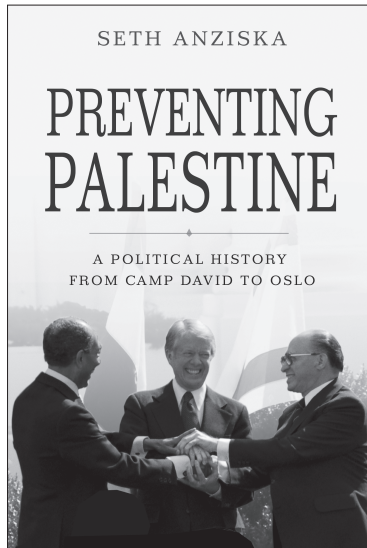


Recent Books



Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo, by Seth Anziska. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018. 464 pages. \$35.00 cloth, e-book available.

MOUIN RABBANI

When Anwar Sadat detached Egypt from the Arab-Israeli conflict during the 1970s, the conventional wisdom was that Israel relinquished its occupation of the Sinai Peninsula not only to deprive the Arabs of a military option but also in order to consolidate its rule over the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon—intended to eradicate the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and organized Palestinian resistance in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, so as to enable Israel's further absorption of these territories—formed the violent crescendo of the new direction in Egyptian-Israeli relations that first emerged in the wake of the 1973 October War.

Yet, historical memory can prove remarkably short. In recent decades, researchers and analysts have been more prone to finger the 1993 Oslo Agreement, or its alleged improper implementation, as the primary reason for the continued absence of Palestinian self-determination. With relevant scholarship devoted to either the 1978 Camp David Accords and subsequent Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, or Oslo, few have sought to examine the organic relationship between the three events.

Seth Anziska sets out to examine how and why Camp David set the stage for both the Lebanon War and Oslo, and more broadly how the realities of twenty-first-century Palestine were shaped by diplomacy and conflict in the final decades of the twentieth. His thesis, that Camp David was no more a framework for a comprehensive Middle East peace than Oslo was a blueprint for a two-state settlement, and that the latter is best understood as the progeny of the former, is aptly summarized by the book's title.

Relying primarily on recently declassified U.S. official records (particularly the available Foreign Relations of the United States collections), relevant U.S. presidential libraries, Israeli state archives,

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and Palestinian archival materials, and supplemented with numerous interviews, Anziska contends that Palestinian autonomy proposals in the late 1970s and early 1980s were forged and utilized to facilitate occupation and obstruct Palestinian self-determination. Thus, not only did they not serve as precursors to Palestinian statehood, but they never could have. In making his case, the author examines the diplomatic record exhaustively to demonstrate that a meaningful resolution of the question of Palestine was sacrificed very early on at the altar of the national interests of the United States, Israel, and Egypt, in a process that only deepened as each of these states shifted increasingly rightward over time and successively relinquished any interest in a comprehensive Middle East peace. If it was indeed the case that President Jimmy Carter would have utilized a second term in the White House to explore the prospects for a durable Israeli-Palestinian peace—bearing in mind that the Carter of the 1970s had quite different views and calculations than those he has expressed in retirement*—the more pertinent point is that he was replaced by Ronald Reagan, whose administration's embrace of Israel was unambiguous.

The book's treatment of Israel's 1982 Lebanon War is particularly valuable in that it amplifies the author's analysis and conclusions regarding the Palestinian dimensions of the U.S.-led Egyptian-Israeli peace process, and also reveals significant new information regarding both Israeli and U.S. conduct during the bloodbath—particularly the Sabra-Shatila massacre at its culmination. Advertised as Operation Peace for Galilee, the invasion of Lebanon had, in fact, virtually nothing to do with protecting the north of Israel and was all about securing the West Bank and Gaza Strip for intensified Israeli colonization and eventual annexation.

Similarly, Anziska demonstrates how the Oslo accords essentially reproduced the Palestinian autonomy scheme concluded between the United States, Israel, and Egypt in 1979, with the crucial difference that it could now be successfully implemented on the basis of the Palestinian leadership's endorsement and the participation of the PLO. Autonomy, in other words, was Oslo's strategic objective, and was neither formulated nor intended as a waystation to independent statehood. The transitional has become permanent not on account of a design flaw, but rather because the design—developed and tested over several decades—successfully achieved intended outcomes. Such outcomes were made possible by the combination of Palestinian weakness, Israeli determination to perpetuate the occupation, and a United States that consistently used its formidable power to tilt the scales in Israel's favor.

Preventing Palestine forms a valuable addition to libraries dedicated to Middle East diplomacy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the question of Palestine, and the U.S. role in the Middle East. Not least because it thoroughly dispenses with the notion that either the 1978 Carter-Begin-Sadat handshake or the 1993 reprise featuring Yasir Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin was a milestone to be celebrated rather than mourned, or ever had the potential to enable rather than prevent Palestine. If the story has been recounted previously—and it is worth noting that the first telling commenced virtually the moment Sadat's plane touched down in Tel Aviv on 20 November 1977

* On this point see also the exchange, based on many of the same declassified documents, between Norman G. Finkelstein and William B. Quandt in *Moment of Truth: Tackling Israel-Palestine's Toughest Questions*, ed. Jamie Stern-Weiner (New York: OR Books, 2018), pp. 407–27.

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and has been repeated many times since—Anziska’s extensive research and deployment of new material makes it worth rereading.

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