

## The Second Annual Sadat Lecture for Peace

The Honorable Jimmy Carter

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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 faith in God, and to those who are concerned about the integrity and the future peace of my own country.

There was an alignment of forces in the Middle East that was very disturbing. The powerful Soviet Union in the depths of the Cold War aligned with certain groups and our country aligned with others. I felt it incumbent upon me to cast aside any restraints regarding political popularity or the risk of failure and begin to seek a way to bring peace to the region. I began to meet with Middle East leaders. I was distressed when I met with Prime Minister Rabin of Israel, who was extremely cautious. I then met with King Hussein of Jordan, President Assad from Syria, and Crown Prince Fahd from Saudi Arabia. It was not encouraging, the totality of it.

Then President Anwar Sadat came to meet with me. We had our normal conference — one side filled with Americans and the other with Egyptians — followed by a banquet in the evening with some entertainment. Afterwards I felt a strange rapport with that man that has been almost unequalled in my life. I invited Anwar to go upstairs with me, to a place in the White House where very few people visit, to the second floor where the families live. He went up with me. Our little daughter Amy was asleep, and I woke her up and said, "Amy, I want you to meet a new friend." And President Sadat met my daughter. We then went and sat on the corner of a sofa, and I began to explain to him my dreams of peace in the Middle East. I found a receptivity that I had not experienced anywhere else, and I began to recognize the attributes that made him great. He was calm, self-assured, and had a far-sighted awareness of global interrelatedness. It was obvious that he was bold and did not lack political courage. We explored some ideas. There were some

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. I asked Anwar Sadat to help me break the ice that had frozen over as a result of four wars between Egypt and Israel in the last twenty-five years. Later, when I had not made any progress after a very conservative Menachem Begin was elected prime minister of Israel, Sadat said he would like to do something that was bold. I encouraged him. His first thought was to invite the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council to come together to promote peace in the Middle East. I said there was no way to invite all five — the U.S., Soviet Union, China, France, and Great Britain — that it would just complicate the issue.

We exchanged ideas again, and in September he said that he would be willing to go to Jerusalem. He announced this publicly after he had consulted with me, and I strongly approved. I contacted Menachem Begin, who responded to me with an invitation for Sadat to come, and he went.

It was a momentous event. The First Baptist Church in Washington, where I attended services, adjourned early so I could go home and watch Sadat's speech. It was a harsh speech, laying down the maximum demands of the Arab world. However, it was not important what he said, it was where he said it. Then, through me, he invited Menachem Begin to join him in Egyptian territory, which turned out to be a disaster. The two men were totally incompatible. They were only together about twenty minutes and stormed away from each other in a spirit of anger.

Later, I decided that the only way to break this deadlock was to invite both men to come to meet with me at Camp David. I handwrote long letters to both of them, and they both agreed. And they arrived there, and I talked to both men. Before that I had a deep psychoanalysis of each man presented to me - very thick books. I never let Jehan read the one about her husband. But they turned out to be quite accurate. After studying those book, I knew both men. Sadat thought about complicated matters in a broad strategic, bold, aggressive, global fashion. Begin was just the opposite. He thought about things in a more detailed way. How would they affect the people that had supported him? How would they affect his own interests inside Israel? When I deliberately put pressure on both men, Sadat would respond to escape my pressure by talking about broad generalities. Menachem Begin would become involved in the minutia, particularly the semantics, wondering about what does this word mean, what does that word mean?

I brought them together. However, as had been the case with the visit in Egypt, they were incompatible. I tried for three days to get them to talk about the future. All they could talk about was the past. And so for the last ten days at Camp David, I never them see each other. Begin sat in his cabin. Sadat sat in his cabin. They ate at different times, different places. I kept them very carefully apart and I went back and forth between them. While I was with Menachem Begin, Sadat was resting. While I was with Anwar Sadat, Begin was resting. And we kept going and made some progress.

Within that interim period, we went to the Civil War battlefield at Gettysburg one day, and I made them both agree not to talk about the Middle East or about anything that happened since 1865. I sat between the two men in the limousine. We got to Gettysburg, and Sadat, all of his generals, and all of the Israeli generals knew the battle details – I was really amazed. However Menachem Begin did not know anything about the battle. We had Shelby Foot with us, an expert

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's 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 because Sadat had promised me he would not leave.

I was wearing blue jeans so I put on more formal clothes. I went over to the window and I looked out over the mountain side and said a silent prayer. Then I went over and confronted Sadat. It was the only harsh confrontation we ever had. I told him that he had betrayed me and broken his promise to me—that if left Camp David and left me and the Israelis there, the condemnation of the world would be on him. And eventually he decided to stay. He only made two demands of me and my negotiation role. One was that we have a comprehensive agreement on behalf of the Palestinians – which is there. I hope all of you will read what was agreed to in Camp David. And secondly, that all Israeli troops, all Israeli citizens had to leave Egyptian territory in the Sinai Desert. Those were the only two. He said: "Anything else you negotiate, my good friend Jimmy (as he always said), I will accept it."

There was a general consensus at Camp David that Sadat trusted me too much and that Begin did not trust me enough. Sadat was the most forthcoming member of the Egyptian delegation. Begin was the most reluctant member of the Israeli delegation.

We had gotten to the eleventh day. We had a breakdown because Menachem Begin had taken an oath before God that he would never dismantle an Israeli settlement. And one of Sadat's unchangeable demands was that all Israelis had to be removed from the Sinai Desert. There was one in Yamit, a little settlement, about 3,000 people in the Sinai Desert. That was the fatal obstacle.

Begin had decided to leave, I had decided to leave, and so had Sadat. Begin asked me to sign a photograph of the three of us for his grandchildren. My secretary brought me eight photographs and she had also discovered the names of Begin's grandchildren. So instead of just signing "Jimmy Carter," I put "With Love to" and wrote the name of every one of his grandchildren. I took them over to his cabin. He was hardly speaking to me. I knocked at the door and went in. I handed him the photographs, a stack of them. He said, "Thank you, Mr. President," and turned around, dismissing me in effect. And he looked down and he read the first photograph, and he called out the name of his granddaughter. And then, one by one, he read out the names of his grandchildren. Tears ran down his cheeks, and when I saw them I also cried. And he said, "Why don't we try one more time?"

I went back to my cabin with a man named Aharon Barak, who had been designated to be Attorney General of Israel. He is now the chief justice of the Supreme Court. Barak and I worked out a proposal to submit to Begin in effect saying, "You do not have to violate your oath. You do not have anything to do with dismantling your settlement. We will let the Israeli Knesset make

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 urgently. I left my visit and flew down to the capital. With his eyes filled with tears, Arafat told me they had reached agreement and that the biggest problem for Rabin was to notify the Secretary of State of the United States, whose government had not been involved. They rented a Lear jet in Geneva and flew to Los Angeles and informed Warren Christopher that the Oslo agreement had been signed.

There was a ceremony on the South Lawn. Some of you were there. I was there sitting in the front row and my wife in the third row. Behind her were former secretaries of state. And sitting beside her was the foreign secretary of Norway who had negotiated the agreement. His name was never mentioned. Two years later he died at the age of forty-four. This signing was a high point. and then began the low points with Rabin’s assassination and violence by the Palestinian militants, which resulted in Netanyahu’s election.

And then the long dry spell interrupted recently by President Clinton, who brought the leaders to the Wye Plantation. You know the result, which has basically put back on track the peace

process. It is not quite back where it was before Rabin's assassination, but there is hope. Anyone dealing with the Middle East has to be an optimist. I am. Jehan is. Sadat was. Many others. I am optimistic not as a naïve, foolish person. But I am optimistic because I know the Israelis, and the Lebanese, and the Syrians, and the Jordanians, and the Palestinians, and the Egyptians. I know that the Israeli mothers want peace. And that the Palestinian mothers want peace. And the Lebanese, and the Syrian and the Jordanian mothers want peace. The obstacles are the politicians. They do not have the courage to honor the demands and the prayers of the mothers. I made this same statement in a speech to the Knesset back in those days. I do not know what is going to happen in the future. I am inclined to be cautiously optimistic. Those of us in this room who have demonstrated an interest in the process need to be involved, however mighty, some with authority, some without authority. All of us have some degree of influence.

We need to support President Clinton in his efforts. I sent him a congratulatory letter the day before yesterday. We need to strengthen the Jewish community in this country who are deeply concerned about the security of the honored land. We need to be conversant with the suffering of the Palestinian people who have dreams. And we need to resurrect, in times of doubt, the image of the greatest leader I have ever met. His name has been given to this lecture series: Anwar Sadat.