CHAPTER SIX

THE ISRAELI CHALLENGE
Until the June 1967 war Israel had successfully cultivated abroad the image of a peace seeker and portrayed the Arabs as anti-peace. Nasser became the first major Arab leader to challenge the Israeli thesis by accepting the UN Security Council Resolution 242. He went further and welcomed the Rogers Peace Plan. Israel, by its refusal to withdraw from Arab lands in return for peace, stands exposed and isolated. Sadat took a more radical step in 1971 when he agreed to sign a peace agreement. Israel again refused. After the 1973 war Sadat concluded two separate peace agreements and finally ended the armed confrontation with Israel in 1979. Through all these steps Sadat's determination to realize full peace became known to the world and in effect, demolished Israeli propaganda against the Arabs. Instead of reciprocating the Arab desire for peace Israel persisted in its policy of holding on to occupied Arab lands. The present chapter examines Egyptian peace overtures, Israeli responses and the impact of these on the peace process.

Sadat's first Peace Initiative Isolates Israel

Sadat's first major decision as President was to renew cease fire under the Rogers Plan for a further period of three months from November 7, 1970. Soon he launched an Egyptian peace offensive. On February 4, 1971 Sadat put forward a peace plan. He viewed this as a first step toward total Israeli withdrawal under UN Security Council Resolution 242. Sadat's peace proposal was a radical departure from the policies Nasser had pursued towards Israel. Rabin was to say that this step constituted a "milestone".
For the first time in the chronicles of the Middle Eastern conflict, an Arab country - indeed the largest Arab country and leader of the Arab world - had issued an official document expressing its readiness to enter into a peace agreement with Israel. 1

Israel rejected most of the points contained in the Egyptian peace proposal. Moreover, Rabin told Rogers that "it has been decided to state clearly that Israel will not withdraw to the June 4, 1967 lines". 2 Israel in its reply to Dr. Jarring's queries confined itself to the Egyptian front which indicated its desire for a separate peace agreement. Israel added a new element: it wanted Egypt to withdraw from the Arab League's Collective Security Pact. In other words, Israel considered Egypt's membership of the Arab League itself as a hostile act. 3 Israel was evidently trying to undercut Egypt's commitment to the Arab world by means of a separate deal with that country. Moreover, Israel launched a smear campaign against Dr. Jarring and made strenuous attempts to undermine the position of William Rogers and the US State Department in which Kissinger supported the Israeli stand. Thus, Israeli intransigence and its desire for territorial expansionism killed the peace initiative.

1. Yitzhak Rabin, The Rabin Memoirs (Boston: 1979) pp. 191, 192-5; Rabin wrote: "Israel's reply to Sadat's peace proposal turned out to be rambling document whose long-windedness was exceeded only by its vagueness. Worst of all, it failed in its main task: presenting Israel's demands in return for peace". Ibid, pp. 194-5. "At present". Eban wrote "even our friends are in confusion because they do not know whether we want to hold on to 70 per cent of Sinai or 7%; whether we want security arrangements or aspire to annex sections of Sinai". Ibid, p. 197; see also Henry Kissinger, The White House Years (New Delhi: 1979) p. 1280.


Convinced of their military invincibility Israeli leaders started dreaming of repeating what they did after the 1948 war. It sent feelers about its determination to annex Golan Heights, the West Bank, Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip and to de-militarize the greater part of Sinai in case of its restoration to Egypt. Concerning Egypt, Golda Meir went further when she said Israel's policy, aims towards a considerable change in her border with Egypt. That meant a change of sovereignty, not just an Israeli presence. "We do not employ the term 'annexation' because of its negative connotation" she said. For her a secure border with Egypt meant retention of the Gaza strip, continued control of Sharm el Sheikh and a territorial link to Israel "continued control does not signify a presence but rather concrete military control". Moreover, Golda Meir told a group of Soviet immigrants who had been settled in the Golan Heights that "the border is found there where Jews live and not by a line on a map". Dayan also said: "In every place where we have established a settlement, we will never abandon that settlement or the place itself". To cap it all, the Israeli foreign Minister told the UN General Assembly that "we have not sought to determine the final peace boundary and we have drawn no ultimate maps". With this openly negative attitude from Israel, in which the US to a large degree also supported it, Sadat was greatly disappointed. He began to prepare for war and to put Israel on the spot by declaring that 1971 would not end without a settlement, either peaceful or military. Sadat was convinced that

war alone would enable him to get back his lands. Accordingly, he embarked on a policy which was unequivocally a military one.

Since 1972 was an election year in the US, with Nixon seeking re-election (through the Jewish lobby), Golda Meir managed to secure a promise from Nixon for additional offensive weapons. Moreover Israel succeeded in persuading Nixon not to undertake any new political initiative in the area without prior consultation with Israel. On the other hand Sadat partly due to Soviet preference for detente and its refusal to give the arms needed by Egypt to break the ceasefire with Israel expelled the Soviet military advisers in July 1972. Sadat's unexpected decision convinced the Israelis that his military threat was meaningless. Thus, Israel felt not only secure with Super Power detente but the eviction of Soviet advisers further increased Israeli confidence in Arab unwillingness to fight.

Israeli greed for Arab territories soon became more and more obvious. They planned to create an industrial city in north-east Sinai. Plans were also underway for building in Sinai the city of Yamit, with an estimated quarter of a million people. This was to be the center-piece of a complex of settlements between El Arish and the Gaza strip. This ambitious program was aimed "as a buffer between concentrated Arab populations in the Gaza Strip and in Egypt."

At this point, Sadat stressed his growing anger at what he called Israel's "intolerable arrogance". He was furious over Dayan's statement on Yamit in which the latter had openly admitted that his proposal for Yamit was "to serve as one of the factors enabling us to establish the borders further to the West". Dayan's talk of Yamit as a "primary military defence line" clearly showed beyond doubt that Israel wanted Egypt to be presented with a fait accompli. Sadat said "if only for that one statement of Dayan's I think we should go to war". He also said "every word spoken about Yamit is a knife pointing at me personally and at my self respect".

The October War and the Movement towards Peace

It is against this background that on October 6, 1973 the war broke out with Egypt and Syria simultaneously attacking Israel. The Egyptians crossed the Suez Canal and quickly destroyed the Bar Lev line and the invincible Israeli army was defeated. All statements from the Israeli leaders that Arabs cannot fight were shattered to pieces. The Israelis had portrayed the Arabs as cowards who ran away at the first opportunity. But now it was the Israelis who were fleeing and taken prisoners by Egyptians in large numbers. An Israeli journalist summed up the feelings of his compatriots, a mixture of anger and stupefaction that became famous: "The Arabs have learned from Israel how to fight and we have learned from the Arabs how to lie".

8. Lilenthal, n. 5, p. 188.
But by October 16, the Israelis regained the initiative and crossed the Suez Canal and carved out a salient in 'Africa' which soon put the Egyptian armies which had crossed into Sinai in jeopardy. Eventhough Egypt accepted the UN sponsored ceasefire on October 22, Israel accepted it only on October 27, 1973.

Despite this intrusion, Israel was put on the defensive and its military superiority had been challenged with some success by the Egyptians. The war marked a fundamental shift, at Israel's expense in the balance of power in the region. For the first time since the Balfour Declaration the Arabs had attempted to achieve a fait accompli by force of arms and had nearly succeeded. Israel's setback was not merely in the military field but extended to the psychological, diplomatic, ideological and economic fields which generally make up the strength and vigour of a nation. The Israeli leaders were also shocked to learn of the effective oil weapon which the Arabs used with devastating impact. In Kissinger's assessment (on his arrival in Israel on October 22, 1973), he found that "Israel's endurance was reaching the breaking point". Moreover during the war, Israel had come "close to the abyss" and two weeks of war had drained the Israelis. He found Israeli servicemen and civilians greeting the "approaching peace as the highest blessing" and applauded it with "tears in their eyes". Kissinger concluded: "Their expression showed a weariness that almost tangibly conveyed the limits of human endurance. Israel was exhausted no matter what the military maps showed". 11

Egyptian Concessions

When Israel finally stopped fighting, a meeting took place at KM 101 in Egypt between General Gamassy of Egypt and the Israeli Major General Abaron Yariv. This was the first direct face to face talk between Israel and Egypt to discuss the implementation of the UN ceasefire. Meanwhile, Kissinger entered the scene and presented to Sadat Golda Meir's six points namely: Israel would respect the ceasefire; that non-military resupply of the Third Army Corps would be allowed, with UN and Israeli inspection of convoys; that the town of Suez would receive food, water and medicine; concurrently with the agreement on non-military supplies, POW's should be exchanged and the naval blockade lifted; and the October 22 lines could be discussed in the framework of the disengagement of forces. In Washington Kissinger had told Golda Meir that he was sure Sadat would reject the Israeli points. To Kissinger's astonishment, Sadat accepted it. Thus, Sadat agreed with Kissinger's line of argument and urged him to strive to obtain rapid agreement on the Israeli points. Upon learning that Sadat had agreed to drop the issue of the October 22 lines, the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir termed it a "fantastic achievement". 12

Soon after (on November 9), agreement on a ceasefire plan and the exchange of POW's was announced, and subsequently (two days later) a six point agreement modeled on the original Israeli proposal was

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signed by Israeli and Egyptian military representatives. Sadat who had been badly affected by the Israeli countercrossing accepted Israeli demands because of his fear of further deterioration in his position. Sadat's ready acceptance of the Israeli points and later his readiness to release Israeli POW's led the Israelis to ask for more concessions before they agreed to move on other issues. Once the prisoners were released on November 15, the Israelis wanted Egypt to guarantee free passage in the Straits of Bab el Mandeb. Sadat's concessions had only whetted the Israeli appetite. 13 Having extracted concessions from Sadat the Israelis refused to return to the October 22 ceasefire lines and instead proposed that both sides should pull back from the territory gained in the October war and that UN forces should take over these areas. According to Heikal, Sadat at these talks was engaged

in a complicated peace of deception to which the General (Gamassy) had not been made party. Sadat had come to the conclusion that in the conflict between the Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, and her Defence Minister, Moshe Dayan, the Americans were backing Dayan, and he thought he could exploit this split between the Israeli politicians and soldiers to his own benefit ... Yariv ... he took to be a Dayan man, so while he was sending messages via Fahmy to the Americans that Egypt insisted on being handed back up to the line El Arish Ras Mohamed, to Dayan, via Gamasy and Yariv, he was sending the message that Egypt would be content with no more than the line of the passes. 14

Thus, within one month Sadat had exposed his peace plan to the Israelis without getting anything in return, had released POW's and agreed to lift blockade at Bab al Mandeb. To put it briefly, Sadat


14. Heikal, n. 13, pp. 68-9. Sadat made the concessions demanded by the Israelis, and said he had agreed with Kissinger "on my six points" and "without batting an eyelid, handed out copies of Golda Meir's proposals as his own", Ibid, pp.67-68.
weakened his position considerably by making swift concessions to Israel through the US. By now enough Israeli statements and actions had come to light which should have persuaded Sadat about the wisdom of making additional concessions to Israel, but he went ahead and accepted Kissinger's ideas, ignoring his own ministers.

The Road to Sinai-I

Kissinger's priority now shifted to the convening of the Geneva Conference (GPC). The Israelis were reluctant to attend the GPC because of a) Soviet presence as co-chairman; b) expected combined Arab pressure; and c) UN presence through its Secretary General who would highlight the implementation of UN resolution 242 and 336. The GPC was convened on December 21, 1973 and an Egyptian-Israeli military committee was formed on disengagement. However due to the impending elections in Israel no meaningful negotiations took place in this committee which continued to meet in Geneva for some time. In the meantime Dayan came up with a conceptual framework for disengagement in Sinai. During his visit to Washington he presented the disengagement proposals under which each party would have two-limited-force zones, separated by a UN buffer. He also specified the type of force limitations that Israel could accept. Basically, each sides' forces should be beyond the artillery range of the other side, and SAM's should not be able to reach each other's aircraft. In addition the number of tanks in the limited zones should be very small. This became the conceptual foundations of Sinai-I.

15. Quandt, n. 12, p. 221; Israel disdained the UN and all its works for the same reason that the Arabs esteemed them. Israel is the child of the UN, the only one of its kind, but it has been a delinquent child, with a unique record of censure by the world body which gave it birth; countless UN resolutions are unassailable evidence of the strength of the Arab Case. If the UN were to play an effective and impartial role in the peace-seeking forum, the moral balance would inevitably have tilted in the Arabs favour. So, deferring to the Israelis, Kissinger ensured that its role was ceremonial only. Hirst, n. 10, p. 181.

Interestingly, Sadat accepted Dayan’s conceptual framework when Kissinger visited Egypt.

Initially the Israelis expected Kissinger to confine his diplomacy to readjustments of the ceasefire lines, to relieve international pressures upon Israel and also to supply Israel large quantities of arms. But Kissinger told Golda Meir that a disengagement is clearly in Israel’s interest because it would be easier to achieve and avoid discussing Israel’s final borders and remove pressures upon Israel and the US. Moreover, he said disengagement would make it very difficult for Egypt to resume war. Kissinger told Meir: “I have discussed disengagement with Sadat and he has accepted the general concept. He will thin out his forces on the East Bank of the Suez Canal, limit arms in that area and accept a buffer zone under the UN. I made it clear to him that it’s important to Israel to retain the Sinei Passes”.17 The Israelis fearing a repetition of the 1973 war insisted upon: a) an effective and permanent UN force; b) a severe limitation of Egyptian SAM’s; and c) upon guarantees against the resumption of war. Kissinger exhorted them to adopt a flexible attitude on military details.

We must keep in mind the strategic purpose of a disengagement. You have to remember what is at stake - you have to make a correct assessment of the overall situation. If we don’t get an agreement quickly, by the end of January, then all of the pressures – the oil embargo, the Russians, the Europeans, the Japanese – will be brought to bear on us.18

17. Edward R.F. Sheehan, The Arabs, Israelis and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East (New York: 1976) p. 103; Soon after his first meeting with Kissinger, Sadat was of the view that the US should organize and supervise peace in the area. He added that he would even be ready in due course for direct negotiations with Israel, but that would have to wait until the people in Egypt had begun to appreciate the benefits flowing from the ending of hostilities and the beginning of the peace process. This was later to be confirmed by Rabin. He said “Back in 1974 there was a tacit understanding between the US, Egypt and Israel as to a common strategic concept based on 3 points: (a) That the US would lead the peace process; (b) that Egypt and Israel would be regarded as twin cornerstones of a US-led peace policy; and (c) that the peace process would be a gradual one. There was Kissinger’s step-by-step approach and Carter’s policy which produced the Camp David agreement”. Jerusalem Post, April 16, 1982, cited in Hoikal, n.13, pp.67-68.
He further told them that if the disengagement could not be achieved then Sadat might abandon US mediation and "Israel itself would be immeasurably worse off. Israel might bargain hard, Kissinger implied, but it should not make its price too high. The world would not stand still for Israel".19 Kissinger also told the Israeli Prime Minister that Sadat has already changed his position. Initially he demanded El Arish, then the evacuation of the Sinai passes "I think a lot of these details are negotiable with Sadat, but you have to establish your own priorities. Sadat's intention after disengagement was to start economic reconstruction and reopen the Suez Canal. Moreover, Sadat will restore the civil populace to the canal zone - "a guarantee against war".20 Despite this advice from Kissinger Israel wanted firm guarantees. During Sinai-I talks itself, Golda Meir expressed her fears about the viability of any agreement signed with Israel. She asked "... regimes change in the Arab World ... Suppose something happens to Sadat and someone more anti-Israeli and pro-Soviet comes to power? What happens then to all these agreements?" On January 15, 1974 it was reported that Golda Meir had dropped the demand for an end of belligerency as part of Sinai-I but through Kissinger they were determined to extract non-belligerency from Sadat not directly but in a truly "devious" manner.21

Sinai-I was signed finally on January 18, 1974. This was concluded with little efforts and minimal pressure on either party, since by then both badly needed the agreement. The choice

for both was harsh. Israel had to demobilize her enormous army or face severe economic problems. Sadat had to save the Third Army and prove that war had won him territory. 22 With the conclusion of Sinai-I the GPC was shelved. Sadat completely embraced Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy which meant that GPC was bypassed.

Soon after Sinai-I, Kissinger wanted Sadat to honour his promise to work for the lifting of oil embargo. This was complied with on March 18, 1974. Kissinger managed to conclude a disengagement between Syria and Israel on May 31, 1974. With this Arab pressure on US was removed. Moreover, once Israel had solved the pressing problems of temporarily stabilizing the ceasefire lines with Egypt and Syria and the consequent disengagement of troops it lost interest in any further peace talks with Arab countries. In fact the Israelis talked openly of separating Egypt from Syria and of removing Egypt from the Arab-Israeli military equation. Even for non-belligerency, Israel seemed to be in no great hurry. It soon became obvious that the paramount Israeli goal was to delay and prolong peace talks with Arab states. In a revealing interview with Israeli paper Haaretz on December 3, 1974 Yitzhak Rabin who replaced Golda Meir as Israeli Premier stated that "the central aim of Israel should be to gain time" - upto 7 years, the period essential for Europe and the US to free themselves from dependency on Arab oil. During that interval Israel would continue to seek partial agreements, but he implied it would avoid a total settlement until the US was no longer constrained by the need for oil to impose conditions that Israel found unpalatable. 23 With the resignation of Nixon as US

22. Ibid, p. 112.
President in August 1974, the US pressure also receded. Moreover, Israel was provided with more arms by Nixon than any other President and this made Israel adamant in its position. Rabin believed that the agreements with Egypt and Syria "remain in force long enough for us to observe the Arab's intentions". Moreover, the assassination of King Faisal in March 1975 removed one potential Arab leader who could have used the oil weapon once again.

The Sinai-II Agreement Establishes Israeli Supremacy

Sadat who had been promised by Nixon and Kissinger an early Israeli withdrawal was disappointed by the slow pace and urged Kissinger to resume the shuttle diplomacy. He wanted Israel to withdraw beyond the Sinai Passes and oil fields. He wanted this step to be treated as another military disengagement as he would be denounced in the Arab world if he were to sign a disengagement with political overtones. Moreover, he had to abide by the 1974 Rabat summit declaration which called for an early resumption of the GPC and which also opposed separate peace agreements. From one angle the Rabat summit provided Sadat with a convenient excuse to harden his stand by presenting that it was more difficult for him to enter into a separate agreement with Israel and that he would not be able to sign an agreement unless Egypt's demand for full Israeli withdrawal from Sinai was agreed. Moreover, he could have used the forthcoming visit of Brezhnev to Egypt to extract further Israeli withdrawal by

impressing on the US and Israel that the Soviet option was still open to him. But he ignored these factors and indicated his preference for yet another disengagement agreement with Israel. During the talks for Sinai-II Sadat agreed to an Israeli withdrawal from Sinai Passes and oil fields. On the political level he agreed to diminish the boycott and hostile propaganda and to permit a limited communion of peoples - "may be some students, and family reunions, but no tourist aircraft flying back and forth", he said - though this dimension would be defacto not a promise he could commit to paper.25 Sadat rejected Rabin's suggestion for a separate peace agreement. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy collapsed by March 22, 1975 mainly due to Israeli intransigence. It must be stressed that Rabin all along the talks insisted on the non-belligerence pact in return for the Sinai Passes, whereas Sadat could agree only for the less binding concept of non-recourse to force for which Israel would withdraw from only half the Sinai Passes. The collapse of Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy led to an open rift between US and Israel caused by the inflexible attitude of Israel. It was a small measure of success for Sadat's policy of isolating Israel.26 The Suez Canal was reopened by Sadat in early June 1975. By doing so Sadat thought he had enhanced his international reputation as the one willing to take risks for peace. This and his meeting with President Ford in Salzburg (Austria) in the same month brought further pressure on Israel. These steps were taken by Sadat mainly to regain Sinai quickly due to his fear of further Israeli procrastination at the GPC. But Sadat possessed no serious war option due to his


break with Moscow and because the US had armed Israel to the peak. Moreover, the Israelis used their clout in US Congress through the Jewish lobby to contain the damage from the "reassessment" ordered by Ford. Rabin also told Kissinger: "This is no way to conduct negotiations. We will not bow to Egypt's demands. And please don't threaten me with the GPC. There, too we will resist any step that endangers our security". 27

Concerned at the rigid position adopted by Israel, Sadat urged Kissinger to give shuttle diplomacy one more chance, which in any case started in the second half of August 1975. This time Sadat relaxed his conditions on two major issues: he displayed a measure of flexibility regarding the duration of the agreement and the timing of Israel's withdrawal, while Israel made no major changes in her stand. In addition, Sadat agreed that Egyptian forces would not advance beyond the buffer zone of Sinai-I, with the forces strictly limited in numbers and fire power. He also permitted Israel to retain its control over the Sinai Passes eastern footholds and allowed it to continue operating the UN Hashiva early warning station. Besides, mainly at Israel's insistence, Americans manned their own electronic listening posts in the new buffer zone, supplementing Israeli and Egyptian early warning stations. Despite this move towards peace the Israelis still retained possession of nine-tenth of Sinai. More significantly, Sadat gave Israel the non-belligerence Pact it sought in all but in name. 28 The Sinai-II agreement was formally signed in Geneva on September 4, 1975.

The Israelis in return for Sinai-II wrested from the Americans "a moral, monetary and military cornucopia unattained by any other foreign power".29 The US signed three secret agreements with Israel. The secret commitments from US to Israel were - as Kissinger's own aides admitted - "mind-boggling". A sixteen point US-Israeli memorandum of understanding dealt with military supplies, assistance, oil supply, economic aid and a number of political points. The US and Israel agreed among other things that the next step with Egypt should be a final peace agreement.30

The Sinai-II was a major victory for Israel. As one senior Israeli official told Time magazine:

Given non-acceptance of Israel by the Arabs we have been maneuvering since 1967 to gain time and to return as little as possible. The predominant Government view has been that stalemates are to our advantage. Our great threat has been the Rogers plan - and American policy to move us back to the (1967) lines. The ... Agreement with Egypt is another nail in the coffin of that policy. We realize that the entire world is against us on the issue of borders and that we are terribly dependent on one nation for sophisticated arms. Nevertheless, we have been successful for the past ... eight years, and we may have to go on maneuvering for another ten. If the ... interim Agreement (gave) us only six months rather than three years, we would buy it because the alternative is Geneva and ... more pressure to go back to the 1967 borders. The ... Agreement has delayed Geneva, while ... assuring us arms, money, a coordinated policy with Washington and quiet in Sinai .... We gave up a little for a lot.31

"The package as a whole was quite impressive", observed Nadav Safran. "But for the fact that it bore the label of Executive

29. Sheehan, n. 17, p. 190.
31. Sheehan, n. 17, p. 192; see also pp. 245-57.
Agreements, it exceeded in many ways a formal treaty signed by the United States. It brought Israel other advantages too. It caused an open break between Egypt and Syria (with Assad denouncing it as a step towards an eventual bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.) and created deep differences among the Arab countries which exploded in Lebanon in the form of a fierce civil war. This suited both Israel and the US. According to Rabin:

The interim agreement created a new strategic situation in the Sinai that was an improvement for both sides. Egypt could operate the Suez Canal and rebuild the cities on its banks with a greater sense of security. The return of oil fields moderated Egypt's hostility and gave its leaders good reason to maintain their side of the bargain. Moreover, the agreement gave further impetus to developments already in train, moving Sadat further away from the Soviet Union, depriving the Egyptian army of further supplies of Soviet arms and widening the rift between Egypt and Syria. In this manner we hoped to leave Sadat with only one choice: a political solution. Egypt might have other options - but not Sadat.

Later Rabin was to say that Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 and the subsequent Camp David Agreement of September 1978 and the bilateral peace treaty between Egypt and Israel of March 1979 "could never have come about were it not for the course my government adopted" in signing the Sinai-II agreement.

In order to impress the US and Israel of his sincere desire for peace, Sadat in March 1976 abrogated the friendship treaty

33. Rabin, n. 1, p. 274.
34. Ibid, p. 275.
with Moscow, thereby burning all his bridges with the USSR and weakening still further Egypt's precarious military strength, whereas Israel had managed to increase her military capability with colossal quantities of modern arms supplied by the US. Sadat also tremendously boosted Israel's position by giving the non-use of force commitment to Israel. The US on the other hand had assured Israel that it will not negotiate with PLO unless the latter recognized Israel and UN Resolution 242 and that it would consult Israel first before presenting any peace proposals.

Hurdles Towards Peace

The January 1977 food riots in Egypt underscored the urgent need to tackle the deteriorating economic situation in Egypt. Sadat began to speak of 1977 as a year in which the final search for peace should materialize. The election of Carter as US President and his desire to move quickly towards a comprehensive settlement of the conflict made Sadat optimistic. But he was soon to be dismayed with the emergence of right wing Likud bloc under Begin in Israel. After assuming charge as Israel's Prime Minister on June 21, 1977, Begin proclaimed his commitment to retaining control over Judea and Samaria, as he always insisted on calling the West Bank and Gaza. Sadat was soon confronted with an Israeli government dominated by such hawks as Ezer Weizman, Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon. The Begin government recognized three previously illegal Jewish settlements on the West Bank (Kadum, Ofra and Malle Adumim) as permanent, legal entities. Moreover new settlements were authorized and old one's expanded with government funds. Begin asserted the right of Jews to settle in any part of occupied Arab
lands. Moreover, Israel objected to any role for the PLO in the peace talks, not only because it branded it as a "gang of terrorists" but also because it concluded PLO participation would imply acceptance of a Palestinian entity in the West Bank. In fact, Begin refused to attend GPC if the PLO was present. He said "we will not, we cannot, give our acceptance. We can't and we shall not". To cap it all, Begin presented an entirely new Israeli interpretation of UN Resolution 242 and asserted that it did not require Israel to withdraw from all the fronts and lands. Under this, Israel's need for secure and recognized boundaries excluded the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights from any peace talks. However, the US affirmed that 242 "means withdrawal from all three fronts in the Middle East dispute - that is Sinai, Golan, West Bank and Gaza". To the surprise of Fahmy, Sadat accepted Israeli interpretation of UN Resolution 242 when Vance informed him in Alexandria, soon after his visit to Israel.

Sadat was greatly disappointed with the developments in Israel and especially Begin's provocative policies and accused him of favouring expansionism and not genuinely wanting peace. Despite Israeli attempts to place hurdles on the road to peace Sadat worked hard to ensure the smooth convening of Geneva Peace Conference. Even though, Sadat was making every effort to remove the obstacles towards convening the GPC and to bring about an early


36. Quandt, Ibid, pp. 88-9; 46; Fahmy, n. 13, pp. 216-17; One participant in the talks noted that "Sadat was putting his cards almost face up" and appeared more interested in "inigratiating himself with the American Side". Quandt, n. 35, p. 90.

peaceful settlement of the AIC but Begin's government proved
to be the real obstacle towards peace. Ismail Fahmy rightly said:

The real obstacle to Geneva was not the
divisions and suspicions in the Arab Camp,
but the position of Israel. Israel did not want
multi-national negotiations and the convening of
the Geneva Conference. Infact, there was never
any public statement by Israeli leaders supporting
the conference, even after they had privately
informed the US that they would attend. The
Israelis believed that they could not dictate their
will on a United Arab front, but if they could
negotiate with each country separately, and above all
isolate Egypt from the other countries, they might
obtain what they wanted. 38

The Israeli attempt to isolate Egypt from the Arab world and
impose its peace terms became very obvious from the Israeli draft
peace treaty which was presented to the US in early September 1977.
The text of the treaty consisted of some forty articles, many of
them dealing with minor details. The draft contained many demands
for Arab concessions and short on what Israel would give in
return. Territory, the most crucial issue to Arabs, was not
mentioned in the draft at all. 39

Moreover, Dayan wrote to US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance
that Israel would seek to retain territorial control in Sinai from
Sharm-el-Sheikh in the South to just West of Gaza. He outlined the


39. Ibid., p. 215; As per the draft treaty the Israelis did not
plan to withdraw to the international boundaries of Egypt.
Furthermore, they wanted to start with the immediate termination
of belligerency, while they requested that their troops
continue to occupy Sinai till everything was normalised and
agreement reached on the new borders between the two countries.
Ibid., p. 231.
need for security zones but pointed out that Israel was prepared for substantial withdrawals. On the West Bank, Israel would support equal rights for Arabs and Jews, but that there should be no foreign rule or sovereignty. Dayan wanted the Jordan river to be the basis for the security of Israel's eastern border. However, he was shrewd enough to point out that other proposals could be put forward and Israel would receive with an open mind. All subjects, he said, were open for negotiations. Initially, Israel was not enthusiastic about the GPC but since Carter was bent on convening it, so Israel made it clear that even if the conference was convened it would insist on bilateral commissions namely: Egypt-Israel, Jordan-Israel, Syrian-Israel, after the public session and not as the other Arabs insisted on committee on withdrawals, on Palestinian issue; so on. Despite the procedural problems raised by Israel, Sadat expressed several times his readiness to attend the GPC. Towards this end he proposed the working group idea between the parties under US auspices. The main aim of Sadat in insisting on the working group idea was to make proper preparations before GPC. He wanted to go to Geneva only to sign the Peace agreements, because he feared that Israel would drag the peace talks and even after ten years of talks Egypt would get nothing. Sadat noted that the Arabs and Israel could talk about procedures for years whereas he wanted a speedy settlement of the problem. More significantly, Carter also


41. Moshe Dayan, Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations (New Delhi 1981), pp. 2-3; 18-19; Sadat's Speeches and Interviews on the occasion of his visit to Jerusalem (Cairo; n.d.) pp. 50-51; Hirst, n. 10 p. 258.
reminded Sadat: "If we go to Geneva with lots of loose ends and with the Soviets present, there is little chance of reaching harmony there".42

Covert Diplomacy

By September 1977 Sadat became increasingly desperate about peace. He embarked on secret talks with Israel in order to arrive at prior agreement with the Israeli leaders so that GPC would not drag on for too long and that it would be a mere signing ceremony at Geneva. There were already signs towards this direction. Begin during his first visit to the US as Premier had told Carter that he was planning to meet with some top Arab leaders, in particular Sadat. Sadat had also expressed to Vance in August 1977 his desire to meet Begin, and this information had reached Begin.43 In early September word came from King Hassan, that Israel was keen as Sadat to pursue covert diplomacy. Begin and Dayan at this juncture concluded that while peace talks with Syria and Jordan would lead nowhere, there was a real chance of progress with Egypt. Since the US was adamant on a comprehensive negotiation with the PLO as well, Begin like Sadat had also decided not to coordinate his strategy with the US. Instead, Begin opted for the covert channels offered by Rabat and through it, the Israelis told Sadat that Israel sought a secret agreement with Egypt that would pave the way for the eventual negotiation of a comprehensive peace settlement.

In this connection Sadat sent Hassan Tuhami for talks with Dayan in Rabat on September 16, 1977. At the outset, Tuhami told

42. Quandt, n. 35, pp. 51-2.
43. Ibid., p. 108. With this aim Dayan met King Hussein on August 22 in London but Israeli refusal to effect full withdrawals from all lands including East Jerusalem, the talks collapsed - Dayan, n. 41, pp. 35-37.
Dayan that Israel would get peace in exchange for its complete withdrawal from Arab lands. Arab sovereignty should be absolute and the Arab flag should fly in all Arab lands including East Jerusalem. Tuhami also told Dayan that Sadat was "serious in his quest for peace. Let us, therefore, consider together how we may achieve it". Sadat was ready, he said, to meet Begin and shake his hand, provided Israel agreed to the principle of total withdrawal from Arab lands. He also told Dayan: "It is our solemn request that you accept Sadat's word that he will respect all commitments and obligations as written. He is a man of principle, of honour, of nobility. If presented with a formula to which he can agree, Sadat will go with you all the way, for both you and we have vital interests in common". According to Dayan, Tuhami proposed that there, in Morocco, with the help of King Hassan and before the Geneva Conference we should conclude our negotiations and reach agreement on all the factors which concerned us. "We would then proceed to Geneva merely to affix our signature". He then proposed a meeting soon to reach a final agreement. Tuhami declared that Sadat sought "a complete package deal with all the difficulties smoothed out, not a partial agreement, not in public, and not at Geneva". 44

Dayan shrewdly did not give any clear answers to the points raised by Tuhami. He pleaded his inability to be precise because he was only Begin's "emissary" and so could not react to the points without Begin's "instructions". On the question of withdrawal from Arab lands Dayan said he could not tell whether Begin would respond to Tuhami's request. "He might or might not ... withdrawal was no light matter". Dayan made it clear that Israel's preference was to deal

44. Dayan, n. 41, pp. 43-8. From Dayan's account it is clear that Tuhami appeared interested in a bilateral deal with Israel and some linkage between Jordan and West Bank/Gaza. There was no Egyptian demand for the recognition of the Palestinian right for self-determination (Ibid pp. 48-52) or inclusion of PLO, even though it was reported that Dayan hinted that "Israel would be prepared to include the PLO in the peace process". Eitan Haber et al, The Years of the Dove (1979) pp.11-12.
separately with Arab states "on an individual and separate basis."

Regarding Palestinians, Dayan was of the view that they would have to be settled elsewhere, meaning Israel would continue to occupy West Bank and Gaza and that Arab countries should absorb the Palestinians and forget about a state for the hapless refugees. He further told Tuhami of his firm belief that Israel could arrive at a suitable arrangement with Egypt especially under Sadat, because Israel did not trust Assad. Therefore, he wanted both Egypt and Israel to begin serious and immediate discussions to resolve the issues. More significantly, Dayan was eager to know how far Sadat would go without the other Arab leaders. Would Sadat be ready to sign an agreement even if Assad did not? Did Israel have to agree to withdraw from all the territories, or just Egyptian territory, to meet Sadat's condition for talking to Begin? From the talks Dayan concluded that Sadat was interested in a deal, that he was prepared for covert talks and that GPC was a secondary issue. For Dayan: "That was quite a bit to learn from one encounter". 

Tuhami on his return told Sadat that Israel was prepared to relinquish all of Sinai and that Dayan had been flexible and forthcoming and that both had agreed to meet again in a fortnight to discuss their alternative peace proposals.

**Desperate Drive**

It was around this time that the Super-Powers issued a joint statement on the Arab-Israeli issue on October 1, 1977. The Israeli reaction to the statement was extremely negative. "An angry meeting ensued" between Begin and the US ambassador Samuel Lewis when the latter gave a copy of the statement to the Israeli Premier. Begin and Dayan

were furious because the US had not given advance warning about it. For Israel it appeared that Carter had deviated from the agreed lines and accommodated Palestinians and Soviets. Dayan wrote that Israel opposed the statement because "the declaration gave renewed strength to Russian influence in the Middle East - when Egypt had gone to such lengths to weaken it". Moreover, Israel insisted that UN Resolutions 242 and 338 were the basis for convening the GPC because they "do not contain any specific reference to the Palestinians, thereby excluding their presence at the talks". Dayan who was in US at that time threatened to take the issue to the American public and reportedly black-mailed Carter. He wanted the US to reiterate that all previous agreements between US and Israel remained in force and that there would be no imposed settlement and no pressure in the form of cuts in economic or military aid. He emphasized that Israel should be free to object to a Palestinian State, and the US should say that Israel did not have to withdraw to the 1967 borders or accept the US-Soviet Joint Communique. Carter simply caved in to Israeli pressure and virtually buried the joint statement. A new working paper was produced which was very sympathetic to Israel. Moreover, Dayan in his meeting with Carter on October 4, 1977 told the


48. Ibid, pp. 71-72. Moreover, Carter told Fahmy that he cannot apply pressure on Israel because it would be a "personal political suicide for me". Fahmy, n. 13, pp. 196-7.
US President that Israel did not want to miss a chance of peace with Egypt because of possible objections from Syria. He also warned that the US should be open to the idea of less than a full peace agreement. In any case, Dayan told Carter that the future was with Egypt, because other Arab states were not yet ready (presumably for peace on Israeli terms). 49

It was against this background that Sadat in an address to the People's Assembly on November 9, 1977 surprised his listeners by saying that he was prepared to go to "the ends of the earth" for peace,

49. Besides, he said "if one wheel of a car was removed, it could not be driven. If Egypt was out of the conflict, there would be no war". Quandt, n. 35, pp. 128-9. In his meeting with Dayan in New York, Carter made the following concessions (a) no participation by PLO members in the negotiations; (6) removal of the question of Palestinian entity from the conference agenda; (c) the opening plenary session at Geneva with the unified Arab delegation not to be permitted to remain in session during the conference; and (d) no "negotiations" regarding the Arab occupied lands under Israeli control the word "negotiate" to be replaced by the word "discuss". New York Times, October 14, 1977, p. A9.
even to talk to the Israelis in their Knesset in Jerusalem. By so
deciding to visit Jerusalem in search of peace Sadat in a single blow
publicly put an end to the thirty years of armed confrontation with
Israel. He also seemed to believe the Israelis would respond with
enormous concessions, which was not exactly Begin's style as he
learnt later, at great cost. Even though Tuhami had told Dayan in
Rabat that unless Begin makes a promise to withdraw from Arab lands
(and its fulfilment) Sadat would not shake Begin's hand, but when
Sadat decided to visit Jerusalem without any conditions officially,
Dayan was very happy. He wrote: "I was pleased that Sadat had backed
down from this position, and that he would be coming to Jerusalem
unaccompanied by any preconditions". 50

Sadat arrived in Jerusalem on November 19, 1977. Next day
in a speech Sadat made clear that he had not come for a 'separate
peace' nor for a 'partial peace', nor had he come for a third Sinai
agreement, but to urge the Israelis to withdraw from all Arab lands,
and also to urge them that the Palestine cause was the crux of the
whole problem. He said: "If you have found the legal and moral justi-
fication to set up a national home on a land that did not belong to you,
it is incumbent upon you to show understanding of the Palestinian
people's insistence on establishing once again a state on their land. 51

In his reply, Begin was hard and unyielding. It was mere
repetition of the Likud's extremism. He said there could be no surre-
rendering of the lands taken in 1967 and no redivision of Jerusalem. 52

50. Dayan, n. 41, p. 77. Fahmy had urged Sadat to reconsider his
total reliance on the US, but Sadat was "unresponsive", Fahmy,
n.13, p.197.

51. For full text see Anwar-el-Sadat, In Search of Identity (New York:
1979) p. 330-43; The Jerusalem Post: Souvenir Album Sadat in
Jerusalem November 19-21, 1977, pp. 36-38.

52. The Israeli Defence Minister General Ezer Weizman is reported to
have leaned over towards Dayan during Sadat's speech and passed
him a note: "We've got to prepare for war". Begin's face grew
even grimmer. 'That's an ultimatum' he is reported to have said
in an audible whisper. Eitan Haber et al, The Year of the Dove
He did not even bother to mention the Palestinians. He further said "President Sadat knows that our attitude is different from his as far as the borders around us, between ourselves and our neighbours, are concerned." 53

Disillusionment with Israel

Sadat was anticipating a grand gesture from Begin, similar to his, but was disappointed as Begin made no mention of Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands. Instead Begin told Sadat that the problems to be solved were numerous and too complex. Hence, both should establish a procedure and mechanism for holding discussions.

Sadat told Dayan that he had come to discuss substantive issues such as the Palestinian problem, the Golan Heights, an agreement with Jordan, during his visit. When Dayan persisted on the need for some procedural system such as the appointment of a joint body, so that the talks could continue, Sadat abruptly said "No". For Sadat substance was what he had come to discuss and he wanted to know from Israel what it was prepared to offer and what it was not prepared to offer. Sadat told the Israelis that before going to GPC "we must have an agreed programme". When asked who would be the parties preparing this "agreed programme", whether the Syrians, Jordanians, the US, the Palestinians. Sadat is reported to have become angry and lost patience and gave no clear answer, and simply said: "I don't care who they are or who comes to the conference. Whoever wants to can come. Whoever does not want to can stay at home and we will carry our deliberations without them". Sadat at the end of the visit told Dayan that he was very disappointed, particularly by Begin's negative speech turning down all his peace proposals. Despite

53. Hirst, n. 10, pp. 270-1; Dayan, n. 41, pp. 82-3.
this rebuff Sadat told Dayan that there would be a continuation of the peace talks in Morocco or Rumania. More significantly, Sadat during his visit unilaterally declared that there will be no war after the 1973 October war. Finally he again called upon Begin to take hard and drastic decisions in favour of peace.54

With this visit to Israel Sadat had become isolated in the Arab world. Begin was fully aware of this and was anxious to conclude a separate peace treaty with Egypt. Dayan, on the other hand, was always looking for an opening for a separate agreement with Egypt. After Sadat's speech to Knesset Dayan concluded:

I judged that there was a chance of coming to an understanding with him. I felt he honestly wanted to end the successive series of wars with Israel, and this desire would bring him closer to our positions. We would need to sit with him face to face and explain what Israel would be prepared to do and what she was unable to do.55

The hard and drastic decisions Sadat had pleaded for during his Jerusalem visit failed to materialize. Three respected Israeli journalists have described Begin's view of Sadat's peace initiative as follows:

Begin was not unmindful of Sadat's courage in proposing the visit to Jerusalem, but he also regarded Sadat's move as an act of weakness, even desperation. The Egyptian President would not have taken this risk, Begin thought, if he had had any choice.56

It soon became apparent that Begin was least interested in making similar dramatic gesture to Sadat's. Uri Avneri a critic of Zionist

54. Dayan, n. 41, pp. 79-83; Dayan told Butrous Ghali, Egypt's acting foreign minister that Egypt had to be ready to sign a peace treaty with Israel even if she were not joined by others, Ibid, p. 78.

55. Ibid, p. 82.

orthodoxy wrote:

For him (Begin) this visit was a gift from Heaven. It was handed to him free, on a silver platter. It was Sadat who initiated it and paid the full price for it, endangering his life and his regime and gave Israel an invaluable prize — full recognition of her existence and her legitimacy. What did Begin pay? Nothing at all, not even a piastre with a hole in it.57

The Road to Separate Peace

Despite the negative Israeli response Sadat sent Tuhami to meet Dayan in Morocco on December 3, 1977. Tuhami was firm on complete Israeli withdrawal from Sinai to Egyptian-Israeli international border and removal of all Israeli settlements and soldiers. He told Dayan "You are gaining a great deal by the very fact that we would be recognizing your international frontier. You do not possess a single frontier which is recognized as an international border". It was during this meeting that Tuhami fully revealed Egyptian thinking on the peace agreement with Israel. He mentioned two agreements: One dealing with Egypt-Israel peace arrangements which would be more detailed; while the other part dealing with other Arab countries, which would be set forth in general terms.58

58. Dayan, n. 41, pp. 94-96; Dayan wrote: I had the impression that the status of Tuhami was obscure, and that his presentation of himself as the man closest to Sadat, whose words we could take as coming directly from his President was not in fact the case. His reluctance to finalize matters or to make a commitment on any issue, suggested to me that he had no authority to initiate ideas but only to speak and to listen — and sometimes not even that. For instance: he himself raised the question of the future of the Golan Heights. Yet when I started to answer and suggest the principles of a solution, he promptly drew back and begged me not to include it in our discussions, lest the Syrians get to hear of it and castigate Egypt for interfering in what was not her concern. I also had an unhappy feeling about Sadat himself, in so far as what Tuhami told me reflected his policy. I did not think he would retreat from the course of peace on which he had embarked, but I suspected that he did not quite know how to advance. He knew what he wanted but not how to achieve it. Ibid., p. 97.
From this moment onwards, Israel was convinced that Sadat was mainly interested in a bilateral peace but needed a comprehensive cover to protect his flanks. They reasoned that if Israel remained stubborn Sadat would agree to separate peace.

As a followup to his Jerusalem visit Sadat convened the Cairo Preparatory Conference on December 14, 1977. The PLO and Arab states refused to attend. Only Israel, and the USA attended along with the UN Secretary General.

At the Conference the Egyptians submitted a list of principles which should serve as the basis for peace. These included the principle of Israeli withdrawal from all Arab lands taken in the 1967 war and the restoration of the national rights of the Palestinians with the guarantee of self-determination and independent statehood. Egypt also reaffirmed that it adhered to the decision of the 1974 Rabat summit which recognized the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinians. The Israeli delegation flatly rejected all the ideas put forward by the Egyptians. Because of Israeli negative attitude no agreement on a single issue was possible, not even on such procedural matters as to who should be the chairman and what items should appear on the agenda.59

The uncompromising Israeli attitude became obvious on Christmas Day 1977 when Begin accompanied by Dayan and Weizman arrived in Egypt for the first time for the Ismailia summit. At the officials level talks Begin declared that he had two projects to present: on Sinai and on the West Bank and Gaza. Begin repeated what he had said before Knesset regarding Sinai. But what was surprising was his

stand on borders. He said "when the peace agreement is signed the Egyptian army may be established on a line which will not reach beyond the Mitla and Giddi Passes". He proposed demili­tarization of the rest of Sinai. Moreover, Israel would retain its military airports in Sinai as well as the early warning stations. The settlements between Rafah and El Arish and Eliat and Sharm-el-Sheikh, would remain and become civilian settlements. Further, Begin had the boldness to say:

This in no way prejudiced Egypt's sovereignty, Mr. President, however, we have a sacred Jewish principle, namely that no civilians should be left without military protection. We shall, therefore, retain a very small force to protect such civilian settlers. We hope, Mr. President, to find in you understanding for such a humane principle, in view of the afflictions the Jews have suffered at the hands of others ...60

When challenged that the UN Security Council Resolution 242 stipulated withdrawal from the Arab lands, and this, so far as Egypt was concerned implied withdrawal to the international borders between it and Palestine, Begin accused Egypt of being responsible for the 1967 war. "The war of 1967 was an aggression on your part. Israel was in a state of legitimate defence. Consequently, it is entitled to keep the territories it occupied while defending itself against aggression". Then Begin went on to present his home rule plan now termed "self rule" for the Palestinians, adding that Carter endorsed and praised his proposals "Constructive", and represented "a fair basis for negotiations", and marked "a long step forward".61 The plan was "substantially" different from the one Begin had pre­sented to Carter in Washington.61a Given this adamant position of Begin the Ismailia summit ended in failure. The differences were so wide that a joint communique could not be issued: so two separate statements were issued. One read: "The position of Egypt is that a Palestine

60. M.I. Kamel, n.46, p.24. Through these highly provocative state­ments Begin in effect was challenging Egypt's sovereignty over Sinai. This Israeli negotiating strategy compelled the Egyptians to concentrate on the full recovery of their territory as more urgent than the Palestinian issue. One Israeli assessment pointed out that Begin's approach revealed that Sadat would have no alternative but to conclude a separate peace. Haber et.al, n.52, p. 126.


state should be established in the West Bank and Gaza strip". The other: "The Israeli position is that the Palestinian Arabs residing in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza District should enjoy self-rule".

Sadat who was looking forward to a declaration of principles on the Palestine issue was disappointed. The Israelis even rejected Egyptian position on Sinai and so the gap was very wide even on an Egypt-Israel peace agreement. The only agreement arrived at the summit was on the formation of Military and Political Committees to continue talks. Upon his return to Israel Begin said, he was a happy man. He had reasons to be happy. For Sadat the meeting was a "great fiasco" but in view of Begin's intransigence, the willingness of the Israeli leader to talk itself was great. As he said:

It is the first time since Israel came into being that the Jews have put forward a plan ... They used to make very sure that everything was like a jelly, shrouded in fog, so that you could see neither the beginning nor the end, neither head nor tail. This time they came so that we could discuss together. I say my opinion, they say theirs ... this in itself is positive ... Begin said everything is negotiable. This is alien to his thinking. He is the hawk of hawks.

Soon after his return to Israel from Ismailia, Begin sanctioned work on four new settlements in the Sinai Peninsula. Apparently the agriculture Minister Ariel Sharon was the moving force behind the idea of building new settlements in Sinai as a form of pressure on Sadat to agree for separate peace. Sadat was simply furious at this Israeli duplicity, coming so soon on the heels of the Ismailia summit. He said: "I emphasize from now that I will not agree to any Israeli settlement on my territory. Let them plough

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63. Kamel, n.46, p.31 and 44. At the Ismailia summit Sadat told Begin privately that it was his advisers from the foreign ministry who were adamant about a comprehensive settlement and who "insisted that he not yield an inch on the matter of self-determination for the Palestinian People". Haber n.52, p. 137. From the Ismailia summit "the Israelis repeatedly sought to deal with Sadat without the presence of his advisers; in due course the American side followed suit. Ismailiya convinced Begin that progress could be made by isolating Sadat from the influences that surrounded him". Quandt, n.35, p.159.
them up". Successive statements were made by Begin, Dayan Weizman and Sharon that UN Resolution 242 did not apply to the West Bank and Gaza and asserted Israel's right to establish settlements there. Meanwhile, the Egyptian press launched an offensive on the Begin government calling his policies short-sighted and aimed at aborting all chances for peace created by Sadat's peace initiative. In an interview to October, Sadat bitterly attacked Israel. He said he had lost all hope of reaching an agreement with Israel on the foundations of peace. Israel was no less a 'rejectionist state' than Syria. She had sown the wind, and she would therefore reap the whirlwind. He, by his visit to Jerusalem, had given Israel everything - the prospect of peace, security, and legitimate status in the region - and he had received nothing in return. He had risked not only his political future but also his life, but he had believed that by so doing he had put an end to the conflict. He also said "Begin has offered nothing. It is I who have given him everything."

Despite being rebuffed by Israel at Ismailia and the Cairo Preparatory Conference and its subsequent provocations by establishing new Israeli settlements in Sinai, Sadat agreed to Egypt's participation in the meetings of the Political Committee in Jerusalem. Egypt's Foreign Minister M.I. Kamel led the Egyptian delegation for talks at the political Committee in Jerusalem on January 17, 1978.

65. Ibid, 8 January 1980; Begin flew into a rage and answered Sadat that only Nero burnt cities. Sadat replied that he had not said "burnt" but "ploughed", two words that could easily be confused in Arabic. Kamel, n.46, p.50. Weizman explained the strategy behind the new settlements, "if the Egyptians acquiesced to our 'colonization' we would have pulled it off, if they refused to countenance the new 'settlement' Israel could make a gesture and give them up in return for the right to retain the existing settlements". Thus it was part of Begin's strategy to persuade Sadat to give up his hope for a comprehensive cover and instead lower his sights only to Sinai. Weizman, n.26, p. 142. According to Weizman, as far as Begin was concerned, the withdrawal from Sinai would be the end of the story. Ibid., pp. 190-1.


From the very outset due to stubborn attitude of Begin, the talks ended in a deadlock. Due to Israel's rejection of Egyptian peace efforts Sadat was deeply hurt and he ordered the delegation to return to Egypt immediately. Moreover, he was offended by Begin's speech at the banquet. He accused Israel of seeking to put forward partial solutions and complained that Begin had not understood his peace initiative. In fact, Begin preferred land to peace. Sadat bitterly noted that Begin continued to insist on keeping settlements in Sinai. When Kamel went to inform Begin of Sadat's decision, Begin repeated Israel's refusal to withdraw. He said: "We shall not return to the 1967 borders". Begin reminded Sadat that this is what he had heard from him in the Knesset, and at Ismailia. He, however, told Sadat "we are ready to go on negotiating with you".

It became obvious that Begin sought to gain time through negotiations, without committing anything on Israeli withdrawal. By maintaining direct negotiations with Egypt, Israel apart from gaining more time also wanted to deepen the rift between Egypt and the Arab States and consolidate its hold over the Arab lands. Many other things also revealed Israeli thinking: Begin's self rule formula and the establishment of new settlements in Arab lands.

In the face of repeated Israeli provocations and public rejection of his peace initiative Sadat was still committed to the cause of peace. Inspite of Israel's return to the "vicious circle of arguing over every single word and comma" and its "hiding behind fanatic groups who are beating the drums of war in their feverish

69. Kamel, n. 46, p. 63.
70. Ibid, pp. 68-9, Dayan, n. 41, pp. 111-4. Israel's stubborn attitude at the Political Committee talks and Begin's provocations dawned on Sadat that his peace initiative termed "sacred mission" to break the "psychological barrier" had not yielded any results and had made no impact on Begin. He visited Israel with the hope that his direct approach would yield immediate and positive results than the GPC where talks could drag for years without concrete results. Frustrated at Begin's intransigence, Sadat now slowly turned to Carter again.
campaign to build these settlements" he was willing to give the experiment every possible chance until "I reach the conclusion that enough time has elapsed without achieving any tangible progress". For Sadat GPC was now ruled out, but direct talks with Israel also seemed unproductive. What he was now banking on was an American compromise peace proposal to break the deadlock.71

From now onwards most of the talks revolved around the issue of linkage i.e. what kind of agreement, if any, on the Palestinian issue should accompany an Egyptian-Israeli treaty. Begin was opposed to any legal linkage. For him a treaty with Egypt should in no way depend on progress in solving the Palestinian question. Egypt and Israel might agree to some general principles, or to a variation of Begin's self-rule proposal, but these were separate matters from a treaty between the two states. For Sadat any bilateral deal with Israel had to be within a framework of general principles that would apply to the other fronts of the conflict.72

Meanwhile, Sadat sent a letter to Begin, on March 1, 1978 in which he pointed out that Israel's thinking was still unhappily, directed to acquisition of strategic advantages and to the annexion of territory belonging to other parties. Sadat declared that territory could not be conceded. He was prepared to grant Israel all the other concomitants of peace provided this did not impair territory or sovereignty. He had already demonstrated this by his trip to Jerusalem, by inviting Begin to Ismailia, and by agreeing to hold direct contacts with the Israelis at the Cairo Preparatory Conference and in the political and military committees. Sadat

71. Hirst, n. 10, p. 300.
also claimed that Begin was wasting time by quibbling over words, whereas he felt the whole problem could be solved in a few days if only Israel would agree to the principles of withdrawal, Palestinian rights, and mutual security. Expanding on this last point, Sadat said he recognized that Israel would have security concerns in the West Bank even after the five-year traditional period. Begin sent a quick reply dated March 5, 1978. Part of it read:

Permit me to pass on to other issues essential to our dialogue. You complain that "we are still unfortunately dealing with "wording". All of us remain engaged in this exercise because, Mr. President, your advisers propose to us "wording" which has only one meaning: that the Government of Israel give a commitment of withdrawal to the lines proceeding the Six Day War of defence. This is an old concept going back to the autumn of 1967. As I said to you in Ismailia, Israel is not committed under Resolution 242 to such a withdrawal, nor is it required to agree to such a pre-condition ... 73

It was during this period when the peace process was stalled that on March 14, 1978 Israel launched a massive invasion of South Lebanon. This clearly revealed Israeli attitude towards the resolution of the conflict.

In the midst of this invasion on March 27, 1978 the Arab League Council meeting was convened in Cairo. Despite a boycott by Syria, Libya, Algeria and South Yemen, all the other Arab states and PLO attended, the meeting. The presence at the meeting of 14 Arab foreign ministers showed that though they were angry with Sadat, they were willing to support his peace policy if only it remained comprehensive in nature. When Cairo was packed with Arab delegates Sadat

73. Kamel, n. 46, pp. 129-30; Quandt, n. 35, pp. 181-2. Begin's reply also included the point that Israel did not need Egypt's recognition, because recognition of Israel's right to exist came only from God.
against the advice of Kamel invited Ezer Weizman to Cairo. 74

Eventhough it is difficult to reason why Sadat invited Weizman to the meeting, the following points could be noted: a) soon after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, Sadat appears to have been quite worried of a probable Israeli attack on Egypt, hence he wanted reassurance from Israel; b) Unable to extract any concessions from Begin, Sadat embarked on a policy of discrediting him by encouraging Weizman; and c) Sadat was genuinely concerned over lack of progress on the peace front and revealed to Weizman the many concessions he was ready to make on the Palestinian issue in view of strong Israeli views on this issue. As Weizman wrote:

Summarizing my conversation with Sadat put me in a better mood. Like us, the Egyptian President was not interested in a Palestinian state. He was willing to leave our West Bank settlements in place, he would substitute for Hussein should the King refuse to take part in the negotiations. I was gratified to have had Aharon Barak listening in on our conversation. Without his testimony, no one in Israel would believe me. 75

Since his visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 Sadat had made concessions after concessions to Israel hoping in exchange to get an Israeli commitment to withdraw but again and again he was rebuffed by an adamant Begin. 76 Every tactic, strategy of Sadat had failed to make a dent on Begin's policy. He remained inflexible, unbending and totally opposed to a compromise and had frustrated all sincere attempts of Sadat. Consequently, Sadat had concluded that

74. Ibid, pp. 142-3.
76. Matti Golan, Shimon Peres : A Biography (London: 1982) p. 217; see also Kamel, n. 46, p. 199; Sadat pointed out that Goldman had told him that Erlich, the Israeli Finance Minister and Shimon Peres were looking to America to rid them of "that man Begin", Ibid, p. 252.
it was impossible to deal with Begin and that he should work for his downfall. 77 Weizman warned Sadat at such attempts and urged him to desist from such further attempts because in any forthcoming elections Likud was bound to win as the poll surveys had predicted. 78 He went on:

I should tell you that people in Israel suspect you of trying to split our leadership and divide it from the ordinary people. The mood in Israel is not good. People in the street say that Sadat is laying a trap for us. That he wants everything. There are growing misgivings about the degree of your candor and about your intentions. 79

In the meeting with Weizman in Vienna on July 13, 1978 Sadat stressed the urgency of an immediate conclusion of the peace agreement. Weizman, of course, was glad to learn that Sadat was determined to maintain contacts with Israel but was surprised at Sadat's plea:

You Israelis must do something for me. No not for me - for Egypt. When I came to Jerusalem in 1977 if you had only made some gesture in response - if you had only withdrawn to the El Arish-Ras Muhammed Line! I was expecting you to do something like that. But you were silent:

Sadat went on:

I propose that Israel declare that she is immediately restoring El Arish and Jabal Musa (Mount Sinai) to Egypt. Even before the peace treaty is signed. 80

To sweeten the atmosphere, Sadat spoke of a future in which Egypt would sell oil from Sinai to Israel and provide water from the Nile to help irrigate the Negev. Sadat seemed to believe he could use

77. Weizman, n. 26, p. 312 and 318
78. Golan, n.76, pp.210,217-18, 220 and 222. It's interesting to note that Begin cautioned Peres "Don't forget that Sadat is not a democrat. You should avoid praising his regime. Who knows where it will lead?" Ibid, p.231. See also Kamel, n.46, pp.191-98 for details on Sadat-Peres meeting.
the Nile water as a trump card of sorts to gain Israeli acceptance of withdrawal from the Arab lands.\textsuperscript{81} Begin rejected Sadat's proposal and reminded him that "no state takes unilateral steps".\textsuperscript{82}

This open rejection of Sadat's request was a painful personal humiliation to Sadat—a slap in the face. It was under these circumstances that the Leeds Castle Conference took place on July 18, 1979 between Egypt, Israel, and US. The Israelis under Dayan repeated their hardline proposals on West Bank and Gaza as was done previously. The Egyptians reiterated their well-known position based on the UN Resolution 242.

Since Dayan made it clear at the Leeds Castle Conference that Israel could not meet the Egyptian demand for a clear statement on withdrawal and Begin had also in unambiguous terms made clear that Israel would not withdraw from 1967 borders, Sadat was left with possibly two options: to conclude a separate peace agreement with Israel concerning Sinai—an alternative Sadat had persistently rejected from the start. The second was to return to the Arab fold and adhere to the 1974 Rabat strategy. Under the circumstances, he did neither. Only his position hardened in the face of Israeli adamancy. He decided not to have any further negotiations with Israel and also to end the Israeli military mission in Cairo, since its presence no longer served any useful purpose.\textsuperscript{83}

Sadat now sought Carter's intervention to salvage his "sacred mission". He told Elts that the US is not giving him sufficient support in the face of Begin's intransigence. He was disillusioned with lack of US commitment to his peace initiative. It was at this stage Carter decided to invite Sadat and Begin for a summit.

It was under these circumstances that Begin and Sadat accepted Carter's invitation for a Summit. Whereas Sadat concluded

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{81} Ibid, p. 313.
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Ibid, p. 330; see also Kamel, n. 46, pp. 222-23 and 253.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Ibid, p. 247; According to Quandt, "Some of Sadat's comments in the meetings with the Israelis must have conveyed to Begin a sense of Sadat's mounting frustration, perhaps even desperation. And Begin was a good enough bargainer to know that this frustration could be turned to his advantage". Quandt, n. 35, p. 204.
\end{itemize}
that Carter would force Begin to make significant concessions or "pressurize Israel and cut Begin down to size".\textsuperscript{84} To Begin, Carter's proposal was a golden opportunity to come out of the Egyptian boycott of any talks as long as it refused to change its rigid stand. Moreover, inviting Begin for Camp David summit had not asked Israel to modify its hardline stand on the issue of withdrawal from Arab lands in any way.\textsuperscript{85} At the Camp David talks Sadat presented his peace framework on September 6, 1978. The Egyptian proposal was called "Framework for the Comprehensive Peace settlement of the Middle East Problem". The eleven page document consisted of a preamble and nine articles. The Egyptian document among other things called for Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands taken in the 1967 war in accordance with UN 242 resolution.\textsuperscript{86}

Whereas Sadat brought a peace proposal and submitted to Carter, Begin in his first meeting with the US President made it clear that he feared that Carter and Sadat would confront him with a common

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid, p. 265. As he repeatedly told the Americans, US-Egyptian agreement was more important to him than an Egyptian-Israeli agreement. The Egyptians expected the summit to break down after a few days. Ibid., pp. 273-9.

\textsuperscript{85} Quandt, n. 35, p. 208.

\textsuperscript{86} Kamel, n. 46, pp. 295-7; If the negotiations had broken, Egypt was prepared to publish this proposal immediately. Representatives were waiting with drafts in Washington, London and Paris and were ready to launch a media campaign denouncing Israel. Sadat had told the Egyptian delegation that he would "turn the tables" on Begin. Sadat is reported to have immediately reassured Carter that the proposal did not represent his final position. Quandt, n. 42, p. 222; J.R. Lakah, "Political Communication in a Conflict Situation", Ph.D., Columbia University, 1978.
This among other reasons made Begin adopted a hard and inflexible attitude towards a peace settlement. His strategy was to hold off making any concessions on the things most important to Sadat, like settlements in Sinai, until he had agreed to drop most of his demands on the West Bank and Gaza. Meanwhile, Begin would make insignificant changes in his position on West Bank and Gaza, hoping Carter would seek to match each of his mini-concessions with a major one from Sadat. The aim of all the Israeli maneuvering was obviously a bilateral peace agreement with Egypt. On the fifth day on September 9, 1978 Sadat is reported to have received Weizman twice during the day. Ezer Weizman mainly wanted to probe whether further concessions could be extracted from Sadat. But Sadat reminded Weizman of Begin's statement in the Knesset: 'I will not give anything and told Weizman without getting something in return' "I will behave the same way". Weizman was discouraged by this conversation but felt that Sadat did not want the talks to break down.

87. Dayan, n. 41, p. 162. Sadat according to Dayan hurriedly published the Egyptian Framework for peace in the Egyptian press so that all the Arab countries would know that he had made not the slightest concession to Israel. He had adhered meticulously to standard Arab line. How, then, would he face the later charge that he had not stuck to his word? To that he would reply: 'I conceded nothing to the Israeli, not even an inch; but I responded to the plea of Carter, our friend and ally, an ally whose help we both need and receive". Ibid, p. 163.

88. Quandt, n. 35, pp. 225-6; Begin, Weizman, Dayan and other Israelis had openly acknowledged that such a bilateral treaty was their aim.

89. Weizman, n. 26, pp. 360-62; Sadat was so upset over Begin's behaviour that he told Kamel, "We are dealing with the lowest and meanest of enemies. The Jews even tormented their prophet Moses, and exasperated their God!" "I pity poor Carter in his dealings with Begin, with his stilted mentality". Kamel, n. 46, pp. 321-22.
But after consultations with the Israelis, the US presented its peace proposal which was heavily pro-Israel. Interestingly, Sadat's initial reaction was generally positive, whereas, Kamel, argued strongly that the American draft was unacceptable. Despite a forceful argument by Kamel and by the Egyptian delegation, against the US peace proposal, Sadat nevertheless told Carter that he would agree to the American proposals. But Sadat remained adamant in his refusal on the issue of Israeli settlements and bases in Sinai.

It was against this backdrop that Sadat agreed to receive at Weizman's request Dayan on September 14. According to Dayan it was Sadat who "plunged straight into the problems of the conference" which was drawing to a close without agreement, and the main reason for this was Israel's adamant insistence on retaining the settlements in Sinai. Obviously, Sadat asked Dayan some tough questions on this issue. In Dayan's account his meeting with Sadat focuses attention exclusively on Sadat's concern on Israeli settlements in Sinai whereas according to Kamel, it was the West Bank and Gaza that was crucial during discussions. When Sadat asked Dayan "Do you imagine that it is possible for me to conclude any peace treaty with you which did not include the removal of the settlements and airfields and the restitution of Sinai with full sovereignty?", he got a blunt reply from Dayan: "We shall continue to occupy Sinai and pump oil". When Sadat asked him why he had not said so from the very outset — instead of wasting time on sterile talks. Dayan answered:

We did say so from the start, but you chose not to believe us. I wished to explain to you the truth of the situation by presenting it clearly

90. Dayan, n. 41, pp. 171-72.
To prevent you building false hopes on what it is impossible for Begin to approve of, at least for the time being.92

After this meeting with Dayan, which was described by one observer as the coup de grace, that finished Sadat, by taking the Israeli game plan to its next logical step of exposing to Sadat the helplessness of his position, he (Sadat) was extremely disappointed and frustrated with the Israelis. According to Kamel, even though Sadat's meeting with Dayan lasted less than an hour it was the last straw for Sadat and a turning point in his attitude. From then on he became embroiled in a series of concessions. This ended in his total capitulation, and he finally appended his signature to what Israel, in its wildest dreams, never imagined possible.93

Sadat finally accepted US peace proposals which were largely based on Begin's autonomy scheme submitted at Ismailia summit in December 1977. In protest M.I. Kamel resigned and boycotted the accord signing ceremony at the White House. The accords which Sadat accepted ignored Palestinian right for self determination and representation and more significantly it bypassed the principle of nonacquisition of territory by force, and only spoke of "redeploying" Israeli military forces, thus defeating the principle of withdrawal from the Palestinian lands. With this hardline stance Begin virtually froze the autonomy issue as he only used it as a cover for the separate peace policy. At the

92. Ibid, p. 351. To the end the Israelis adhered to their plan whereas Sadat remained convinced of the correctness of his strategy.

93. Ibid, p. 352. Already ten days had elapsed since the start of Camp David conference and it appeared increasingly that it would end in failure. Indeed, by this time Sadat had become nervous and impatient in face of the unyielding Israeli position. Moreover, he found Carter unwilling to put any pressure on Israel.
Blair House talks concerning the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, the Israelis from the outset were determined to impose conditions on Egypt, leading to a separate peace treaty with no linkage to the autonomy accord. Not satisfied with the concessions he got at Camp David. Begin insisted and obtained the following additional concessions from Sadat especially limiting Egyptian sovereignty in Sinai: a) multinational forces were allowed to patrol the DMZ on the Egyptian side of the border where the presence of Egyptian troops was severely restricted; b) to please Carter, Sadat agreed to the building of a road link near Taba with Jordan via Israel, fully aware that it is intended for the USRD; c) Sadat agreed to Israeli demand that Egypt's treaty with Israel be given priority over Egypt's previous commitments to the Arab states under the Arab League's Arab collective Security agreement; d) Egypt consented to the termination of the state of belligerency and normalize its relations with Israel even while its troops remained in Sinai.

To sum up, Israel not only rejected Sadat's February 1971 peace initiative but made clear its preference for a separate peace agreement with Egypt. Israel's "intolerable arrogance" as Sadat put it, made him opt for war. The Egyptians not only crossed the Suez Canal but destroyed the Bar Lev line and the invincible Israeli army was defeated. Eventhough Israel was able to cross the Suez Canal it was, however, put on the defensive and its military superiority had been challenged with some success by the Egyptians. The Israeli leaders were also shocked to learn of the effective oil weapon which the Arabs used with devastating impact. After the war Sadat anxious for an early Israeli pull out agreed for direct talks with Israel at KM 101. This was the first direct face to face talk between Egypt and Israel heralding a new relationship. Moreover, Sadat agreed to most of the Israeli demands for Sinai-I. Since
Israel solved the pressing problems of temporarily stabilizing the ceasefire lines with Egypt and the consequent disengagement of troops it lost interest in any further peace talks with Egypt. Now they set their eyes on removing Egypt from the Arab-Israeli military equation. Israeli goal was to delay and prolong peace talks if possible, but in case of pressure seek partial agreements. On the other hand, Sadat indicated his preference for yet another separate agreement with Israel. In return for limited Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, Sadat signed Sinai-II. Besides making several concessions on the non-military front, Sadat gave Israel the non-belligerence Pact it had always sought though not under the same name. Israel's strategic position was greatly enhanced by the agreement.

Sadat was dismayed over the emergence through elections of Begin (and the Likud bloc) as he talked about not only retaining Arab lands but also asserted the right of Jews to settle in occupied lands. Begin not only opposed GPC and PLO but he also presented an entirely new Israeli interpretation of UN Resolution 242 and asserted that it did not require Israel to withdraw from all the fronts and lands.

As Sadat's domestic position deteriorated he became increasingly desperate about peace. This partly explains his decision to embark on covert talks with Israel in order to arrive at prior agreement with Israeli leaders before GPC. The Israelis were obviously delighted at this opening which convinced them that
it would eventually pave the way for separate peace. It is against this background that Sadat visited Jerusalem in November 1977 with the hope of solving his acute domestic problems. He was disappointed as Begin showed no signs of vacating Arab lands. It increasingly became clear to Sadat that Israel was primarily interested in a separate deal. This became obvious at the Cairo conference, the Ismailia Summit, and the Leeds Conference. This clearly reveals Sadat's poor perception of the possible strategy Begin could adopt at the talks. It must also be remembered that in order to put pressure on Sadat Begin sanctioned many new Jewish settlements in Sinai and West Bank. Despite being rebuffed by Israel at every stage and with no change in Israeli hardline stand on the issue of withdrawal Sadat agreed to attend the Camp David talks hoping that Carter would rescue him. As expected Begin adopted a hard and inflexible attitude because he understood Sadat's desperation and, extracted concessions after concessions. By making inconsequential concessions on Sinai, Begin made Sadat drop most of his demands on West Bank and Gaza. The aim of all the Israeli maneuverings was a bilateral peace agreement with Egypt which Sadat signed in March 1979. The peace treaty was a feather in Begin's cap and he used it brilliantly subsequently, whereas for Sadat it led to his assassination. In the end, Israel not only gained acceptance and legitimacy from the largest Arab country but also virtually got a free hand to deal with other issues.