

## [H-Diplo Roundtable XX-36 on Jørgen Jensehaugen. Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians](#)

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Introduction by Salim Yaqub, University of California, Santa Barbara

On a December evening in 1977, toward the end of President Jimmy Carter's first year in office, the television journalist Barbara Walters hosted a dinner party at her Washington, D.C. apartment. The purpose of the event was to bring together the Egyptian and Israeli ambassadors to the United States, who, though residing in the same city, had never officially interacted with one another. The guest list was a Who's Who of Washington power players from both the government and the media. Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who had left office the previous January, saluted the gathering in some after-dinner remarks. "I have not addressed such a distinguished audience," he said, "since dining alone in the Hall of Mirrors."<sup>[1]</sup>

Kissinger was spoofing his own reputation for vanity, of course, but on this occasion he had reason to preen. As he spoke, Arab-Israeli diplomacy was undergoing a dramatic transformation that seemed to

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vindicate his geopolitical vision. For most of 1977, President Carter had doggedly pursued a comprehensive approach to Arab-Israeli peacemaking, in stark contrast to the bilateral Egyptian-Israeli diplomacy that Kissinger had promoted since 1973. But then, in November, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat stunned the world by flying to Jerusalem to meet face-to-face with his Israeli counterpart, Prime Minister Menachem Begin, effectively upending Carter's multilateral efforts and forcing his administration to revert to the previous bilateral diplomacy. The result was an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty that won enthusiastic acclaim in the United States (foreshadowed by the convivial toasts in Barbara Walters's tony digs) but fell far short of President Carter's own vision for a comprehensive peace, especially one that addressed the Palestinian issue that lay at the heart of the dispute.

Jørgen Jensehaugen explores this irony in his richly researched and cogently argued book, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians*. By the time Carter left office in early 1981, Jensehaugen writes, he "was in an odd position—he had attempted to break with traditional US policy but ended up fulfilling the goals of that tradition, which had been to break up the Arab alliance, side-line the Palestinians, build an alliance with Egypt, weaken the Soviet Union and secure Israel" (178). How and why had all of this come to pass? The author argues that Carter, in attempting to achieve a comprehensive settlement, faced daunting obstacles: the staying power of the U.S. tradition he sought to overturn; sharp divisions in the Arab camp, including among Palestinians; Begin's utter determination to hold on to the occupied territories; Sadat's at times startling indifference to Palestinian national claims; and the evaporation of international conditions that had initially been conducive to comprehensive diplomacy. But Carter compounded his own difficulties, Jensehaugen argues, by declining "to utilise his full political toolset" (194), especially when it came to pressuring Israel to accommodate Palestinian claims. On several occasions, the Carter administration considered confronting Begin over his intransigence and deploying its full rhetorical, diplomatic, and perhaps economic leverage to compel the Israeli prime minister to modify his position. Each time, however, the administration drew back from the brink. We cannot know if such measures would have succeeded, Jensehaugen acknowledges. But we do know that they were never tried.

The four scholars reviewing this book—Maia Hallward, Osamah Khalil, Daniel Strieff, and William Quandt—bring formidable expertise and acumen to the task, and one of them, Quandt, was an important participant in the events Jensehaugen recounts. The reviewers explore many questions, which for the sake of brevity I will reduce to two: could Carter *really* have pushed that much harder for a comprehensive settlement than he actually did, and what connections might we draw between Carter's Middle East diplomacy and subsequent political events in the Middle East?

The first question receives the fullest airing in Quandt's review. While granting that Carter did not use all the means that were theoretically available to him to achieve a comprehensive settlement, Quandt writes: "as a participant in those forty-year old events, I have a somewhat different sense of what was politically possible." Carter had to deal with diplomatic realities as they were, and any move he made to place pressure on Israel was sure to arouse fierce opposition at home. "[W]e academics and policy advisers are not politicians," Quandt observes, "and do not have to worry about being reelected." It certainly would have been commendable had Carter stuck to his guns and insisted that any bilateral Egyptian-Israeli agreement be linked to an ironclad Israeli commitment to vacate the West Bank and Gaza Strip. But Sadat himself was willing to settle for much less, and the

Americans couldn't realistically be more pro-Palestinian than the Egyptians. (Actually, Jensehaugen shows that on a couple of occasions the Carter administration did outstrip Sadat on this score, but clearly this was not a sustainable U.S. posture over the long haul.) Moreover, by the time of the Camp David meeting in September 1978, Iran was sliding toward revolution, and the Carter administration was increasingly concerned about its strategic position in the region. Amid such worry, Quandt writes, "it was almost inconceivable that any president would willingly let the Egyptian-Israeli peace slip away because of a larger commitment to a comprehensive peace." Jensehaugen displays a keen understanding of these political, diplomatic, and strategic constraints, but Quandt believes they merit greater emphasis.

The second question, about connections to subsequent events, is mainly the province of the other three reviewers. Strieff praises Jensehaugen's treatment overall yet wishes the book had said more about the legacy Carter bequeathed to later practitioners of American policy toward the Middle East. "Did he succeed in changing the conversation on the Palestinians in U.S. policymaking?" asks Strieff. Hallward provides a fuller discussion of the legacy question, noting some striking parallels between Arab-Israeli diplomacy in the late 1970s and the Middle East 'peace process' since the early 1990s. For example, the back-channel contacts between Sadat and Begin in 1977 foreshadowed Israel's secret negotiations with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in Oslo in 1993. Similarly, both in the Carter years and post-Oslo the United States refused to deal directly with key Palestinian organizations, the PLO in the earlier case, and Hamas later on. Hallward also observes that, both forty years ago and more recently, "the starting point for negotiations has been an ever moving and shrinking target," with hopes for meaningful Israeli withdrawal repeatedly giving way to de facto U.S. acquiescence in continued occupation. The first of these three parallels may be simple happenstance, but the latter two suggest a negative answer to Strieff's question: it appears that President Carter did *not*, to any significant degree, "succeed in changing the conversation on the Palestinians in U.S. policymaking." Arguably, the Palestinians themselves have played a role in this outcome, a conclusion Quandt hints at in his discussion of the PLO's diplomacy.

Khalil goes a step further, contending that Carter's Middle East policies not only failed to ease the region's polarization but in fact made things much worse. He writes that the treaty with Egypt gave Israel "peace on its southern border," enabling Begin's government to build more settlements on the West Bank, illegally annex the Golan Heights, and launch a devastating invasion of Lebanon. Support for this grim causal analysis can be found, interestingly enough, in Jimmy Carter's own post-presidential writings. In 1985, Carter observed that the strategic benefits of Camp David abetted Israeli leaders' domineering and aggressive inclinations: "With the bilateral treaty, [Begin] removed Egypt's considerable strength from the military equation of the Middle East and thus gave the Israelis renewed freedom to pursue their goals of fortifying and settling the occupied territories and removing perceived threats by preemptive military strikes against some of their neighbors."<sup>[2]</sup> In the decades since, Israel's fortunes in Lebanon have waxed and waned, but its occupation of the Golan Heights and creeping annexation of the West Bank have continued, with precious little challenge from Washington—and, under President Donald Trump, with the U.S. government's outright encouragement. "At present," Khalil concludes, "there is a de facto one-state solution in Israel-Palestine, albeit one where Israel maintains a separate and unequal legal regime for Palestinians that satisfies the definition of apartheid. This, too, is the legacy of Camp David."

Khalil points to another product of Camp David: the close, and remarkably enduring, client

relationship between Egypt and the United States. The arrangement survived the 1981 assassination of Sadat and became more deeply entrenched over the three decades in which Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, subjected the nation to his authoritarian rule. When widespread public protests erupted in 2011, President Barack Obama eased Mubarak out of power. But two years later, Khalil writes, "Washington endorsed the military coup that overthrew Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi, accompanied by a brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood that has yet to abate." These developments are a far cry from the "absolute" commitment to human rights that Carter proclaimed in his Inaugural Address in January 1977.<sup>[3]</sup>

For all that, and speaking just for myself, I come away from Jensehaugen's outstanding book still persuaded that, by the standards of U.S. Middle East policymakers, Carter acquitted himself with intelligence, conscientiousness, and integrity. These qualities place the dismal consequences of his actions more squarely in the realm of irony than of incompetence or hypocrisy. As Strieff notes, the results say less about Carter himself than about the formidable obstacles he faced. So read Jensehaugen and his colleagues and weep—but savor, too, the rich insights they bring to bear on this dispiriting topic.

#### Participants:

Jørgen Jensehaugen is a Senior Researcher at the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). He holds a Ph.D. in history from the Norwegian Institute of Science and Technology (NTNU). *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter* (I.B. Tauris 2018) is his first book, but he has published articles in journals such as *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, *The International History Review* and *Diplomacy & Statecraft*. His current work is on the Palestinians as the historical missing link in U.S. Middle East policy.

Salim Yaqub received his Ph.D. in U.S. history from Yale University in 1999. He is now Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and Director of UCSB's Center for Cold War Studies and International History. He is the author of *Containing Arab Nationalism: The Eisenhower Doctrine and the Middle East* (University of North Carolina, 2004) and of several articles and book chapters on the history of U.S. foreign relations, the international politics of the Middle East, and Arab American political activism. His second book, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.-Middle East Relations in the 1970s*, was published by Cornell University Press in September 2016. Professor Yaqub is currently writing a post-1945 history of the United States for Cambridge University Press.

Maia Hallward holds a Ph.D. in International Relations from American University's School of International Service and is a professor of Middle East Studies at Kennesaw State University. She is the author of four books, including *Struggling for Just Peace: Israeli and Palestinian Activism in the Second Intifada* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2011), *Transnational Activism and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Palgrave, 2013). She is currently working with Dr. Charity Butcher on a book-length project exploring the similarities and differences between religious and secular organizations' approach to human rights.

Osamah Khalil is an Associate Professor of History at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs. He is the author of *America's Dream Palace: Middle East Expertise*

*and the Rise of the National Security State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016) and editor of the forthcoming volume, *United States Relations with China and Iran: Towards the Asian Century* (Bloomsbury, 2019).

From 1994 to 2013, William B. Quandt held the Edward R. Stettinius chair in the Department of Politics at the University of Virginia. He taught courses on the Middle East and American Foreign Policy. In 2012, he received the University's Thomas Jefferson Award. He received his Ph.D. from MIT in 1968 and his BA from Stanford in 1963. Before going to the Brookings Institution in 1979, Dr. Quandt served as a staff member on the National Security Council (1972-1974, 1977-1979). He was actively involved in the negotiations that led to the Camp David Accords and the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty. William Quandt has written numerous books, and his articles have appeared in a wide variety of publications. His books include: *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, (Brookings, 2005, third edition); *Between Ballots and Bullets: Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism*, (Brookings, 1998); *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*, (Brookings, 1986); and *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria, 1954-1968*, (MIT Press, 1969). Most recently, he co-authored *Peace Puzzle: America's Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace, 1989-2011*, (Cornell University Press, 2013).

Daniel Strieff is a Visiting Fellow at the London School of Economics and Political Science, where he earned his Ph.D. in International History. He is the author of *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

Review by Maia Hallward, Kennesaw State University

Jørgen Jensehaugen's new rendering of Arab-Israeli peacemaking under the presidency of Jimmy Carter explores the historic Camp David accords not through the lens of success, but rather through one of failure, namely, the failure of the accords to include the Palestinians, particularly their quest for self-determination and self-representation. Jensehaugen argues that "solving the Palestinian issue was considered a strategic necessity" (3) by Carter, his foreign policy advisors, the CIA, and the State Department. Forty years later, however, the Palestinian question remains unresolved, and the prospects of a sustainable agreement between the parties seems unlikely in the near future.

The book is based on in-depth research using primary documents from the recently declassified Carter archives, the U.S. State Department, the CIA, the British Foreign Office, some recently available Israeli documents, and interviews with decision-makers. While the book provides an intimate look at the decision making of the Carter administration from the perspective of those directly involved at the time, including Carter's own reflections, it does not engage as directly with the broader domestic context in which Carter's administration worked. The text briefly mentions domestic constraints, notably the imbalance in organizing power between Jewish Americans and Arab Americans, and the administration's lack of political capital after choosing to lobby for a Middle East arms deal that was not popular with Congress, but largely leaves them to the side. Similarly, apart from noting that Carter was a Washington outsider, the book does not discuss Carter's personal

characteristics, such as the faith background that shaped his interest in the region that he discusses in *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid*.<sup>[4]</sup>

Jensehaugen's primary research question is, "What had happened to the comprehensive peace and the call for Palestinian homeland? Why were the Palestinians excluded from the negotiations, when Carter had insisted on their inclusion?" (2) Implicitly, however, the author seems to ask whether Carter could have done better, and if so, what might have been done differently. The outline of the book traces the trajectory of President Carter's efforts in the region during his time in office. After an overview of Carter's relationship to the Palestinian question and the history of U.S. Presidents and the Palestinians, the third chapter is entitled the "Comprehensive Approach," documenting Carter's ambitious goal of bringing together Arab states, the Palestinians, and Israel to find a resolution to the Middle East impasse. Subsequent chapters illustrate the administration's efforts to 'cling' to the comprehensive approach despite significant difficulties such as Israel's refusal to speak to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) regardless of PLO concessions and the hardline position of the Assad regime, the 'tortuous' road to Camp David, and ultimately chapters entitled "Where do we Go Now, but Nowhere?" and "A Failed Ambition."

The book outlines multiple challenges facing Carter's desire to achieve a comprehensive peace, including the divided views of Arab states, and the fact that the U.S. and Israel were not talking to the PLO, which they viewed as a terrorist group. Jensehaugen explains how the Palestinians were not included in discussions about their fate, and how gradually the Palestinian question was sidelined in an effort to reach an agreement between Egypt and Israel. For Jensehaugen, the Carter administration failed to challenge a "self-imposed...diplomatic straitjacket" preventing the US from dealing with the PLO due to an agreement made with Israel under previous administrations (65). This theme winds throughout the book, with the U.S. putting pressure on Arab states for additional concessions whenever the Israeli position hardened (56). In contrast with the Israeli narrative that the Arab states have constantly rejected peace efforts, Jensehaugen quotes Secretary of State Cyrus Vance as saying that although Arab leaders had moved in a good direction, Israeli leaders were "remarkably unyielding" (58). Time and again, the Carter administration revised its own positions to follow those of Israel, and while the U.S. pressured Arab leaders, it never put actual pressure on Israel (83, 124).

Although the research question focuses on the Palestinian question, much of the book focuses on the Egyptian-Israeli peace process. Jensehaugen tells a story in which the U.S. was caught by surprise when, on 20 November 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem and made his famous speech to the Israeli Knesset, and failed to recalibrate foreign policy accordingly. Isolated from other states by his bilateral initiative, Sadat was desperate to succeed, and the book chronicles Sadat's many concessions and missteps that gave Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin—already a shrewd negotiator—the upper hand in the negotiations (119). In his strategic need to reach a peace agreement with Israel, Sadat relinquished demands for Palestinian autonomy. Sadat had much less leverage than Begin, and the Carter administration chose not to use its limited political capital to offset the imbalance between the two leaders. Jensehaugen argues "Since Carter failed to apply this type of pressure, Begin could once again continue to make gains, and refuse to make concessions" (151). Consequently, the resultant agreement was less legally binding on Begin than on Sadat, and Begin used shrewd, legalistic techniques, such as arguing he was not building "new" settlements, but only expanding existing ones to advance his own ideological objectives of preventing Palestinian self-

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determination (138).

One of the major limitations of Jensehaugen's account is the failure to draw parallels between the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations, the Oslo Accords, and current events. Although Jensehaugen does observe that Begin's offer of 'home rule' for Palestinians foreshadowed the autonomy offered in the Oslo accords, much more analysis of the impact of the Carter administration's failed efforts for later administrations would make the book stronger. Many of the issues noted in Jensehaugen's account were repeated in the Oslo process. For example, the U.S. was surprised by back-channel talks between Sadat and Begin moderated by Romanian President Nicolae Ceausescu, just as the U.S. was surprised by the back channel talks in Norway that led to the Oslo Accords. Further, the refusal of Israel and the U.S. to speak with the PLO unless it met certain demands and without any promises in return supported rejectionist views and undermined the moderates. Today, the refusal of Israel and the U.S. to engage substantively with Hamas contributes to the ongoing political stalemate as Palestinians are divided politically into two distinct entities, unable to speak as one people. The 'Gaza first' option proposed by Begin has been effectively pursued by Israel since then—Gaza first for the Palestinians after the Oslo accords, Gaza the subject of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's "disengagement" in 2005, and Gaza designated a "hostile entity" distinct from the West Bank in 2007 after Hamas came to power. The book also does not discuss the ways in which the starting point for negotiations has been an ever moving and shrinking target. In Carter's era, the Israelis insisted on the PLO agreeing to UN Security Council Resolution 242 as a precondition for talks. Over the decades, however, it has become the Palestinians, rather than the Israelis, seeking to hold up such resolutions as the basis for talks, as Israel has erased the pre-1967 'Green Line' from mental, physical, and lived maps. Just as the Carter administration took a long time to recognize that the comprehensive approach had given way to a bilateral one, the U.S. government has been slow to acknowledge that the two-state solution—the premise of the Oslo Accords—has given way to the reality of a de facto one state—controlled entirely by Israel with differential rights based on citizenship status and nationality.

Today in 2018, the U.S. once again has a president in the White House who makes it clear he is a political outsider, and who "think[s] outside the box of traditional U.S. foreign policy" (2). However, whereas Carter made including the Palestinians a stated priority at the start of his administration, President Donald Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, moving the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv without any conditions, thereby removing any remaining pretense of the U.S. being an 'honest broker' between the parties. And, in September 2018, the U.S. shut down the Palestinian embassy in Washington, D.C. and cut aid to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the branch of the UN responsible for schools and medical facilities for Palestinian refugees. Cutting support to Palestinian refugees, in the absence of political efforts to address their situation, repeats the previous mistake of excluding Palestinians from decisions about them, and strengthens the hands of extremists. Palestinians using nonviolent tactics of boycott, divestment, and sanctions are portrayed as terrorists by other means, as Israel continues to control the limits of what is deemed 'acceptable' action. Portrayed as either refugees or terrorists - a humanitarian or a security issue (180)—and in light of international attention spent on other regional crises such as the ongoing wars in Syria and Yemen—the Palestinian issue is easily pushed aside by Arab states pursuing their own strategic interests, leaving no one to advocate on Palestinians' behalf in governmental forums.

Although the author does not take the strong stance of John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt in their book on the so-called Israel lobby<sup>[5]</sup>, his underlying argument is that “Israel’s know-how in effectively using U.S. domestic policies to its advantage helped the Israelis outmanoeuvre both the Arab states and the Carter administration” (189). Apart from President Dwight Eisenhower, who stood up to the British, French, and Israelis in the 1956 Suez Crisis and President George H.W. Bush, U.S. presidents have shied away from putting real pressure on Israel, and efforts to enact a ban on settlement construction have not included ‘natural growth’ within existing settlements. It is instructive that Carter has been able to do more to bring Palestinians into the conversation after he left the White House than he was as President, and speaks to why the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement calls for pressure from global civil society to achieve Palestinian self-determination—state-led efforts have failed. Jensehaugen identifies the structural and personal challenges facing the Carter administration well, in addition to the difficulty of dealing with rigid personalities. What lessons, however, can be learned from this history? Unfortunately, the book leaves the reader to draw their own conclusions.

Review by Osamah F. Khalil, Syracuse University

Palestinians observed several major anniversaries in 2018, none of them celebratory. May marked the seventieth anniversary of the *Nakba*, or catastrophe, the destruction of Palestinian society that accompanied the creation of the state of Israel. In September, the fortieth anniversary of the Camp David Accords and the twenty-fifth anniversary of the signing of the first Oslo Accord (Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements) passed without fanfare. Meanwhile, Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian Territories (i.e., West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem) continues into its fifty-second year. These events frame Jørgen Jensehaugen’s *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel, and the Palestinians*. Although the book is ostensibly about the negotiations between Egypt and Israel that resulted in the 1979 Peace treaty between the two countries, to his credit Jensehaugen recognizes that the Palestinians are and have been at the center of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Jensehaugen relies largely on American diplomatic documents. The Egyptian archives are generally unavailable and the records of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) were either lost, destroyed, or under restricted access in Israel. As a result, the motivations and actions of key players are often viewed from an American perspective. Jensehaugen resolves this issue by relying on published Israeli and Palestinian sources as well as a range of memoirs and secondary sources. The result is a carefully argued and well-written examination of President Jimmy Carter’s diplomatic initiative. In evaluating Carter, Jensehaugen is generous with praise and judicious with criticism. The book’s structure and scope as well as its accessible prose are ideal for advanced undergraduate courses and graduate seminars.

In examining the diplomatic and political landscape that Carter inherited, Jensehaugen does not ignore or discount the Palestinian narrative. He explains that after 1948, Washington dealt with the Palestinians as a humanitarian issue to be resolved as part of a larger settlement between Israel and



the Arab states. The United States neither wanted nor sought separate political representation for the Palestinians, regardless of what they requested or demanded.<sup>[6]</sup>

However, the Palestinians refused to be ignored. By 1974, the PLO was recognized by the United Nations and the Arab League as the “sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” (31). But Washington did not recognize or have official relations with the Organization. That the PLO’s leadership sought to replicate the examples of the Algerian and Vietnamese revolutions was not lost on either the United States or Israel. While Israeli leaders disingenuously rejected the existence of the Palestinians and refused to negotiate with the PLO, the United States also sought to contain the Organization’s regional and international influence. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger actively sought to undermine the Organization’s diplomatic efforts. This included constraining future administrations from developing relations with the PLO and hindering the Organization’s ability to participate in future negotiations. As Jensehaugen explains “Kissinger’s ghost was haunting Carter’s peace process” (59).

Yet as Jensehaugen demonstrates, instead of exorcising Kissinger’s ghost, Carter made it his own with predictable results. Carter recognized that the Palestinians were the key to a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict and spoke of the need for a “homeland” for Palestinian refugees (40). However, the Carter administration became bogged down on the PLO’s acceptance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242. The major issue hindering relations between Washington and the PLO was the secret Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by the United States and Israel that accompanied the second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement (also known as Sinai II). In the MOU, Washington agreed not to negotiate with or formalize relations with the PLO until the Organization accepted UNSC 242 and recognized Israel’s right to exist (30).

As a presidential candidate, Carter criticized the Nixon-Ford-Kissinger approach to foreign policy. Rather than abandoning the approach of his predecessors entirely, Carter adopted the terms of the MOU. Carter’s strict adherence to the MOU surprised American diplomats in the region, including U.S. ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts.<sup>[7]</sup> The Carter administration relied on intermediaries to negotiate with the PLO, which contributed to misunderstandings and frustration for all involved. Although the PLO signaled moderation to Washington, the Carter administration was unwilling to promise anything more than direct talks in exchange for the Organization agreeing to the MOU’s terms (59-60).

The PLO was left on the sidelines after the Likud Party’s victory in the May 1977 Israeli elections and Washington’s emphasis on Egyptian-Israeli negotiations. It was not alone, as Syria and Jordan were also spectators. Although Camp David has been viewed as a missed opportunity for the Palestinians, ultimately the PLO was forced to choose between bad options. The Carter administration’s refusal to offer the Organization significant guarantees and Sadat’s willingness to pursue a separate peace further limited the PLO’s choices. Moreover, as Jensehaugen notes, the Palestinians were a red line for Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin. If Carter hoped to salvage his peace initiative and limit the criticism from pro-Israel supporters in the United States, especially from his own party, the Egyptian track offered the most likely chance of success. Even though Sadat publicly supported the PLO, in private he informed Kissinger and the Carter administration that the Palestinians would hinder progress on negotiations (86).<sup>[8]</sup>

Jensehaugen admirably discusses the positive and negative implications of Carter's efforts. It is the latter that are often overlooked or discounted. The limited autonomy provisions for the Palestinians were weak and eventually a dead letter. In addition, Israel continued expanding illegal settlements in the West Bank in a deliberate snub to Carter and Sadat. Two years after the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty was signed, Carter was out of office, Sadat had been assassinated, and an emboldened Begin illegally annexed Syria's Golan Heights. The following year, Begin and Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon launched a massive invasion of Lebanon with the goals of destroying the PLO, securing the West Bank, and reshaping the region. Although these goals were not achieved, it is unlikely that Israel would have attempted such an ambitious endeavor without peace on its southern border and encouragement from the Reagan administration.<sup>[9]</sup>

Meanwhile, Cairo aligned with Washington and the main beneficiaries were the Egyptian military and oligarchs with ties to the regime. Egypt became the second largest recipient of American aid after Israel. Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, remained in power for three decades until he was forced to relinquish power during the 2011 Egyptian uprising. Egypt's importance to U.S. interests in the region was on display as the Obama administration debated whether to support Mubarak or the protestors. Two years later, Washington endorsed the military coup that overthrew Egypt's first democratically elected president, Mohamed Morsi, accompanied by a brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood that has yet to abate.<sup>[10]</sup>

Jensehaugen cautions that Carter's efforts to induce concessions from Israel at Camp David have been overstated. As observed in the July 2000 Camp David summit between Israel and the Palestinians, although attention from an American president is necessary, it will not guarantee success. Moreover, a replication of the Camp David effort is unlikely to happen today. Despite his claims of the "ultimate deal" being developed, the current President of the United States lacks the attention to detail, intellect, and motivation of either Carter or Bill Clinton.<sup>[11]</sup> Even under the more disciplined Obama administration, the attempts by Secretary of State John Kerry to restart negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were stillborn.<sup>[12]</sup> In large part this is because Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's opposition to a two-state solution and an independent, viable Palestinian state has been apparent since the mid-1990s.<sup>[13]</sup> Under the Trump administration, the political and ideological alignment between the United States and Israel is closer than ever before. Meanwhile, the Israeli military now concedes that in the territory covered by Mandate Palestine (Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories), Palestinians are now the majority.<sup>[14]</sup> At present, there is a de facto one-state solution in Israel-Palestine, albeit one where Israel maintains a separate and unequal legal regime for Palestinians that satisfies the definition of apartheid.<sup>[15]</sup> This too, is the legacy of Camp David.

Review by William B. Quandt, University of Virginia, Professor Emeritus

Jørgen Jensehaugen has written a well-researched and clear-eyed assessment of President Jimmy Carter's diplomacy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. By now, most of the relevant documentation on the American side is in the public domain, many of the actors have written their own version of those

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events, a number of academic studies have been completed, and therefore one might wonder how much new can be expected in a book of this sort. The answer is that there is still room for judgments about what was done and what might have been tried, even if the basic narrative of events is pretty well known. And Jensehaugen does make a case that Carter could have done more to address the Palestinian part of the conflict if he had been willing to use more of the tools in his toolkit.

I am sympathetic to Jensehaugen's point of view, but, as a participant in those forty-year old events, I have a somewhat different sense of what was politically possible. Before getting into those differences, let me briefly spell out Jensehaugen's main theme and let me underscore where I believe he is very much on the mark.

First, Jensehaugen argues that Carter and his team did, in fact, initially hope to pursue a comprehensive approach to Arab-Israeli peace, including the Palestinians, and not just a continuation of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's step-by-step incrementalism, and a separate Egyptian-Israeli peace. That is a correct assessment, but it is worth pointing out that Carter's initial policy preferences in the early days of his presidency were almost all designed to be 'comprehensive.' He had been trained as an engineer and his inclination was to try to see how all the pieces would fit together before launching any project. And his two closest foreign-policy advisers, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, were also predisposed to try for an overall peace in the Middle East. As Brzezinski's National Security Council (NSC) staff person with responsibility in this area, I shared this view. But having said this, it was also the case that we all understood that such an ambitious approach might not succeed, and we realized that our preferences were not the only ones that mattered. The regional parties, who had a huge stake in how this would play out, would certainly make their views known, and they would not all be on the same page.

During Carter's first several months in office, he and his advisers tried to consult with all the state actors to determine whether or not the idea of an overall Arab-Israeli peace settlement might be possible. A number of channels were also opened to the Palestinian leadership—the Palestine Liberation Organization, or PLO—with which we were unable to deal directly because of both a prior commitment by Kissinger in 1975, but also as a result of Congressional action that prohibited any U.S. government official from negotiating with the PLO unless it recognized UN Resolution 242, and thus Israel's right to exist, *and* renounced terrorism, an even more stringent set of constraints than those set forth by Kissinger.

The net result of our initial contacts was that Carter believed that his comprehensive approach had a chance. There were serious differences over how the Palestinians might be included, but the Israelis had told us that if the PLO were to accept UN Resolution 242, then their objection to the PLO's involvement would change. We were also aware that the Arab states were not all in lock-step concerning how negotiations should take place, with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat wanting to insure that his room for maneuver would not be excessively constrained by Syria or Jordan. Still, as of April 1977, Carter was fairly hopeful, and he was particularly pleased that he had gotten off to a very good start with Sadat.

Then came the first big obstacle to the comprehensive strategy—the election of Menachem Begin as Israel's first Prime Minister from the right-wing Likud party. It took some time for Carter and the rest of us to realize how big a change this would be, since no one in the U.S. government had met with

Begin prior to his election, but we were aware of several troubling facts. Begin had quit the Israeli unity government in 1970 when the cabinet had formally accepted UN Resolution 242 with the understanding that it called for the exchange of 'land for peace' on each front of the conflict—Sinai, Golan, and the West Bank-Gaza. Begin and his ideological colleagues on the right would not agree to the possibility that Israel might one day withdraw from 'Judea and Samaria and the Gaza District' as they termed those territories, since they saw them as 'liberated' in a defensive war, not occupied. And Begin was also known to be an enthusiastic advocate of settling large numbers of Jews in these territories in order to make it impossible for any future Israeli leader to relinquish them. These were troubling indicators, to say the least, and they were reinforced each time we had direct talks with Begin and his team in the ensuing months.

A second turning point for Carter came in August-September 1977. We had been trying to persuade the PLO to accept UN Resolution 242, even if they included a reservation about its inadequacy as a basis for dealing with the Palestinian dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. (Syria had made a similar reservation when it had accepted 242). If PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat had taken this step, we would have begun a direct dialogue with the PLO, which might have helped prevent all the mixed signals that we got through Arab regimes and various private sources. But in September, Arafat sent word that he could not accept 242, largely because of Syrian pressure—he was then in Lebanon where Syria could indeed squeeze the PLO—but he did add that he might be able to accept 242 if we could guarantee a Palestinian state, with him as its president! This was so far from anything that we were prepared to do that it convinced Carter and Brzezinski to put the PLO issue to the sideline for the moment, while concentrating on getting the Arab governments to agree to a negotiating framework. This development deserves more attention than Jensehaugen and most other authors who write on the topic have given it.<sup>[16]</sup>

Jensehaugen is right on the mark, however, in underscoring the importance of the U.S.-Soviet joint statement of 1 October 1977, and the Israeli and American Jewish reaction to it. In brief, this was the moment when domestic politics suddenly intruded on our diplomatic deliberations. Carter was not much inclined to worry about the ups and downs of public opinion, but he could not ignore the outcry that came in the wake of the joint statement. At a crucial meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, he agreed to back away from the joint statement if Dayan would agree to use his influence to calm the heated atmosphere in the American Jewish community. It is easy for those of us who are not politicians to say that Carter should not have caved, but politics is, after all, the art of the possible, and he must have concluded that he could go no further without more domestic support for what he was trying to do.

Ironically, Sadat initially thought that the October 1 statement was a positive development, and he immediately sent us word that he also had Arafat's agreement on how the Palestinians could be represent at the prospective Geneva Conference—namely by two American-Palestinian academics. This almost certainly would not have worked in practice, but it did show some flexibility on the part of the PLO. But when Sadat saw Carter back down a few days later under pro-Israeli pressure, and after receiving an earnest request from Carter for his support at a crucial moment—the handwritten letter of October 21, 1977—Sadat concluded that Carter had exhausted his ability to push the Israelis further. Sadat was also worried that a Geneva conference without prior agreement on basic principles would turn out badly, not least of all because of inter-Arab differences.

Up until this time, we had underestimated the extent to which Sadat and Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad had come to distrust one another. But when Sadat decided in November to go to Jerusalem on his own, it was clear that any remnant of a united Arab front, or of Egyptian-Syrian cooperation, was finished. If there was a moment that can be identified as the point at which we began to seriously rethink the chances of continuing with our comprehensive approach, this was it. Jensehaugen is very good at explaining this in his narrative.

After Sadat's dramatic trip to Jerusalem, we were beginning to reassess our options, putting more emphasis on the Egyptian-Israeli track, but still hoping that something might be salvaged on the Jordanian-Palestinian track. Begin understood that he could not just seem to be saying no to all of our attempts to get something started on the Palestinian-Jordanian track, so in December 1977 he came up with his 'self-rule' proposal. Carter and his team were not much impressed, but Carter was reluctant to pour cold water on it, especially since Begin was winning plaudits in Congress for his supposedly generous offer. Brzezinski had the idea of trying to convert the 'self-rule' proposal from a permanent arrangement—Begin's intention—to a framework for a transitional period, at the end of which the Palestinians would exercise their right to self-determination. This proved to be a major shift in our approach, and was probably never discussed in enough detail before it became part of our new vocabulary. I now believe that this was a more important development than most analysts have noted, and Jensehaugen does a good job of spelling out how it happened.

One of the issues that we struggled with after Sadat's trip to Jerusalem was trying to figure out how much 'cover' Sadat would need on the Palestine issue before he would agree to a bilateral peace with Israel. His speech to the Knesset, if taken seriously, made it seem as if he would demand a very tight link between the two. But in private, Sadat would sometimes imply that while he would seek significant linkage, he would settle for something symbolic at best. In reading Jensehaugen's book, I found a reference to Sadat's minimalist views on the Palestinians that is dated much earlier than I had expected (106). I looked up the document in question, an intelligence report from 30 December 1977, in which Sadat is quoted as saying "he secretly had no problems if the West Bank eventually went to Israel" (Ch. 5, fn. 107). I had no recollection of his saying anything so explicit—but then I looked more carefully at the copy of the document and saw my own handwriting on it with a note to file it under 'Eg general.' So I actually had seen this copy of the document, but the version as released had masked the source, always an important indicator of how seriously to take such a report. In the context of the time, this was just one more bit of evidence, and not a decisive piece.

My own feeling is that Carter came to the conclusion that Sadat would settle for a bilateral agreement with Israel with only minimal 'cover' after meeting alone with him at Camp David in February 1978. There are no records of their discussions until the last day when the Middle East 'team' joined the two presidents, but I recall being struck how determined Carter seemed to be from then on about getting a full Egyptian-Israeli peace, without much explicit linkage to the Palestinian issue. And months later, at Camp David, Carter invested most of his time and effort in working out the details of the bilateral agreement, while the rest of us wrestled with Begin and his assistants over the tortuous and obfuscatory language dealing with the Palestinians and Jordan.

Jensehaugen pays due attention to the lead up to Camp David and then to the thirteen days themselves. He has the basic story well in hand. I sometimes felt, however, that he had a tendency to portray things as either fitting a model of comprehensive peace, or a totally separate Egyptian-Israeli

agreement. Until quite late in the day, we were still trying for something in between. We hoped that we could get Begin to agree that the withdrawal principle of UN Resolution 242 would, eventually, be applied to the West Bank and Gaza, even if only after a transitional period; and we hoped to get a freeze on settlement activity. In the end, we got neither, and it might not have made much difference even if we had. But that was what much of the struggle with Begin at Camp David was all about.

This leads me to Jensehaugen's judgment that Carter could have done more to force Begin to be more forthcoming on these two issues concerning the Palestinians. He mentions several times that Carter could have gone public with his private views on Begin's obstinacy; he could have held back on aid to Israel; he could have explained all this in a 'fireside chat' to the American people. Perhaps. While at Camp David, I was asked to draft what we called the 'failure speech,' which would explain how Begin's hardline positions were the main obstacle to peace. I did produce such a draft, and Carter did consider going public with it if the summit were to collapse. But he was not willing to give up on getting the Egyptian-Israeli peace, even if it meant putting the Palestinian issue on ice for an indefinite period. With Iran on the verge of revolution, it was almost inconceivable that any president would willingly let the Egyptian-Israeli peace slip away because of a larger commitment to a comprehensive peace.

At the end of the day, politics does matter in diplomacy. Carter was constantly being told by his political advisers that he was spending too much time on the Middle East, that he was using up too much political capital, and all for naught. It is easier for those of us who focus intensely on the Middle East and who could foresee the many loose ends that still needed attention after Camp David to say that Carter should have done more. I have thought and said much the same. But we academics and policy advisers are not politicians and do not have to worry about being reelected. So I am not so sure that there was much more that Carter realistically could have done to secure more than the Egyptian-Israeli peace. As Jensehaugen correctly says, we will never know because he did not try.

At some point, I believe, Carter came to the conclusion that Begin could not be pushed to do much of anything on the Palestinian issue, and that Sadat was much more concerned with Sinai and his new relationship with the United States than with anything else. And that was essentially true. So Carter ended up acting much more like a realist politician than the idealist who initially hoped to bring about a comprehensive peace to the Middle East.

Review by Daniel Strieff, London School of Economics and Political Science

I recently finished watching the second season of the Israeli TV spy thriller "Fauda," which centers on an Arabic-speaking Israeli unit that works undercover in the Palestinian territories. As an historian of American foreign relations and U.S. diplomacy in the Middle East, I was reminded of how little the United States plays a role in the day-to-day grind of Israeli-Palestinian relations. In fact, by my count there have been precisely zero references to the United States in the series. It offers a necessary reminder that however central Americans feel themselves to be in the middle of many international events, in reality most global disputes are driven by their own internal factors. Such lessons remind

me why I have increasingly concluded that close study of the history of American foreign relations ultimately can tell us more about the people, society, and system from which they emerge than about daily events in faraway lands.

Which brings me to Jørgen Jensehaugen's meticulously researched, highly readable, and persuasively argued new book, *Arab-Israeli diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians*. He focuses on Jimmy Carter's "historical role as the first US president to focus on the Palestinian issue," thereby offering the "first full account of the impact of the Palestinian issue upon the Carter administration's policies" (8).<sup>[17]</sup> Jensehaugen locates the originality of Carter's approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict in his initial push for a comprehensive peace deal and his related emphasis on including the Palestinians in any final agreement. In context, Carter's approach to the Palestinian issue, and most especially his (apparently improvised) March 1977 statement of the need for a "homeland" for the Palestinian people, was "radical" (5) and "truly remarkable," (9) Jensehaugen explains. Carter's focus "represented a break with traditional US Middle East policies" (177). Until the 1970s, "for the United States, the Palestinians were still largely invisible except as mere refugees without a national political role" (20). But though Carter "attempted to break with traditional US policy, ... [he] ended up fulfilling the goals of that tradition, which had been to break up the Arab alliance, side-line the Palestinians, build an alliance with Egypt, weaken the Soviet Union and secure Israel" (178). Indeed, his ultimate inability to shift the debate on the Palestinians—largely because of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin's stubborn, but effective, negotiating strategy—defines his legacy in the dispute every bit as much as his success in securing Egyptian-Israeli peace.

The pace of studies of the Carter administration has steadily quickened in recent years, with the president's performance in Middle East diplomacy often seen as among his most significant legacies. Earlier assessments of Carter and the Arab-Israeli dispute tended to focus on his work on Egyptian-Israeli peace, with Kenneth Stein memorably labeling it "heroic diplomacy."<sup>[18]</sup> Just a few years ago, *New Yorker* journalist Lawrence Wright wrote a riveting account of the 13 days of negotiations at Camp David in September 1978 between Begin, Carter, and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat that largely viewed Carter's job favorably.<sup>[19]</sup> More recently, Seth Anziska's *Preventing Palestine* repositions Carter's diplomacy, which was not so much a positive breakthrough in American involvement in the Arab-Israeli dispute, Anziska contends, but rather marked the start of a period in which Washington more or less followed the lead of Israel's right-wing Likud governments in conspiring to block the establishment of a Palestinian state through the step-by-step diplomatic machinations later enshrined in the Oslo Peace Process of the 1990s.<sup>[20]</sup> Craig Daigle shares many of these conclusions, framing Carter's lack of success on the Palestinian question within his rhetoric on the need to support human rights abroad.<sup>[21]</sup> Because I am not above self-promotion, I would also add that my own work has focused on what I saw as the unique dynamic of Carter's approach: his direct personal engagement with the negotiations, which made major qualitative differences to the outcome. Both the motivations for, and consequences of, this "hands on" approach stemmed in significant part from domestic imperatives.<sup>[22]</sup>

Jensehaugen seeks to distinguish his work in part by zeroing in on the extent to which Carter was willing to pressure Israel to make concessions on the Palestinians. Ultimately, Jensehaugen faults Carter for repeatedly going to the edge of a confrontation with Begin, only to back away at the last minute. For instance, he notes that in March 1978 Begin's hard-line positions toward the Palestinians

faced criticism and doubt in Israel. That skepticism “provided an opportunity to make a real push against Begin, such as threatening to withhold US funds to Israel.” It was a moment when the American president could have tried to force Israel to make concessions and to counter Begin’s refusal to consider withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. “While there was absolutely no guarantee that such pressure would work, the fact that Carter did not try sent the message that harsh words from the US president would not lead to actual pressure from the US government,” Jensehaugen argues. The lesson that the Israeli premier learned, he continues, was that “he could push hard against Carter without being punished” (121-22). This was a pattern that repeated itself over and over again during Carter’s term. “We simply do not know if the result would have been different if Carter had taken steps to pressure Israel, or to facilitate a proper US-PLO dialogue,” Jensehaugen contends. “What we do know is that he failed to utilize his full political toolset” (194). Rhetorical barbs were one thing, but, “Hard pressure, ... such as withholding money and ceasing to supply Israel with arms, was never really considered at all” (195). Instead, Carter routinely found that he could seek concessions from the much more pliable Sadat; “It was easier to lean on the weak party (Sadat) than the strong (Begin)” (122). This tendency moved the Palestinian issue to the sidelines, which is where Begin wanted it. In failing to set a precedent for American policy to act firmly against Israeli demands that were not consonant with U.S. diplomatic objectives, a fleeting opportunity for something truly big was lost—perhaps forever.

So, what was novel about Carter’s approach? It lay in three interconnected areas. First, he saw a comprehensive peace between all regional antagonists, resolving all outstanding issues, rather than the step-by-step approach, as the only way forward for regional stability. Second, that meant addressing the Palestinian issue—if not creating a Palestinian state (for which, to be clear, Carter never advocated while in office), then in devising some other acceptable outcome. Third and finally, all of this meant having the Soviet Union on board, with Washington and Moscow collaborating to ease the friction in an area where they had most recently (in October 1973) nearly come into catastrophic confrontation with one other.<sup>[23]</sup>

Jensehaugen devotes considerable time to 1977, a year sometimes overlooked by diplomatic historians eager to re-examine the September 1978 Camp David Accords. The “first nine months of Carter’s tenure in office ... [constituted] an almost hyperactive period of constructing a comprehensive peace edifice.” The administration’s overall effort toward that end, he notes, was “staggering” (182). But two issues continually bedeviled U.S. efforts.

First, in order to convene a Geneva peace conference, which all parties understood to be the optimal forum for multiparty talks, as co-chairs the United States and Soviet Union needed to agree on the broad contours of such a meeting. Although my own research suggests that Moscow was genuinely interested in coming to terms, Carter faced a Washington establishment for which close cooperation with its Cold War foe was anathema. Carter faced intense political criticism as he and Secretary of State Cyrus Vance tried to forge a joint approach.

Second, Carter felt that the Palestinians had to have a role in any Geneva conference—no comprehensive solution was feasible without addressing their very real concerns. But the absurdity of the comprehensive approach as it played out in 1977, as Jensehaugen points out, was that “all the talks focused *on* the Palestinians, but the Palestinians themselves were not talked *to*” (44-45).<sup>[24]</sup> In large part, this was because “Carter and his team employed a very strict interpretation of the PLO

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clause in Sinai II,” the 1975 agreement negotiated by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Israel only signed the agreement when it received American assurances that Washington would not “recognize or negotiate” with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) so long as the group did not accept UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. The Carter White House considered this pledge to mean it could not have direct contact with the PLO, even though the text did not explicitly say that. “This strict interpretation unnecessarily restricted the administration’s room for maneuver,” Jensehaugen observes (36). As a result, a contradiction between means and ends plagued Carter’s policy.

Regardless, the comprehensive approach was dealt a fatal blow on 1 October 1977, when the United States and Soviet Union issued a joint communiqué on the Middle East.<sup>[25]</sup> This document laid out points of agreement between the two superpowers as both confirmed their shared objective of a comprehensive peace. Such an agreement meant that the Palestinians—the PLO or otherwise—would need to participate in negotiations and Israel would need to withdraw to the 1967 lines. It was ultimately a political and diplomatic disaster for Carter. He was pilloried on Capitol Hill and in the press for appearing to work so closely with the Soviets. And Israel and its American supporters objected vociferously to its contents. Faced with such an intense backlash, Carter backed down and ultimately effectively repudiated the statement. It killed the comprehensive approach and, going forward, Carter focused on bilateral Egyptian-Israel negotiations because that looked like the best he could get.

Jensehaugen contends that the communiqué had a “profound impact on the peace process overall” (76) and was “enormously detrimental to the comprehensive approach” (83). I agree. Yet, if that is indeed the case, it seems a peculiar decision to devote relatively little space to the communiqué and its fallout (76-83). The joint statement is significant because it represented the apex of Carter’s attempts to bring the Soviets and the Palestinians into the peace process. Yet the ensuing backlash also immediately doomed the Carter administration’s efforts toward its policy objectives. The communiqué has yet to receive its proper due in the scholarship.

One of the things that the communiqué also did was to help catalyze Sadat’s decision to make his historic trip to Jerusalem to speak in front of the Knesset. If there had been any doubt that the peace process was now a bilateral affair, Sadat’s sensational visit to Israel erased it. In fact, Jensehaugen ultimately places the onus for Carter’s failure to fulfill his comprehensive peace objectives on Egypt and Israel. Sadat had a “terrible sense of timing,” he asserts (195). “At several important junctures in the talks, the Carter administration was prepared to place the blame on Begin, consider opening talks with the PLO, vote against Israel at the UN and undertake a variety of soft options,” according to Jensehaugen. But these efforts were repeatedly halted prematurely by Sadat’s periodic moves to suspend talks. “While Sadat was not aware that Carter was preparing to move against Begin, his decisions caused ire with Carter, who withdrew the threat of blaming Begin,” Jensehaugen notes (195). As for Begin, it was his intransigence and rigid negotiating positions that blocked Carter, “who failed to appreciate how deeply ideological Begin’s claim to the West Bank and Gaza was” (196). In the final analysis, Carter “grudgingly let Begin get his way, since it seemed to be the only means of obtaining any agreement at all” (196). This is why, Jensehaugen concludes, “Begin’s legacy looms large over the West Bank and Gaza to this day” (197).

Jensehaugen rightfully avoids pathologizing Carter’s approach to the Middle East. Yes, Carter’s

Baptist beliefs and his Southern upbringing and his understanding of the Civil Rights Movement all contributed to how he framed the Arab-Israeli dispute and viewed the plight of the stateless Palestinians. Fundamentally, however, the concrete policies he pursued were animated by strategic concerns. “The central premise of the comprehensive approach was that only such a grand peace could create a stable Middle East and reduce Cold War tensions,” Jensehaugen observes (8). Carter’s approach was in line with his broader foreign policy vision of trying to transcend the traditional Cold War paradigm by working with the Soviets, improve global North-South relations (which he believed the Israeli-Palestinian dispute represented), and resolve conflicts through negotiations. On the Middle East, moreover, Carter’s early comprehensive policies stemmed to a considerable degree from a seminal 1975 Brookings Institution report that called for an end to incremental, step-by-step agreements in favor of a comprehensive peace that included the Palestinians (182).

In the final analysis, Jensehaugen demonstrates that Carter’s efforts were bested by regional actors and their needs. His book raises important questions about the efficacy of American diplomacy in the Middle East. While it might be taken for granted that the United States is *the* central outside power in the Arab-Israeli dispute, smaller powers have been startlingly successful at bending Washington to their wills. Before, during, and after Carter’s term, the United States made short-term tactical concessions with a view toward eventually circling back to address the stickiest of issues. But the result of such myopia is perpetual Middle East conflict and depleted American leverage. Issues remain unresolved, largely because regional actors cannot or will not come to terms.

*Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter* does not upend the scholarly assessment of the Carter years, but it does deepen and texture our understanding of the president’s ill-fated pursuit of a truly paradigm-shifting result in the Middle East. Occasionally, the focus on the Palestinians can be somewhat awkward only because the nature of the diplomacy at the time was such that all of these issues were completely interconnected. The book also takes a while to get going; chapter 2 (“US Presidents and the Palestinians”) could stand a trim. A final point is that while the entirety of the book is focused on the performance of the Carter White House, the conclusion is mostly about Begin’s legacy in the region. I would have liked to have read more about the legacy of Carter’s efforts for *American foreign policymaking*. Did he succeed in changing the conversation on the Palestinians in U.S. policymaking? Or did he affect public perception of a people known to most Americans at that time chiefly as refugees and, yes, terrorists? Still, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter* justifiably places his novel efforts at resolving this thorny conflict at the center of his administration. It warrants a place alongside the newest crop of Carter books as well as works such as Kathleen Christison’s *Perceptions of Palestine* and Paul Thomas Chamberlain’s *The Global Offensive* that focus on United States and the Palestinian question.<sup>[26]</sup>

Carter is 94 years old and it seems fair to wonder how his epitaph will read. On the Arab-Israeli dispute, will he be recalled as the man responsible for securing a lasting Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty? Or will he be remembered as a politician with high ideals who nevertheless helped deepen and lengthen Israel’s hold on the Palestinian territories? But, of course, wholly favoring one conclusion over the other is unsatisfactory. His enduring legacy on the Middle East is probably that he illustrated the strengths and limitations of applying the power of presidential authority and prestige to diplomatic machinations. That Carter was unable to fulfil his original goal of securing a comprehensive Middle East peace, however, says more about the intractability of the regional conflict than it does about the aptitude of the 39<sup>th</sup> U.S. president.

Author's Response by Jørgen Jensehaugen, Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

As any author will know, there is a certain level of anxiety surrounding reviews. We want them, we need them, we fear them. Since *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter* is my first book, I was surprised, almost shocked, when this Roundtable was proposed, and particularly when I saw who was to take part in it. While all the four reviewers are excellent academics whose reactions are well founded and highly appreciated, it is particularly daunting to have my analysis reviewed by William B. Quandt. This is because he not only wrote *the* book on the subject, but he was also part of the Carter team those forty years ago.<sup>[27]</sup> While Quandt and I assess the range of realistic political possibilities for Carter somewhat differently, I am truly honored by the stamp of approval he gives my account. Having read all four reviews, my anxiety has dissipated.

There are areas of disagreement, but I would have expected no less. I will try to address the most central of these.

While it is undeniably true that President Jimmy Carter had a religious background that influenced his outlook—as pointed out by Maia Hallward—I stand firmly by my decision to not dwell on it. The reason, to quote Daniel Strieff's review, is that I wanted to avoid “pathologizing Carter's approach to the Middle East.” I find that too much presidential literature tends to focus on specific personal traits of the president and then extrapolate from those explanations for policy choices. More often than not, the personal trait in question could equally lead to the opposite policy—let us not forget that George W. Bush was also a born-again Christian and certainly not a radical when it came to the Palestinian question.

It is also true that I could have focused more on U.S. domestic politics as a context for the limits which constrained Carter, particularly in instances such as the U.S.-Soviet joint communiqué and the arms package. One of the main reasons for not doing so was quite simply that Strieff had done such a good job of analyzing this in his work.<sup>[28]</sup>

Some of the reviewers (Hallward, Strieff) point out that there is a paradox in the weighting of my book, in that while my stated focus is the Palestinians, large sections of the book deal with negotiations of which the Palestinians were not a party, that is the Egyptian-Israeli talks. I completely agree, but I find that this paradox actually illustrates one of my main arguments—that the Palestinians were talked about, but not with.

While I agree with many of the contemporary parallels that could have been drawn, as raised by Hallward, I find myself taking the stance of defending history as a subject. There are some excellent, recent books that have drawn on the lessons from Carter in order to examine today's situation, but I intended my contribution to the field to be a thorough reexamination of Carter's diplomacy because it represented such a significant historical moment in its own right.<sup>[29]</sup> I am not estranged from the idea of drawing contemporary parallels, but I wanted this historical analysis to stand on its own.<sup>[30]</sup> Thankfully, as all of the reviewers demonstrate, any discussions of the Carter legacy trigger debates

about the current situation. If these four readers are anything to go by, I think Hallward's commentary can be restated as: "Fortunately, the book leaves readers to draw their own conclusions."

I am gratified to read Osamah F. Khalil's appreciation of my presentation of the Palestinian narrative despite primarily using U.S. and other Western sources. This is one of the greatest methodological problems for diplomatic historians dealing with U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian diplomacy and it is always the issue that worries me the most. It is also the area within this field with the largest research gaps. Why, for instance, was Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat so slow to react to U.S. developments? How were the internal PLO debates? What exactly took place behind closed doors when Arafat went to Moscow or Damascus? We might never know the proper answers to these questions.

I have been very careful—perhaps too careful—in not drawing conclusions about the internal Palestinian debate when sources are lacking. This, at least in part, is my defense against Quandt's criticism of my not giving adequate attention to the PLO demands to the U.S. and the PLO-Syria dynamic. I maintain, however, that the U.S. should have opened direct contacts with the PLO, not only because it would have been the right thing to do given that the PLO was (and is) one of the central parties to the conflict, but also because Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin broke so many of the understandings he had with Carter that Carter should have been able to counter with a breach of his own pledge.

Both Quandt and Strieff commend my book for identifying the centrality of the debate surrounding the U.S.-Soviet joint communiqué in derailing the comprehensive process. As Quandt points out, this was the moment when U.S. domestic politics became impossible to ignore, forcing Carter to cave in to Israel's demands. This again led to Egypt going it alone, which again resulted in the Camp David process. Strieff criticizes me for not giving the communiqué the attention it deserves. While eight pages discussing one document and its fallout might seem ample, I must admit that I agree with Strieff on this one. The communiqué itself, the closed-door debate with Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, the Israeli hardball diplomacy, the U.S. domestic reaction, and the various Arab reactions all warrant proper studies, and I can only put Strieff's statement out there as a bait to other diplomatic historians: "The communiqué has yet to receive its proper due in the scholarship."

I completely agree with Quandt's comment that the Carter team was slow to realize how intransigent Begin actually was. However, I checked the statement about nobody in the U.S. government having met Begin prior to his election and discovered that this was not actually the case. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski had met him during his trip to Israel in 1976.<sup>[31]</sup> This detail does not take away from the fact that Begin was a completely different political being than earlier Israeli prime ministers, both in ideology and in approach. The Carter team clearly loathed Begin's approach, but they adapted to it rather than confronting it.

Strieff's summation of my argument is on point: "a contradiction between means and ends plagued Carter's policy." It sounds simple, but that is precisely it. The Palestinians were part of the intended ends, but they were not part of the practical means. When it came to Israel, the U.S. would bend over backwards to get Begin on board, but when it came to the PLO, red lines were red lines.

## Notes

[1] William Safire, "Barbara's Dinner Party," *New York Times*, 22 December 1977, 17.

[2] Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 45.

[3] Jimmy Carter, "Inaugural Address, January 20, 1977," The American Presidency Project, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-0>, accessed 30 March 2019.

[4] Jimmy Carter, *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

[5] John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

[6] See also Osamah Khalil, "Pax Americana: The United States, the Palestinians, and the Peace Process, 1948–2008," *New Centennial Review* 8:1 (2008): 1-41.

[7] See Hermann Eilts Oral History, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, 12 August 1988, <https://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Eilts,%20Herman.toc.pdf>.

[8] See also Osamah Khalil, "The Radical Crescent: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and the Lebanese Civil War, 1973-1978," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 27:3 (September 2016): 496-522.

[9] See Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000).

[10] See Hilary Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014); Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Knopf, 2014); David Kirkpatrick, *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East* (New York: Viking, 2018).

[11] See Jørgen Jensehaugen, "The Fatal Flaw in Trump's Plan for Middle East Peace," *Washington Post*, 24 July 2018.

[12] Ahron Bregman, *Cursed Victory: A History of Israel and the Occupied Territories, 1967 to the Present* (New York: Pegasus, 2016); Ben Birnbaum and Amir Tibon, "The Explosive, Inside Story of How John Kerry Built an Israel-Palestine Peace Plan—and Watched It Crumble," *The New Republic*, 20 July 2014.

[13] See Glenn Kessler, "Netanyahu: 'America is a Thing You Can Move Very Easily'," *Washington Post*, 16 July 2010; Avi Issacharoff, "When Netanyahu Closed the Door on Peace Talks," *Times of Israel*, 13 February 2015.

[14] Yotam Berger, "Figures Presented by Army Show More Arabs Than Jews Live in Israel, West Bank and Gaza," *Haaretz*, 26 March 2018.

[15] See Gershon Shafir, *A Half Century of Occupation: Israel, Palestine, and the World's Most Intractable Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017); Edo Konrad, "How One of Israel's Veteran Activists Came to Support (some) Sanctions: An Interview with Galia Golan," *+972 Magazine*, 20 November 2018; For the definition of apartheid and its applicability, see John Dugard and John Reynolds "Apartheid, International Law, and the Occupied Palestinian Territory," *European Journal of International Law* 24: 3 (August 2013): 867-913, and Dugard, "Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid," <http://legal.un.org/avl/ha/cspca/cspca.html>.

[16] For example, Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), and Lawrence Wright, *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin and Sadat at Camp David* (New York: Knopf, 2014).

[17] A good article-length examination can be found in Jeremy Pressman, "Explaining the Carter Administration's Israeli-Palestinian Solution," *Diplomatic History* 37:5 (November 2013): 1117-1147.

[18] Kenneth Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[19] Lawrence Wright, *Thirteen Days in September: Carter, Begin and Sadat at Camp David* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

[20] Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

[21] Craig Daigle, "Beyond Camp David: Jimmy Carter, Palestinian Self-Determination, and Human Rights," *Diplomatic History* 42:5 (November 2018): 802-830. Victor Nemchenok raises similar points: Victor V. Nemchenok, "These People Have an Irrevocable Right to Self-Government': United States Policy and the Palestinian Question, 1977-1979," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 20:4 (December 2009): 595-618.

[22] Daniel Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

[23] The best look at this comes in Daigle, *The Limits of Détente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

[24] It is worth noting that this was also an issue with the Camp David Accords vis-à-vis Jordan, which was not party to the accords but whose name is mentioned throughout the document. Nigel Ashton, "Taking friends for granted: the Carter administration, Jordan and the Camp David Accords, 1977-80," *Diplomatic History* 41:3 (June 2017): 620-645.

[25] "Joint US-Soviet statement on the Middle East-1 October 1977," Israel Ministry Of foreign Affairs, accessed 21 December 2018, <http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook3/pages/50%20joint%20us-soviet%2>

[Ostatement%20on%20the%20middle%20east-%201.aspx](#)

[26] Kathleen Christison, *Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on U.S. Middle East Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive. The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post-Cold War Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[27] William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1986).

[28] Daniel Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Daniel Strieff, "Arms Wrestle: Capitol Hill Fight Over Carter's 1978 Middle East 'Package' Airplane Sale," *Diplomatic History* 40:3 (2016): 475-499; See also my review of Strieff's book: Jørgen Jensehaugen, "Booknote: Strieff, Daniel (2015) Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy," *Journal of Peace Research Booknotes Online*, 2016, <https://www.prio.org/JPR/BookNotes/?x=112>.

[29] Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Nathan Thrall, *The Only Language They Understand: Forcing Compromise in Israel and Palestine* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017).

[30] For pieces where I have argued such lessons from history see: Jørgen Jensehaugen, "The fatal flaw in Trump's plan for Middle East peace", *Washington Post*, 24 July 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2018/07/24/the-fatal-flaw-in-trumps-plan-for-middle-east-peace/>; Jørgen Jensehaugen, "Saudi Arabia as a peace peddler? The Limits of Riyadh's Influence over Israeli-Palestinian Diplomacy", *Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) Commentaries*, 11 January 2019, <https://www.iai.it/it/publicazioni/saudi-arabia-peace-peddler>; Jørgen Jensehaugen, "Lessons from Camp David", *PRIO blogs*, 17 October 2018, <https://blogs.prio.org/2018/10/lessons-from-camp-david/>.

[31] Justin Vaïsse, *Zbigniew Brzezinski: America's Grand Strategist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 206.