The Players of Camp David

An insider Israeli view on the personalities and ideas that drove the history-making Camp David Accords

By Elyakim Rubinstein

At once both a distant dream and a vivid memory as if only several days have passed, I see in front of me the scene of the meeting between Prime Minister Menachem Begin and President Anwar Sadat on the evening of September 17, 1978: the final moments of the Camp David conference. The two were meeting in Prime Minister Begin's cabin, reciprocating Prime Minister Begin's earlier visit to President Sadat's cabin. They were in a good mood, as our sages say, "There is no joy as when doubts are solved." And indeed, the doubts had been solved. The decision was made, the chips had fallen into place. Before them was the agreement we had worked on for thirteen days and twelve nights. I was the youngest member of the Israeli delegation. I specifically and vividly recall the chilly night ten months earlier on November 19, 1977, when we stood at Ben Gurion Airport welcoming President Sadat to Israel, his visit warming our hearts. That pioneering moment is deeply embedded in my consciousness.

Camp David was followed on March 26, 1979 by a treaty of peace between Israel and the world's largest Arab country, Egypt. I will not deny that many of us on the Israeli negotiating team had, on the day of the agreement, deep doubts regarding the evacuation of the Sinai villages and the terms of Palestinian autonomy. But although there have been a few sad cases of human lives lost between Israelis and Egyptians since the treaty, by and large, the Camp David agreement should clearly be perceived as a great achievement. Remember that by 1978, Israel and Egypt had been at war five times since the founding of Israel in 1948—that is, five wars in thirty years. The fact that over the past forty years there has been no war between both countries is in itself sufficient to view Camp David as a step of major historic importance.

▷ Prime Minister Menachem Begin with members of the Israeli delegation on the Laurel Lodge porch at Camp David, September 1978. *White House/CNP/ZUMAPRESS*

There is a well-known debate among schools of historiography—does an idea shape history, or is history shaped by personalities? The "truth" most probably lies in the space between the two schools of thought. But my life experience has taught me that personalities and personal relations occupy an important part of the story.



This finds its significance in major political decisions, and in other contexts—in the way political and diplomatic negotiations are conducted. At Camp David, personal decision-making was the order of the day.

Our Israeli delegation to Camp David included twelve people. Sadly, nine of them are not with us anymore. I will mention the deceased and their titles then briefly: Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, Israeli Ambassador to the United States Simcha Dinitz, Prime Minister Begin's Military Secretary General Ephraim Poran, the legal advisor to the Foreign Ministry Dr. Meir Rosenne (later ambassador to France and the United States), Head of Planning in the Israeli Defense Forces Major General Abraham Tamir (later director general of the Prime Minister's Office and the Foreign Ministry), Prime Minister Begin's Chef-de-Cabinet Yechiel Kadishay, and Military Secretary to the Minister of Defense Colonel Ilan Tehila. We were also joined at times by Hanan Bar-On, deputy chief of mission at our Washington Embassy (later deputy director general of the Foreign Ministry). On our support staff was, inter alia, Eliora Carmon, who was later killed in the terror attack on our embassy in Buenos Aires in 1992.

Those of us who are alive are the former president of our Supreme Court, then the retiring Attorney General Aharon Barak; Prime Minister Begin's spokesperson Dan Pattir; and myself, then Assistant to Foreign Minister Dayan and Assistant Director General of our Foreign Ministry.

The Egyptian delegation, besides President Sadat, included Dr. Hassan Tuhamy, a somewhat unusual Deputy Prime Minister who met Dayan in September 1977 in Morocco, and whom I met at a later clandestine session held in Morocco as well. It was at a meeting between Dayan and Tuhamy in Marrakech on December 2-3, 1977, shortly after President Sadat's visit, where Dayan informally submitted our ideas to the Egyptians on three main issues—the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank and Gaza, and the Golan Heights. Dayan wrote the position paper in Hebrew and I translated it into English from his handwritten notes. Tuhamy simply cut the paragraph stating that the Golan was a Syrian issue that Egypt would not deal with.

Other important Egyptian delegation members included Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then Minister of State for Foreign Affairs and later Deputy Prime Minister, finally becoming the Secretary General of the United Nations. Boutros-Ghali always called me *abu el-banat* which means the father of daughters, an applicable title as I am indeed the father of four daughters. The foreign minister of Egypt, Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, was there too. It was said that Kamel knew Sadat from being held together in British prison in the forties; he was appointed at the Ismailia Conference on December 25, 1977, as his predecessor Ismail Fahmy resigned when Sadat visited Israel.

Upon the conclusion of the Camp David conference, Kamel himself resigned, expressing unhappiness about the result. His bureau chief was Ahmad Maher, later Egypt's ambassador to Washington and then Egypt's foreign minister. Osama El-Baz, the senior advisor to President Sadat and later to President Hosni Mubarak, fulfilled an important role in the last days of the summit when he sat with President Jimmy Carter and Aharon Barak throughout the drafting stage of the agreement. There were also Ashraf Ghorbal, the Egyptian ambassador to Washington, and Nabil Elaraby, the legal advisor to the Foreign Ministry who later held a series of senior positions.

The American delegation included President Jimmy Carter; Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, a senior jurist and a pleasant, honest person even when you did not agree with him, which happened on more than one occasion; and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, who held a similar viewpoint to Vance's but was less friendly to us—even though Prime Minister Begin, of Polish origins like Brzezinski, tried to engage in dialogue with him. There were of course the professional diplomats: Assistant Secretary of State Harold Saunders, Ambassador Alfred (Roy) Atherton (later ambassador to Egypt), Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts, Ambassador to Israel Sam Lewis, and Dr. William Quandt of the National Security Council. Interestingly, the American delegation did not include a legal advisor, while our delegation had three (Barak, Rosenne, and myself), and the Egyptian delegation had many, including Ghali, El-Baz, Elaraby, and more. Vance fulfilled the American legal role, and only later, in the negotiations on the Egypt–Israel peace treaty that followed the accords, did Herbert Hansel, the legal advisor of the State Department, join the team.

Positions and Personalities before Camp David

Prime Minister Begin had been the commander of the Irgun Zvai Leumi (IZL), one of the underground organizations fighting against the British Mandate, and was a lawyer by profession and training. He had been in the opposition twenty-nine years before becoming prime minister in June 1977. He was a true democrat. I was impressed with how open he was, how much information he wanted from all of us on his team. While at Camp David, a few times a day the entire Israeli delegation consulted in Begin's cabin—Camp David consists of cabins that have nice botanic names—and each of us would report to him about the interactions we had over the day with the Egyptians and the Americans. Oftentimes discussions ensued about the directions of the peace talks, and the prime minister, to his credit as an open-minded democrat, encouraged each of us—including myself, the youngest and a junior—to give their input. Begin listened

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intently to his advisors; and I even had the courage at these meetings to press my views on occasion. After listening to all of us, the prime minister gave us his summary and decisions.

A word about Prime Minister Begin. He was a Holocaust survivor, having lost most of his family to the Nazi beast, in their town of Brest (now Belarus). He spent time in a Soviet prison for his Zionist beliefs. Later, he became the commander of the IZL fighting for national freedom against the British. He was known to be humble and modest, living in a basement apartment. Begin treated me and my wife, Miriam, warmly and invited us on a number of occasions for Saturday afternoon tea with him and his wife.

On November 19, 1977, President Sadat received a warm welcome from the Israeli people, Prime Minister Begin, the Israeli government, and from the parliamentarians in the Israeli Knesset. Yet, following Sadat's visit, little progress was made in the way of peace between Israel and Egypt. There were a few meetings, however. Notable among the meetings was a visit by Begin to Ismailia on December 25, 1977, and a senior ministerial meeting in July 1978 in Leeds Castle, England. However, at the end of the summer, President Carter realized that negotiations were not progressing, and decided to convene the Camp David conference. It should be noted, though, that discussions at Leeds Castle informed some of the negotiations later at Camp David.

It was not easy for us to prepare for the conference, though there was a team headed by the director general of the prime minister's office Dr. Elie Ben-Elissar (later Israel's first ambassador to Egypt). Part of the reason the Israeli team was not able to sufficiently prepare was that the format, length, and purpose of the conference were not clear ahead of time. More importantly, perhaps, detailed preparation was avoided because of the possible leaks to the press. In a negotiation, if it is known what your maximum offer is going to be, it is likely to cause much harm to your position and negotiating power.

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That is not to say that one should encourage unprepared conferences. In fact, I have attended several in which the lack of proper preparedness was harmful. My experience shows that where there is thorough preparation, the work of the negotiating delegations is greatly eased. It is important, though, to maintain ambiguity concerning "bottom lines." I should add that on the eve of the Camp David conference, Dayan conducted a series of meetings with Palestinians from Judea and Samaria—the West Bank—and the Gaza Strip, to listen to their views concerning the conference and the prospects for peace.

In any case, as we entered Camp David we did not assume that the conference would lead to an agreement. I remember a meeting in a safe apartment in New York—to maintain secrecy—that preceded the conference. The private Israeli team meeting did not give me the impression that the prime minister and the other ministers assumed we would return with an agreement. We were expecting a three- to four-day conference, hoping to leave it "dry," that is, that Israel will not be blamed for a failure. Yet even at the New York meeting Ambassador Dinitz stressed that the United States intended to push for an agreement.

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Later on, as the days went by, it became clear on the one hand that there was a real chance of reaching an agreement and on the other hand, that if the conference ended without an agreement, it would cause damage for the prospects of peace, and cause a major crisis in the Israeli–American relationship. First and foremost, the prime minister and the ministers understood that at the conference they had an historic opportunity, which should not be missed.

The challenge was complex; the Israeli delegation, and in particular Prime Minister Begin, Foreign Minister Dayan, and Defense Minister Weizman, faced complicated ideological questions regarding the land of Israel, the Palestinian issue and related security challenges, and Sinai. Ideological questions also presented themselves, it seems, to President Sadat, first and foremost the written and signed recognition of Israel, which he had already explicitly demonstrated in his unprecedented visit to Israel, but its translation into a treaty of peace was above what a major part of the Arab World was ready to tolerate in those days.

Israel came to the conference hoping to achieve peace with the largest and most important Arab state. The idea of peace with our Arab neighbors was embedded in our Declaration of Independence of 1948 which states, "We extend our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land. The State of Israel is prepared to do its share in a common effort for the advancement of the entire Middle East." So from our inception, we, Israelis, have always extended a hand of peace to our neighbors, and the meeting with Sadat thirty years after our Declaration of Independence was the first chance Israel ever had to actualize this part of our national basic declaration.

In my humble view, there was a clear difference between the Egyptian priorities and the American position. President Sadat, while not abandoning the Palestinian issue, desired first and foremost to reinstate Egyptian sovereignty in Sinai, which was under Israeli control since 1967. Despite the surprise attack

launched jointly by Syria and Egypt on Israeli forces on October 6, 1973—known in Israel as the Yom Kippur War and in Egypt as the October War—the fighting nevertheless ended with the Israeli Defense Forces 101 kilometers from Cairo. Still, it was important to Sadat that he be perceived by Egyptians as having won the war. Indeed, when I visited Egypt later in 1977 for the Ismailia Conference of December 25, we found that to Egyptians, Sadat was honored as the *batal el-ubur*, the hero of the crossing of the Suez Canal, and signs carrying this title were to be seen everywhere. Yet, in practice, the war was far from achieving its intended result; four years later all that Sadat's Egypt had been able to negotiate with us was a 1975 interim arrangement which provided for the potential withdrawal from Sinai by Israel and the reopening of the Suez Canal.

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Therefore, Sadat seemed to have concluded well before the Camp David meeting that war was not the way forward and another path should be pursued in order to get Sinai back. Meanwhile, following the Sinai disengagement agreements in 1974 and 1975, Egypt began to rebuild the Canal cities, a move Dayan believed might signal a wish for peace, because a new war would cause the demolishment of these cities.

Regarding Sadat's diplomatic perspective on the Palestinians, the Palestinian issue was certainly important to Egypt. As a leading Arab country, Egypt was keen on Palestinian rights and statehood. Yet, in the minds of the Egyptian negotiating team, the Palestinian question came second to regaining control of Sinai. Last but not least, I should add, I do believe that President Sadat wanted to reach peace.

Meanwhile, the United States approached the subject from another angle. President Carter took office in January 1977 with a mission to help the Palestinians attain a homeland. He aspired to reconvene the Geneva Conference of late 1973 in which the Palestinian issue was openly discussed and to somehow include the Palestine Liberation Organization in a peace with Israel. However, by the end of 1977, after Sadat's visit to Israel, Carter understood that the Palestinian issue must be tackled together with Egyptian–Israeli peace.

High Drama at Camp David

Dayan, a well-known war hero and an experienced statesman, who became somewhat of a controversial figure following the Yom Kippur War, was a pessimist by nature. He dedicated days and nights to promoting the prospects for peace and was heavily invested in the quest for an agreement. He also wished, in my view, that his public life would be crowned by a peace treaty, not by the

Yom Kippur War. Weizman, a former air-force commander (like Vice President Mubarak) was personally liked by President Sadat, and this created a positive atmosphere. And let us remember, as Dayan and Weizman were generals who fought for Israel, this further legitimized to the Israeli people their position that now was a time for peace.

The interplay between these personalities was key in shaping the outcome of the summit. Oftentimes discussions ensued about the directions of the peace talks. While there may have been differences of character between the ministers and at times small differences of view, there was basic trust and a strong sense of shared mission. I know that for Begin the decision-making was far from easy, both because of ideological conviction and because of a sense of deep national and social responsibility. But he was an avid reader of history, and rose up to the promise of peace.

The summit lasted for thirteen days and twelve nights (Prime Minister Begin used to say "for thirteen days and thirteen nights"). Practically, it had two parts: the first, from Tuesday, September 5, 1978, until Sunday, September 10, 1978, was the warming up stage. The Americans first let the parties submit their thoughts. Israel submitted a draft of the peace treaty. Egypt argued that Israel should be denuclearized. The second part, starting Sunday, September 10, began after a joint excursion to the American Civil War battlefield of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, not far from Camp David, where President Abraham Lincoln gave his immortal Gettysburg Address 114 years earlier, in another time of war, of declarations, and of hope for peace.

When we returned to Camp David, the substantial negotiations began and lasted eight days in which there were twenty-three drafts of the accords. The negotiations were difficult. They became especially tense during the last four days of the conference, when a major part of the talks took place in the presence of President Carter, Aharon Barak, and Usama El-Baz. Carter chose to do so surpassing, in a way, the political echelon, rightly assuming that it was going to be difficult to conduct negotiations on the actual text of an agreement with Sadat (who ostensibly was not a "text person") and Begin (who perhaps may have been somewhat too much a "text person," and lover of the written word).

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Contrary to a certain conventional wisdom, Sinai was not promised to the Egyptians as a precondition to Sadat's visit to Israel in November 1977. Even

at the Morocco meeting with Tuhamy in early December 1977, after the visit, Foreign Minister Dayan made no such commitment. As far as I remember, the Israeli negotiators focused on security, that is, the retention of forces in Sinai, and on maintaining the Jewish settlements (and airfields) in Sinai. The effect on the last point was unsuccessful; Dayan even went in person to Sadat to try and convince him that the settlements should stay under Israeli sovereignty, underlining the humanitarian difficulties of evacuation. But to no avail.

Regarding Jewish settlements in the Sinai Peninsula, Prime Minister Begin found it difficult to decide on this matter, as his heart was against doing away with flourishing villages; yet, he understood that peace was at stake. According to what Begin told us, he convinced President Carter that the settlements should stay within a United Nations-supervised area and Carter spoke to Sadat, but he too, was unsuccessful. Sadat would have none of it. The settlements in Sinai had to go. It may have been Dayan's advice to Begin to bring the Sinai settlements matter before the Knesset for approval, which eased the decision-making for the prime minister. It was important to Begin to underline that the decision on the evacuation of the Sinai settlements was taken by the Knesset and not by him and the delegation at Camp David.

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A year later, I wrote an essay on the peace negotiations with Egypt. It was after Dayan's resignation in October 1979, and the prime minister was acting foreign minister. I sent him the draft, which he basically liked, but strongly asked me to change a sentence about the settlements issue, stating that there was no promise to President Carter that we would withdraw the Jewish settlements in Sinai, but only that we were to bring the subject for a full vote at the Knesset. It was President Carter's assumption, the prime minister said, that he would vote against this stipulation. Begin suggested that the Knesset should hold votes on the Camp David Accords and on the settlements issue separately. The opposition, however, insisted on uniting the votes, and the prime minister decided that the overriding consideration was to support peace.

The other difficult subject in our negotiations was, of course, the Palestinian issue. There was no way to finalize the bilateral Egyptian part without a substantial move on the Palestinian front, for which Dayan in particular had prepared himself in his meetings with Palestinian notables leading up to the Camp David summit. It should be mentioned that the prime minister had prepared an autonomy plan for the Palestinian Arabs in the territories to which Dayan and Barak, if I recall correctly, injected the Jordanian element, that is, the need to have Jordan as part of the negotiation on the final status of the territory,

as stipulated indeed in the accords. Begin presented it to President Carter and later to President Sadat in Ismailia.

Yet, at Camp David, the autonomy language, which appears in the complicated lengthy document entitled "Framework for Peace in the Middle East," went beyond Begin's plan and the issue of Palestinian autonomy was shrunk to a five-year period with permanent status negotiations to begin in the third year. Begin's ultimate agreement to the Camp David Accords' stipulations on negotiations with Palestinian leaders was likely predicated on Begin's belief that the autonomy had to be negotiated in the next five years and would permanently resolve the Palestinian issue and Israeli interests would thus be protected. Some of us, myself included, doubted this and time would prove that the Palestinian question was much harder to respond to than we had hoped at Camp David.

During Camp David, there were those of us who believed that the prime minister was not fully satisfied with the direction to which the negotiations led, mainly concerning the Palestinian autonomy plan. One Saturday night immediately after the summit, the prime minister conducted a consultation at his residence, and I expressed doubts on one of the points concerning the Palestinian issue. Begin had a picture of his late mentor Ze'ev Jabotinsky on the wall, and I felt as if he was admonishing him. When we left, I was reproached by Weizman, who said, "Do not spread salt on the Prime Minister's wounds."

Yet, I must stress, that contrary to the common notion that Begin regretted his signature concerning the Palestinian issue, this was far from the truth. In a September 1982 telephone conversation with the prime minister after I had mentioned that the fourth anniversary of the Camp David Accords was a few days away, Begin said: "Ely, we did a good thing for our nation and country."

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I should add, concerning the famous debate that marred the Begin–Carter relationship until the end of Carter's term regarding Begin's commitment at Camp David to freeze construction of the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza; Carter was wrong and Begin was right. Begin argued that he was committed to freeze construction for three months (which actually became six) until the attainment of the treaty of peace with Egypt. Meanwhile, Carter spoke about a freeze throughout the negotiations on the Palestinian issue until there was a permanent status agreement with the Palestinians. Yet, even President Sadat, right after Camp David, said "What is wrong with three months?" The facts are fully corroborated by President Aharon Barak, who attended the relevant meeting.

Internal Agonies and Decision-Making

I saw Begin have his doubts, even though I did not belong to his close circle. I saw his final decision, which I believe he was satisfied with in the end. It is a pity that the prime minister did not write his memoirs as he ostensibly hoped to. But I believe that Begin's considerations regarding the future of Arab–Israeli relations included the following: on the one hand, there was the historic and revolutionary step of peace with the largest and strongest Arab state. On the other hand, there was the ideological price of returning Sinai to Egypt. Giving away Sinai was not easy for the prime minister. He had risen to power believing in the concept of the Complete Land of Israel or *Eretz Israel,* which placed Judea, Samaria, and Gaza (the West Bank and Gaza) within Israel's borders; Sinai was a "softer" ideological concept, but there was nevertheless an attachment to the area in which the Torah was given to the Jewish people.

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Therefore, the Camp David Accords placed two of Begin's core values—pursuit of peace and maintaining the land of Israel—at odds with one another. Begin's convictions were historically rooted and ideologically driven and he hoped to see his ideas on the Land of Israel reflected in the Palestinian autonomy model that he had originally helped shape. Despite the difficulty, the prime minister ultimately supported the Camp David Accords, declaring that they were a major strategic achievement for Israel. Looking back now forty years, I agree that he was right, and this could hardly be disputed.

Among the factors shaping the dynamics of the Israeli delegation in Camp David was that Dayan, Weizman, Barak, and others in the delegation were not of Begin's ideological mold, and did not share his affinity to Jabotinsky (1880–1940). Jabotinsky was the founder of the Zionist Revisionist Party, Begin's party from his youth in Poland. He was a warrior, a very able writer, and was followed by a large number of Jews in Europe. The sovereignty on *Eretz Israel* was part of his ideology, but it was combined with liberalism and human rights, which were also part of Begin's beliefs. In fact, it was only Begin himself, his wife, and Kadishai who were real Jabotinskities. These differences in backgrounds in the Israeli team were evident on the second Friday night of Camp David; as we were approaching the end of the meal Begin said, "Let us sing 'underground' songs together!" These were songs from his period as the Irgun commander in the pre-state years, fighting against the British. But he had no singing partner except for his wife and Kadishai.

But from Begin's as well as Dayan's point of view, the biggest achievements at Camp David were the attainment of peace with Egypt, as well as the fact that the

agreement concerning the Palestinian issue did not mention a Palestinian state and self-determination. The Israeli Defense Forces were to remain in the West Bank and Gaza, guarding the security of Israel, and the accords did not include Jerusalem—a subject which almost torpedoed the conference on the last day.

An important point is that the accords state that every change is subject to mutual agreement—there was to be no coercion. As mentioned, there were hopes from our team that the shaping of Israel's eastern boundary would ultimately be with Jordan, which has not yet materialized.

The ability to reach an agreement was also greatly augmented by the absence of media from Camp David, coupled with a ban on spokespersons' briefings, except for the American spokesperson, who focused on anecdotes and "color" stories rather than substance. Otherwise, pressures from both sides could have doomed the agreement.

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The great achievement of Camp David is the fact that the accords were reached despite the huge differences between the personalities that met there, mainly Begin and Sadat. It should be noted, though, that despite the differences of backgrounds, cultures, and careers, both men had a common trait—besides their leadership, and love for their nations to which they dedicated their lives—it was the tendency toward drama, toward the grand picture of history. Yet, beyond this point, it would be difficult to find two people with such divergent backgrounds.

I believe that until his meeting with President Sadat, during the 1977 historic visit, Begin met few Arabs outside of those who are citizens of Israel. The Arab culture was not part of his natural environment. He grew up in Poland between the two World Wars, and had a classical and legal education, well rooted in Jewish culture and history, and later his personality developed with a special focus on the memory of the Holocaust, where he lost his family. Begin also believed deeply in the democratic ideas of human and civil rights and the rule of law. Sadat, meanwhile, began as a military officer, and climbed up the political ladder until he became president in 1970 after the passing of Gamal Abdel Nasser. He was an Egyptian patriot.

Even though the actual meetings between Begin and Sadat during Camp David were few, I vividly remember their warm meeting in the early evening of September 17, before signing the accords. Having attended their very last meeting, in August 1981, in Alexandria, I also recall how it was conducted in good spirits, seemingly a climax before the terrible and tragic anticlimax five weeks later with President Sadat's assassination.

President Carter, unlike his two interlocutors, did not have to bear a responsibility regarding the fate of his people. The peace process was, however, a matter of strategic importance to the United States. Like countless other Israelis, I am critical of many of President Carter's writings and speeches over the years concerning Israel. Yet, he deserves credit for the effort he had put into this conference: you cannot underestimate the effect of having a sitting U.S. president disconnect from most other matters for thirteen days, fully engaged in the process, working from a yellow legal pad.

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Let me add that Prime Minister Begin was a person who unequivocally respected and kept his word. Hence, there was no basis whatsoever for the apprehension expressed during the next few years, that he was not going to fulfill his side of the promise of withdrawal from Sinai. However, he was not well acquainted with the Arab World, and—indeed—negotiations such as Camp David had no precedent.

I would like to make another important point regarding negotiations: respect. All people want to be respected. Respect—honor—is a pillar of many cultures. It is strongly rooted in our own region's cultures. Begin and Sadat, despite some ups and downs over the years, shared a respect for one another.

The Camp David Accords were followed by the Egyptian–Israeli peace agreement, signed by the two leaders at the White House on March 26, 1979. The negotiations for the final peace treaty started in October 1978 at the Blair House—the presidential guesthouse in Washington opposite the White House—and while the main stipulations were almost fully ready by November, several issues, in particular the relationship between the treaty with Egypt and the Palestinian autonomy plan, and between the Defense Treaty of the Arab League and the peace treaty to be signed, necessitated another few months and a visit by President Carter to the region in March 1979 to finalize. It was done through agreed minutes, which when read look rather enigmatic, but never had to be invoked. The main provisions of the treaty included, inter alia, the military arrangements which divided Sinai into three areas with gradual limitation of military forces, a symbolic area on one side for the establishment of an international—later multinational—force, and normalization of relations, including resident embassies. And of course, the boundary was defined, and disputed points later went to arbitration.

I still remember the festive dinner at the White House on March 26, 1979, the day the treaty was signed. I was seated at the table with an Egyptian

parliamentarian, a former military officer who lost a leg in the Yom Kippur War, and I served as his translator from Arabic to English and vice versa, while celebrating with the American guests the unique event of peace. Next to me was the late editor of *Yediot Ahronot*, a major Israeli newspaper, who practiced with me how to approach the leaders in order to ask them to sign an autograph for his newspaper, an endeavor in which he finally succeeded.

Looking Back

The Camp David Accords was an example for peace between Israel and an Arab state, and it also laid the foundations for Arab–Israeli peace at large, stating that the framework may serve as a model for future implementation with Israel's other neighbors. Although over the years there were many in the Arab World who wanted to dismiss the accords, in my view they are still valid today. I remember saying to some American negotiators, in particular Secretary of State James Baker, who tried to convince Israel to make concessions quoting parts of Camp David somewhat taken out of context, that the accords were not a fruit salad from which you could pick a plum or an apple; they consisted of a principled whole.

Camp David from its inception was a symbol and a milestone, but also controversial in Israel and in the Arab World. As such, the accords and their success have always been in the eyes of the beholder. Yet it must be remembered again that forty years have gone by with no wars between Egypt and Israel. In the thirty years before, there were thousands of casualties on both sides. On a personal level, two of my cousins and many of my friends were killed. There is regret—and personally I feel particularly sad that the many bilateral agreements on which we worked hard between 1979 and 1982 (and I was heavily involved in them as an Assistant Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in charge of the implementation of the treaty, and later as Legal Advisor to the ministry) were only partially fulfilled, and that the civilian relations between the two countries have not properly developed.

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I still remember the devotion and enthusiasm with which our people worked on those agreements, many of which unfortunately still only remain on paper. For officials in our government, working on this sort of agreement was a source of joy. Let me mention here that in February 1980, I was proud to welcome at Ben Gurion Airport the first Egyptian ambassador to Israel, Saad Murtada.

Our embassy in Cairo functions, but not at the same capacity as other Israeli embassies in the world. I believe the atmosphere at the Egyptian embassy in Israel is better. Unfortunately, the civilian part of the treaty never approached what was anticipated and Egyptians and Israelis are not as close as the Camp

David Accords hoped we would become. The attitude of the Egyptian media toward Israel over the years leaves much to be desired. Education for peace is needed. Nevertheless, the strategic part of the accords and the treaty is with us, and in this the strategic interests of both parties find their expression, including the struggle against terrorism, and thank God for that.

My last conversation with Dayan took place two days after President Sadat's assassination in October 1981, and about a week before his own passing away. It revolved around Sadat's death in which Dayan said he felt apprehension as to whether the peace process with Egypt was going to continue. I was reminded of an earlier talk Dayan and I had in September 1979, during which Dayan told me that Sadat possessed extraordinary courage and optimism.

Even today, forty years after Camp David, we have not yet reached a comprehensive peace; but the half-full glass is better than an empty glass, and to date there have been substantial achievements in the area of peace between Israelis and Arabs. For example, it was my honor and privilege to head the Israeli delegation to the treaty of peace with Jordan signed in October 1994 under the leadership of the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who was himself assassinated in November 1995. I was also present at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference, led on our side by Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. There were also beginnings of agreements with the Palestinians and a partial interesting agreement with Lebanon in 1983, as well as efforts to achieve peace with Syria. I took part in many of them.

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As an Israeli, I would like to hope and believe that the "no more war" declaration from the Sadat and Begin encounter will one day materialize beyond our relations with Egypt and Jordan. We Israelis have much respect for Egypt, a country with a special history and culture that has contributed greatly to the world. Egypt is a pillar in the Middle East and beyond, and we look forward to continue living in peace and quiet with our great neighbor. ℟

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