

The Honorable Jimmy Carter

Oct. 25, 1998

College Park, Maryland

It is always nice to hear a good introduction, and particularly from someone who is so close and such a cherished as Jehan Sadat. In thinking about what I was going to say today, I decided not to write a text but just to reminisce about some of the things that have been important to me in dealing with this vitally important subject.

But I came today not because of entreaties, and not because of my respect for Jehan Sadat, not even because of my respect for this great university. I came for a different purpose and wanted to come last year. The first year I was in office, I met sixty-eight foreign leaders, some who came to the White House on formal occasions, and others when I visited the United Nations in New York. And in the next three years I met a number of others. This is my seventeenth year as a professor at Emory University. I have given a lot of lectures in that time and I have been asked a lot of questions. One of the most frequent questions is: Who is the greatest leader you have ever met in your life? And I have only had one answer: President Anwar Sadat of Egypt.

I first met Anwar Sadat just a few months after I became president. I had taught Sunday school for many years — I taught this morning before I left my home — and I had a deep religious interest in the Holy Land. I had learned as a candidate and as a new president the importance of the Middle East to me personally, to those who share

things he said would never happen in his lifetime. He said we might see Israeli ships going through the Suez Canal, but there would never be an exchange of ambassadors.

After he left I knew, and made a public statement saying, that a bright shining light came into my life with the visit of this singular man.

on the Civil War. And so Begin was a little embarrassing to me, not having learned about Gettysburg. But when we arrived at the point where Abraham Lincoln had made his address, Menachem Begin recited it word-for-word. A nice event that I will never forget.

Then we went back to work, not very successfully at first. Assistants were negotiating. I was primarily by myself with those two men and those whom they designated. One day we made the mistake of letting Moshe Dayan go and speak to Sadat. Ezer Weizman who was here last year was a friend of Sadat, as you know. Moshe Dayan, who did not know Sadat well, outlined to him a harsh summary of Israel' demands and said, ""We will not make any concessions!" I was in a meeting in my cabin with my secretary of state and defense secretary. And I was informed that Sadat had packed his bags and called for his helicopter to remove him from Camp David. I was distressed

the decision, yes or no. And you do not have any reason to vote.” And to make a long story short, we concluded the agreement. And then later with an eight-five percent vote, the Knesset agreed to dismantle the settlement in Yamit. That was the high point.

After that things broke down again, and I could not get the Israelis to carry out the commitments that had been made. My interpretation of Sadat’s interpretation was that Begin had agreed not to build any more settlements until the peace agreement was concluded. Begin, in my opinion, (he disputed this) violated that commitment and said he only agreed to wait three months. So the settlements began to be built again. I decided to go to Egypt and Israel in March of 1979. I called Sadat in advance, and he said, “Anything you propose, I will accept it.” When I got to Israel, Begin was totally adamant against making any further concessions and he and I had a terrible confrontation.

All members of his cabinet, included Sharon, agreed with my proposal, but Prime Minister Begin did not. The last day I was to be there, Prime Minister Begin and his wife came up to my and Rosalynn’s suite in the King David Hotel. We went down to the lobby to meet them. Our elevator got stuck six feet above the floor. It took them about twenty minutes with a big crow bar to tear open the door of the elevator. We did not know if God had His hands in the episode or not, but Begin finally agreed. I went back to the airport in Cairo, and we announced that a peace treaty had been concluded. We signed it a few days later.

Next spring it will have been twenty years. Not a single person has been killed. And not a single word of that peace treaty has been violated. And it has been a testament that it is possible for Arabs and Israelis, who have despised each other and killed each other and have been at work with each other can indeed find peace so that it is permanently beneficial to both sides.

Then came another long, empty period when nothing was done, frustrations grew, and violence erupted. Then there came a time of secret negotiations by the Norwegians. There was a social science group who went to Gaza to study the problems of Palestinians who were living in occupied territory in Gaza. They became trusted by the Palestinians and as academics they reached out to the Israelis too. First, a very low level of government increased upward. I was in Vienna, Austria at a human rights conference in June of 1993 and Shimon Peres told me about the secret talks. He said the United States did not know about them. Later, Chairman Arafat also told me about the talks. I was in the northern part of Yemen when I got a call that Arafat had flown into the capital and needed to see me.

