

1-1-1978

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### Recommended Citation

Vera, Vincent Nodoro (1978) "Turning Point Analysis of Sadat's Journey to Israel," *New Directions*: Vol. 5: Iss. 2, Article 6.

Available at: <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol5/iss2/6>

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## Analysis of Sadat's Journey to Israel

By Vincent Nodoro Vera

The Arab-Israeli conflict took a surprising new turn in November when President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt—in a dramatic move—paid a visit to Jerusalem. The move was unprecedented, bearing in mind that Egypt is Israel's most powerful adversary.

Sadat's decision to travel to Israel in the name of peace was viewed by many Arab states as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Sadat himself claimed he had a sacred mission to accomplish: to bring peace to the Middle East. He had told the Egyptian Parliament before leaving for Israel that he would go to the end of the earth in search of peace. The search did not exclude the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament. To militant Arabs, Sadat's decision was an anathema.

Therefore, his visit was viewed by the forces who oppose his new brand of diplomacy as a de facto recognition of the sovereignty of the state of Israel. Perhaps justifiably, they suspected a plot by the Egyptian leader to enter into a separate agreement with Israel that would result in the recovery of most of the Israeli-occupied Sinai. Sadat's own statements about his intention to go to Geneva alone [if need be] gave credence to the charges by the Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO] and other radical Arabs. After Sadat's visit to Israel, the radical camp met in Libya and formed a "confrontation front" to counter Sadat's go-it alone diplomacy and to isolate Egypt from the Arab brotherhood. Egypt retaliated by severing diplomatic ties with five Arab states, Algeria, Iraq, Libya, South Yemen and Syria.

World reaction was mixed when Sadat first announced his new peace mission. The Prime Minister of Israel, Menahem Begin, who during the 1930s was a leader of an underground Jewish terrorist group operating in Palestine, welcomed Sadat's visit. He praised the Egyptian leader as a man of courage and an able statesman.

The willingness of the Israelis to accept Sadat in their midst must be viewed in the length of 30 years of Israel's isolation from its Arab neighbors. The Israelis stood to gain from an adversary paying them a visit and talking peace—a welcome change from the stand taken by the militant Arab camp, which is: "to drive the Jews to the sea."

Hasty arrangements were made to make Sadat's visit a memorable one. It must be noted here: no other Arab leader has set foot in Israel since the Jewish state was created, except in battle.

In the United States, Sadat's move won praise from the highest level of the government. But in the Soviet Union, Sadat's actions were denounced.

As co-chairmen of the Geneva conference, America and Russia were interested in what Sadat did from two separate points. The United States viewed the visit as a constructive and a conciliatory move that broke the 30-year psychological barrier between the Arab world and Israel. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, saw Sadat's visit to Israel as a damaging blow to the unity of Arab states and as a major deterrent to the liberation of Palestine.

### Roots of War

The state of Israel was created in 1948 with the partition of Palestine by the Western powers. The United States and Great Britain were involved. Britain issued the now famous Balfour Declaration in 1917, which in principle gave support to the creation of a Jewish national home in Palestine. The Zionist Organization, which was the main European agency for the effort to resettle Jews in the Middle East, was urging Britain for support. And the British issued a series of white papers after the end of World War I, which supported migration of Jews to Palestine.

The Arabs had been urged by the British to fight on the side of the allies in World War I in return for deliverance from the Ottoman Empire. But the promise was not kept and Palestine was partitioned. A portion in British hands was the nucleus of the

modern state of Israel. Palestinian Arabs were displaced with the intensification of Jewish immigrants after 1945. Since 1948, four wars have been fought, resulting in the loss of more Arab land, particularly after the 1967 war.

Sadat, as well as other Arab leaders, now are seeking the return of all the Arab land occupied by the Israelis since 1967. The creation of a Palestinian home in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, where the hundreds of thousands of Palestinian refugees who now languish in camps in neighboring Arab states would be settled, has been suggested from time to time. But whether the Israelis and indeed the Palestinians would be agreeable to such a plan is not clear.

The Jews on their part claim historical connection to Palestine. It is the Promised Land to them. However, a majority of the Jews who are now influential in the state of Israel constitute immigrants from Europe. Traditionally, the European Jews have demonstrated hostility towards Oriental Jews and Palestinian Arabs.

In any event, a separate peace between Egypt and Israel—if indeed it comes to that—will not solve the problem. Palestinian Arabs are the major victims of the arena of war, and the denial of their human rights would leave the Middle East problem unsolved.

### Significance of Sadat's Gamble

Disarray has been created in the Arab world by Sadat's visit to Israel. As Sadat was calling for an end to war, Israel continued to bomb Palestinian refugee camps in neighboring Lebanon. Indeed, this gave credence to the charge that Israel was not ready for peace.

Sadat appears to be willing to negotiate at all cost with Israel. And this willingness to meet face-to-face with the Israelis has alienated most of his Arab neighbors, particularly the hardliners who continue to challenge Sadat's self-appointed role of a spokesman for all Arab interests. And because Sadat has ruled out war completely, this move is considered a capitulation to

Israeli pressure.

It is a fact that some of the problems underlying the Arab-Israeli conflict are psychological, but the political issues outweigh the former. To the Palestinians, the state of Israel constitutes an extension of Western imperialism in their homeland.

The latest move by the head of an Arab state is an anachronism. It has divided the Arab world in the same manner that Rhodesia's Ian Smith has attempted to deal with the legitimate aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe. Smith would only deal with certain moderate groups while excluding the militant camp.

Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, despite its drawbacks, may have added a new dimension to the Middle East conflict. Individual states can now approach Israel and seek peace. This would include the PLO. But Israel is not willing to talk with the PLO leaders, thus making one wonder how Israel intends to achieve a lasting peace.

President Sadat will probably go down in history as a visionary who sought to extinguish a 30-year fire with a glass of water. □

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