



## POINT OF VIEW

40 years later.

**Anwarel Sadat's historic visit to Israel:**

### **From Cairo to Jerusalem and then to the Camp David Accords**

**Ambassador (ret.) Alexandros P. Mallias \***

"...consider the vast influence of accident in war before you are engaged in it. As it continues, it generally becomes an affair of chances, chances from neither of us is exempt, and whose event we must risk in the dark. It is a common mistake in going to war to begin at the wrong and, to act first, and to wait for disaster to discuss the matter..." (Thucydides, The Peloponnesian War, book one, par. 78).

40 years ago, on Saturday, November 19th, 1977 Egypt's President Anwar el Sadat's landed to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport.

This paper has no intention or ambition to rewrite history and/or teach diplomacy. It simply aims to recollect the facts – some at least – and proceed to the analysis of gains and losses for the protagonists of this extraordinary journey.

\* Ambassador (ret.) Alexandros P. Mallias served as Ambassador of Greece to the United States of America (2005-2009), to Albania and to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. He also served as Chargé d'Affaires a.i. to Libya (1982-1984). Other assignments include First Counselor for Political Affairs at the Hellenic Mission to the United Nations (New York) 1989-1993 and Negotiator of the Paris Charter for a New Europe (Vienna, CSCE Process, 1990). Author of three books (in Greek): "In the constellation of President Donald Trump: The New Turkey and Greece" (Athens, July 2017, I.SIDERIS), "Visions and Chimera- A Diplomat's Journey", (I.SIDERIS, 2016) and "The Other Crisis-An Ambassador's Account", (INFOGNOMON, 2013). Guest lecturer at the Athens University for Economics and Business, at the University of Peloponnese and the New York College. He recently published with ISAG (<http://www.isag-italia.org/>) and the Hellenic Foundation For European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) a comprehensive proposal on the Middle East.

## The Legend

Camp David (September 5-17, 1978) remains a legendary process. Since 1978, many tried to follow the format and the process. The “perfect accord” does not exist. Also, the ideal model for solving international conflicts (bilateral or multilateral) remains to be invented. For sure, there are no ideal *erga omnes* diplomatic recipes and agreements. In fact, any international agreement reflects the best options to reach a possible and sustainable compromise under the specific conditions then prevailing. Notwithstanding the issues at stake, the characters/personalities involved count a lot. Strategy and timing are also key variables in our equation. Balance of power, domestic politics and pragmatism may influence the process, any peace process, as much as great ideas and vision. Since Thucydides and the History of the Peloponnesian War, might prevails over right. Also, interests count more than values.

Yet, the Camp David’s innovative format was the setting itself; two plus one leaders or better one (Jimmy Carter) place two (Begin and Sadat) “isolated” in the Camp David compound, out of the real world. Time proved to be of the essence. Jimmy Carter in particular and Anwar el Sadat acted under time constraints and had to deliver. For Menahem Begin, time was not a decisive factor.

## The International Context

It is difficult for us today, 40 years later, to understand the Middle East realities. In particular, the quasi permanent state of war existing between Israel and his Arab neighbors.

### *The key international parameters*

- The 1967 (June 5-10) and 1973 (October 6-25) two Arab–Israeli wars.
- The Sinai, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem were occupied by Israel.

- Last but not least, the two key non-implemented UNSC Resolutions 242 and 338.

To be fair, only the cease-fire and specific military disengagement provisions were implemented.

The UNSC Resolution 242 adopted on November 22, 1967 contained the fundamental formula “territory for peace”. Here are in an epigrammatic way its key elements:

- the inadmissibility of acquisition of territory by war
- all UN Member States have undertaken the commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter
  - to work for a just and lasting peace
  - every state in the area can live in security
  - the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in recent conflicts
  - the termination of all claims or state of belligerency
  - the respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force
  - freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area
  - achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem
  - guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones.

The UNSC Resolution 338 adopted on October 22, 1973 contained the following key points:

- calls upon all the parties to the present fight to terminate military activity
- calls upon the parties concerned to start the implementation of SCR 242, in all its parts

- negotiations shall start under appropriate auspices between the parties concerned aiming at a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

### *President Carter takes office (January 20, 1977)*

When Jimmy Carter moved in the Oval Office, the state of play in the Middle East was summarized as follows:

The Israel-Arab relations were precarious. The status quo remained unstable. According to the State Department and NSC Middle East policy makers there was danger for a new war. Furthermore, it should be noted that following Henry Kissinger's successful shuttle diplomacy, the USA had already cemented the perception of being the only possible "third party" between Israel and the Arabs; being also able to make considerable and much desired by them – mostly but not exclusively by Israel and Egypt – commitments to all parties to the conflict.

A key factor that led to Camp David was Jimmy Carter's personality and agenda. The Middle East was high on his foreign policy agenda and very present on his mind. He had no clearly defined Middle East strategy or policy; yet, he had perceptions of the problem, a clear voluntarism and above all predisposition for activism.

The high degree of convergence among the President, his inner team and the Bureaucracy's Middle East policy makers proved to be a decisive factor during the decision making process. Planning and its implementation. When Jimmy Carter assumed his duties the Department of State and National Security Council proposals were proposing mainly: stock taking of Kissinger's step by step diplomacy and partial agreements; though, the Palestinian element was missing; leaning toward a Geneva type Middle East multilateral Conference to be co-chaired by the USA and the USSR.

A large consensus surfaced in President Carter's staff: 1977 was a good year to swiftly work on Middle East. Early White House and NSC policy review assessment indicated a preference for a comprehensive agreement on principles rather than partial agreements and the small albeit secure steps approach (Kissinger's method)

In early 1977, Sadat showed no eagerness and no readiness for a separate peace with Israel. He much insisted on the so called "the linkage issue": he needed to show that an Egypt-Israeli Agreement should bear fruits, hope and perspective also for the Palestinians. At minimum, he would be satisfied with an Israeli statement indicating readiness for the "territory for peace" formula/principle; then, get recognition by Arabs and acknowledgement of Israel's security needs. It was also fundamental for Sadat to establish personal confidential bonds and friendship with Jimmy Carter and a privileged partnership with the USA. This consideration proved to be of the essence before.

Menahem Begin was throughout the process adamantly motivated by the Eretz Israel vision. For him these were principles, not tactics. He kept a steady line consisting of a bold refusal to satisfy Sadat's and Carter's demands for the Palestinians (the linkage issue). He never gave up on the Palestinian statehood and self-determination agenda items and never moved beyond the self-rule formula, providing for an administrative council with limited competences.

We should not underestimate the fact that the Soviet Union was much on board in the search of a negotiated peace in the Middle East. At a higher degree than even the USA initially anticipated. In fact, Moscow was willing to work jointly with Washington to cement détente, instead of paying a lip service to the Arabs.

History should be fair and praise Anwar el Sadat's visit to Jerusalem. In fact, on November 15, 1977, through well established and trusted American diplomatic channels, Sadat received a written invitation from Menahem Begin to pay a visit to Israel. Four days later, on Saturday November 19th, he landed to Tel Aviv. This was truly history in the making. Sadat became the first Arab leader to visit Israel offi-

cially when he met with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, and spoke before the Knesset in Jerusalem about his views on how to achieve a comprehensive peace to the Arab–Israeli conflict, which included the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 337.

Since, he gradually opted for a direct rapprochement with Israel rather than a Geneva style multi-lateral comprehensive peace conference. Yet, Sadat acted under the (wrong) assumption that his historic visit would make Begin ready to reciprocate, thus making major concessions on the Palestinian issue (self determination and statehood). Sadat's gesture did not make Menachem Begin alter his vision on Eretz Israel, though he soon realized that he should fully deliver on Sinai.

## **The Camp David Accords**

### *A tribute to President Jimmy Carter*

President Jimmy Carter, assisted by Secretary Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brezinski, distinguished himself in the genuine search of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Arabs. Motivated by interest and values (Biblical). President Carter contributed his good will, his determination and his positive thinking and vision of peace. The Egypt-Israeli Treaty could not be achieved without his sustained efforts, his commitment and his personal engagement. He personally drafted the first version of the Egyptian-Israeli framework agreement at Camp David. Unlike many of his successors, Carter did not try to impose the American views.

His most difficult task was to persuade and convince Menachem Begin. Sadat opened early all his cards; even his fall back positions. Not surprisingly, to have the deal at Camp David, Jimmy Carter pressed mostly Anwar El Sadat. Yet, Carter's biggest foreign policy achievement did not bear domestic political gains. The erosion of his constituency had already started.

### *Why did Camp David prove to be a functional and sustained treaty for Israel and Egypt?*

The occupied territories and oil fields in Sinai were returned to Egypt. Israeli settlements were dismantled and its military bases removed from Sinai. Sadat had a perfect story to say from an exclusive Egyptian point of view. Yet, the outcome and the negative reactions provoked in the Arab World, did not sound good for Egypt as the de facto leader of the Arabs. Sadat's decision to act out of the box was an historic event. Yet, during the negotiation process and in particular in Camp David it proved to be both an indication of strength and weakness as well. Sadat, unlike Begin, could not leave Camp David without at minimum a fair bilateral agreement with Israel.

As far as Israel is concerned, Egypt, the stronger and mighty Arab enemy, ceased being a military or even a diplomatic threat. It rather became – often behind the scenes – a partner and a pillar of stability and cooperation throughout the MENA. The Diplomatic recognition by Cairo and the establishment of diplomatic relations was an historic, a major step. Menachem Begin, a strong political leader, managed to have at home the whole Israel backing him in the conclusion of the separate peace treaty with Egypt.

Last but not least, for the USA, Camp David was of major importance, notwithstanding the fact that it did not launch the much hoped comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

### *An Evaluation*

The Egypt–Israeli Accords changed the course in the Middle East. Until Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the mainstream assessment was that there could not be an Arab war against Israel without Egypt. No Arab leader had ever thought of a possible separate peace accord of Egypt with Israel. The alleged Egypt's "defection" from the Arab camp rendered diplomatically weak, militarily impossible and strategically unbearable an Arab – minus Egypt – war with Israel. Anwar el Sadat was clear: he was not going

to sacrifice the Egyptian national interests for the sake of other Arabs, Syria in particular. History also shows that President Sadat recovered through the negotiations and the Camp David Accords the territories Egypt lost in the battlefield and occupied by Israel. 40 years later, we can easily see that he set a high precedent that no other Arab leader has ever reached.

As far as the “linkage issue” is concerned, following the normalization of his relations with Egypt, Israel had little interest and less incentive to offer important compromises to get Jordan, Syria and the Palestinians on board. Sadat was confident with Egypt’s role and position the Day After. Yet, in Camp David, Carter and Sadat either overestimated Egypt’s capabilities for a settlement of the Palestinian Question, either they underestimated and misread the reaction and the attitude of the Jordanian, Syrian, Saudi and Palestinian leadership.

Israel’s Begin obtained also the maximum he could, if not everything he wished. He delivered bilaterally with Egypt. That was fundamental for Israel. He made no substantial concessions on the Palestinian issue. There was a vague content offered to the concept of Palestinian self-government (West Bank and Gaza). Camp David Accords fail to mention even an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, self-determination for the Palestinians and freezing the settlements. Nothing in the Agreement precluded Israeli control over West Bank and Gaza.

Ultimately, Camp David offered the possibility for a peace in the Middle East, but did not and could not guarantee its achievement.

**Key source:**

Quandt, William B., *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1986).