

'No miracle' from Le Monde (19 September 1978)

Caption: On 19 September 1978, the French daily newspaper Le Monde reviews the difficult peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt and expresses doubt about the effective implementation of a peace agreement between the two long-standing enemies.

Source: Le Monde. dir. de publ. Fauvet, Jacques. 19.09.1978, n° 10.462; 35e année. Paris: Le Monde. "Pas de miracle", p. 1.

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No miracle

What has happened at Camp David is not a miracle but, viewed from the most optimistic standpoint, the beginning of a long and difficult process to which President Carter, more than any of his predecessors, has committed the United States. The two framework agreements signed on Sunday evening in the White House by Begin, Carter and Sadat do not by any means solve what has come to be called the Middle East problem; they could, however, help break the deadlock.

One of the agreements concerns relations between Israel and Egypt. As might be expected, it is the most specific and detailed of the two, embodying as it does a commitment by Sadat to sign a peace treaty with Jerusalem within three months on condition that the Knesset agrees to dismantle the Jewish settlements in the Sinai. Diplomatic relations should be established between Jerusalem and Cairo within nine months of the signing of the Peace Treaty, though Israel is given two to three years to withdraw totally from the Sinai. This point indicates clearly the scale of the concessions made by Sadat.

The other framework agreement concluded by the two adversaries under pressure from President Carter confirms that the Egyptian leader has shown greater flexibility than Begin: contrary to what he had hoped, Sadat has not won a promise of complete withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza. The head of the Israeli Government has simply agreed to refer to United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, which does indeed provide for such withdrawals but whose interpretation remains a matter of dispute. The Israeli Prime Minister, while still insisting on a five-year transitional period for the West Bank and Gaza, has also agreed to a few measures designed to lend greater credibility to the self-governing regime that is being considered, not the least being a halt to new Israeli settlements in the territories occupied in 1967 and the possible deployment of a United Nations force. King Hussein, due to arrive in Washington in a few weeks, has still to agree to take part in these negotiations. The close links which the King of Jordan has now established with Syria make such an outcome fairly unlikely, although President Carter has just demonstrated how persuasive he can be ...

It will now be a question of perseverance on the part of the US President. If he decides tomorrow to ease up, it is more than likely that the Camp David meeting would leave Israel the winner. Begin is of course more interested in a separate peace with Egypt than in West Bank and Gaza achieving the status of a Palestinian entity. If Israel stalls again, the peace agreement with Cairo could go up in smoke; this would vindicate the line taken by Syria and the PLO, which have already rejected the Camp David accords, and would inevitably encourage a further confrontation on the battlefield.

The only way President Carter can now make any progress is to keep a very close eye on Israel, not only to prevent negotiations over the West Bank and Gaza from stalling but also to preserve the fragile peace in the area, especially in Lebanon. Only in this way will all the efforts made during the Camp David talks prove of long-term significance. Whatever anyone may say to the contrary, the United States is perfectly capable of making Begin listen to reason. It has hitherto simply lacked the political will to assume all the consequences of the role it is now seeking to play.