

Introduction

“I FEAR FOR THE SPIRIT OF CAMP DAVID,” wrote its chief architect, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter, in a 2016 plea to outgoing president Barack Obama. Before leaving office, Carter told Obama, his administration should “grant American diplomatic recognition to the state of Palestine.” The thirty-ninth president invoked his own efforts to reach a peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in 1978, based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, passed in the aftermath of the 1967 War. This resolution, Carter underscored, formed the basis of U.S. policy toward the region and should guide a renewed commitment to ensure the viability of a “two-state solution” to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. By recognizing a Palestinian state, Carter argued, Obama would clear the way for other countries and the UN Security Council to take action, “countering the one-state reality that Israel is imposing on itself and the Palestinian people.”¹

“The primary foreign policy goal of my life has been to help bring peace to Israel and its neighbors,” Carter concluded. He recalled with pride his speech to a joint session of Congress in September 1978 after Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian president Anwar al-Sadat had reached their agreement at Camp David. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God,” the president had said to loud applause and a standing ovation, looking at the two leaders in the balcony above. It was a moment broadcast live on television and the radio, etched into public consciousness as the high point of Carter’s time in office.

Forty years since negotiations were convened in the isolated Catocin Mountain Park presidential retreat, Camp David still endures as a moment of rare triumph for a U.S. administration beset by domestic challenges and struggles abroad. Under Carter's guidance, the United States acted as an effective broker to secure a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel that has persisted as the cornerstone of regional politics in the Middle East. For many observers, Camp David's success underscores the importance of skilled American mediation and burnishes the image of judicious U.S. engagement abroad. But could such a positive interpretation be a misreading of history? Is the invocation of Camp David as a model for peacemaking to help solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict truly appropriate? Might Carter's great diplomatic success have helped ensure the prevention of a Palestinian state?

There is in fact a competing view of Camp David that focuses on its more troubling legacy for the Middle East. From the vantage point of Palestinian nationalists in Beirut and in the streets of other Arab capitals at the time, the 1978 summit was a formative moment of disenfranchisement. Palestinians, whose struggle for self-determination had been moving definitively from armed resistance to diplomatic engagement in the years prior to this deal, had high hopes for a shift in the American approach to their political fate in the late 1970s. Yet at the very moment when their demands for self-determination were under serious consideration for the first time, they found themselves shut out of an incipient peace process and consigned to the sidelines. In exchange for peace with Egypt and the return of the Sinai Peninsula negotiated at Camp David, Israel was able to exercise continued control of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The bilateral peace agreement that Carter brokered between Begin and Sadat was therefore castigated as an abandonment of the Palestinian cause. Sidestepping the question of Palestinian self-determination in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip, the accords ultimately shifted negotiations to the question of possible local autonomy for Arab residents living in the occupied territories. The emergence of these subsequent "autonomy talks," which were held between representatives of Egypt, Israel, and the United States from 1979 to 1982, were premised on a non-sovereign

resolution to Palestinian national aspirations. Although often ignored or dismissed as insignificant in accounts of this period, the autonomy discussions became the basis of limited self-rule and, eventually, the emergence of the Palestinian National Authority after the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993.

Four decades since the signing of the Camp David Accords, the Palestinian quest for self-determination remains unfulfilled. Without an independent state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, Palestinians continue to live as non-citizens under Israeli occupation, deprived of basic rights like the freedom of movement. They are stateless subjects under Israeli military control, suspended between limited autonomy within enclaves of self-rule and the continuing encroachment of Israeli settlements.² This result did not appear out of the blue, nor was it inevitable. A non-statist outcome emerged directly from the diplomatic negotiations meant to resolve their political fate, in line with what Israeli officials intended.

Camp David's narrow outcome was not at all what President Carter had envisioned when entering office in January 1977. Unlike his predecessors, Carter sought to include the Palestinians as part of a comprehensive regional peace settlement to resolve the unanswered questions of the 1967 War once and for all. He was the first U.S. president to speak openly of a Palestinian "homeland," using the controversial term at a news conference a few months after he took office.³ But through a series of protracted diplomatic negotiations following on the heels of the Camp David Accords, which began while Carter was in the White House and continued after the administration of Ronald Reagan took over, the expansive vision that had guided the thirty-ninth president yielded a far more troubling legacy.

This book traces the fate of the "Palestinian question"—the diplomatic negotiations over Palestinian self-determination—from its emergence as a central feature of a Middle East settlement under Carter in the late 1970s to the onset of the Madrid and Oslo peace process that finally brought Palestinian leaders to the negotiating table in the early 1990s. It is the first study based on primary sources of how Palestinian self-determination was conceptualized and debated by American, Israeli, Egyptian, Palestinian, and

transnational actors in this crucial period, predating the years traditionally demarcated as formative for the negotiations of a Palestinian political future.

A tendency to canonize Camp David—even by President Carter himself—has obscured the structural deficiencies enshrined by these early negotiations. While an Egyptian-Israeli settlement was indeed a significant achievement, it was reached at great and recurring expense. For Israel, the primary outcome of the peace treaty was the end of the traditional military rivalry with a neighboring Arab state. Concurrently, however, it also helped secure legitimacy for the extension of Israeli state sovereignty beyond the 1967 borders. For the Palestinians, Camp David was a crucial moment of state prevention. It marked the first instance of post-1948 discussion of their plight on a global scale, yet excluded them from the negotiations that would decide their political fate. By reassessing the negotiations that led to the summit and its consequences, this account complicates the dominant interpretation of Camp David as “heroic diplomacy.”⁴

The diplomacy around Camp David actually served more troubling ends. Alongside the linkage to autonomy provisions and settlement expansion plans, it connected directly to Israel’s military invasion of Lebanon in 1982, which in turn shaped the outbreak of the first Palestinian Intifada in 1987. Taken together, these successive developments reshaped Israel’s relations with the Palestinians as well as broader regional politics in the Middle East during the late twentieth century. Given its transnational dimension, Camp David also affected crucial domestic currents in the United States, from the resurgence of Cold War conservatism to the shifting political allegiance of American Jewry. Yet beyond essential accounts of the summit itself, the linkage between Camp David and the wider transformations of this period remain unexamined.⁵

In order to understand why the Palestinian question remains among the most vexing problems of international diplomacy, we must revisit the years in which the very terms of political engagement were first substantively debated by American, Israeli, British, and Arab officials. In recounting this history, *Preventing Palestine* demonstrates how a confluence of global and regional politics, as well as shifting local developments on the ground, has produced an

outcome of indefinite occupation, statelessness, and deep fragmentation for Palestinians. After surveying Israel's territorial conquest and the resurgence of Palestinian national politics after 1967, as well as the American approach to resolving regional conflict in the wake of the war, chapters 1 and 2 turn to the rise of new leadership in the United States and Israel in the 1970s. The clash between President Jimmy Carter's expansive vision of Palestinian political aspirations and Prime Minister Menachem Begin's more sobering approach explains how two competing worldviews led to a more limited Egyptian-Israeli peace at Camp David. Chapters 3 and 4 explain how Egyptian and American acquiescence in the face of Israeli statecraft led in turn to the triumph of "autonomy" as a rubric for addressing the Palestinians, while facilitating the extension of Israeli sovereignty inside the occupied territories.

Troubling dynamics unleashed in the 1970s were exacerbated in the 1980s. Rising neoconservative influence and the election of Ronald Reagan, as chapter 5 examines, positioned the Palestinians as a proxy of the Soviet Union in a revived Cold War and offered legal legitimacy to the settlement project. While bolstering Israel's restrictive notion of autonomy, the Reagan administration facilitated a turn from political suppression to military intervention as the Camp David process gave way to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. Chapter 6 explores the central role of the Israeli-American relationship in the lead-up to the war and during the fighting itself, which targeted Palestinian nationalists in their Lebanese stronghold. The unforeseen consequences of the war, from the Sabra and Shatila massacre to Iranian-backed proxy attacks on U.S. Marines, underscored the limits of American support for Israeli actions and undercut U.S. influence in the Middle East. It also highlighted the futility of thwarting Palestinian nationalism, which rebounded in the wake of the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from Beirut. Continued attempts to sideline the movement—which included economic initiatives and Jordanian circumvention, as chapter 7 demonstrates—were ultimately unsuccessful. The 1987 outbreak of the first Intifada led to U.S. recognition of the PLO in 1988, one of Reagan's final acts in office.

The end of the Cold War reordered U.S. relations with the Middle East, reviving a political track on the Palestinian front. Chapter 8

explores the onset of formal peace negotiations in the 1990s and the continuing influence of diplomatic models first introduced through the Camp David Accords. While the Madrid Conference crucially brought the Palestinians to the negotiating table in 1991, and the secret Oslo Accord of 1993 secured the return of the exiled Palestinian leadership to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, meaningful sovereignty and the possibility of statehood remained elusive. Rooted in the autonomy model enshrined by Menachem Begin, the negotiations ensured an ongoing Israeli presence in the occupied territories. Twenty-five years after the signing of the Oslo Accord and the subsequent establishment of the Palestinian National Authority, the Palestinians are no closer to self-determination. Many would argue that a separate state of Palestine is even farther away from reality and that Palestinians are alternatively no closer to securing equal rights within an expanded one-state entity between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. The book's conclusion examines the persistence of statelessness and its long-term consequences against this historical backdrop.

At the heart of this story is a struggle between two competing political projects: the first of an Israeli government emboldened by the conquests of 1967 and seeking to extend control into the newly occupied territories while preventing Palestinian self-determination from taking hold. The second is of a Palestinian national movement finding its political voice in the wake of the same war and seeking sovereignty on a portion of their ancestral homeland.⁶ The race between these two projects was ultimately won by Israel, in part as a result of U.S. and Egyptian acquiescence in the wake of Camp David, as well as through Israel's military victory in Lebanon. But Israel's success also bred its own version of failure, as the crushing military and political defeat of the PLO brought the Palestinian plight to world attention. This development opened a space for global agitation on their behalf, as the visibility was solidified by the outbreak of the first Intifada. Inversely, the Palestinian achievement in gaining international recognition and opening a dialogue with the United States ultimately yielded a diplomatic agreement that did not resolve the core issues of contention. Diplomacy in the 1990s, like the autonomy talks in the 1970s, helped assure Israel's expansion of settlements in the occupied

territories, now extant for more than fifty years. When those territories first came under Israeli control, neither the conquerors nor the inhabitants could have imagined what would follow.

In the Wake of 1967

For many Israelis and their supporters abroad, the capture of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, Sinai Peninsula, and the old city of Jerusalem in June 1967 was greeted with ecstatic revelry. It seemed to fulfill the redemptive hopes of messianic Zionism, or else a secular variant of nationalist fervor.⁷ The swift but surprising war had first been a source of existential dread, ultimately giving way to celebration.⁸ At the same time, the expansion of Israel's territory raised profound political and demographic questions for Israeli leaders. During the earliest security cabinet discussions about the future of the newly occupied territories, the specter of how to manage the Palestinian population took on central importance. While the assembled Israeli ministers broadly agreed that the newly acquired Golan Heights and Sinai Peninsula would be bargaining chips for possible peace treaties with Syria and Egypt, the status of Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip remained a matter of extensive debate.⁹

The conquest of territory greatly expanded the young state's borders, but it now left Israel in control of more than one million inhabitants living on the land that it had occupied. Officials argued over the fate of the Palestinians in the West Bank who had previously been under Jordanian rule. What would become of these residents? Would they acquire rights and an ability to vote in Israel? What of their citizenship? A consensus emerged against either annexation or granting rights to the Arab residents, with the cabinet of Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol making a "decision not to decide" on the status of the newly occupied territories. The land would be utilized for Jewish settlements, and the Palestinians living there would de facto be deprived of sovereign control or the right to self-determination.¹⁰

The cabinet's "decision not to decide" evolved into a permanent condition of military occupation, and it enabled the building of settlements under the Labor-led government in the decade after the

war.¹¹ Legal and historical arguments about the state's right to the conquered territories expanded with the rise of the messianic Gush Emunim movement, or "Bloc of the Faithful." Founded in 1974 by Orthodox followers of Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the group's ideological support base had grown in the wake of the 1967 War. The movement called for the reclamation of land in the territories—labeled by their biblical name, Yehuda v' Shomron (Judea and Samaria)—to establish Jewish settlements.¹² While nationalists and the religious right were advocating for settlements, secularists from the dominant Labor party had in fact long been ushering a wave of expansion on the ground in the territories. A project that began under the Labor government of Eshkol expanded dramatically under the Likud-led governments that followed. In combination, Israeli control over the territory yielded one of the longest—if not *the* longest—military occupations of the modern era.¹³

Beyond the decisions inside the Israeli cabinet room in 1967, a struggle for self-determination was taking shape among Palestinians themselves. A reinvigorated national movement helped revive global attention to the Palestinian plight, which had been sidelined as a humanitarian problem after the creation of Israel in 1948. In the course of the war, over seven hundred thousand Palestinians were expelled or fled from territories that had become the Israeli state.¹⁴ Against the backdrop of dispersion and infiltration that followed, as well as inter-Arab rivalry and internal divisions in the 1950s and 1960s, the quest for self-determination strengthened in the wake of the 1967 War.¹⁵ Disillusioned with the failure of Arab nationalism, Palestinian leaders seized the struggle for their future away from discredited regional power brokers.¹⁶ The PLO, founded in 1964, was given new life in the aftermath of Israel's victory.¹⁷ In their quest for political recognition, the Palestinians found allies across Europe and the Global South, seizing on other examples of decolonization, from the struggles of Algerian independence to the Vietnam War.¹⁸

The 1967 War was therefore a watershed moment for the United States in the Middle East and for the reemergence of the Palestinian question. Israel's rapid defeat of the Arab states was a decisive blow to the prestige of the Soviet military who backed them. U.S. support for Israel during the war placed Washington at the center

of postwar diplomatic efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. President Lyndon Johnson did not want to return to the status quo that had prevailed before 1967 and supported Prime Minister Eshkol's bid to retain the territories until the Arab states recognized Israel and made peace.¹⁹ This stance was codified in November 1967 via United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, which was understood internationally as a guideline for pursuing an exchange of "land for peace," meaning the return of territories for Israel's full recognition by the Arab world. At the same time, UN resolution 242 did not refer to the Palestinians directly, calling for a "just settlement to the refugee problem," without mentioning the fate of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. According to some opinions, it did not call for full Israeli withdrawal from all the captured territories.²⁰

Nevertheless, by the mid-1970s, the PLO had gained international prominence through a combination of diplomatic overtures and violent acts of political terrorism on the global stage.²¹ After first pursuing "total liberation" over the entirety of historic Palestine via armed struggle, the organization gradually shifted toward territorial partition and separate statehood alongside Israel. Moderating influences within the Palestinian national movement also gained ground after the 1973 War, generating measured support for a negotiated settlement.²² At the Arab League Summit in 1974, the PLO was officially recognized as the representative voice of Palestinian concerns in the Arab world. But how, exactly, were Palestinians going to be able to get any territory for a state? Beyond armed struggle, the PLO needed international backing for its diplomatic track, particularly from the United States. It was an effort riven with difficulty, given internal Palestinian debates over military tactics and the parameters for diplomatic engagement, as well as long-standing U.S. policy toward Israel and the Middle East.²³

A crucial regional development followed the September 1970 death of the champion of pan-Arab nationalism, Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. The new president, Anwar al-Sadat, pivoted his country westward, seeking to align Egypt with the United States rather than the Soviet Union.²⁴ Sadat was also determined to break the hold of Israel's dominant territorial position in the region, seeking to reclaim the Sinai Peninsula. He tried to negotiate a territorial exchange with Israel and signaled his determination to align with

Western powers. Israeli officials were not responsive to his overtures, and President Richard Nixon's powerful National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, was determined to maintain the strategic balance of *détente*. Joining forces with Syrian president Hafez al-Assad, Sadat launched the 1973 October War against Israel as a way to break this regional stalemate and create a "crisis of *détente*."²⁵

The surprise attack broke out on Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar. Israeli reservists were not at their bases, as the leadership of the country had not heeded the warnings of intelligence channels on the eve of the fighting.²⁶ The ensuing battle shattered Israel's cloak of invincibility that had been dominant in the wake of 1967. Although Israel defeated the Egyptian and Syrian forces, Israeli leaders had to seek U.S. military aid to turn the tide of the fighting. A massive American airlift of tanks, airplanes, and ammunition reversed the Egyptian and Syrian advances. With Nixon distracted by the Watergate scandal, Kissinger negotiated the terms of agreement to end the war. These terms were passed as UN Security Council Resolution 338, which called for a "just and durable peace in the Middle East" along the lines of UN Security Council Resolution 242 after the 1967 War.²⁷ Kissinger, as Nixon's envoy and later as secretary of state to President Gerald Ford, pursued a step-by-step approach to achieve a diplomatic solution between Israel and its neighbors.

Within Israel, the 1973 War brought the downfall of Prime Minister Golda Meir's government. A committee of inquiry, known as the Agranat Commission, found deep lapses of judgment among the leadership of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and held several military leaders to account for Israeli losses.²⁸ Meir's replacement was Yitzhak Rabin, a Labor party leader and decorated commander of the Israeli army who had served for five years as Israel's ambassador to Washington. Primarily concerned with rebuilding Israeli military deterrence after the war, Rabin entertained U.S. efforts to maintain postwar calm with interim arrangements. Alongside Sadat, who had been seeking out U.S. patronage and aid since assuming the Egyptian presidency, the two leaders helped ensure the success of Kissinger's diplomacy.²⁹

In December 1973, a few months after the end of the Yom Kippur War, the United States and the Soviet Union convened a

short-lived Geneva Conference that included representatives from Egypt, Jordan, and Israel. Although largely in a ceremonial role, it was to be the last time the United States accepted the Soviet Union as an equal partner in the Middle East, leading to a period of American diplomatic dominance in the region. The PLO leadership, which thought that Palestinians would be included in these discussions, began to rethink its diplomatic options.³⁰ While the Geneva Conference did not achieve a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, it fostered Kissinger's "shuttle missions" to Egypt, Syria, and Israel between 1973 and 1975. These missions led to disengagement agreements between the three countries, as well as the Sinai Interim Agreement (Sinai II), which signaled a willingness to resolve conflict between Israel and Egypt "by peaceful means."³¹

While strengthening bilateral relations with Israel and Egypt, the American approach also prolonged broader regional conflict indefinitely.³² Sinai II included further Israeli withdrawals from the Sinai Peninsula and the establishment of a UN buffer zone in the area. In pulling Cairo out of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the United States hoped to reduce the likelihood of another dangerous armed conflict, which threatened to destabilize great power relations in the Middle East. Kissinger's approach was a means of conflict management: by removing Egypt as a strategic and diplomatic threat, Israel's position would be secured and American dominance in the region would be preserved.

Palestinian national aspirations, which remained a central point of contention between Israel and the Arab states during this period, were ignored by Kissinger's diplomatic initiatives. In focusing on limited cease-fires between warring states, Kissinger's effort favored a piecemeal approach that separated the Palestinian issue from broader regional concerns.³³ This served Kissinger's agenda of conflict management, and also assuaged the anxieties of the Rabin government. Israel was deeply opposed to the possibility of Palestinian self-determination, and in 1975 Kissinger formally promised that the United States would not engage with the PLO unless it acknowledged Israel's right to exist and accepted UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. This ban on dealing with the PLO was formative in shaping U.S. relations with the

Palestinians, forestalling meaningful engagement just as the PLO was moving purposefully toward diplomacy.³⁴

During the 1976 presidential campaign, a new U.S. approach to the Middle East began taking shape. Gerald Ford's Democratic opponent, Georgia governor Jimmy Carter, had grander plans for U.S. foreign policy in the Global South.³⁵ Carter was viewed in the United States as a political outsider and foreign policy neophyte, but he also ran for office at a time when Cold War *détente* was under assault and human rights were emerging as an alternative basis on which to formulate the trajectory of U.S. internationalism.³⁶ The governor was developing a regional, rather than strictly Cold War, approach to foreign policy, marked by a concern with localized political dynamics.³⁷

In his campaign speeches on the Middle East, Carter stressed a shift away from Kissinger's gradualist approach to regional peacemaking. "A limited settlement," Carter argued, "leaves unresolved the underlying threat to Israel. A general settlement is needed—one which will end the conflict between Israel and its neighbors once and for all."³⁸ This comprehensive tone, which sought a resolution with countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, marked a more expansive agenda while privileging U.S. relations with Israel. Carter also placed the Palestinian question at the heart of a comprehensive solution. In a break with longstanding policy, Carter spoke of a Palestinian "homeland," offering the possibility of a radically new American policy toward self-determination.³⁹ For the first time since 1948, U.S. officials had come to recognize the centrality of Palestinian political—rather than humanitarian—rights.

The eventual outcome of the Carter administration's extensive diplomatic efforts in 1977 and 1978 was the Camp David Accords, which secured the bilateral peace agreement between Egypt and Israel. In effect, the accords were the triumph of Kissinger's diplomatic architecture. They left the Palestinian issue subject to further negotiations over autonomy after the ratification of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. These autonomy talks sidestepped the PLO and served to prevent a territorial resolution of Palestinian national aspirations, solidifying a condition of statelessness and deliberately undermining sovereignty claims. While the peace treaty

with Egypt was being implemented, Israel's Likud government introduced new plans for the territories, expanding settlements that had first started under the Labor governments in the decade after the 1967 victory.

Despite their significance, the autonomy talks have largely been absent from historical accounts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Among the leading studies, Israeli historian Benny Morris dismisses autonomy as a "nonstarter," while other scholars downplay or ignore the negotiations in the wake of Camp David.⁴⁰ Dominant narratives of the peace process instead trace the beginning of a serious engagement with the Palestinian question to the Madrid and Oslo negotiations of the 1990s, often ignoring the diplomatic mechanisms that constrained Palestinian self-determination in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴¹ Those who do examine this earlier period, like one recent study of the Carter administration's approach, paint a more sympathetic portrait of American attempts to create a process leading to "genuine Palestinian self-determination" by challenging the Begin government on settlement expansion and territorial withdrawal.⁴² But the U.S. role in the autonomy talks—and the very substance of the negotiations themselves—actively undermined the prospects of a solution to the Palestinian question.

Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin's autonomy scheme was in fact a formidable and sophisticated piece of statecraft. While it was designed to frustrate Palestinian nationalism, its ingenuity was to sustain the fiction of serious movement on the Palestinian front. Far from representing a diplomatic dead end, the talks were an integral, dynamic, and highly consequential component of Israel's diplomatic strategy. The recent revival of interest in the autonomy plan among right-wing politicians in Israel attests to the deep imprint it continues to have on Israel's approach to the Palestinians.⁴³

While Begin was indefatigable as a negotiator and relentless in advocating for his ideas, he received a great deal of help from his new ally, Egypt. The country's formal withdrawal from the Arab-Israeli conflict as a consequence of Camp David relieved Israel of military pressure from the southwest and enabled the intensification of the occupation of Palestinian land. However, Cairo was also a willing partner in the political project that Begin had conceived for the Palestinians. Despite Sadat's loud exhortations as the chief

defender of Palestinian rights, Egypt explicitly countenanced the Israeli notion that autonomy would preclude, rather than facilitate, the achievement of Palestinian statehood. Verbatim records of successive rounds of negotiations between delegations from these two countries reveal how an initial Egyptian insistence on a meaningful outcome for the Palestinians gave way to functional autonomy and the preservation of a bilateral peace alone.⁴⁴ Egypt's permissive role underscores a causal link between the "breakthrough" of Camp David and the subsequent thwarting of Palestinian statehood.

Global constraints also played a large part in the limits of Carter's achievements in the Middle East. After Camp David, events in 1979 fueled a shift in Carter's attention, notably with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.⁴⁵ As a result of the Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis in Tehran, the latter part of Carter's time in office was not devoted to the intricacies of the Arab-Israeli conflict as it had been in the early years. Heightened tensions in the Cold War, which have often been ascribed to Reagan's election and the revival of global conflict in the 1980s, actually emerged in part as a reaction to Carter's actions.⁴⁶ By his 1980 State of the Union address, the articulation of a "Carter Doctrine" signaled a more muscular American posture toward the international arena. This would only increase during the early years of the Reagan administration.⁴⁷

There are many ways to narrate the Palestinian struggle for self-determination in the late twentieth century and a multiplicity of perspectives to account for. I have focused here on the interactions between the United States, Israel, Egypt, and the Palestinians themselves, although the latter were often excluded from the discussions over their political fate. Grassroots activists and various movement-based organizations were also pivotal in framing (and opposing) this struggle, and I have incorporated the constraining voices of domestic groups like the American Jewish community and Cold War conservatives. While examining local developments, this is not an internal history of the Israeli Likud or the PLO's military and diplomatic strategy, although those dynamics are discussed. Nor does this book seek to cover all the developments within inter-Arab politics or international and nongovernmental organizations, even as organizations

like the United Nations and the Arab League, as well as European governments, played a crucial role and appear as well. Rather I explain how and why a host of influential state and non-state actors engaged with the question of Palestinian self-determination in political terms and reflect on the broader outcome of those discussions at a pivotal moment in the international history of the Middle East.⁴⁸

The persistence of Palestinian statelessness since the years under examination in this book remains intimately tied to the triumph of a political vision for limited self-rule first articulated by Israeli leaders in the 1970s, as well as the very real consequences of settlement expansion in the occupied territories. These processes are linked together. But while visible evidence of Israel's fifty-year-old occupation is well-documented, the evolution of its intellectual, legal, and political architecture is only recently coming under sustained scrutiny.⁴⁹ By examining the genesis of diplomatic negotiations prior to Camp David and the repercussions in the decade that followed, I am therefore suggesting we rethink the conventional periodization of the peace process to more directly account for the 1970s and 1980s. This deeper history is often obscured by the immediate concerns of the present, but the architecture of this process extends much farther back than has been acknowledged.

My argument by no means implies that independent statehood was necessarily the preferred outcome for Palestinians, or even considered a viable option as far back as the 1970s. Other ideas were always circulating in diplomatic corridors, from confederation with Jordan to limited self-rule by local elites and other non-state alternatives. Rather than presume statist outcomes, it is important to remember that the articulation of self-determination in the 1970s and 1980s looked rather different than it might in the early twenty-first century.⁵⁰ The central claim of *Preventing Palestine* is also not to say that Palestine, as a real or imagined place, was irrevocably foreclosed in the period under examination. At multiple junctures, horizons had opened for possible Palestinian self-determination, and may very well still exist.

But in writing a history of contingent and unfolding events during the formative period between Camp David and Oslo, it is clear that certain avenues for sovereignty were closed down in the process, and the effect—if not the intent—has been the elision

of a political solution for the Palestinians. In tracing a history of failure—the genealogy of a non-event, as it were—the historian must be mindful of clashing dynamics at play, haphazard intentionality, and a predetermined reading of the recent past. As this book makes clear, a series of diplomatic decisions and military interventions, shifting legal ideas about settlements, and conceptual debates over the meaning of autonomy and self-determination all contributed to the prevention of Palestine at the very moment when demands for sovereignty were first being heard.