
The Camp David treaty: what it

It has often been stated since the publication of the Egyptian-Israeli treaty that Egyptian President Anwar Sadat has “sold out” the Palestinian Arabs. Many Arab leaders, including Syrian President Hafez Assad, have described Sadat as a “traitor” to the Arab cause. In the following section, we intend to document — quoting from the treaty text itself and from its annexes and appended letters — the exact extent of Sadat’s capitulation to Israel in exchange for the promised withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula.

The core issue in the Palestine conflict is a resolution of the partition crisis of 1947. At that time, an internationally accepted United Nations resolution called for the establishment of two states, one Jewish and one Arab, in the territory of historic Palestine. At the time, the Arab states — dominated by the British Crown — refused to accept the UN resolution. In recent years, virtually every Arab state has come to support a policy of making peace with Israel if the Israelis accept the establishment of an Arab Palestinian state on the occupied West Bank and Gaza, both Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 by Israel.

Should Israel announce its willingness to accept the creation of a Palestinian state and to withdraw its forces to the lines that prevailed before the June 1967 war, then the Arabs — especially including the Palestine Liberation Organization — would be prepared to make peace with Israel in a comprehensive settlement.

Not only does the current treaty *not* include any reference to the full withdrawal of Israel to its former borders, but Sadat has fully legitimized the permanent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza area. In the treaty appendix, in a letter from Begin and Sadat to Carter, the following is stated:

Israel and Egypt set for themselves the goal of completing the negotiations (for West Bank and Gaza autonomy) within one year so that elections will be held as expeditiously as possible after agreement has been reached between the parties.

The self-governing authority... will be established and inaugurated within one month after it has been elected, at which time the transitional period of five years will begin. The Israeli military government and its civilian administration will be withdrawn, to be replaced by the self-governing authority, as specified in the (Camp David) “Framework.” ...A withdrawal of Israeli armed forces will then take place and there will be a redeployment of the remaining Israeli forces into specified security locations.

We must now consider the following points from this most important section of the treaty documents:

(a) Nowhere does it state that the parties are bound to conclude an agreement on autonomy within one year, only that it is a “goal” to do so. Thus, if the Israelis object to the process, or if Arab Palestinians of the territories cannot be found to serve as negotiators, then the autonomy process may break down permanently. Should this happen — as it must, since the treaty does not even try to resolve the fundamental issues at stake — then Sadat has no legal recourse. During the negotiations, Sadat said that he would demand a fixed date for the autonomy process; that demand was abandoned.

(b) Nowhere does it state when elections must be held, only that they will be held “as expeditiously as possible.” This vague phrase means that the period for implementing the treaty can be stretched indefinitely by the Israelis.

(c) The appendix mentions a “transitional period” of five years, but it does not mention anything about what should happen after the five years. Israel’s government has stated officially that it plans to assert its sovereignty in — i.e., annex — the West Bank after the five-year period.

(d) The appendix states that “a withdrawal” will take place from the West Bank and Gaza after the autonomy, but that the “remaining Israeli forces” will be redeployed. In other words, the treaty itself conceives

really says

of a permanent Israeli army occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, with no provision at all for total Israeli withdrawal. Thus, Sadat has acquiesced in the fait accompli of the Israeli West Bank annexation.

This above has been referred to as the famous "linkage" issue. It is clear that, from the treaty text itself, there is simply no linkage at all.

Into this plan the Israelis and Egyptians have invited Jordan to join. The appendix letter states:

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is invited to join the negotiations. The delegations of Egypt and Jordan may include Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza...or other Palestinians as mutually agreed.

But the Jordanians and the Palestinians have both flatly rejected the offer to join the negotiations, since to join means to acquiesce in the permanent Israeli occupation of the lands from which Israel is supposed to withdraw.

The danger, of course, is that as Sadat becomes progressively isolated from the other Arabs, he will be compelled to strike a harder bargain with the Israelis. But the Israelis, under the treaty's provisions, are not bound to Palestinian autonomy. In that case, Sadat — or, if he is overthrown, a successor regime — will be faced with the necessity of unilaterally breaking the treaty.

In regard to the second major treaty issue, the treaty states in Article VI:

In the event of a conflict between the obligations of the parties under the present treaty and any of their other obligations, the obligations of this treaty will be binding and implemented.

This is the famous issue in which Egypt, until the last stage of the negotiations, insisted that its Arab League treaty commitments held it responsible to come to the aid of another Arab state — i.e., Syria, Lebanon, Jordan — should that Arab state be attacked by the Israelis. But

Article VI clearly relieves Egypt of that commitment. This week, in fact, Egypt formally suspended its own membership in the Arab League.

A third major complication in the treaty is that it states:

The parties will request the United Nations to provide forces and observers to supervise the implementation of this annex and employ their best efforts to prevent any violation of its terms.

But the UN has formally declined to participate in the Egyptian-Israeli treaty. Since an attached letter states that President Carter will ensure that Washington

will exert its utmost efforts to obtain the requisite action by the Security Council, and if the Security Council fails to establish and maintain the arrangements called for in the treaty, the President will be prepared to take those steps necessary to ensure the establishment of an acceptable alternative multinational force...

it is therefore clear that Washington is prepared to introduce U.S.-allied military forces into the Sinai area over Soviet and Arab objections.

Concerning the issue of timetables, there is little doubt that the Israelis can also retain their control over even the Sinai itself despite the commitment to withdraw. According to the treaty accord,

Israel will complete withdrawal of all its armed forces and civilians from the Sinai not later than three years from the date of exchange of the instruments of ratification of this treaty (in a) phased withdrawal....

But the treaty, by allowing Israel to retain control over major portions of the Sinai for years, means that Israel will not give up control over the Sinai until long after the unresolvable issue of the Palestinians has wrecked the treaty itself once and for all.

— by Robert Dreyfuss