

It took President Sadat's dramatic trip to Jerusalem to initiate the process which resulted in the successful conclusion of the Camp David Accords in 1978 between Israel, Egypt and the United States. On this basis Israel and Egypt, in accordance with the principles of Resolution 242, have signed a peace treaty providing for full normalization of relations between them and for Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai peninsula. The Accords also established a mechanism for negotiations aimed at resolving the Palestinian question on the basis of Resolution 242.

The Camp David process has been opposed by most Arab governments. They see it as a bilateral arrangement only between Egypt and Israel which has complicated rather than assisted movement toward the goal of a comprehensive peace. In particular they assert that the Accords do not provide the basis for a just settlement because they make no satisfactory provision for solving the Palestinian question. But the Accords do not pretend to do this. Instead they put in place a mechanism by which basic issues can be negotiated if the parties are willing to join in negotiations. While I believe the Arab governments whose representatives I met are quite genuine in their reservations about Camp David, general statements of position by these governments together with their hope that American influence will induce Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories and recognize Palestinian rights are not a substitute for negotiations.

Real talks around a table are surely the only means by which satisfactory territorial and other arrangements can be worked out. But if such talks are to be successful it is essential that the Palestinians be encouraged to join. To do this, they themselves must be given reason to believe that Camp David can give them a very substantial measure of control over their own affairs during the five year interim period established in the Accords, preparatory to the negotiation of the final status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Actions which appear to prejudge the nature of an eventual settlement of the status of the West Bank and Gaza necessarily discourage Palestinians from involvement in the Camp David process. The establishment of Israeli settlements, Israeli exploitation of these territories' natural resources such as water, and the increasing integration of basic infrastructure with Israel generate suspicion among the Palestinians that the Government of Israel intends to effect practical integration of these territories with Israel itself and to preclude their return to Arab rule. Even the most moderate of Palestinians whom I met will not accept any solution giving Israel and its citizens this kind of control of the West Bank and Gaza. These two areas together constitute much less than the Palestinians have traditionally claimed. The willingness of many of them now to accept these diminished territories is in their eyes a considerable concession.