part due to domestic factors, many commentators believed the burden for making the treaty work fell heaviest on the president. He needed to demonstrate 'toughness' at home and abroad, especially on the Palestinian issue, commented ABC's Howard Smith. 'Mr. Carter must press Israel on that question (of an independent Palestinian homeland) even at the cost of the enmity of American Jewry,' he argued.¹⁰⁶²

Indeed, the most striking feature of the post-Camp David negotiations is the downgrading of Palestinian issues. At Camp David, the fate of the Palestinians in the occupied territories had been a primary, maybe even *the* primary, point of contention. Carter's ability to push on West Bank and Gaza had been circumscribed by the sentiment of the pro-Israel lobby and broader domestic constraints.

Begin would never have renounced completely his ideological attachment to the West Bank and Sadat's primary interest remained in achieving a bilateral treaty that would help right his state's economic ship. Yet intense U.S. psychological pressure at Camp David had helped Begin yield on at least two points: the acceptance of 'Palestinian legitimate rights' and the dismantlement of the Sinai settlements.¹⁰⁶³ Although Carter told his advisors that he believed Sadat 'did not give a damn

¹⁰⁵⁹ 'Mideast Peace Developments/Treaty Signing,' ABC 'World News Tonight,' 26 March 1979, VTNA 58646.

¹⁰⁶⁰ 'NBC Nightly News,' 26 March 1979, VTNA 503451.

¹⁰⁶¹ Tom Shales, 'In an Era of Video Diplomacy, the Live Telecast Was the Event,' *WP*, 28 March 1979.

¹⁰⁶² 'Comment (Mideast Peace Treaty),' ABC 'World News Tonight,' 27 March 1979, VTNA 58682.

¹⁰⁶³ Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy*, 103-04.

about the West Bank,' the only way for the Egyptian president to avoid total regional isolation would be positive movement for the Palestinians.¹⁰⁶⁴

The Arab League denounced Egypt for making peace with Israel. It suspended Egypt's membership and moved its headquarters from Cairo to Tunis.¹⁰⁶⁵ The PLO's Arafat expressed outrage.¹⁰⁶⁶ In the territories, West Bank leaders similarly rejected the treaty and the proposals for autonomy.¹⁰⁶⁷ Moscow criticised Carter's push for the bilateral agreement and emphasised its support for the Palestinians.¹⁰⁶⁸

The American public welcomed the treaty, though perhaps not as enthusiastically as the administration had hoped. By the time the ceremony had taken place, many felt jaded by the decades of conflict and counter-conflict in the Middle East, and were uncertain about the durability of peace.¹⁰⁶⁹ According to an AP-NBC News poll, a plurality of Americans – 43 percent – did not believe that the Egypt-Israel pact would act as a springboard for agreements with other Arab countries.¹⁰⁷⁰

Moreover, it remained unclear what implications would arise from a broken treaty now that Washington was so committed to the pact. The public appeared reluctant to support further U.S. moves to make the treaty work. According to one poll, only one in five respondent supported the proposed increases in aid and weapons for Egypt and Israel, while just one in three favoured selling oil to Israel if it was unable to buy it elsewhere. Moreover, only 27 percent believed long-term peace between Egypt and Israel was likely.¹⁰⁷¹ The administration, which scheduled a lavish White House ceremony following the signing, was no doubt displeased that the excitement over the treaty did not linger long in Americans' minds.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, 296.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Document 93, Baghdad Conference resolutions, 31 March 1979, *International Documents on Palestine, 1979*. (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1981), 155-58.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Letter from Arafat to Waldheim, 24 March 1979, 'Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,' *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 4 (1979): 161-62.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Statement, West Bank Municipalities, Nationalist and Professional Institutions, 26 March 1979, *ibid.*, 162-63.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Letter from Brezhnev to Carter, 19 March 1979, DDRS CK3100073483.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Bernard Gwertzman, 'Mood of Peace Seems Somber and Uncertain,' *NYT*, 27 March 1979; Karen Elliot House, 'Prospect of Cordial Egyptian-Israeli Ties In Doubt as Pact Signing Is Slated Today,' *WSJ*, 26 March 1979.

¹⁰⁷⁰ 'Poll Shows Limited Hopes For Additional Peace Pacts,' *WP*, 25 March 1979.

¹⁰⁷¹ Adam Clymer, 'Carter Gains in Poll After Treaty, But His Rating on Economy Falls,' *NYT*, 29 March 1979.

Still, although Carter's overall approval ratings saw neither a significant nor lasting jump, the public believed he played a positive role in the Middle East. Americans displayed less enthusiasm for his decision to travel to the region at the last minute, however. The polls demonstrate that Carter's approval rating on foreign policy rose more than his overall ratings; in the case of the *NYT/CBS* News polls, his foreign policy approval jumped 14 percent.¹⁰⁷²

These results suggest that the public's appreciation for Carter's role was incident-specific, and did not extend to the rest of his presidency. Any political benefits generated by Carter's demonstration of presidential persuasion was offset partly by the concomitant media coverage that depicted a leader desperate for success, even one that was short of what he had initially sought.

Conclusion

Carter later admitted that his March 1979 journey put him in a 'much more vulnerable political posture' than at Camp David.¹⁰⁷³ In his travels to Egypt and Israel, the president bucked protocol by deeply immersing himself in final negotiations on foreign soil. Carter outdid even Kissinger: by placing the president at the centre of negotiations, he set a precedent whereby little progress could be achieved without direct involvement from the occupant of the Oval Office.

In his trip to Egypt and Israel, Carter's dual roles of politician and peacemaker clashed, with one serving to weaken the other. Carter's domestic troubles led Washington to blur the line between mediator and participant. As a mediator, Carter sought to facilitate any agreement between Egypt and Israel. As a participant, however, he had his own objectives.

Domestic forces did not play a decisive role in Carter's negotiations in Egypt and Israel, but likely influenced his position on the Palestinians. The pro-Israel lobby, White House perceptions of public opinion and elite consensus had established the guidelines within which Carter could work.¹⁰⁷⁴ By March 1979, Carter could not afford to apply pressure on the Palestinian issue; too

¹⁰⁷² CBS News/*NYT* Polls, 27-28 February, 26-27 March 1979, Roper Center. Other surveys found comparable results. NBC News/AP Polls, 5-6 February, 19-20 March 1979, *ibid*.

¹⁰⁷³ Jimmy Carter interview (II), 25 October 1991, Folder 8, Box 63, SEP.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Bard, *Water's Edge and Beyond*, 235-36.

many foreign policy challenges were in play. Strategically, Washington had become more concerned about stability in the Gulf than the fate of the Palestinians and consequently saw Egypt and the Gulf states, not Israel, as strategic allies.¹⁰⁷⁵ However, a treaty that included firmer linkage on the Palestinian issue may have gained the support of other Arab states, thus making more strategic sense.

Moreover, agreement was reached only after Washington pledged generous assistance to both countries, but especially Israel. Egypt was promised \$1.5 billion in aid over the next three years. Israel, however, received \$10.2 billion in American aid over the following four years, including \$3 billion to help construct new air bases. This package far outstripped aid provided by any previous administration to Israel. Although these sums aroused media attention, their passage was guaranteed by strong pro-Israel sentiment in Congress. Thus, even amid a recession, both the Senate (73-11) and the House (347-28) overwhelmingly approved the package.¹⁰⁷⁶

The press did not determine the outcome of Carter's negotiations in Egypt and Israel. However, in helping articulate, form and reiterate the political stakes for Carter, the media dramatised the consequences of failure. Conversely, reporters and commentators treated the president's success conservatively, wary that any breakthrough would be tenuous. The coverage proved similar to public opinion: Carter was given credit for that specific success, but it did little to mitigate broader criticism of his presidency.

The essential point is that Carter's immersive diplomacy was predicated partly on assumptions about his need for a political victory to boost his domestic fortunes. A survey sent to the White House in April underscored Carter's woes. Although a majority of respondents approved of Carter's foreign policy, his approval rating continued to slip and, by a factor of more than 2-to-1, likely primary voters favoured Kennedy over the president. When asked about Carter's specific accomplishments, his work on the Middle East topped the list, domestic and foreign, by a

¹⁰⁷⁵ Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, 'The United States and Israel since 1948: A "Special Relationship"?' *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2 (1998).

¹⁰⁷⁶ Bard, *Water's Edge and Beyond*, 235-36.

considerable margin. Perhaps most tellingly, however, respondents only listed foreign policy 10th among major issues, below 'pocketbook' concerns such as inflation, taxes and unemployment.¹⁰⁷⁷

A speedy conclusion of the treaty could have changed the dynamic – it would have built on Camp David's momentum, had salutary effects on the Democrats' fortunes in the 1978 midterms and avoided six months of grinding negotiations. Moreover, the shah's regime in Iran was crumbling but still intact in October 1978. A swift treaty resolution might have altered the way Washington approached those months of the revolution.

However, the delay in finalising the treaty had its most direct impact on Palestinian autonomy talks. Carter could have become personally involved in those negotiations, rather than delegating the task to special negotiators, because the domestic political calendar would have afforded him more time. By April 1979, the president's re-election campaign loomed imminently and he could not afford to provoke further controversy by pressuring Begin. Instead, Carter's policy in 1979-1980 was completely dominated by electoral concerns.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Memo with attachments from CSR to DNC, 'The political situation and President Carter,' 25 May 1979, Folder: 'Caddell, Patrick (3)', Jordan Files, Box 33, JCL.

Chapter Eight: Blurred Lines – Carter, the Campaign and Final Troubles with the Politics of Arab-Israeli Diplomacy, 1979-1980

Introduction

‘Foreign policy should offer you the greatest opportunity for the exercise of Presidential leadership, in a manner that could significantly influence the outcome of the elections,’ National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski advised President Carter three months prior to Election Day 1980. However, he added, ‘our biggest problem is … the need to get our story out more forcefully and effectively.’¹⁰⁷⁸ Yet during the last year and a half of Carter’s term, even the Camp David Accords, which Brzezinski hoped to highlight as the president’s greatest foreign policy achievement, provided little political comfort to a president ricocheting from one crisis to another.

This chapter contends that in 1979-1980 the line dividing Carter’s Arab-Israeli policy from his domestic position had become virtually invisible. As the election approached, Carter’s inability to separate the domestic from the diplomatic burst into plain view. The circular pattern of influence had become set; each area served to reinforce the other. The Arab-Israeli dispute had little to do with Carter’s electoral fortunes. However, his experience underscored the hazards of staking his primary foreign policy legacy on such a domestically contentious area.

With conclusion of the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, the focus of diplomatic activity turned to the stickier half of the Camp David Accords: Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The United States held a supervisory role in the autonomy talks, which were held between Egypt and Israel beginning in May 1979. The negotiations, which took place without Palestinian representation, were intended to create the basis for self-government in the occupied territories.

Carter, increasingly consumed by his re-election campaign, remained aloof from the negotiations. Instead, the president appointed a special negotiator – first Robert Strauss and, later, Sol Linowitz – to act as a ‘political shield’ to protect him from the negotiations’ domestic

¹⁰⁷⁸ NSC Weekly Report #149 from Brzezinski to Carter, 7 August 1980, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 136-150,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 42, JCL.

repercussions.¹⁰⁷⁹ 'If anyone can keep these negotiations on track and protect me from the Jewish community politically, it's Bob Strauss,' the president believed.¹⁰⁸⁰

Yet Carter could not escape the domestic politics of Arab-Israeli diplomacy. The autonomy talks, with diminished American participation, proceeded haltingly. Even relatively meagre U.S. efforts to bring Palestinians into the negotiations faltered in part due to domestic considerations: U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young was forced to resign following his unauthorised meeting with the PLO's U.N. envoy, about which he subsequently misled the secretary of state. The fallout created strains between the American Jewish community and African-Americans, both prime components of the Democratic coalition.¹⁰⁸¹ Six months later, a communications breakdown led Young's successor to vote in favour of a UNSC resolution criticising Israeli policy in East Jerusalem – contrary to Carter's wishes. The president disavowed the vote, a sequence of events that wrecked his credibility with Israel and its U.S. supporters, as well as Arab states, and contributed to his defeat in the New York primary.

Full explanations for the failure of the Palestinian autonomy negotiations, which were finally suspended in June 1982, lie beyond the scope of this chapter. Previous works on the autonomy talks suggest they only ever had slim chances for success for three primary reasons: first, the Begin government's extremely narrow definition of Palestinian autonomy; second, lack of U.S. political will; and, finally, the absence of Palestinian representation.¹⁰⁸²

U.S. policy toward the Palestinians has been the focus of an increasing body of scholarship.¹⁰⁸³ Pressman demonstrates that a genuine concern for Palestinian rights motivated Carter, but never did those rights fully trump Israel's concerns for security. Ultimately, Carter intended to create a framework for negotiations toward Palestinian self-determination intended to

¹⁰⁷⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 438.

¹⁰⁸⁰ 24 April 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 315.

¹⁰⁸¹ _____, *Keeping Faith*, 501-02.

¹⁰⁸² Said, 'Peace and Palestinian Rights.'; Smith, *Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 240-78; Tessler, *Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, 514-31.

¹⁰⁸³ Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine*, 157-94; Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy towards Palestine and Israel since 1945*, 117-19 and 54-59; Harvey Sicherman, *Palestinian Self-Government (Autonomy): Its past and Future* (Washington: Institute for Near East Policy, 1991), 21-34; Terry, 'Carter Administration and the Palestinians.'

outlast Begin's Likud government.¹⁰⁸⁴ The latest scholarship, however, reveals that Washington acquiesced to Israeli efforts to limit Palestinian autonomy.¹⁰⁸⁵

Regardless, none of these works sufficiently address the political drag that Carter's Arab-Israeli diplomacy had on his fortunes at home. Thus, through analysis of multiple archives, media sources, oral histories and public opinion surveys, this chapter explores how domestic politics informed Carter's approach toward the negotiations, why the U.N. missteps cost the administration so dearly and how the president's political needs helped doom efforts to bring the promise of the Camp David Accords to fruition.

Starting the talks

The PLO denounced the Egypt-Israel treaty and the autonomy negotiations. Washington came under particularly withering attack: in May, Arafat declared the United States the 'principal enemy' of the Palestinian people for mediating the treaty without a clear provision for the Palestinians.¹⁰⁸⁶ The rival Peoples' Front for the Liberation of Palestine, a Marxist group, labelled the autonomy plan a 'liquidationist scheme' that constituted a 'major element in the overall imperialist settlement.'¹⁰⁸⁷ Nevertheless, in the initial months the administration moved cautiously toward trying to expand the negotiations to include Palestinian representation – possibly even the PLO.

Two weeks after the Egypt-Israel treaty was signed, Brzezinski advised Carter on how to employ the administration's foreign policy for political gains. 'It is important that in 1980 you be recognized as the President both of *Peace* and *Resolve*', Brzezinski argued. In terms of priorities, he advised:

... [G]iven the inevitable domestic time pressures, you will need to discriminate very carefully in the future between the things you *must* do in order to maintain momentum in your foreign policy and to shore up your important tangible accomplishments; the things that you *should* do because of their potentially positive impact on both foreign policy and

¹⁰⁸⁴ Pressman, 'Explaining the Carter administration's Israeli-Palestinian Solution.'

¹⁰⁸⁵ Seth Anziska, 'Aborting Palestinian Autonomy: 1979-1980,' in *LSE Middle East Workshop* (London 2013).

¹⁰⁸⁶ 'Arafat: US is our People's Main Enemy,' WAFA, 31 May 1979, IPS.

¹⁰⁸⁷ "Autonomy"-Liquidationist Scheme,' *PFLP Bulletin*, no. 28, June 1979, 3-5, IPS.

domestic politics; and things that you *should not* do because they either detract from your foreign policy accomplishments or because they would complicate your domestic political situation.

In the final category, Brzezinski included the autonomy negotiations, ‘because of their impact on the Jewish community.’¹⁰⁸⁸ This thinking deeply informed the administration’s approach toward the process.

This shift in tactics concerned the regional actors, particularly Egypt. Cairo pushed for an expansive definition of Palestinian self-government, largely to prevent further isolation from other Arab states. Although Egypt’s stance toward involving Palestinians – especially the PLO – in negotiations was ambivalent, it nevertheless needed Washington to influence Israel. The month after the treaty was concluded, Egyptian Ambassador Ashraf Ghorbal expressed ‘deep concern’ to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance that he and Carter were ‘walking away from the Middle East problem’ during the autonomy talks.¹⁰⁸⁹

Ghorbal’s conclusion was not surprising. Spring 1979 was a troubled time for U.S. policymaking. The ink was barely dry on the Egypt-Israel treaty when Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran, which remained in post-revolutionary ferment.¹⁰⁹⁰ In addition to upending the U.S. security framework in the region, Iran’s oil production had nearly halted after the revolution. By summer, the White House won a temporary increase in Saudi oil production to compensate for Iran’s loss. However, that resulted in a stronger desire to placate the Saudis: progress on Palestinian autonomy was needed.¹⁰⁹¹

In Washington, divisions between Brzezinski and Vance, which had heretofore been muted in Arab-Israeli policy, began to surface. A meeting in May revealed how central Vance believed the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian issues to be for Middle East and Gulf security, and why he attached deep significance to the autonomy talks. ‘I think it is clear that the basic sources of instability are

¹⁰⁸⁸ NSC Weekly Report #94 from Brzezinski to Carter, 12 April 1979, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 91-101,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 42, JCL. Emphases in original.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Memo from Vance to Carter, 30 April 1979, NLC-128-14-6-1-8.

¹⁰⁹⁰ ‘Iran: The Making of U.S. Policy, 1977-1980,’ DNSA. Retrieved 23 September 2013, <http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/gate2.library.lse.ac.uk/collections/content/IR/intro.jsp>.

¹⁰⁹¹ Spiegel, *Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 374.

the Arab-Israeli conflict, plus inter-Arab tensions. There is also the Palestinian problem ...' Vance said. Defense Secretary Harold Brown concurred. However, Brzezinski and Energy Secretary James Schlesinger disagreed, arguing that the primary threat to Gulf stability came from external forces: the Soviets and nearby Moscow-backed states.¹⁰⁹²

Nevertheless, Carter decided to appoint a super-negotiator for the autonomy talks who could work for U.S. interests while also providing political protection-by-distance for the president. However, when making this selection, domestic necessities trumped diplomatic concerns. Carter tapped Robert Strauss, a former Democratic National Committee chairman and trade negotiator, to manage the American role in the talks.

Strauss turned out to be a poor choice. Brzezinski believed he had taken up the appointment thinking it would turn him into a 'Democratic Henry Kissinger, a mass-media star, the new peacemaker in the Middle East,' but effectively gave up when obstacles arose.¹⁰⁹³ Strauss' rough-hewn, Texas style did not translate well into the Middle East. For example, his tendency to use coarse language startled Egyptian and Israeli negotiators, and did not help build rapport. According to one U.S. diplomat, Strauss once voiced his frustration by telling both delegations that 'negotiating with you people is like wiping your ass with a wagon wheel. It never ends.'¹⁰⁹⁴ Moreover, as he later confessed, he simply lacked knowledge. 'There were a lot of things I couldn't do well out there because I didn't know the issues well enough ...' Strauss said.¹⁰⁹⁵

Strauss' appointment led to tensions with Vance. The secretary of state erupted in anger when Carter announced at a foreign-affairs breakfast that he would delegate responsibility to Strauss in order to mitigate domestic political fallout and allow Vance to focus on other issues. 'There is Lebanon, there is the Palestinian question, there is the question of the U.N. Do you want me literally to do nothing? ... If you don't want me to do this, I am going to resign as secretary of

¹⁰⁹² 'Middle East Security Issues,' n.a., n.d. [circa 11 May 1979], NLC-33-4-5-1-5.

¹⁰⁹³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 438.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Wat Tyler Cluverius IV interview, 31 May 1990, ADST. Retrieved 22 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004clu01\).](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004clu01).)

¹⁰⁹⁵ Robert Strauss interview, 25 October 2002, ADST. Retrieved 22 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2007str01\).](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2007str01).)

state.¹⁰⁹⁶ Ultimately, Vance remained in his post until the failed Iran hostage rescue attempt in 1980. However, this period marked a growing estrangement between Carter and his secretary of state.

Strauss was largely ineffective. ‘He had no expertise, (and) it was pretty clear he didn’t plan on acquiring any,’ a U.S. diplomat recalled. ‘His view of this was basically Texas politics. … You scratch my back, I’ll find a way to scratch yours, and let’s move on. … The kinds of things he was good at weren’t going to work there.’¹⁰⁹⁷ U.S. Ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis concurred. ‘Initially, he (Strauss) decided that his tried and true negotiation techniques could work in the Middle East as they had everywhere else,’ he said. But that ‘Texan approach,’ using ‘bonhomie’ with Begin and Sadat, was ineffective, Lewis said.¹⁰⁹⁸

There was little love lost between Strauss, who bristled at the notion of reporting to anyone other than the president, and Carter’s foreign policymakers. ‘I felt the State Department, most of them in the Middle East section, were very anti-Israel, and I didn’t trust them as far as I could throw them,’ he said. As a result, Strauss insisted, ‘I didn’t swallow everything I was fed.’¹⁰⁹⁹ Strauss, who had cabinet-level status as a result of his previous role as a trade negotiator, also conceded that he had ‘a lot of difficulty’ with the NSC. ‘I didn’t like the idea of being a member of the Carter cabinet and going back and reporting to … a bunch of people at the State Department,’ he said.¹¹⁰⁰

According to Brzezinski, Strauss ‘was from the outset particularly concerned with the domestic implications of our Middle East policy, and … made it clear to Carter that any pressure on Israel would be damaging politically at home.’¹¹⁰¹ Similarly, Vance was prepared from the beginning that the negotiations would also play out within the United States ‘in Congress and with domestic groups.’ The White House hoped the Camp David Accords could serve as a beachhead for a wider peace, and Vance considered the administration’s ‘primary substantive job at the outset’ to

¹⁰⁹⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 438.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Cluverius interview, ADST.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Lewis interview, ADST.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Strauss interview, ADST.

¹¹⁰⁰ Strauss interview, 27 October 1989, Folder 1, Box 66, SEP.

¹¹⁰¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 438.

be building Arab support for the process. A major effort in that regard was to halt, or at least sharply limit, Israeli settlement building. ‘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 US public and Congress,’ Vance advised Carter.¹¹⁰²

Vance emphasised the importance of gradually bringing Palestinians into the negotiating process, with the goal by the end of 1979 to achieve PLO acquiescence in the emergence of a ‘moderate’ West Bank leadership that was willing to participate in elections. Consequently, he believed the United States needed to maintain contact with the PLO and take opportunities ‘to articulate the US position on the issues of importance to Palestinians.’¹¹⁰³

Moreover, Vance suggested the need for a robust domestic strategy, ‘so that we can expect a significant body of public support in this country for our position when the time comes to come to grips with these issues in the negotiations.’ He recommended the administration consult regularly with Congress and take opportunities to ‘reiterate publicly’ the White House’s known stances on issues particularly important to the Arab states, especially Israeli settlements and the Palestinians.¹¹⁰⁴

At a PRC on the autonomy talks held shortly afterward, senior policymakers agreed that the best issue to challenge Israel on was the settlements and that, for now, administration members should emphasise the importance of adhering to the principles of Camp David. ‘The most important thing would be to take a stand on settlements. … I would try through diplomatic channels to get this done,’ Vance said. Brzezinski and Strauss concurred. The national security advisor emphasised: ‘Israel will try to narrow the issues, and Egypt to expand them. Then later, we can try to define the issues in accordance with Camp David. But we should just start with the principles of Camp David.’¹¹⁰⁵

¹¹⁰² Memo from Vance to Carter, ‘West Bank/Gaza Negotiations,’ 2 May 1979, NLC-15-32-6-68.

¹¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁵ PRC meeting minutes, n.a., ‘West Bank, Gaza Negotiations,’ 17 May 1979, NLC-132-75-4-1-7.

However, what emerges most clearly from the meeting is tension between Strauss and the policymakers, as well as the new negotiator's insistence on building domestic support for the U.S. position in the talks. Tellingly, when Vance asked the group, 'Is there agreement that the goal of the negotiations is an outcome of the West Bank and Gaza that gives real, or full, autonomy?' Strauss immediately responded: 'I don't want us to take any more positions, especially if I didn't shape them. I want things left open. ... I don't know what the issues are yet.' Strauss continually stressed that emphasising Washington's commitment to the negotiations would be sufficient, and that the United States should avoid specific issues, such as settlements and Jerusalem.¹¹⁰⁶

True to Carter's purpose in selecting Strauss, the domestic aspect of the negotiations loomed large. 'There may be some perception growing that I was appointed simply to handle the domestic problems associated with the negotiations,' Strauss fretted. Brzezinski agreed, and admitted that the United States was 'losing on both sides,' because Arab states feared Washington was going to succumb to domestic priorities and U.S. Jewish groups were concerned that the White House was going to pressure Israel.¹¹⁰⁷ Little was done to mitigate these concerns, however.

Later, Strauss emphasised the importance of preparing the way in Congress and among the American Jewish community:

I need to meet with more Jewish leaders. ... Begin has to see that he can regain American public support that he is now losing. ... If he can handle his domestic situation in Israel, I could convince him that he could make a big gain in the United States. The American Jewish community is uncomfortable with this question of settlements. So is Congress. He would make gains here, even if not in relations with Egypt. ... [E]ven if Begin has to pay a price at home, he can make up for it here.¹¹⁰⁸

In believing that support for Begin inside the United States could somehow compensate for any loss of support inside Israel, Strauss displayed a deep ignorance of regional politics and overestimation of American influence in Israel's internal affairs.

Nevertheless, Strauss used his contacts with the Anti-Defamation League to commission a poll demonstrating Israel's falling support in the United States because he knew Begin would

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

respect a survey from that source. ‘... I was concerned number one as an American and number two as a Jew and number three in terms of the direct responsibilities I had there,’ he said. According to Strauss, the poll showed that Begin’s ‘intransigence and his attitude was hurting him and hurting Israel in the American community.’ However, Begin told Strauss the survey was meaningless and he would disregard its findings.¹¹⁰⁹

In June, Jewish community liaison Edward Sanders weighed in. He advised the administration against pushing Israel on settlements. ‘I believe that the interjection of a U.S. program to pressure Israel to change its policy would be counterproductive,’ he advised. ‘I do not believe that we should interfere with the healthy debate going on in Israel and in the American Jewish community. Our interference will only boomerang.’¹¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, Carter’s fortunes continued to fall. Pollster Patrick Caddell sent the president a series of alarming memos indicating that he believed Carter needed to do something drastic to turn his presidency around.¹¹¹¹ That process culminated in Carter’s ‘crisis of confidence’ speech¹¹¹² and subsequent cabinet reshuffle,¹¹¹³ which contributed to the image of an administration in disarray.¹¹¹⁴

Changing 242

In June 1979, the Palestine Committee of the United Nations – composed of 23 member states – began circulating draft resolutions on Palestinian rights, including a Palestinian state. By July, Kuwait’s U.N. delegation had taken the lead in attempting to revise 242 in such a way as to be acceptable to both Israel and the PLO. The aim of this endeavour was to find a way to allow PLO representation in the autonomy talks by devising an acceptable formulation on Palestinian rights that did not prejudice Israel’s right to exist.

¹¹⁰⁹ Strauss interview, SEP.

¹¹¹⁰ Memo from Sanders to Brzezinski, ‘Israeli Settlement Activity,’ 19 June 1979, Folder: ‘Israel, 5-11/79,’ NSA, Brzezinski, Country, Box 36, JCL.

¹¹¹¹ Memo with attachments from Caddell to Carter, ‘Of Crisis and Opportunity,’ 23 April 1979, Folder: ‘Memoranda: President Carter 1/10/79-4/23/79,’ Press, Powell Files, Box 40, JCL.

¹¹¹² ‘Speech on Energy and National Goals,’ 15 July 1979, *PPP: Carter, 1979, II*, 1235-1241.

¹¹¹³ Memo from Jordan to Carter, 16 July 1979, Folder: ‘Image analysis and Changes, 7/16/79,’ Jordan Files, Box 34B, JCL.

¹¹¹⁴ Kevin Mattson, *‘What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?’: Jimmy Carter, America’s “Malaise,” and the Speech That Should Have Changed the Country* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2010).

Egypt was eager to demonstrate it had not abandoned the Palestinian cause for the sake of a bilateral peace. In doing so, it hoped to alleviate its regional isolation. The Carter administration was basically sympathetic to Egypt's position and, in the initial months of the tripartite negotiations, pursued a strategy to broaden the talks to include Palestinian representation. As the administration had previously discovered, however, Israel and its supporters viewed negatively any move toward allowing Palestinians into the peace process.

In summer 1979, the Carter administration again made attempts to prepare American public opinion for bringing Palestinians to the negotiating table. Rhetorically, members of the administration, including Strauss, Vance and Carter himself, frequently suggested that for genuine peace in the region, Palestinians would need to be included in the process. Just how that would be achieved, however, was left vague.

Israeli raids and strikes in southern Lebanon, intended to target Palestinian guerrillas, often occurred in areas policed by U.N. peacekeepers. Washington believed Israeli military activity to be disproportionate, and disapproved of Israel's apparent disregard for the U.N. peacekeeping mandate in Lebanon. American policymakers agreed Washington should take the lead on consultations for a Security Council resolution on Palestinian rights 'in order to seek an outcome that will preserve the primacy of the Autonomy Talks, demonstrate our good intentions to the Palestinians (and others, like the Saudis), while minimizing the political risks with the Israelis.'¹¹¹⁵

During a wide-ranging interview shortly afterward, Carter compared the Palestinian issue to the 'civil rights movement here in the United States.'¹¹¹⁶ The remark provoked an angry response from the Jewish community and other Israel supporters inside the United States, prompting Vice President Walter Mondale to take the lead in denying any change in policy toward the PLO.¹¹¹⁷

'... [W]hy did [Carter] choose an analogy that so clearly implied that Israel is in the right wrong?' AIPAC complained. Carter painted the 'emotional Palestinian issue in stark right-versus-wrong terms,' it added, and 'increased the growing anxiety of Israeli negotiators who are trying

¹¹¹⁵ Minutes from Brzezinski to Carter, 'Senior Level Meeting on Middle East Issues,' 25 July 1979, NLC-33-3-4-1-7.

¹¹¹⁶ Leonard Silk, 'Carter Expects Rise in Joblessness; Believes GOP Will Pick Reagan,' *NYT*, 1 August 1979.

¹¹¹⁷ Jim Hoagland analysis, 'U.S.-Israeli Feuding Revives Dilemma,' *WP*, 4 August 1979.

against severe odds to view the Carter administration as an evenhanded mediator in the Palestinian autonomy talks.¹¹¹⁸ Arnold Foster, Anti-Defamation League counsel, said: ‘Carter’s suggestion that the PLO is akin to civil rights is the worst insult he could level at Americans trying to achieve true equality. … Americans are not murderers or false revolutionaries.’¹¹¹⁹

Carter’s linkage of the plight of the Palestinians to the civil rights movement was no accident. Carter had long seen the Palestinians issue primarily in human rights terms,¹¹²⁰ which was something that grew out of his Southern roots.¹¹²¹

Nevertheless, the responses to his comments underscored the persistent problems plaguing American administrations in trying to involve Palestinians in negotiations. The unfortunate conflation of the Palestinians with the PLO, with little regard for the distinction between the Palestinians as a people and the PLO as a political entity, made discourse on the issue virtually impossible.

On 3 August, Carter noted that he discussed with his advisors how best to proceed on the U.N. resolution on the Palestinians and how the administration ‘could move toward peace without committing political suicide.’ Again, Carter felt he needed Strauss to take the lead in dealing with ‘the Israelis, American Jews, and Arabs.’ Strauss needed to be visible in order to ease pressure on the administration. ‘There’s no advantage for me or Vance to be in the forefront of this difficult issue. We can set the policy; Strauss can carry it out with more political impunity,’ the president believed.¹¹²²

Faced with criticism over his Palestinian comments, Carter stated: ‘I’m against the creation of a separate Palestinian state. I don’t think it would be good for the Palestinians.’ He added that he believed the Palestinians ‘should have a right to a voice in the determination of their own future.’

¹¹¹⁸ ‘A Flawed Analogy,’ *NER*, XXIII: 32, 8 August 1979.

¹¹¹⁹ The AP, PM cycle, 1 August 1979, Nexis.

¹¹²⁰ Nemchenok, ‘United States Policy and the Palestinian Question, 1977-1979.’

¹¹²¹ Saunders interview, ADST.

¹¹²² 3 August 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 349.

However, he was nebulous on how that would come about except to reiterate that Begin and Sadat had agreed to those principles at Camp David.¹¹²³

Washington had meanwhile made clear its opposition to any U.N. resolution on Palestinian rights that might include a reference to a Palestinian state. It believed that a debate, confrontation and vote on the issue would be unhelpful at that stage in the autonomy talks. Ambassador Young thus sought to delay the Security Council's consideration of the issue until new wording could be developed.

As part of this effort, Young on 26 July met with Zehdi Terzi, the PLO's envoy to the United Nations, at the residence of the Kuwaiti ambassador to explain the American position. Although the meeting was brief and did not delve into substantive issues, it ran contrary to Washington's Sinai II pledge to Israel not to negotiate with the PLO.¹¹²⁴ The Israelis learned of the meeting and leaked it to the media. Young at first denied that he had met with Terzi, before conceding they had indeed encountered one another, but that it had been inadvertent. Finally, Young admitted he knew Terzi would be present at the meeting.¹¹²⁵

Carter and Vance were furious. 'This is an almost impossible problem to resolve without Andy leaving,' Carter believed.¹¹²⁶ Carter insisted he would have fought to retain Young in his position if he had not initially misled Vance about the meeting.¹¹²⁷ In his letter of resignation to Carter, Young wrote: 'I want you to fulfill the tremendous promise of your administration, and that depends to a great extent on a settlement ... in the Middle East. It is therefore extremely embarrassing that my actions ... may have hampered the peace process.'¹¹²⁸ Publicly, Young said it had been his decision to quit, but that he did not 'feel a bit sorry for anything that I have done' and,

¹¹²³ 'Interview with the President,' 10 August 1979, *PPP: Carter, 1979, II*, 1425-1432.

¹¹²⁴ The PLO envoy said the meeting did not go beyond social conversation. 'Tarazi: Young Refused to Discuss Palestinian Cause,' WAFA, 15 August 1979, IPS.

¹¹²⁵ 'Chronology of Events,' 14 August 1979, Folder: 'Resignation Statements, 1979,' Box 116, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library, Atlanta (hereafter AYP).

¹¹²⁶ 14 August 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 351.

¹¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 352.

¹¹²⁸ Letter from Young to Carter, 14 August 1979, Folder: 'Resignation Statements, 1979,' Box 116, AYP.

given the same situation, he would do it ‘again almost exactly the same way.’¹¹²⁹ Carter accepted Young’s resignation ‘with deep regret.’¹¹³⁰

Young insisted the problem was that he admitted to the meeting, whereas the State Department had officially denied other U.S. contacts with the PLO. ‘There were a number of other meetings around … and we were denying them. And I was the only one who wouldn’t deny meeting with the PLO … and that pissed off the State Department,’ he said.¹¹³¹

The Young affair exacerbated tensions between Israel and the United States. Of all the issues of contention between the two countries, the Palestinian issue was perhaps the most sensitive for Israel. Young’s meeting with Terzi, moreover, appeared to many observers to be the latest in a string of U.S. gestures toward Palestinian representation in the West Bank talks.¹¹³²

Regardless, as with so many other aspects of American Arab-Israeli policy, the incident quickly converted from a diplomatic issue into a domestic one. General public sentiment on Young’s resignation appeared to be mixed. According to one poll, a plurality of respondents (49 percent) believed Young had been wrong to meet with Terzi.¹¹³³ However, another survey found that a majority – 55 percent – did not feel that Young should have lost his job over the incident.¹¹³⁴ Still, as a general political issue, Young’s resignation gained little traction. As an ethnic political issue, however, it had more salience.

Young was a prominent member of the African American community. He had been highly visible in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and was a former U.S. congressman. By the late 1970s, many African Americans held politically influential positions, but none were as close to the president as Young, who like Carter hailed from Georgia.

¹¹²⁹ Transcript, State Department briefing, 15 August 1979, *ibid*.

¹¹³⁰ Letter from Carter to Young, 15 August 1979, Folder: ‘White House, Jimmy Carter, 1978-1979,’ Box 207, AYP.

¹¹³¹ Andrew Young interview, 17 December 1991, Folder 5, Box 66, SEP. Indeed, the U.S. ambassador to Lebanon later said Americans met with the PLO over security interests in the country. See Gunther Dean interview, CLOHP, 223, 238-40. Regarding the Sinai II pledge to Israel about not dealing with the PLO, Kissinger conceded that he had always considered Lebanon ‘a special case’ and therefore considered talking to the group about American interests there. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 1042.

¹¹³² Steve Strasser, et al, ‘A Crisis with Israel,’ *Newsweek*, 13 August 1979; Joseph Treaster, ‘Some Still See Young’s Meeting As Sign of a U.S. Shift on P.L.O.,’ *NYT*, 17 August 1979.

¹¹³³ ABC News/Harris Survey, 21-22 August 1979, Roper Center.

¹¹³⁴ Gallup/*Newsweek* Poll, 29-30 August 1979, *ibid*.

Many prominent African Americans blamed the Jewish community for forcing Young to quit.¹¹³⁵ No evidence exists to support that claim. Alexander Schindler insisted the Presidents' Conference made the "unanimous decision" not to call for Young's ouster. It indicated it held the State Department, not Young, responsible.¹¹³⁶ AIPAC also stopped short of demanding that Young quit. Yet it believed that his meeting with Terzi was 'but one sign of [a] policy shift' toward American engagement with the PLO.¹¹³⁷

A misleading *New York Post* front page that read, 'Jews Say: Fire Young,' fed the furore.¹¹³⁸ Moreover, the site of the controversy – New York – exacerbated the situation because of the city's function as the cultural centre for both the Jewish and African American communities. Carter, who was on a weeklong trip down the Mississippi as the controversy raged, took weeks to refute the accusation that pressure from the Jewish community had forced Young out, which allowed it to fester.¹¹³⁹

The issue was especially sensitive to the president because of the importance of African Americans, whose support enabled Carter to carry the Southern states in 1976, and the Jewish community for the Democratic Party. According to one report, 'extensive interviews with blacks, both rank-and-file and leaders' across the United States 'found hostility (toward Jewish Americans) that was often intense.' Mayor Richard Hatcher of Gary, Ind., said that the reactions of Israel and American Jewish groups indicated to the African-American community that they 'didn't realize how large a stake Andy had with us and how important he was and is to us. It ... calls for a reassessment of black relations with the White House, the Jewish community and traditional attitudes toward Israel and the Arab world.'¹¹⁴⁰

Surveys indeed revealed divisions. According to one poll, 39 percent of respondents believed Young's resignation would 'hurt relations between blacks and Jews in the U.S.' a 'great

¹¹³⁵ Thomas Johnson, 'Black Leaders Air Grievances on Jews,' *NYT*, 23 August 1979.

¹¹³⁶ Schindler interview, SEP.

¹¹³⁷ 'The Resignation,' *NER*, XXIII: 34, Aug. 22, 1979.

¹¹³⁸ Schindler interview, SEP.

¹¹³⁹ Memo from Sanders to Jordan, 27 August 1979, Folder 13, Box 5, Sanders Papers; Letter from Maas (American Jewish Committee) to Carter, 20 September 1979, *ibid*.

¹¹⁴⁰ Paul Delaney, 'Leaders Try To Halt A Black-Jewish Rift,' *NYT*, 19 August 1979.

deal' or 'to some extent,' while a plurality – 42 percent – felt that 'troubles in the Middle East' had caused a great deal or some trouble 'between blacks and Jews in the U.S.'¹¹⁴¹ Moreover, despite attempts by Carter, Young and others to quell tensions, nearly a quarter (24 percent) of respondents to a separate survey believed the ambassador was forced to resign because 'of pressure from Jews.'¹¹⁴²

Meanwhile, a group of African American leaders expressed support for Palestinian 'self-determination' after meeting with the PLO's Terzi.¹¹⁴³ Black leaders called for a greater voice in U.S. foreign policy and some sought U.S. recognition of the PLO.¹¹⁴⁴ Sensing an opportunity to gain support, an editorial in the newsletter of the NAAA argued that 'black involvement with the Middle East is now moving into broad-based, institutionalized frameworks that will provide vehicles for sustained effort.'¹¹⁴⁵ Separately, the PLO warned: 'The Palestine Question is not only a fact in the Middle East, but it is becoming ... a fact within American society. Whether the present U.S. Administration wants it or not, Palestine is coming.'¹¹⁴⁶

After his resignation, Young received a flood of angry letters accusing him of betraying Israel. Many writers, some of whom forthrightly expressed racist views, claimed that Young's decision to talk to the PLO was the equivalent of African American civil rights leaders in the 1950s and 1960s being willing to sit down to talk to the Ku Klux Klan.¹¹⁴⁷

The problems over the Young resignation were as damaging to Carter for their timing as for the constituencies involved in the dispute. The push by Arab states for a U.N. resolution on Palestinian rights came at a delicate time, when Washington was trying to gain support softly for greater Palestinian representation in the autonomy process. Moreover, Young's unauthorised

¹¹⁴¹ By contrast, 49 percent believed Young's resignation would harm black-Jewish relations 'not very much' or 'not at all.' Gallup/Newsweek Poll, 29-30 August 1979, Roper Center.

¹¹⁴² LAT Poll, 9-14 September 1979, *ibid.*

¹¹⁴³ Lee Lescaze and Thomas Morgan, 'Black Leaders Back Palestinian Rights,' *WP*, 21 August 1979.

¹¹⁴⁴ Morgan and Lescaze, 'Foreign Policy Voice Demanded By Top Blacks,' *WP*, 23 August 1979.

¹¹⁴⁵ 'Blacks and the Middle East (II),' *Political Focus*, 15 November 1979, Folder: 'Arab-[American] Newsletters 10/79-7/80,' Aiello Files, Box 38, JCL.

¹¹⁴⁶ 'U.S. Administration in Disarray' (editorial), *Palestine PLO Information Bulletin*, vol. 5, no. 15 (16-31 August 1979), 3, IPS.

¹¹⁴⁷ See Folder: 'Palestine Liberation Organization, 1979,' Box 201, AYP.

meeting – and deception about it – contributed to an image of a president lacking control of his administration.

The prospect for a Palestinian resolution triggered a debate within the Carter administration. Although the president and his top aides supported amending 242 into a resolution that would allow the PLO to accept Israel’s right to exist, several others did not. Sanders, the Jewish community liaison, believed any attempt to bring the PLO into the process through a reworking of 242 would lead to “almost certain catastrophe.” He urged the White House to ‘cease any activity at the UN’ on a Palestinian rights amendment and ‘indicate that we will veto any resolution in that forum.’ Instead, it should pour its efforts into making the autonomy talks successful.¹¹⁴⁸ His view was supported by Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders, who believed the autonomy negotiations represented the ‘only’ forum for progress to be made on the Palestinian issue.¹¹⁴⁹

Nevertheless, Strauss was tasked with presenting the administration’s proposals for reworking 242 to both Egypt and Israel. However, he did not disguise his lack of support for White House efforts and presented the plan unenthusiastically. Unsurprisingly, Begin and Sadat both rejected it.¹¹⁵⁰

The high-profile failure of Strauss’ mission – and his penchant for voicing his disagreements with policy to reporters – increased Carter’s problems even as he was reeling from the fallout from Young’s resignation. Upon Strauss’ return, *The New York Times* reported that he met with Brzezinski and Vance to clarify policy ‘against a background of apparent confusion and indecision’ in the administration’s Middle East approach.¹¹⁵¹ The same newspaper asked in an editorial: ‘Is there an American Middle East policy, and if so, who is shaping it?’ and added that the ‘present

¹¹⁴⁸ Memo from Sanders to Carter, ‘Middle East Peace Negotiations,’ 15 August 1979, Folder: ‘Middle East [CF, O/A 646],’ Jordan Files, Box 49, JCL.

¹¹⁴⁹ Memo from Saunders to Vance and Strauss, ‘The UNSC Resolution on Palestinian Rights,’ n.d. [circa early August 1979], NLC-126-17-42-1-6-3.

¹¹⁵⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 238-40.

¹¹⁵¹ Bernard Gwertzman, ‘Strauss, Brzezinski And Vance Concur On Mideast Course,’ *NYT*, 22 August 1979.

disarray is sad and pointless.¹¹⁵² *The Wall Street Journal* labelled U.S. policy in ‘flamboyant disarray’.¹¹⁵³

Against this backdrop, Brzezinski again argued that the president needed to display toughness and resolve. ‘I believe that both for international reasons as well as domestic political reasons you ought to deliberately toughen both the tone and the substance of our foreign policy,’ he advised¹¹⁵⁴ While Brzezinski was particularly concerned about U.S. policy toward the Soviet Union, the ‘disarray’ of Arab-Israeli policy also needed a corrective.

Regardless, efforts for a new U.N. resolution on Palestinian rights were quietly dropped in late August. Still, the episode left a residue of domestic political angst and largely ended Carter’s efforts to introduce a greater role for the Palestinians in the negotiations. His domestic political weakness contributed to Washington’s inability to move the talks forward. ‘We are concerned about the Mideast talks becoming stagnant, which may be the best state for them until Sadat gets his land (Sinai) back and we solidify our political support among American Jews,’ he noted in his diary.¹¹⁵⁵

Events in the summer and autumn 1979 conspired against robust U.S. action in the autonomy talks. Moreover, the absence of a strong, unified American policy and lack of political will undermined efforts. ‘We made modest progress but not toward anything really substantive,’ Strauss conceded.¹¹⁵⁶ Those efforts became more difficult later in the autumn, when Strauss left his post to lead Carter’s campaign. In Strauss’ place, Carter tapped Sol Linowitz.

Taken hostage

However, events outside American control soon intervened. On 4 November, Iranian students took dozens of Americans hostage in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. The crisis, which vividly suggested to Americans how weak their country had become, consumed the remainder of

¹¹⁵² Editorial, ‘Downstream in the Middle East,’ *NYT*, 23 August 1979.

¹¹⁵³ Editorial, ‘Middle East Disarray,’ *WSJ*, 22 August 1979.

¹¹⁵⁴ NSC Weekly Report #109 from Brzezinski to Carter, 13 September 1979, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 102-120,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 42, JCL.

¹¹⁵⁵ 12 October 1979, Carter, *Diary*, 361.

¹¹⁵⁶ Strauss interview, SEP.

Carter's presidency and was only resolved in its final moments. Then, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December seemed to spell an end to détente and the Carter administration's efforts to get the Senate to ratify SALT II.

These events threw into doubt the administration's policy assumption that its course in Arab-Israeli diplomacy offered the best route to stability in the Gulf region. Indeed, by the end of 1979, a U.S. intelligence assessment concluded, 'US influence in the area has declined, and manifestations of anti-American feeling have increased, in part because the United States is seen as irresolute, but basically as the result of a historical trend that is not likely to be reversed.'¹¹⁵⁷

Consequently, by the time Linowitz joined the autonomy talks, the media's focus had turned to the Iran hostage crisis. Gone were the heady early months of the Carter administration, when the media played a central role in Arab-Israeli negotiations. Instead, neither the president nor the public displayed much interest in the autonomy talks; both were fixated on hostages in Tehran.

Before Linowitz's trip, he was advised to frame his work through an Iran prism. 'It seems ... that shock waves from Iran are going to spread pretty far in the Middle East, and these Washington correspondents might welcome the opportunity to get their own insights via a trip with you,' a State Department official suggested.¹¹⁵⁸ Linowitz was also advised to make his first trip largely about rebuilding confidence in Carter's commitment to the talks. 'Your public image on this visit is almost as important as your private image,' Linowitz's special assistant suggested.¹¹⁵⁹

Moreover, Linowitz faced a challenge not just in attracting the attention of the media, but also the president. 'Linowitz was working very hard trying to make progress but he did not have the energetic support that Carter had given prior peace accord efforts,' Ambassador Lewis

¹¹⁵⁷ 'Interagency Intelligence Memorandum,' n.a., 'New Realities in the Middle East,' December 1979, NLC-2-17-6-2-3.

¹¹⁵⁸ Memo from Sherman to Linowitz, 'Press Coverage of Middle East Trip,' 26 November 1979, Folder 7, Box 128, Sol Linowitz Papers, LOC (hereafter SLP).

¹¹⁵⁹ Memo from Walker to Linowitz, 'Scheduling Your Initial Visit to the Middle East,' 26 November 1979, Folder 7, Box 128, SLP.

commented.¹¹⁶⁰ Meanwhile, Dayan, often considered a moderating influence in Begin's cabinet, resigned in October 1979, in part over differences with the premier over autonomy.¹¹⁶¹

A mistaken vote

Although the United States scaled back its effort to bring Palestinians into the negotiations, it remained opposed to Begin's settlements policy, especially in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. By early 1980, the work of the U.N. Settlements Commission, which was mandated by UNSC 446 'to examine the situation relating to settlements in the Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem,' had generated momentum toward a fresh resolution condemning Israeli settlements.¹¹⁶² Carter believed Begin undertook settlement construction to upset the autonomy negotiations and 'to keep the Palestinians from becoming moderate and cooperative.'¹¹⁶³

Meanwhile, a U.N. effort was afoot to devise a resolution that might accelerate the negotiating process, possibly including reworking 242. AIPAC was furious. 'Changing 242 would be disastrous,' it argued. 'They should try to build on what has already proved successful, rather than try new formulas that could destroy the foundation of all that has been achieved.'¹¹⁶⁴

From Tel Aviv, Lewis cabled that Begin had become 'increasingly suspicious' over the U.S. stance on a settlements resolution because Vance had seemed evasive about the American position. According to Lewis, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Donald McHenry, who had succeeded Young, told Begin and Israeli Ambassador to the United States Ephraim Evron that Washington did not support the Settlements Commission, but that even U.S. opposition did not preclude a continuation of its mandate. Lewis told Begin 'that we would do what we could to achieve what Israel has consistently asked us to do: i.e., get rid of the Settlements Commission ...' Lewis added

¹¹⁶⁰ Lewis interview, ADST.

¹¹⁶¹ Dayan, *Breakthrough*, 303.

¹¹⁶² UNSC S/RES/446, 22 March 1979, QOP. Retrieved 22 September 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/db942872b9eae454852560f6005a76fb/ba123cded3ea84a5852560e50077c2dc?OpenDocument>.

¹¹⁶³ 12 February 1980, Carter, *Diary*, 400.

¹¹⁶⁴ 'Upsetting the Formula,' *NER*, XXIV: 9, 27 February 1980.

that he ‘carefully stayed away from any discussion of whatever else the resolution might contain and how we might or might not vote on it.’¹¹⁶⁵

The story of the March 1980 U.S. vote on a U.N. Security Council Resolution condemning Israeli settlement activity in East Jerusalem provides an example of poor communication, the perils of divisions at the top of the policymaking hierarchy and politically feckless decision-making. In this incident, the public appearance of disorganisation matched the record of internal decision-making. Most troubling for the administration’s public image in an area that was once its strength, in this period the word ‘disarray’ again came to characterise Carter’s policy.

In November 1979, Kennedy launched his challenge to Carter for the Democratic nomination. This rare primary challenge to a sitting president meant that Carter spent much of 1980 fending off criticism from the left while also protecting himself against attacks from eventual Republican nominee Ronald Reagan on the right.¹¹⁶⁶ It also made Carter particularly vulnerable in Northeastern states such as New York, where the Kennedy clan had strong support.¹¹⁶⁷ New York’s primary voters headed to the polls on 25 March 1980.

Against this backdrop, the UNSC prepared to vote on Resolution 465, which condemned Israel’s settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the Palestinian territories.¹¹⁶⁸ The White House believed it had made its instructions clear to its delegation: only vote favourably on 465 if it omitted all references to Jerusalem. Carter thought the resolution as it stood violated his understanding with Begin, forged at Camp David, that the United States would not take a public stand on Jerusalem nor demand the dismantlement of existing settlements during the autonomy negotiations. However, Vance apparently understood Carter’s instructions to mean that he wished only for the deletion of

¹¹⁶⁵ Cable from Lewis to Vance, 21 February 1980, DDRS CK3100146548.

¹¹⁶⁶ Timothy Stanley, *Kennedy Vs. Carter: The 1980 Battle for the Democratic Party’s Soul* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010).

¹¹⁶⁷ Sewell Chan, ‘Jimmy Carter and the New York Democrats,’ 31 January 2008, City Room blog, *NYT*. Retrieved 22 September 2013, <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/31/jimmy-carter-and-the-new-york-democrats/>.

¹¹⁶⁸ UNSC S/RES/465, 1 March 1980, QOP. Retrieved 22 September 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/5AA254A1C8F8B1CB852560E50075D7D5>.

Paragraph Seven, which dealt with religious freedom in Jerusalem. That, Vance believed, would settle the president's concerns.¹¹⁶⁹

According to Hamilton Jordan, the language of the resolution had been raised at the White House's Friday foreign-affairs breakfast. Jordan believed that Carter gave Vance 'oral' parameters on what was acceptable in the resolution, but that Vance interpreted them too liberally.¹¹⁷⁰ Nevertheless, McHenry believed 465's original wording to be 'virtually identical with American policy.'¹¹⁷¹ After instructions from 'others in the State Department' McHenry on 29 February negotiated the necessary changes, including the removal of Paragraph Seven, and informed Israel's U.N. ambassador and other delegations that the United States would vote favourably on the resolution – against Israel.

Yet that was not the end of it. Shortly before casting the vote, McHenry received a call from the State Department requesting that he negotiate further changes. Frustrated with the confusion, McHenry asked for an immediate adjournment until the following morning. 'I blew my stack,' he recalled. 'Now, with the word out of how we were going to vote, Council in session, vote expected momentarily, they were asking for a further change, and I thought it was unreasonable.'¹¹⁷²

In the subsequent discussions, McHenry recommended a favourable vote on the resolution. In the event of any blowback, he felt Washington could explain away any 'minor changes' that the United States had failed to obtain.¹¹⁷³ Vance spoke twice to Carter on the morning of 1 March. The president, informed that the offending Paragraph Seven had been deleted, gave the go-ahead for McHenry to vote in favour of the resolution.¹¹⁷⁴ Carter had not been told, however, that the resolution still contained no less than seven references to Jerusalem. 'I don't think that McHenry had clear instructions that involved the special sensitivity of the word Jerusalem,' he admitted.¹¹⁷⁵

¹¹⁶⁹ Memo from Vance to Carter, 29 February 1980, NLC-128-15-2-21-8.

¹¹⁷⁰ Jordan interview (I), 23 December 1992, Folder 6, Box 64, SEP.

¹¹⁷¹ Donald McHenry interview (II), 23 March 1993, ADST. Retrieved 22 September 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2004mch01\).](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2004mch01).)

¹¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷⁴ Memo with attachments from Granum to Jordan, 7 March 1980, Folder: 'Middle East [CF, O/A 646],' Jordan Files, Box 49, JCL; John Goshko and Oberdorfer, 'Vance Takes Blame for U.N. Switch,' *WP*, 5 March 1980.

¹¹⁷⁵ Jimmy Carter interview (II), 25 October 1991, Folder 8, Box 63, SEP.

Although the vote was technically consistent with American policy stretching back to Lyndon Johnson, reporters nevertheless heralded it as a ‘significant stiffening’ of the U.S. stance toward Israel¹¹⁷⁶ and a ‘sign that the United States had grown more sensitive to the interests of Arabs in the area.’¹¹⁷⁷ By the end of 3 March, McHenry recalled, ‘we were dealing then with a firestorm. … People in the administration who saw an election coming up in 1980 were concerned about what the Jewish community was going to do in terms of their votes and their money.’¹¹⁷⁸

According to Carter, he was only shown the final resolution, which included the Jerusalem references, on 3 March. ‘I couldn’t believe it,’ he wrote. Later that day, Carter met World Jewish Congress leaders, with whom he reiterated his opposition to West Bank settlements, although he stressed the issue should be handled through negotiations and that Washington firmly supported Israel’s security.¹¹⁷⁹

Carter attempted to disavow the vote, which was not technically possible, and accepted responsibility for the fiasco. He emphasised that Washington did not believe outposts should be dismantled. ‘We believe that the future disposition of existing settlements must be determined during the current Autonomy Negotiations,’ Carter said. The vote was made under the belief that all references to Jerusalem had been deleted. ‘The failure to communicate this clearly resulted in a vote in favor of the resolution rather than abstention,’ he added.¹¹⁸⁰ Subsequently, Carter reiterated that the vote was a ‘genuine mistake, a breakdown in communications … we will be much more careful … in the future’¹¹⁸¹ and admitted that ‘it would obviously have been better, in retrospect, for me to study very carefully the text of the U.N. resolution.’¹¹⁸²

That did not assuage the criticism. *The New York Times* labelled Carter’s vote repudiation a ‘pathetic confession.’¹¹⁸³ Later, it blamed ‘sabotage’ by State Department aides more sympathetic

¹¹⁷⁶ Bernard Nossiter, ‘U.S. Votes at U.N. to Rebuke Israelis on Settlement Issue,’ *NYT*, 2 March 1980.

¹¹⁷⁷ ‘Israel/United Nations,’ ‘CBS Evening News,’ 1 March 1980, VTNA 269262.

¹¹⁷⁸ McHenry interview (II), ADST.

¹¹⁷⁹ 3 March 1980, Carter, *Diary*, 406-07.

¹¹⁸⁰ ‘Statement on Israeli Settlements and the Status of Jerusalem,’ 4 March 1980, *PPP: Carter, 1980, I*, 427.

¹¹⁸¹ ‘White House Briefing on Administration Policies,’ 11 March 1980, *ibid.*, 458-61.

¹¹⁸² ‘Question-&-Answer,’ 10 April 1980, *ibid.*, 631-43.

¹¹⁸³ Editorial, ‘And Now, the Communication Gap,’ *NYT*, 5 March 1980.

than Carter to the Arab cause and argued for their removal.¹¹⁸⁴ *The Washington Post* called the disavowal ‘pathetic’ and blamed State’s ‘Arabists.’¹¹⁸⁵ *The Wall Street Journal* believed it showed ‘rampant incompetence.’¹¹⁸⁶

Carter later acknowledged the problem. ‘I think it was a rapidly changing thing as far as the exact wording of the text that created the confusion,’ he recalled. Moreover, the back-and-forth on the resolution gave ‘the impression that we were not only wrong but confused.’¹¹⁸⁷

Many people looked to cast blame. Jordan believed it was an inadvertent – but revealing – error on the part of Vance, who favoured a hard line toward Israel’s settlement activity. ‘I felt like it was an honest mistake, but I think the mistake reflected … (Vance’s) own policy biases, that we had to be tough on that issue, on that point,’ he said.¹¹⁸⁸ Conversely, a group of 50 Jewish leaders made it abundantly clear to the NSC that they felt that McHenry was ‘the villain.’¹¹⁸⁹

Kennedy quickly made the vote, the disavowal of which came on the eve of his victory in the primary in his home state of Massachusetts, a campaign issue.¹¹⁹⁰ The senator had been struggling before the New York primary, which he ultimately won (59 percent to 41 percent), along with the vote in Connecticut (47 to 41 percent).¹¹⁹¹ According to a *New York Times/CBS News* poll, the U.N. vote played an important issue in New York’s primary, leading Jewish voters to support Kennedy nearly 4 to 1 against Carter.¹¹⁹² Pollster Patrick Caddell concurred. ‘It’s the UN vote in the Jewish community. We’re getting wiped out. It’s almost as if the voters know that Carter’s got the nomination sewed up but want to send him a message. It’s a protest vote,’ he said.¹¹⁹³ The victories breathed new life into Kennedy’s campaign and enabled him to push his primary challenge to the Democratic Convention on 12 August.

¹¹⁸⁴ Editorial, ‘Wrong Number on Israel,’ *NYT*, 9 March 1980.

¹¹⁸⁵ Editorial, ‘Up the Hill, Down the Hill,’ *WP*, 6 March 1980.

¹¹⁸⁶ Editorial, ‘Bungle Fever,’ *WSJ*, 7 March 1980. Also: Editorial, ‘For America, Diplomatic Discomfort,’ *LAT*, 4 March 1980; Editorial, ‘A Foolish Confession,’ *CT*, 5 March 1980.

¹¹⁸⁷ Carter interview (II), SEP.

¹¹⁸⁸ Hamilton Jordan interview (I), 11 May 1992, Folder 6, Box 64, SEP. That was also the British interpretation. UKNA: PRO PREM 19/295, ‘The Situation in the Middle East.’ Telegram from U.K. Embassy Washington (Henderson) to FCO, ‘US Statement on the vote on the occupied settlements,’ 4 March 1980.

¹¹⁸⁹ Evening Report from Middle East/North Africa Desk to Brzezinski, 11 March 1980, NLC-25-126-6-7-2.

¹¹⁹⁰ Adam Clymer, ‘Kennedy Campaign Seeks Gains From Confrontation Over U.N. Vote,’ *NYT*, 6 March 1980.

¹¹⁹¹ Chan, ‘Jimmy Carter and the New York Democrats.’

¹¹⁹² Hedrick Smith, ‘Inflation, Israel and Aid to City the Main Issues,’ *NYT*, 26 March 1980.

¹¹⁹³ Jordan, *Crisis*, 234.

Jordan felt the furore was ‘tremendously harmful politically’ and if not for that, ‘we might have gotten Kennedy out of the race then.’¹¹⁹⁴ British Ambassador Nicholas Henderson felt his presence in the campaign would affect U.S. policy. ‘Indeed so long as Kennedy remains in contention for the Democratic nomination, his strong pitch for the pro-Israeli vote can be expected greatly to complicate the administration’s Middle East task,’ he wrote to London.¹¹⁹⁵

Alexander Schindler called it ‘another watershed moment’ in ‘its impact on the voting of American Jews.’ He believed that Reagan’s November advantage with Jewish voters was ‘undoubtedly due to that Jerusalem resolution.’¹¹⁹⁶ McHenry concurred. ‘... [T]here is no question but that the position that we took probably reinforced among the Jewish community and among the Israelis an underlying concern about President Carter and the Middle East,’ he said.¹¹⁹⁷ The affair also simply made Carter look inept. ‘The question is: Is anyone really in charge’ at the White House? ABC’s Donaldson asked in closing one report.¹¹⁹⁸

The politics of the affair put Washington in an impossible diplomatic position. It simultaneously harmed American credibility with the Jewish community, Arab states and Israel, McHenry believed. ‘Moreover, it was going to raise questions about our policy: Did we stand by our policy, or didn’t we stand by our policy?’ he asked.¹¹⁹⁹ AIPAC claimed that, regardless of the revelation that it was a mistake, the vote was ‘a bow to Arab extremism.’¹²⁰⁰

It was indeed embarrassing. State Department spokesman Hodding Carter, who recalled a ‘world of goddamn screaming’ over the mistake, said his ‘job was to go down and apologize abjectly and to ... crawl on my belly, and let people jump up and down on me, which is what happened.’¹²⁰¹ Britain’s U.S. ambassador called the incident ‘a shambles.’¹²⁰²

¹¹⁹⁴ Jordan interview (I), SEP; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 493-94, drew a similar conclusion.

¹¹⁹⁵ UKNA: PRO PREM 19/295, ‘The Situation in the Middle East.’ Telegram from U.K. Embassy Washington (Henderson) to FCO, ‘US Statement on the vote on the occupied settlements,’ 4 March 1980.

¹¹⁹⁶ Schindler interview, SEP.

¹¹⁹⁷ McHenry interview (II) ADST; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 442; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 493-94.

¹¹⁹⁸ ‘Campaign ‘80/Massachusetts Primary/US-Israel Relations,’ ABC ‘World News Tonight,’ 4 March 1980, VTNA 64828.

¹¹⁹⁹ McHenry interview (II), ADST.

¹²⁰⁰ ‘A Misguided Vote,’ *NER*, XXIV: 10, 5 March 1980.

¹²⁰¹ Hodding Carter interview, 10 June 1992, Folder 7, Box 63, SEP.

The situation was made worse afterward. Called before the SFRC, Vance admitted under questioning that, yes, the resolution was consistent with U.S. policy. ‘I can envisage a report or a resolution with some items in it dealing with the question of settlements in which we would vote in favor … because our position is clear on settlements,’ he stated. Asked if the administration regarded East Jerusalem as occupied territory, Vance replied affirmatively. Yet he denied that the disavowal could be attributed to domestic pressure.¹²⁰³

In her memoir, first lady Rosalynn Carter expressed anger over Vance’s remarks. ‘Heaven knows, Cy Vance doesn’t have a political bone in his body. His concern for his country is his total commitment, but I went straight to the telephone to call Jimmy. “Doesn’t Cy know we’re in a campaign?”’,¹²⁰⁴

The Jerusalem vote damaged Carter politically and undermined confidence in American policy at a moment in which Washington was mulling new action to prod the autonomy talks forward. From New York, Britain’s U.N. mission reported to London:

Having witnessed the increasing disarray in the US performance here on the Middle East since the New Year, I firmly believe that it is unrealistic to think in terms of our being able, at any time before the presidential elections, to formulate any resolution designed to “fill the gap in 242”, which would be both minimally acceptable to the Arabs and would not attract a US veto.¹²⁰⁵

Linowitz believed ‘the (U.N.) episode hovered over our negotiations.’¹²⁰⁶ Egypt and Israel exchanged ambassadors in February 1980, without significant problems, demonstrating that the bilateral process remained on track. However, Carter had the previous month told Vance ‘something positive *must* be attempted after ambassadors are exchanged.’¹²⁰⁷ That no significant U.S. initiative took shape from March 1980 onward suggests that the U.N. vote incident helped to undermine that effort. As evidenced by Jordan’s comments, the incident also suggests that Vance

¹²⁰² UKNA: PRO PREM 19/295, ‘The Situation in the Middle East.’ Telegram from U.K. Embassy Washington (Henderson) to FCO, ‘US Statement on the vote on the occupied settlements,’ 4 March 1980.

¹²⁰³ Vance, SFCR, ‘U.S. Middle East Policy,’ 20 March 1980, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., 17, 32.

¹²⁰⁴ Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 346.

¹²⁰⁵ UKNA: PRO PREM 19/295, ‘The Situation in the Middle East.’ Telegram from Parsons (U.K. Mission New York) to FCO, ‘European Initiative on the Middle East,’ 8 May 1980.

¹²⁰⁶ Linowitz, *Making of a Public Man*, 234.

¹²⁰⁷ Note in margins, Memo from Vance to Carter, 15 January 1980, NLC-128-15-1-9-3. Emphasis in original.

was given sufficient free rein to interpret policy according to his own beliefs rather than Carter's. In this case, Carter's confidence in his subordinates was misguided, and it hurt him politically.

Autonomy talks limp toward election

The autonomy talks continued haltingly through 1980, though Sadat suspended them twice. Still, hope faded quickly. 'A full autonomy agreement by May 26 is virtually out of the question,' Brzezinski's deputy, David Aaron, wrote to Carter, 'both because of Begin's concerns on issues like long-range security and preventing a Palestinian state; and because of Egypt's position ... that some issues ... cannot be decided ... without Palestinian participation.'¹²⁰⁸

The following month, British diplomats in Israel expressed similar sentiments. 'It is now clear, as seemed inevitable from the start, that the Camp David negotiations will not lead to a comprehensive agreement. No agreement on the West Bank and Jerusalem is possible on the Camp David basis,' the embassy wrote to London. Meanwhile, Palestinians would be driven to 'extremism.'¹²⁰⁹

Britain's Cairo Embassy was unimpressed with Sadat's stance on autonomy and his reliance on Carter. He 'neither understands nor cares about' the specifics of the Palestinian negotiations, it reported to London. Sadat's April 1980 trip to Washington would achieve little. 'It seems most likely that he will return to Egypt ... as planned, proclaiming his confidence that Jimmy Carter will fix everything,' the embassy wrote.¹²¹⁰

Palestinians were dismissive. 'Egypt's decision not to resume the autonomy talks with Israel is meaningless, for in any case they cannot achieve any results whatsoever, whether resumed or not' because of the lack of Palestinian representation, WAFA argued.¹²¹¹ Even Sadat's 1980 proposals

¹²⁰⁸ Memo from Aaron to Carter, 'Sadat Summit,' 3 April 1980, Folder: 'Egypt, President Sadat and Prime Minister Begin, 4/80: Cables and Memos, 3/24/80-4/9/80,' NSA, Brzezinski, VIP Visit, Box 4, JCL.

¹²⁰⁹ UKNA: PRO PREM 19/295, 'The Situation in the Middle East.' Telegram from U.K. Embassy Tel Aviv (Mason) to FCO, 'Middle East,' 4 May 1980.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid., ibid. Telegram from U.K. Embassy Cairo (Weir) to FCO, 'President Sadat's Visit to Washington,' 3 April 1980.

¹²¹¹ 'Editorial: Egypt Seeking Save-Face Maneuvers,' WAFA, 17 May 1980, IPS.

for a Gaza-first option for a self-governing authority failed to win support from Palestinians in the territories.¹²¹²

Carter's decision to prioritise domestic politics when he appointed Strauss to launch the autonomy negotiations significantly damaged the U.S. role. 'We all believed that ... had Linowitz been appointed first and had he been able to carry the negotiations from the beginning, there might have been a chance that we might have achieved success in the autonomy talks,' Lewis recalled.¹²¹³ Foreign diplomats seemed to concur. Britain's Washington embassy believed that Linowitz was 'easier to work with than Strauss,'¹²¹⁴ while its Tel Aviv mission wrote that he seemed 'a most attractive personality, and a great improvement on his predecessor. ... Linowitz must be about the most hopeful thing that has happened to the autonomy negotiations since they started ...'¹²¹⁵

Toward the end of his appointment, Linowitz claimed the two sides had agreed on 80 percent of the areas of responsibility that a self-governing Palestinian authority would have.¹²¹⁶ '... [I]t was a fair thing to say ... and each party could probably agree to that. The problem was the remaining 20 percent were the toughest issues,' according to a U.S. diplomat.¹²¹⁷ Indeed, the unresolved issues – water, land, security, settlements, and details about who would be able to vote and in what form the electoral procedures would take place – were fundamental.

Sadat again suspended participation in July 1980 after Begin's government annexed East Jerusalem. Although Linowitz continued his role in the talks, results were scanty, and the U.S. media and public – not to mention the president himself – grew ever more fixated on the inexorably linked stories of the 1980 race for the White House and the Iran hostage crisis.

Conclusion

¹²¹² 'The Palestinians reject Sadat's latest Autonomy plan proposals,' *Al-Fajr*, 23 April 1980, IPS.

¹²¹³ Lewis interview, ADST.

¹²¹⁴ UKNA: PRO PREM 19/295, 'The Situation in the Middle East.' Telegram from U.K. Embassy Washington (Henderson) to FCO, 'Linowitz Middle East Tour,' 23 January 1980.

¹²¹⁵ UKNA: PRO PREM 19/295, 'The Situation in the Middle East.' Telegram from U.K. Embassy Tel Aviv (Mason) to FCO, 'Mr. Hurd's Visit to Israel: Meeting with Mr. Sol Linowitz,' 13 December 1979.

¹²¹⁶ George Gedda, 'Linowitz, Disclosing U.S. Palestinian Plan, Sees "Better Prospects" for Mideast Settlement,' AP, 6 September 1980, Nexis.

¹²¹⁷ Cluverius interview, ADST.

In 1979-1980, Carter was increasingly consumed by his re-election campaign and decreasingly involved in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Limitations were imposed by the electoral cycle and the president's need to attend to domestic politics. The administration's poor record on Palestinian autonomy did not stem from any special enmity toward the Palestinians, nor any affinity for Begin's interpretation of Camp David. Rather, it shows concretely how the domestic political calculus made it unfeasible for the administration to exert much pressure on the Palestinian issue.

The administration knew the negotiations would never solely be a diplomatic matter. However, by appointing Strauss as his first special negotiator to the autonomy talks, Carter prioritised domestic political considerations over diplomatic objectives. Strauss brought an American – and specifically Texan – attitude toward the negotiations that did not serve broader U.S. interests. Later, when Carter appointed Linowitz to the post, progress was made toward American objectives, but even that came up short. A multitude of factors militated against an agreement on autonomy, foremost of which was the Begin government's resistance to relinquish Israeli control over the West Bank. Nevertheless, Strauss' early appointment did not serve American policy ends and may have contributed marginally to the stalemate.

Moreover, as opposed to Carter's first two and a half years in office, the 1979-1980 period demonstrated a complete absence of political will. Carter had already been hampered by his too-close identification with the peace process as well as his many public confrontations with Begin over settlements. For Carter, there was simply no gain to be had from pushing for Palestinian rights.

The forced resignation of Young was not primarily due to Middle East policy. However, the fallout from his resignation underscores how the ramifications of Arab-Israeli policy can affect domestic politics in unforeseen ways. Carter's poor handling of the affair contributed to the image of a president lacking control of his own foreign policy and furthered alienated his own political constituencies.

The U.N. vote on Jerusalem in March 1980, meanwhile, fed the public image of an administration that lacked competence and a president who lacked leadership. Had Carter left the

matter alone and not attempted to disavow the vote, the matter might have had little impact domestically beyond, perhaps, the New York primary. In turn, if Carter had defeated Kennedy in New York, it is possible that the senator would have dropped his campaign, allowing the president to focus on the Republicans.

Carter tried to distance himself from Middle East diplomacy in his final year and half in office. However, by this time, it had permeated American politics, and become virtually inseparable from his electoral prospects. These domestic pressures do not prove conclusively why Palestinians were not brought into the political process. However, they contribute to our understanding about the development of administration policy and why the White House was reluctant to challenge the Begin government from 1979 onward.

Whether Carter would have devoted a great deal of time to Palestinian autonomy if he had won a second term is an open question. However, his results show that even a president as motivated as Carter can only with great peril risk going against the system. Unfortunately for the administration, moreover, by 1979-1980 the media and public had become so fixated on the Iran hostage crisis as to erase Carter's earlier gains in the Middle East. What remained was a bitter residue of domestic tension and conflict, a divided Democratic Party and a resurgent Republican Party.

Conclusion

In August 1980, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski sent President Carter a memo on how to use his stewardship of U.S. foreign policy to his advantage in the final stages of his campaign against Republican candidate Ronald Reagan. In summarising the themes of the presidency, Brzezinski wrote that, ‘in time it will become clear that [the Carter administration offered] the proper course for the nation at this time: a building presidency, not a flamboyant, “fire-fighting” one.’¹²¹⁸ It was a far cry from Brzezinski’s ambitious early advice, which spoke of initiating ‘a new phase in U.S. foreign policy.’¹²¹⁹ A unique constellation of factors, foreign and domestic, had come together to undermine the Carter administration’s global agenda.

This thesis has offered a critique of Carter’s role as American diplomat-in-chief in the Camp David peace process. It has examined the possibilities and, especially, the hazards of presidential diplomacy in the Arab-Israeli dispute. It has argued that the unique domestic aspects of the conflict, acting in tandem with regional dynamics, ensured that Carter’s unprecedented presidential attempts for peace became mired in domestic politics. By the end of Carter’s term, the reciprocal influence of domestic politics and his Arab-Israeli policy had become so prevalent that it was nearly impossible to determine in which direction the influence flowed. Rather, it had simply become clear that each side served to reinforce the other.

Domestic politics inevitably influence the foreign policy of any democratic polity. However, the unique feature of Carter’s presidency lay in how dramatically and intensively he involved himself in the diplomatic minutiae of the Arab-Israeli arena. He never had to turn to his foreign policy specialists and ask, “Would you explain to me the history of this particular issue,” or “Will you show me on the map where the lines run or where is this town located,” because I knew it. And

¹²¹⁸ NSC Weekly Report #149 from Brzezinski to Carter, 7 August 1980, Folder: ‘Weekly Reports [to the President], 136-150,’ Brzezinski Donated, Box 42, JCL.

¹²¹⁹ Memo from Brzezinski, Gardner and Owen to Carter, ‘Foreign Policy Priorities November 3, 1976 – May 1, 1977: A Memorandum to the President-Elect,’ 3 November 1976, Folder: ‘Transition: Foreign Policy Priorities, 11/76,’ Plains File, Box 41, JCL.

I could negotiate for hours with the subordinates of Begin and Sadat,' Carter said later. 'I knew personally what the issues were because I felt like that was a presidential responsibility.'¹²²⁰

Presidential involvement also engaged different governmental – namely, political – actors. That meant Carter's Arab-Israeli policy received input from predominantly domestic political advisors like Patrick Caddell, Stuart Eizenstat, Jody Powell, Gerald Rafshoon and, especially, Hamilton Jordan. 'Here I was from South Georgia and was being exposed to all these problems at the very highest level without having a background or context for understanding a lot of these things,' Jordan recalled. 'It was exciting, it was stimulating, but I was not always able to understand or put into context some of the things I was working on.'¹²²¹

As a result of this presidential prioritisation, Carter became intimately identified with American policy toward the peace process. That activated a number of reinforcing domestic factors, some general to American foreign policy and others specific to U.S. Arab-Israeli policy, that served to constrain what Carter could ultimately achieve. This thesis has explored the process by which Carter's role as chief diplomat in the Camp David peace process interacted with those factors and explained how that process affected the development of policy.

From the onset, the Carter administration appeared insufficiently prepared for the intense emotions that animated the Arab-Israeli issue for many domestic actors, particularly the organised American Jewish community. Despite periodically flirting in 1977-1978 with a public 'confrontation' or 'showdown' with Israel, especially over its settlements policy, the administration ultimately refrained from taking such a course. This thesis contends that, regardless of whether a 'confrontation' strategy would have provoked a change in Israeli behaviour more toward Carter's liking, the administration's fear of adverse domestic response played the central role in its decision not to pursue such a 'showdown.'

The present work has used a unique source base. By reviewing Carter's domestic, foreign and media advisors' materials, it has revealed the similarities and reinforcing tendencies of the

¹²²⁰ Carter interview, CPP, 15.

¹²²¹ Jordan interview, CPP, 52.

advice reaching the president from multiple sources. Moreover, it has incorporated material on American public opinion in a way that transcends mere reliance on polling data. It has contended that, as a by-product of its ‘agenda-setting’ role, the news media is fundamental in creating the political environment within which the president can function. Thus, this project has scrutinised commentary *and* reportage in conjunction with polling data to develop a better understanding of the political climate that enveloped Carter. It has used reportage predominantly for what it indicates about the general assumptions toward Carter and the Arab-Israeli peace process.

The existing historiography has mostly elided the perils attendant to Carter’s unique style of presidential diplomacy. However, this thesis has set forth the fresh argument that Carter’s involvement as the chief U.S. diplomat in the Arab-Israeli conflict ensured that the presidency itself became the locus of domestic opposition stemming both from the substance of his proposals and the style with which he set them forth. Carter’s personal role in Arab-Israeli negotiations helped compel Egypt and Israel toward an agreement, but created its own problems. His diplomatic immersion had the consequence of activating domestic forces deeply invested in the dispute and set a precedent whereby regional parties require presidential attention for deals to be concluded. The expectation of high-level involvement, which began to take shape under Henry Kissinger, became concretised under Carter, whose particular political style deeply influenced the course of American involvement.

The characteristics that helped propel Carter to the presidency fed many of his problems in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. In 1976, American voters wanted a president who spoke his mind without having to craft carefully his words. They wanted a leader who seemed to be above politics – who did what was right for its own sake. But faced with a range of economic and international problems, after four years, Carter’s ‘freshness and innocence’ lost its appeal, in the words of Carter’s energy secretary, James Schlesinger.¹²²² As Carter’s term progressed, his freshness began to resemble naïveté, and his innocence and candour shifted from asset to liability.

¹²²² James Schlesinger interview, 19-20 July 1984, CPP, 1, 6, Retrieved 25 September 1980, http://web1.millercenter.org/poh/transcripts/ohp_1984_0719_schlesinger.pdf

Three broad characteristics of Carter's political style exerted powerful influence on his Arab-Israeli diplomacy. First, Carter learned through rough experience that speaking publicly – indeed, with too much candour and openness – on the Middle East could have severe domestic repercussions. His early comments on the contours of a settlement, though generally consistent with existing American policy, alarmed many of Israel's U.S. supporters, who feared the new president was applying pressure unevenly on Israel. Moreover, Carter's open style heightened the distrust of elite opinion, which was already uneasy about the self-described outsider president. Carter's public enunciation of his ambitious objectives had the consequence of magnifying the import of each subsequent policy shift and reinforcing the popular perception that he was willing to bow to pressure.

Second, Carter's penchant for taking on seemingly intractable and unpopular issues to prove that he was up to the challenge led him to pursue a sometimes reckless course in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. 'We were dealing with a generation of (foreign policy) issues that no one had dealt with because they were so politically controversial,' Jordan recalled. These issues were all political 'losers,' he said.¹²²³ In the Middle East, this translated into a willingness to challenge Israel on settlements, to try bringing Palestinians into the peace process, and to strengthen strategic ties with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which was sometimes interpreted as weakening the U.S.-Israel bond. Carter's willingness to tackle these issues, despite their political consequences, demonstrated how, in communications chief Gerald Rafshoon's words, Carter 'never governs like he has to run for office again.'¹²²⁴ Generally, Carter's reluctance to participate in the cut and thrust of politics damaged his performance as president, which remained fundamentally a political job.

Finally, Carter's comprehensive approach to problem solving led him to cling for too long to the idea of Geneva as a forum for a final agreement even after regional obstacles made that outcome unlikely. Fuelled by his training as an engineer, and encouraged by close advisors like Eizenstat, Carter's comprehensive approach led him to embrace solutions that were often difficult to explain

¹²²³ Jordan interview, CPP, 15.

¹²²⁴ Rafshoon interview, CPP, 57.

to, and therefore gain support from, the public.¹²²⁵ Most pertinent for this study, Carter's focus on resolving all outstanding issues in the entire Arab-Israeli dispute through Geneva led to his sluggish response to Anwar Sadat's Jerusalem initiative.

Neither foreign policy generally, nor the Arab-Israeli conflict specifically, played a decisive role in Carter's 1980 loss.¹²²⁶ However, Sigelman and Conover show that the public's rapidly diminishing support for Carter during the hostage crisis was attributable in part to previous unfavourable impressions of his presidency.¹²²⁷ The hostage ordeal was undoubtedly a political disaster for Carter. 'The news about this swamped everything,' Vice President Walter Mondale said. 'So, it wasn't that we couldn't do other things. It was that the sort of milieu that ensued from the capture of our hostages and the way [the hostage-takers] played the game really paralyzed us.'¹²²⁸ Moreover, recent studies suggest that voters have traditionally punished Democratic presidential candidates, including Carter, for perceived dovishness, but not for hawkishness.¹²²⁹ Therefore, it is unsurprising that Carter's attempt to run on a foreign policy of peace and resolve, highlighting his Camp David achievements, made little inroads at a moment when Americans perceived a hostile international environment, largely as a result of Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

However, the domestic conflicts over Carter's Arab-Israeli policy were significant in that they contributed to the climate of criticism surrounding the incumbent. Brzezinski and others hoped to point to the Camp David Accords and the Egypt-Israel treaty as Carter's greatest achievements, but those legacies remained, in 1980, ambiguous. Carter had difficulty trumpeting his role in the Arab-Israeli peace process when the winding road from his early months pushing for a comprehensive accord, to the disastrous U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué, through the contentious F-

¹²²⁵ Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency*, 50-51.

¹²²⁶ William Schneider, 'Conservatism, not interventionism: Trends in foreign policy opinion, 1974-1982,' in *Eagle defiant: United States foreign policy in the 1980s*, ed. Kenneth Oye, Robert Lieber, and Donald Rothchild (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983).

¹²²⁷ Lee Sigelman and Pamela Johnston Conover, 'The Dynamics of Presidential Support during International Conflict Situations: The Iranian Hostage Crisis,' *Political Behavior* 3, no. 4 (1981).

¹²²⁸ Walter Mondale interview, 27 April 2004, ADST. Retrieved 22 August 2013, [http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field\(DOCID+mfdip2007mon01\).](http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mfdip:@field(DOCID+mfdip2007mon01).)

¹²²⁹ Shana Kushner Gadarian, 'Foreign Policy at the Ballot Box: How Citizens Use Foreign Policy to Judge and Choose Candidates,' *The Journal of Politics* 72, no. 4 (2010).

15 sales debate, to the evanescent triumph of Camp David Summit, the tardy conclusion of the Egypt-Israel treaty, and then to the inconclusive Palestinian autonomy talks, had been so riddled with potholes.

Moreover, saturation media coverage of the Iran hostage crisis was almost certainly a contributing factor to Carter's 1980 loss.¹²³⁰ Yet Carter's overall relationship with the news media had been poor throughout his term. 'Another of my key failures as president ... was my inability to form a mutually respectful relationship with key news media,' Carter judged later. 'Our consistent attempts to run an open administration had little beneficial impact.'¹²³¹

Simply put, most members of the White House press corps did not like Carter. 'There were things about his personality that people didn't like, and over time that just bugged the White House press corps,' according to *The New York Times'* Hedrick Smith. 'Carter was hurt by the fact that the press didn't like him. Certainly by the third or fourth year, the White House regulars were down on Carter and they were not inclined to give him the benefit of the doubt.'¹²³²

Carter's starring role in Arab-Israeli diplomacy thus attracted media attention from those least sympathetic to him. The coverage of the complex diplomatic negotiations was tinged with the negative political tone that characterised so much of the rest of his presidency. Carter's personal role ensured that many journalists covering the negotiations interpreted lack of conclusive, unambiguous agreement as political defeat or setback, rather than part of the ebb and flow of diplomacy. More broadly, Carter's poor relationship with the press helped his critics gain the upper hand and establish a reliably negative narrative for his foreign policy, from which his administration could not emerge to pursue its agenda.

The 1980 election was also a disaster for congressional Democrats, who lost 34 seats in the House. The party fared worse in the Senate, however. It lost 12 seats – and its majority – to the Republicans, who for the first time in a quarter century gained control of one house of Congress.

¹²³⁰ Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience in Iran* (New York: Penguin, 1981), 344-63; James Glen Stovall, 'Incumbency and News Coverage of the 1980 Presidential Election Campaign,' *The Western Political Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1984).

¹²³¹ Carter, *Diary*, 528.

¹²³² Smith interview.

Again, this was not a result of Carter's involvement in the Arab-Israeli dispute. However, throughout his presidency he harmed his party not only through the substance of his policies, but also the timing of his initiatives. This dynamic was clearly illustrated in the 1978 Middle East airplane sales, which occurred in a midterm election year virtually simultaneously with the Panama Canal Treaties ratification. Moreover, Carter's frequent clashes with Israel's U.S. supporters, especially his poor relations with the American Jewish community, led many Democratic lawmakers, some of whom depended on those groups' support for re-election, to distance themselves from the president. As Election Day 1980 approached, the president found himself isolated, with few political allies.

On Election Day, Carter complained that 'most of the things that were difficult,' including the Camp David Accords, 'cost us votes in the long run.' He spent 'a major portion of [his] time trying to recruit back the Democratic constituency that should have been naturally supportive,' with Jewish Americans at the top of that list.¹²³³ Indeed, perhaps Carter's most notable domestic failure in regard to the Arab-Israeli dispute was his alienation of a significant portion of the American Jewish community. After winning 71 percent of the Jewish vote in 1976, his Jewish support dropped to just 45 percent in 1980 – the worst performance of a Democratic presidential candidate since 1920.¹²³⁴

In its post-vote analysis, AIPAC concluded that Reagan and Carter effectively tied among Jewish voters. '... [T]his represents a radical shift in traditional Jewish allegiances to the national Democratic ticket,' it noted. AIPAC'S analysis found that the Jewish defection represented the greatest among all voting blocs. '... [V]oting patterns point to concern over Carter's handling of Middle East matters and approval of Reagan's pro-Israel posture as the prime factor motivating Jewish voters,' it wrote.¹²³⁵

¹²³³ 4 November 1980, Carter, *Diary*, 479-80.

¹²³⁴ 'Election Reference Information: Jewish Voting Record (1916-2012),' JVL. Retrieved 28 August 2013, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/jewvote.html>.

¹²³⁵ AIPAC legislative update, 'Year End Report,' December 1980, Folder 4, Box 1, Sanders Papers.

An example of how intertwined the domestic and Arab-Israeli issues had become toward the end of Carter's term can be found in the Mondale staff's time analysis. In 1980, for example, the vice president's 'meetings with Jewish leaders' were classified under 'foreign policy, defense, intelligence' issues. As the election campaign hit its peak in August, Mondale spent more time with 'Jewish leaders' than on 'defense.'¹²³⁶

Moreover, in a bid to win back some Jewish allegiance, Carter's aides tried to push 'two major policy proposals (through Congress) aimed at strengthening [the president's] Jewish support.' Eizenstat and Jewish community liaison Al Moses wanted to reschedule Israeli debt repayment and establish a joint military facility with Israel.¹²³⁷ These proposals had relatively little to do with the Arab-Israeli dispute, but rather dealt with internal Israeli issues and showcasing Washington's commitment to Israel. Neither specifically came to pass before the election. Nevertheless, during Carter's term the United States continued to offer Israel favourable treatment and special benefits on assistance not typically accorded to other countries. As part of the Egypt-Israel treaty, the United States in 1979 gave Israel nearly \$4.9 billion – mostly to finance the cost of dismantling airbases in the Negev Desert – which remained through 2009 the highest single-year total ever provided by the United States to Israel.¹²³⁸

Nevertheless, all of these problems came together with the pressures of the electoral cycle to undermine Carter's efforts in Arab-Israeli diplomacy. The haste with which Carter pursued his Arab-Israeli goals in his first year stemmed in part from considerations imposed by the electoral cycle. Later, Carter's disengagement from the negotiations with the conclusion of the Egypt-Israel treaty and the commencement of the Palestinian autonomy negotiations stemmed from his need to place a 'political shield' between himself and any attendant political controversy. Moreover, the

¹²³⁶ 'Vice President Walter F. Mondale Time Analysis,' n.a., August 1980, Folder: 'Miscellaneous, 1/4/79-1/8/81,' Mondale Donated, Box 206, JCL.

¹²³⁷ Memo from Belford to Butler, 'Jewish Issues,' 9 October 1980, Folder: 'Israel: 5-11/80,' NSA, Brzezinski, Country Chron, Box 22, JCL.

¹²³⁸ 'CRS Issue Brief IB85066 – Israel: US Foreign Assistance' (updated 26 April 2005), Federation of American Scientists. Retrieved 28 September 2013, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/IB85066.pdf>; and 'U.S. Assistance to Israel (FY1949 – FY2009),' JVL. Retrieved 28 September 2013, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/US-Israel/U.S._Assistance_to_Israel1.html.

pressures of the approaching election also undergirded the politically inept disavowal of UNSC 465 on Jerusalem in March 1980.

Carter's experience demonstrates the virtual impossibility of separating American domestic politics from Arab-Israeli diplomacy. Carter may not have been able to gain Begin's acquiescence to American desiderata on settlements and the Palestinians. However, the president could have used a more robust carrot-and-stick approach toward Israel. Carter, for example, failed to use all of the weapons in his arsenal – most notably, by not attempting to halt U.S. economic or military aid to Israel. In the end, Begin played the political clock against Carter. The longer he waited, the less able was Carter to push on Palestinian autonomy because of his need to protect himself domestically. Carter's political difficulties were significant in so much as they facilitated Begin's vision of the Land of Israel, which largely meant retaining control of the West Bank.¹²³⁹

This thesis has demonstrated that domestic politics collectively *did* influence the development of Carter's policy and exerted its most direct impact in the final stages of his presidency in the context of the electoral cycle. Moreover, Carter's introduction of presidential diplomacy had the effect of magnifying the impact of these domestic factors. The influence was not decisive, either in U.S. policy outcomes or Carter's 1980 defeat, but it nevertheless permeated the decision making process. Indeed, Carter's policy cannot be understood in a bureaucratic policymaking vacuum. Instead, domestic factors provided clear constraints on Carter's options and at which points he attempted to bring his presidential influence to bear.

Domestic politics were brought to bear forcefully on U.S. policy in several clear instances. The alacrity with which the administration backed away from the U.S.-Soviet Joint Communiqué in October 1977, for example, stemmed mostly for concern over adverse domestic reaction. The desperation that infused Carter's March 1979 shuttle to Cairo and Jerusalem was made more urgent by the president's need to clear the Egypt-Israel negotiations from his agenda so he could attend to pressing political problems at home. Moreover, his appointment of Robert Strauss as his first

¹²³⁹ Peleg, *Begin's Foreign Policy*, 99-100.

negotiator in the autonomy talks clearly arose from political imperatives, but did little to advance the diplomatic process.

More generally, however, domestic politics exerted powerful influence by altering public debate and limiting policy options. This ‘permissive consensus’ was shaped through broad public opinion and the elite, which consisted most prominently of the media, Congress and interested pressure groups. This consensus, within which Carter’s team formulated and carried out policy, narrowed as controversy around the president grew. Carter ran afoul of the consensus early in his term through his use of open diplomacy. He also alarmed Israel’s domestic supporters by taking public positions – such as suggesting that Israel return to its pre-1967 borders, criticising Jewish settlements, urging consideration of the Palestinian role in the peace process – that previously had been spoken only privately to Israeli officials or made publicly by lower-level U.S. officials. However, many of the controversial aspects of Carter’s policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, such as his emphasis on the ‘legitimate rights’ of the Palestinians, reaching out to the PLO or strengthening U.S. ties with oil-producing Gulf states – became routine in succeeding administrations.

Historians who indulge in counterfactuals risk dramatic oversimplification; changing or removing a single factor from past events can render the rest unrecognisable. It can quickly turn into a futile exercise because it is virtually impossible to extract meaning from an imagined scenario with any authority. However, that important caveat aside, limited speculation in this direction can sometimes serve to elucidate history’s lack of predetermination.

Carter approached the Arab-Israeli dispute with a missionary zeal rare among presidents. It is difficult to imagine another recent American leader essentially setting the rest of his work aside to lock himself away at Camp David for 13 days and attempt to resolve, alongside the leaders of two hostile countries, one of the world’s most intractable conflicts. Moreover, Carter’s open-ended, last-minute trip to the Middle East in March 1979 to conclude the Egypt-Israel treaty against the advice

of his advisors demonstrated a particular combination of political boldness and recklessness that is unusual for the occupant of the Oval Office.

On the other hand, across the entirety of the Camp David peace process, a different president – one less focused on the Holy Land, more familiar from the outset with the domestic political hues of the Arab-Israeli issue, better suited to maintaining a domestic coalition, less determined to retain personal control of the negotiations – could also have achieved different results. Carter’s poor relations with the press, Congress, and the rest of the elite ensured that he soon found himself without allies and with little political capital. Moreover, a president prepared to delegate authority to his staff for negotiations would have decreased the pressure and vitriol directed at the White House over the policy. In turn, the Arab-Israeli arena might not have contributed to Carter’s negative domestic narrative.

Nonetheless, had Carter faced fewer domestic constraints, it is highly unlikely that he would have achieved his initial objective of a comprehensive settlement because of regional opposition. Yet Carter still could have pursued his determination to involve Palestinians in the negotiations, clung longer to the possibility of cooperating with the Soviet Union and limited U.S. aid to Israel as an incentive to make concessions. While such a course may not have changed the regional outcome, such shifts in American policy would have set important – or, at least, different – precedents for succeeding administrations.

Carter also had to contend with a spectrum of domestic and international challenges that were unique to the late 1970s and impacted his Arab-Israeli policy. For example, domestically he had to contend with a more assertive Congress and emboldened news media, both of which were critically important to developing the domestic consensus. He also had to deal with a resurgent U.S. conservative movement, which had its roots in détente and U.S. failures in Vietnam – both policies that antedated Carter’s term. Internationally, the crumbling of U.S.-backed regimes in Iran and Nicaragua, as well as the decision to offer diplomatic recognition to China at the expense of downgrading relations with Taiwan, led to concern among allies such as Israel about the

steadfastness of the American commitment. Thus, Israel likely felt more strongly about concretising Washington's strategic, not just moral, commitment to its security. Moreover, several intermestic issues that arose earlier in the decade ripened by the time Carter took office. Most notable among these were the after-effects of the Arab oil embargo, which led Carter to prioritise energy policy at home and stronger ties with Saudi Arabia in the Gulf, and growing inflation worldwide, which partly stemmed from soaring oil prices. Nevertheless, if Carter had not been forced to reckon with one or more of these issues, it is conceivable that his peacemaking path could have been smoother.

Ultimately, Carter attempted to balance the functions of diplomat and politician in the Arab-Israeli dispute like no other president. However, his role as president-mediator blurred the lines between domestic and international, politics at home and negotiations in the Middle East. Carter's personal involvement created a circular pattern of influence between politics and diplomacy, as it engaged political actors, focused public attention and raised the domestic stakes. As his term progressed, he subordinated his diplomatic objectives to his political needs, which in fact had been made more urgent by diplomatic controversy in Arab-Israeli negotiations. Moreover, Carter's service as diplomat-in-chief during the Camp David peace process imbued American policy with the political character of the president. Carter's experience vividly demonstrates that a president who embraces eagerly the role of diplomat-in-chief, especially in a policy area as domestically controversial as the Arab-Israeli conflict, risks trying to reconcile the irreconcilable.

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