

The Camp David Accords

Jimmy Carter, Anwar el-Sadat, Menachem Begin



OVERVIEW

An extraordinary meeting to seek a Middle East peace settlement took place between Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel, President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt, and United States President Jimmy Carter in September 1978. Carter brought the leaders together at Camp David, the presidential retreat near Washington, D.C. Two agreements were reached: "A Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel" and "A Framework for Peace in the Middle East." The peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was signed at the White House in March 1979, but the assassination of Sadat in Cairo in 1981, interrupted the peace process in the region. Excerpts from remarks made by the three leaders at the end of their Camp David talks appear here.

GUIDED READING As you read, consider the following questions:

- Why were the Camp David Accords such a significant achievement at the time?
 - According to the leaders, why were the agreements reached?
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PRESIDENT CARTER. When we first arrived at Camp David, the first thing upon which we agreed was to ask the people of the world to pray that our negotiations would be successful. Those prayers have been answered far beyond any expectations. We are privileged to witness tonight a significant achievement in the cause of peace, an achievement none thought possible a year ago or even a month ago, an achievement that reflects the courage and wisdom of these two leaders.

Through 13 long days at Camp David, we have seen them display determination and vision and flexibility which was needed to make this agreement come to pass. All of us owe them our gratitude and respect. They know that they will always have my personal admiration.

There are still great difficulties that remain and many hard issues to be settled. The questions that have brought warfare and bitterness to the Middle East for the last 30 years will not be settled overnight. But we should all recognize the substantial achievements that have been made. . . .

Tomorrow night, I will go before the Congress to explain the agreements more fully and to talk about their implications for the United States and for the world. For the moment, and in closing, I want to speak more personally about my admiration for all of those who have taken part in this process and my hope that the promise of this movement will be fulfilled.

During the last 2 weeks, the members of all three delegations have spent endless hours, day and night, talking, negotiating, grappling with problems that have divided their people for 30 years. Whenever there was a danger that

human energy would fail, or patience would be exhausted or good will would run out—and there were many such moments—these two leaders and the able advisers in all delegations found the resources within them to keep the chances for peace alive.

Well, the long days at Camp David are over. But many months of difficult negotiations still lie ahead. I hope that the foresight and the wisdom that have made this session a success will guide these leaders and the leaders of all nations as they continue the progress toward peace.

Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT SADAT. Dear President Carter, in this historic moment, I would like to express to you my heartfelt congratulations and appreciation. For long days and nights, you devoted your time and energy to the pursuit of peace. You have been most courageous when you took the gigantic step of convening this meeting. The challenge was great and the risks were high, but so was your determination. You made a commitment to be a full partner in the peace process. I'm happy to say that you have honored your commitment.

The signing of the framework for the comprehensive peace settlement has a significance far beyond the event. It signals the emergence of a new peace initiative, with the American nation in the heart of the entire process.

In the weeks ahead, important decisions have to be made if we are to proceed on the road to peace. We have to reaffirm the faith of the Palestinian people in the ideal of peace.

The continuation of your active role is indispensable. We need your help and the support of the American people. Let me seize this opportunity to thank each and every American for his genuine interest in the cause of people in the Middle East. . . .

PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. *Mr. President of the United States, Mr. President of the Arab Republic of Egypt, ladies and gentlemen:*

The Camp David conference should be renamed. It was the Jimmy Carter conference. [*Laughter*]

The President undertook an initiative most imaginative in our time and brought President Sadat and myself and our colleagues and friends and advisers together under one roof. In itself, it was a great achievement. But the President took a great risk for himself and did it with great civil courage. And it was a famous French field commander who said that it is much more difficult to show civil courage than military courage.

And the President worked. As far as my historic experience is concerned, I think that he worked harder than our forefathers did in Egypt building the pyramids. [*Laughter*]

Yes, indeed, he worked day and night, and so did we—[*Laughter*]—

PRESIDENT CARTER. Amen.

PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. . . . We had some difficult moments—as usually there are some crises in negotiations, as usually somebody gives a hint that perhaps he would like to pick up and go home. [*Laughter*] It's all usual. But

ultimately, ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States won the day. And peace now celebrates a great victory for the nations of Egypt and Israel and for all mankind.

Mr. President, we, the Israelis, thank you from the bottom of our hearts for all you have done for the sake of peace, for which we prayed and yearned more than 30 years. The Jewish people suffered much, too much. And, therefore, peace to us is a striving, coming innermost from our heart and soul.

Now, when I came here to the Camp David conference, I said, perhaps as a result of our work one day people will, in every corner of the world, be able to say, *Habemus pacem*, in the spirit of these days. Can we say so tonight? Not yet. We still have to go a road until my friend President Sadat and I sign the peace treaties.

We promised each other that we shall do so within 3 months. Mr. President [*referring to President Sadat*], tonight, at this celebration of the great historic event, let us promise each other that we shall do it earlier than within 3 months.

Mr. President, you inscribed your name forever in the history of two ancient civilized peoples, the people of Egypt and the people of Israel. Thank you, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT CARTER. Thank you very much.

PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. Oh, no, no, no. I would like to say a few words about my friend, President Sadat. We met for the first time in our lives last November in Jerusalem. He came to us as a guest, a former enemy, and during our first meeting we became friends.

In the Jewish teachings, there is a tradition that the greatest achievement of a human being is to turn his enemy into a friend, and this we do in reciprocity. Since then, we had some difficult days. [*Laughter*] And he then came to visit me. We shook hands. And, thank God, we again could have said to each other, "You are my friend."

And, indeed, we shall go on working in understanding, and in friendship, and with good will. We will still have problems to solve. Camp David proved that any problem can be solved if there is good will and understanding and some, *some* wisdom....

I looked for a precedent; I didn't find it. It was a unique conference, perhaps one of the most important since the Vienna Conference in the 19th century.