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Beyond the Arc of Crisis: Jimmy Carter and the Arab ‘Radicals,’ 1978–79

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ABSTRACT

After signing the Camp David Accords, the Carter administration pushed to increase American security cooperation and military presence in the Middle East. Though often seen as a response to the regional instability caused by the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the hardening of US policy toward the region was also due to the Arab rejectionist threat to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process that Washington saw as a prerequisite to regional stability. This essay highlights the connections between the peace process, the collapse of Soviet-American détente, and the reorientation of US policy in the region toward the Persian Gulf.

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Not even two months old, the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt teetered perilously on the brink of failure in early November 1978. The Accords promised to remove Egypt from the Arab world’s collective stance against the Jewish state. Achieving such a bilateral deal was crucial to building a comprehensive peace throughout the Middle East, limiting the chances of regional or even global conflict; the last Arab-Israeli war in 1973 almost precipitated a nuclear showdown between the superpowers.¹ With Soviet-American détente deteriorating and Soviet influence increasing throughout the Third World, a peace deal was desperately needed.²

Arab opinion had crystallised against the peace process since the signing of the Camp David Accords in September. This solidification, however, was seemingly limited to the ‘radical’ Arab states, or ‘rejectionists’, so called because of their opposition to peace with Israel (or at least to Egypt’s separate peace with it); indeed, as British officials noted in 1979, ‘many of the radicals would not exist but for the Arab/Israel dispute’.³ By late 1978, the ‘radicals’ or ‘rejectionists’ included Algeria, Iraq, Libya, Syria, People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen (PDRY, aka South Yemen), and the Palestine Liberation Organisation

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¹Craig Daigle, *The Limits of Détente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1969–1973* (New Haven, CT, 2012); Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *The Soviet–Israeli War, 1967–1973: The USSR’s Military Intervention in the Egyptian–Israeli Conflict* (Oxford, UK, 2017).

²Raymond Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American–Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, rev. ed. (Washington, DC, 1994), 653–785; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill, NC, [2007] 2009), 255–258; Lorenz M. Lüthi, *Cold Wars: Asia, the Middle East, Europe* (Cambridge, UK, 2020), 489–562.

³UK Embassy Damascus to FCO, ‘Arab/Israel’, March 15, 1979, FCO 93/2205, Adam Mathew Archives Direct. See Adeed I. Dawisha, *The Arab Radicals* (New York, NY, 1986).

(PLO)—all of which enjoyed Soviet backing.⁴ The most important ‘moderate’ (ie pro-Western) Arab states, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, were ambivalent toward the Accords, but the Saudis promised to resist anti-Egyptian measures at the Arab League summit at Baghdad (2–5 November 1978).⁵

That did not happen. Instead, Jordan and Saudi Arabia condemned the Accords, agreeing to potential punitive measures to be implemented if Egypt concluded its separate peace with Israel. Jordanian and Saudi intransigence frustrated US President Jimmy Carter, who had counted on them keeping pressure off Egypt. His frustration increased when, on 9 November, Egypt demanded increased commitments from Israel, presumably because President Anwar al-Sadat feared isolation within the Arab world. As such, the moderates’ shift toward the rejectionist camp signalled the death of any possibility of expanding the bilateral peace into a comprehensive one, and threatened to block the Egyptian-Israeli peace process altogether.

This episode typically receives brief mention in works on the Camp David process, which also take Soviet opposition to Carter’s peacemaking as a ‘given’, because after Washington reneged on its promise to collaborate with Moscow to establish a comprehensive Middle East peace in late 1977, the Soviets backed the ‘rejectionist’ Arabs, who subsequently worked against the separate Egyptian-Israeli peace, but failed to stop it.⁶ A comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace remained elusive because other concerns like the Iranian Revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the collapse of Soviet-American détente distracted Washington. Carter responded by militarising his Middle East policy, as encapsulated in the Carter Doctrine, renewing superpower competition both globally and in the Middle East, and signalling the end of détente and the start of the Second Cold War (1979–1985).⁷

The standard account is largely correct but neglects three important factors. First, it ignores the crucial linkage of the Camp David peace process and the Cold War. Most scholars discuss how Cold War considerations catalysed the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks. They argue that security concerns in the Middle East and the worsening state of détente pulled the United States away from the negotiations in 1979.⁸ However, US efforts to facilitate Arab-Israeli peace were intimately connected with the return of that region to the centre of US foreign policy. Second, although the Soviets and the Arab rejectionists ultimately failed to stop the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, they helped block the path from bilateral to comprehensive peace and hindered other elements of US policy in the Middle

⁴Robert O. Freedman, *Soviet Policy toward the Middle East since 1970*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY, 1982); Galia Golan, *Soviet policies in the Middle East from World War Two to Gorbachev* (Cambridge, UK, 1990); Alexey Vasiliev, *Russia’s Middle East Policy: From Lenin to Putin* (London, UK, 2018).

⁵*Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), 1977–1980, vol. IX, Arab-Israeli Dispute, August 1978–December 1980, 2nd rev. ed. (hereafter vol. IX.2), ed. Alexander R. Wieland (Washington, DC, 2018), docs. 91, 92, 106 and 124.

⁶Carol R. Saivetz, ‘Superpower Competition in the Middle East and the Collapse of Détente,’ in *The Fall of Détente: Soviet–American Relations during the Carter Years*, ed. Odd Arne Westad (Oslo, NO, 1997), 72–94; Seth Anziska, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo* (Princeton, NJ, 2018); Galen Jackson, *A Lost Peace: Great Power Politics and the Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967–1979* (Ithaca, NY, 2023); Jørgen Jensenhaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians* (London, UK, 2018); Daniel Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East: The Politics of Presidential Diplomacy* (London, UK, 2015).

⁷Andrew J. Bacevich, *America’s War for the Greater Middle East: A Military History* (New York, NY, 2016).

⁸Nathan J. Citino, ‘The Middle East and the Cold War’, *Cold War History* 19, No. 3 (2019): 454; Craig Daigle, ‘A Crescent of Crisis: The Middle East and Persian Gulf’, in *The Regional Cold Wars in Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East: Crucial Periods and Turning Points*, ed. Lorenz M. Lüthi (Stanford, CA, 2015), 245–259; Daigle, ‘Sadat’s African dilemma: Libya, Ethiopia, and the making of the Camp David Accords’, *Cold War History* (April 2019): 295–313.

East. Third, the literature offers little commentary on the rejectionists' influence on the peace process or US policy.⁹

This article corrects these gaps by demonstrating that the rejectionists' influence extended beyond attempts to block Egyptian-Israeli peace. From late 1978 onward, the Carter administration doubled its efforts to increase US security cooperation and military presence in the Middle East and Persian Gulf. This was not only a response to the deteriorating situations in Iran and Afghanistan, but also aimed to counter increased Arab radicalism, which threatened the Egyptian-Israeli peace process that Washington saw as a prerequisite to regional stability.¹⁰ This builds on the existing literature that dates Carter's shift to a more aggressive policy *prior* to the collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.¹¹ The 'radical' Arabs' activities coincided with and contributed to American perceptions of Soviet attempts to encroach into the Middle East. As such, this article also highlights the connections between the peace process, the collapse of Soviet-American détente, and the reorientation of US policy toward the Persian Gulf.

Although aware of the threat, Washington did little to engage the rejectionists. Indeed, they received more attention *before* the Camp David Accords. Afterward, the United States viewed the rejectionists as irrational bogeymen and effectively gave them up to Soviet influence. Even Jordan received far less attention because of its shift toward rejectionism. Despite—or perhaps because of—this lack of engagement, the rejectionists strongly influenced US policymaking in this period by destabilising the region and threatening the peace process.

Drawing on memoirs, oral histories, diplomatic cables and internal Carter administration documents, this article examines American relations with the rejectionists to reorient our understanding of this pivotal moment in US foreign policy, contextualising US anxieties over growing unrest in the Middle East. Following a brief sketch of the Camp David peace process from 1977 through late 1978, it connects the Carter administration's efforts to facilitate a Middle East peace with its reprioritisation of the Persian Gulf region, and highlights the Yemen border conflict of February–March 1979 as a crucial turning point in Carter's Middle East policy. It thereby suggests a new understanding of the collapse of détente and the shift to a more interventionist US policy in the Middle East.

While there is significant debate over the applicability and usefulness of the labels of 'radical', 'rejectionist' and 'moderate' to describe the Arabs' positions, I use them here to accurately reproduce the worldview of the Carter administration, which is critical to understanding and analysing its policy choices.¹² By highlighting the role of the

⁹Anziska, *Preventing Palestine*; Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*; Burton I. Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States: Inter-Arab Rivalry and Superpower Diplomacy* (New York, NY, 1996), 106–119; William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington, DC, [1986] 2016).

¹⁰On Afghanistan and Iran, see Christian Emery, *US Foreign Policy and the Iranian Revolution: The Cold War Dynamics of Engagement and Strategic Alliance* (London, UK, 2013); and Conor Tobin, 'The Myth of the "Afghan Trap": Zbigniew Brzezinski and Afghanistan, 1978–1979', *Diplomatic History* 44, no. 2 (2020): 237–264.

¹¹Olav Njølstad, 'Shifting Priorities: The Persian Gulf in US Strategic Planning in the Carter Years', *Cold War History* 4, no. 3 (April 2004): 21–55; William E. Odom, 'The Cold War Origins of the U.S. Central Command', *Journal of Cold War Studies* 8, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 52–82; Luis da Vinha, 'Selling the Arc of Crisis: Promoting Foreign Policy Change during the Carter Presidency', *Slovak Journal of Political Science* 16, no. 2 (2016): 162–189.

¹²Noam Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians*, updated ed. (London: Pluto Press, 1999); Colter Louwerse, '"Tyranny of the Veto": PLO Diplomacy and the January 1976 United Nations Security Council Resolution', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 33, no. 2 (2022): 303–329; Adel Safty, *From Camp David to the Gulf: Negotiations, Language & Propaganda, and War* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1992).

‘rejectionists’ and Soviets in the peace process, I am in no way suggesting that they were the only or even the primary influence on the failure of that process. US and (especially) Israeli contributions to that failure are well-documented and this article does not absolve either party of responsibility. Nor do I imply that the role of the ‘rejectionists’ solely explains how and why US policy changed during this period. Rather, I am simply highlighting an important and hitherto overlooked part of this history.

Whither Moderation? (January 1977–November 1978)

Entering office in 1977, President Jimmy Carter hoped to conclude a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. In a radical departure from previous US policy, he looked to involve the Palestinians (ie the PLO) and the Soviets in the peace process by resuming the Geneva Conference on the Middle East, last held in 1973. Since then, US policy had aimed to exclude the Soviets from the region.¹³ For most of 1977, the Carter administration worked to engage the Soviet Union and the ‘confrontation states’ bordering Israel (Jordan, Syria, and Egypt) and Saudi Arabia (the wealthiest Arab state), haltingly drawing them into the peace process. Due to a 1975 memorandum of understanding with Israel blocking US-PLO negotiations until the PLO recognised Israel’s right to exist, the administration felt unable to directly negotiate with the PLO. Despite movement in this direction, Israeli pressure, domestic attitudes, divisions within the PLO, and inter-Arab politics quashed the possibility of a full US-PLO dialogue.¹⁴

The best chances for a comprehensive peace were shattered when the Carter administration, pressured by American public opinion and Israel, reneged on the 1 October 1977 joint Soviet-American communiqué on the peace process, establishing the terms of a reconvened Geneva Conference. American backpedalling effectively evicted the Soviet Union from the peace process, which it had seen as an opportunity to regain its regional influence.¹⁵ As Carol Saivetz argues, this prompted the Soviets to support the rejectionists.¹⁶

Hoping to reinvigorate the peace process, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat announced he would go to Israel and address the Knesset in Jerusalem in mid-November. By inviting the Israelis ‘to struggle for peace’, Sadat violated standing Arab policy against recognising Israel’s existence, let alone making peace with it.¹⁷ This generated largely negative responses from other Arab states, especially the ‘rejectionists’, whom Carter dismissed as ‘nuts’.¹⁸ Instead, the administration considered ‘moderate’ states like Saudi Arabia and Jordan to be more important because their tacit support for peace could nullify Soviet and ‘rejectionist’ opposition.¹⁹ Conversely, Washington saw the rejectionists as intransigent or a problem to be solved later.²⁰

¹³Galen Jackson, ‘Who Killed Détente? The Superpowers and the Cold War in the Middle East, 1969–77’, *International Security* 44, no. 3 (Winter 2019/2020): 129–162.

¹⁴Anziska, *Preventing Palestine*, 155; Jensehaugen, *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, 1–77; Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 1–78.

¹⁵Jackson, *A Lost Peace*, 162–187.

¹⁶Saivetz, ‘Superpower Competition in the Middle East’, 89.

¹⁷Bruce Maddy-Weitzman, *A Century of Arab Politics: From the Arab Revolt to the Arab Spring* (Lanham, MD, 2016), 116.

¹⁸Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York, NY, 2010), 137.

¹⁹Quandt, *Camp David*, 155.

²⁰Salim Yaqub, *Imperfect Strangers: Americans, Arabs, and U.S.–Middle East Relations in the 1970s* (Ithaca, NY, 2016), 261.

In the year after Sadat's Jerusalem initiative, US policymakers focused on the moderates and largely ignored the rejectionists, dismissing them as unimportant. Washington moved away from a comprehensive peace process and toward a bilateral Egyptian-Israeli one, which blinded the administration from seeing the growing rejectionist threat.²¹ On 17 September 1978, Carter signed the Camp David Accords alongside Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

Hoping to expand the peace process, or at least to decrease Arab opposition to it, the Carter administration sought the moderate Arab states' support.²² Carter warned that a 'lack of support from other responsible and moderate leaders of the Arab nations would certainly lead to the strengthening of irresponsible and radical elements and a further opportunity for intrusion of Soviet and other Communist influences throughout the Middle East'.²³ Washington recognised the growing threat from the 'radicals' like Iraq and Libya, but failed to engage them, in part because US embassies in those countries doubted the rejectionists would demure.²⁴

Jordan's King Hussein reacted negatively to the Accords, whereas the Saudis responded more positively.²⁵ Syria, which floated between rejectionism and moderation, was the sole exception to the administration's focus on the moderates. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance met with President Hafez al-Assad, who interrogated Vance about the Accords for over four hours and explained Syria could not accept them as the basis of a comprehensive peace.²⁶ American officials interpreted Assad's refusal to allow other rejectionists into their discussion as evidence of his continued interest in peace, under the right conditions. While Assad could block Saudi-Jordanian entry into the peace process, they thought, he lacked 'any real capacity' to obstruct an Egyptian-Israeli deal.²⁷ Although Washington gave lip service to Syrian interests, it ultimately disregarded them in favour of the bilateral peace process.²⁸

Recognising his vulnerability vis-à-vis Israel, Assad cast about for support, tightening relations with the Soviets and fellow rejectionists, most notably Iraq.²⁹ In light of the longstanding feud between the two Ba'athist states, this rapprochement indicated a major

²¹Benjamin V. Allison "Through the Cracks of Détente: US Policy, the Steadfastness and Confrontation Front, and the Coming of the Second Cold War, 1977–1984," (Master's thesis, Kent State University, 2020), 20–71.

²²AmEmbassy Beirut to Secretary of State, 'Camp David: Guidance for Discussion', 21 September 1978 (Beirut 5508), US National Archives, Access to Archival Databases (hereafter AAD).

²³Carter to Hussein and Carter to Assad, Washington, 19 September 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX, docs. 61 and 62.

²⁴Secretary of State to Multiple Posts, 'U.S. Support for Camp David', 26 September 1978 (State 244085), AAD. Responses arrived on 26–27 September 1978 (Algiers 2739, Baghdad 1987, Damascus 5739, Tripoli 1354, Jidda 6908, Amman 7575, and Sana 4822, AAD).

²⁵Memcon, Vance et al. and Hussein et al., Amman, September 30, 1978, 5:30 p.m., and Memcon, Fahd et al. and Vance et al., Riyadh, 21 September 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 64 and 65.

²⁶Secretary's Aircraft to Secretary of State (Christopher), 'Meeting with Assad September 24, 1978', 24 September 1978 (SECTO 10071), AAD.

²⁷Situation Room to Brzezinski, 'Additional Information Items', 30 September 1978, Records of the National Security Advisor, President's Daily Report Files (hereafter NSA 1), Box 7, Folder 9, Jimmy Carter Library (hereafter JCL).

²⁸See, for example, Carter to Long, 12 October 1978, Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Staff Material – Middle East (hereafter NSA 25), Box 88, Folder 9, JCL; INR/RNA/NE – [redacted] to Lake, 'DISSENT CHANNEL MESSAGE: The US and Syria: The Special Relationship Crumbles', 13 October 1978, and Lake to INR/RNA – [redacted], 'Dissent Channel Message: The US and Syria: The Special Relationship Crumbles', 7 December 1978, in *Briefing Book #620: Department of State's Dissent Channel Revealed*, ed. Nate Jones, Tom Blanton, and Emma Sarfity (National Security Archive, March 15, 2018), doc. 21.

²⁹Patrick Seale with Maureen McConville, *Assad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Oakland, CA, 1988), 311; Efraim Karsh, *Soviet Policy towards Syria since 1970* (New York, NY, 1991), 119; *The World Was Going Our Way: The KGB and the Battle for the Third World* (New York, NY, 2005), 207; Roland Dannreuther, *The Soviet Union and the PLO* (New York, NY, 1998), 107–111.

step toward a unified Arab front against the peace process.³⁰ As part of the reconciliation, Syria announced its willingness to attend the upcoming Arab League summit at Baghdad, aimed at condemning the Accords and isolating Egypt. Other rejectionists followed suit, consolidating their position before the summit.³¹

The Camp David Accords guaranteed rejectionist opposition and disenchanted ‘moderate’ Arabs, especially Jordan. This presented a serious obstacle to the peace process: if the ‘moderates’ were radicalised, they could not only block a comprehensive peace, but possibly disrupt the separate Egyptian-Israeli peace. Both the Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement and the Soviet Union’s recognition of the PLO as the ‘sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people’ made ‘moderate’ defection more likely.³² Three days before the summit, Brzezinski warned Carter that the moderates seemingly lacked a coherent strategy for protecting Egypt at Baghdad.³³

The ‘moderates’ had little to gain and much to lose by defending the Accords at Baghdad. Saudi and Jordanian officials knew the dangers of opposing the rejectionists, especially given the strength of the nascent Syrian-Iraqi alliance, the threat of ostracisation from the rest of the Arab world, concerns about regime stability, and the Accords’ inadequacy on the Palestinian question.³⁴ Additionally, the radicals drew an already-dissatisfied Jordan closer with financial inducements, including \$1.25 billion per year for ten years.³⁵ Perhaps most importantly, the United States failed to account for Jordanian interests, taking their support for granted.³⁶ This combination of identity, interests, sticks and carrots led the Saudis and Jordanians to oppose the Camp David Accords at Baghdad.

The ‘moderates’ attempts to temper the outcome of the Baghdad Summit enjoyed mixed success, as they opposed Syria, Libya, South Yemen, Iraq, Algeria, and the PLO’s attempts to discipline Egypt.³⁷ They compromised, drawing up potential punitive measures in case of an Egyptian-Israeli treaty. While the apparent Saudi-Jordanian defection to the rejectionist camp enraged American officials, the ‘moderates’ argued they had obtained the best possible results at Baghdad, preventing or at least postponing Egypt’s isolation.³⁸ True as this might have been, the Arab reaction to the Accords threatened to

³⁰Eberhard Kienle, *Ba’th v. Ba’th: The Conflict between Syria and Iraq, 1968–1989* (London, UK, 1990), 135–147; Sonoko Sunayama, *Syria and Saudi Arabia: Collaboration and Conflicts in the Oil Era* (London, UK, 2007), 52.

³¹US Interest Section Baghdad to Secretary of State, ‘Arab Summit in Baghdad’, 7 October 1978 (Baghdad 2073) and Secretary of State to US Mission in the Sinai, ‘Intsum 666—October 10, 1978’, 11 October 1978 (State 256720), AAD.

³²US Interest Section Baghdad to Secretary of State, ‘Iraqi-Syrian Rapprochement’, 27 October 1978 (Baghdad 2230), AAD; Dannreuther, *The Soviet Union and the PLO*, 105–106.

³³Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Information Items’, 30 October 1978, NSA 1, Box 8, Folder 3, JCL; NIDC 78/256, CIA Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room (hereafter CIA FOIA).

³⁴Bassam Abu Sharif, *Arafat and the Dream of Palestine: An Insider’s Account* (New York, NY, 2009), 58–59; Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics: Negotiations in Regional Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 194–195; William B. Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s: Foreign Policy, Security, and Oil* (Washington, DC, 1981), 115; Joseph Kostiner, ‘Saudi Arabia and the Arab–Israeli Peace Process: The Fluctuation of Regional Coordination,’ *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36, no. 3 (December 2009): 417–429.

³⁵Seale with McConville, *Assad of Syria*, 313.

³⁶Nigel Ashton, ‘Taking Friends for Granted: The Carter Administration, Jordan, and the Camp David Accords, 1977–1980’, *Diplomatic History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 620–645; Mahida Rashid al Madfai, *Jordan, the United States and the Middle East Peace Process, 1974–1991* (Cambridge, UK, 1993), 48–54; Secretary of State to AmEmbassy Amman, ‘Meeting with Sharaf in Algiers’, 1 January 1979 (State 14), AAD.

³⁷Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, 195.

³⁸Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (Toronto, 1982), 410–411; Quandt, *Saudi Arabia in the 1980s*, 114; Memcon, ‘President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Nour of Tunisia’, 29 November 1978, 11:10–12:00 p.m., NSA 25, Box 1, Folder 9, JCL.

block the path to peace and created an opening for the Soviet Union to re-establish itself as a major player in the Middle East.³⁹

Seeking Peace outside the Arc of Crisis (November 1978–March 1979)

Sadat's reaction to the summit was contradictory. On the one hand, he castigated the Baghdad decision, publicly dismissing Arab opposition to the Accords as 'the hissing of snakes' and telling Carter that despite 'the Baghdad meeting ... I am in full control'.⁴⁰ Indeed, Sadat was so overconfident that Washington had to dissuade him from invading Libya.⁴¹ On the other hand, Sadat seemed to fear isolation from the Arab world, as he hardened his negotiating position on the Palestinian question shortly after the summit.⁴²

American policymakers worried the rejectionists might slow or derail the peace process, especially as the USSR increased its military and economic support to them.⁴³ Prolonging the negotiations increased the probability of a separate peace and therefore Egypt's isolation from the Arab world. Failure or delay, Brzezinski argued, could damage American prestige, further problematise US policy in an increasingly unstable region, and hurt President Carter domestically.⁴⁴ Conversely, rapidly concluding an agreement, coupled with regional security initiatives and new energy policies, would be a triumph.⁴⁵ Furthermore, Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan argued the stalled talks 'created a p[sy]chological logjam in our foreign policy', demoralising officials and delaying progress on SALT II and US-China normalisation.⁴⁶

Although political risk kept Carter from immediately reinjecting himself into the negotiations, he redoubled efforts to involve Jordan and Saudi Arabia.⁴⁷ Speaking with top Egyptian officials, he repeatedly emphasised the need to broaden the peace process in order to stabilise the region, arguing that the Arabs needed to reorient their priorities

³⁹Joseph Wright Twinam, 'Soviet Policy for the Gulf Arab States,' in *Domestic Determinants of Soviet Foreign Policy towards South Asia and the Middle East*, ed. Hafeez Malik (New York, NY, 1990), 249. On the Soviet-American diplomatic competition before the Baghdad Summit, see Benjamin V. Allison, 'From Camp David to Baghdad: Scrambling for and Against Peace in the Middle East, Fall 1978,' *Not Even Past* (January 20, 2023), <https://notevenpast.org/from-camp-david-to-baghdad-scrambling-for-peace-in-the-middle-east-fall-1978/>.

⁴⁰Sadat, quoted in Quandt, *Camp David*, 289; Telcon, Carter and Sadat, 12 November 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 132.

⁴¹AmEmbassy Egypt to Department of State, 'USG Attitude re Possible Egyptian Move Against Libya', Cairo, 4 November 1978, 1016Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVII, part 3: North Africa (hereafter vol. XVII-3), ed. Myra F. Burton (Washington, DC, 2017), doc. 36.

⁴²Secretary of State to US Mission in the Sinai, 'INTSUM 194—November 1978', 21 November 1978 (State 294477), AAD; Atherton to Vance, Washington, 9 November 1978, and Vance to Carter, 'Middle East Strategy', Washington, 9 November 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 129 and 127.

⁴³Secretary of State to US Mission to NATO, 'NAC Discussion of NATO Experts Report on USSR and Eastern Europe', 6 November 1978 (State 289850), AAD.

⁴⁴Brzezinski to Carter, 'Worst Case Scenarios in the Middle East', 24 November 1978, CIA FOIA; Brzezinski to Carter, 'Secretary Vance's Middle East Strategy Paper', Washington, 1 February 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 171; Vance to Carter, 'Strategy for the Middle East Negotiations', undated, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject Files (hereafter ZB Subject Files), Box 36, Folder 4, JCL.

⁴⁵Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report #79', 9 November 1978, Plains Files, Box 29, Folder 2, JCL; Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report #86', 26 January 1979, and Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report #89', 24 February 1979, Plains Files, Box 29, Folder 3, JCL.

⁴⁶Jordan to Carter, 30 November 1978, Office of the Chief of Staff Files, Box 49, Folder 6, JCL.

⁴⁷Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge, LA, 2000), 191–192; AmEmbassy Amman to Department of State and White House, 'Message to President from King Hussein', 30 December 1978, 1325Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 163; State 14, AAD; 'Agenda for PRC Meeting on Saudi Arabia and Jordan', undated, Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski Material – Office Files (hereafter NSA 15), Box 46, Folder 5, JCL.

away from Israel and toward defending ‘against the Soviet Union and their hired help’ in the region. The Egyptians were reluctant to talk with the Saudis and Jordanians, assuming they would inevitably join the peace process, despite the recent evidence to the contrary. Carter agreed, saying he thought they *only* needed to bring in the moderates, *not* the radicals.⁴⁸

This dismissiveness defined Carter’s policy toward the rejectionists. As a result, relations with them generally declined or remained at the status quo. For example, Washington moved to improve ties with Algeria after President Houari Boumediene’s death in December 1978, but focused on cooperation unrelated to the peace process, like economics.⁴⁹ Reviewing the administration’s policy in late November, Brzezinski opined that one of its major goals had been ‘preventing the emergence of a cohesive pro-Soviet radical bloc by keeping lines out to Syria, Algeria, and moderate Palestinians’.⁵⁰ While the United States had remained open to those parties, they were the least radical of all the rejectionists, and such a policy was decidedly passive, underscoring the administration’s relative disregard for the rejectionists, despite occasional warnings from both the NSC and State about possible blowback.⁵¹

US attempts to expand the negotiations tied the peace process to military and economic cooperation for Egypt, Israel, and the moderates.⁵² While Washington dangled a carrot to induce moderate participation in or acquiescence toward the negotiations, it simultaneously held an implicit stick over them: without US support, they would be far more vulnerable to Soviet encroachment and radical subversion. Indeed, the region had grown unstable over the past year with active crises in Lebanon and Iran and mounting tension on the Arabian Peninsula. The Soviets were gaining confidence in the area.⁵³ In addition to its aggressive support of Somalia in the Ogaden War of 1977–78, the Soviet Union increased its presence and influence throughout the region. Soviet influence in South Yemen and the other rejectionist states, as well as in Afghanistan, provoked fears of Soviet expansion toward the Persian Gulf.⁵⁴

American anxiety over the Middle East was best encapsulated by Brzezinski’s ‘Arc of Crisis’ thesis.⁵⁵ In a 2 December memorandum to Carter, Brzezinski issued a stark warning: ‘If you draw an arc on the globe, stretching from Chittagong (Bangladesh) through Islamabad [Pakistan] to Aden [South Yemen], you will be pointing to the area of currently our greatest vulnerability ... There is no question in my mind that we are

⁴⁸Memcon, ‘President’s Meeting with Vice President Mubarak’, Washington, 16 November 1978, 10–11:30 a.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 139.

⁴⁹*FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVII–3, docs. 66–72; Mohammed Lakhdar Ghetas, *Algeria and the Cold War: International Relations and the Struggle for Autonomy* (London, UK, 2018), 207–213.

⁵⁰Emphasis in original. Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Worst Case Scenarios in the Middle East’, 24 November 1978, CIA FOIA.

⁵¹Tarnoff to Brzezinski, ‘A Solution to Lebanon’s Problems’, 6 November 1978, NSA 25, Box 58, Folder 1, JCL; Quandt to Brzezinski, ‘Revitalizing our Middle East Policy’, 30 November 1978, ZB Subject Files, Box 36, Folder 8, JCL.

⁵²See, for example, Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Initial Reaction to the Latest Middle East Difficulty’, Washington, 30 November 1978, and Brzezinski to Carter, ‘Strategy for the Vance Trip to the Middle East (U)’, Washington, 6 December 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 149 and 152.

⁵³Quandt to Brzezinski, ‘Soviet Middle East Policy’, 17 January 1979, Records of the Office of the National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski Material – Country Files (hereafter NSA 6), Box 51, Folder 3, JCL.

⁵⁴See, for example, AmEmbassy Jidda to Department of State, ‘South Arabia’, Jidda, 9 September 1978, 1230Z, and Sick to Brzezinski, ‘Cracks in Saudi Facade (U)’, Washington, 22 December 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, Middle East Region; Arabian Peninsula, ed. Kelly M. McFarland (Washington, DC, 2015), docs. 255 and 175. See also Tobin, ‘Myth of the “Afghan Trap”’, 240–253.

⁵⁵W. Taylor Fain, ‘Conceiving the “Arc of Crisis” in the Indian Ocean Region,’ *Diplomatic History* 42, no. 4 (September 2018): 694–719.

confronting the beginning of a major crisis', he cautioned, as that vital region seemingly unravelled, inviting significant Soviet influence. The United States faced 'a fundamental shift in the global structure of power'. Brzezinski recommended keeping the 'Arc' in mind when dealing with the peace process and other foreign policy matters.⁵⁶

For the remainder of the Carter administration, Brzezinski's 'Arc of Crisis' informed US policy in the region, which increasingly connected the peace process with regional security. Speaking to the Israeli ambassador in early December, Carter explained that normalising Egyptian-Israeli relations without agreeing on the nature of the Palestinian self-governing authority 'would put Sadat in an indefensible position with the other Arabs', which he feared could end in Egypt abrogating the treaty.⁵⁷ Writing to Sadat the next day, Carter stressed that 'we must not fail. The triumph of *radical elements* who have attacked you would indeed bring the prospects of a dismal future to the entire Middle East'.⁵⁸ Carter clearly feared the rejectionists pressuring Sadat into rejecting or nullifying the peace treaty.

All three parties to the negotiations recognised the importance of concluding the treaty to stabilise the region.⁵⁹ The Syrian-Iraqi alliance which proved so critical to rejectionist success at the Baghdad Summit was especially problematic, as both countries also tightened relations with the Soviets. Despite warnings from the NSC and State Department, however, the Carter administration continued ignoring the Syrians, alienating the Assad regime as American contacts with Iraqi failed to yield results.⁶⁰ Worse still, Jordan was clearly gravitating toward the Syrian-Iraqi position; Carter later complained that King Hussein became 'a spokesman for the most radical Arabs'.⁶¹ Some, like CIA Director Stansfield Turner, feared the Saudis might also be pushed into the Syrian-Iraqi orbit.⁶²

Perceiving the rejectionists as too far gone, Washington prioritised luring Saudi Arabia into the peace process, due to both the Saudis' influence in the Arab world and their centrality to US interests in the region. Regional security and stability were thus inextricably linked to the peace process. As a State Department white paper put it, 'peace in the Middle East is crucial to [US] national interests and to the peace and security of its friends there'.⁶³ Similarly, Brzezinski argued 'we need to relate the peace negotiations to a broader strategic framework which takes into account the developments in Iran, the weakness of Saudi Arabia, the assertiveness of the Soviets, and the new alignments in the Arab world'.⁶⁴

⁵⁶Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report #81,' Washington, 2 December 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. I, Foundations of Foreign Policy, ed. Kristin L. Ahlberg (Washington, DC, 2014), doc. 100.

⁵⁷Memorandum for the Record, 'Summary of President's Meeting with Ambassador Dinitz', Washington, 7 December 1978, 11–11:25 a.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 153.

⁵⁸Emphasis added. Carter to Sadat, Washington, 8 December 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 154.

⁵⁹Quandt to Brzezinski, 'Status Report on Egypt-Israel Negotiations', Washington, 26 December 1978, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 162.

⁶⁰Quandt to Brzezinski, 'Egypt Compared to Iraq and Syria', 14 February 1979, NSA 25, Box 88, Folder 9, JCL; Quandt to Clift, 'Status of Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations', Washington, 19 January 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 169; Seale with McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 309; Carl Forsberg, 'Iraq, the United States, and the long shadow of the Cold War', *Cold War History* 19, no. 4 (2019): 457–476; Hal Brands, 'Before the Tilt: The Carter Administration Engages Saddam Hussein', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 26 (2015): 103–123.

⁶¹Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 410.

⁶²Brzezinski, Handwritten Notes from PRC Meeting, 1 February 1979, Remote Archives Capture Project, NLC-25-112-10-3-6, JCL.

⁶³Brzezinski to Carter, 'White Paper on Middle East?' undated [c. 17 December 1978], *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 160.

⁶⁴Brzezinski to Carter, 'Secretary Vance's Middle East Strategy Paper', 1 February 1979.

By February 1979, these themes coalesced into a general strategy: conclude a peace treaty and stabilise the region through military and economic deals with Israel, Egypt, and moderate Arabs.⁶⁵ The treaty and the security deals were interconnected, as the aid aimed to induce cooperation with or participation in the treaty, which in turn was the necessary first step toward regional stabilisation.⁶⁶ Secretary of Defence Harold Brown travelled to Egypt, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Jordan early that month, aiming to 'restore and reinforce confidence in the United States among our friends in the region', who feared increasing Soviet, Cuban, and radical Arab influence.⁶⁷ Additionally, the collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran in January frightened the moderates; after all, if the United States would not intervene in Iran, its strongest regional ally, how trustworthy were its assurances of *their* security?⁶⁸ Similar fears prompted the Egyptians and Israelis to harden their negotiating positions.⁶⁹

Thus began Washington's efforts to reassure its regional partners that they would not share Iran's fate.⁷⁰ Carter instructed Brown to 'lay the basis for security collaboration among the U.S. and key states in the region', including Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia, in hopes of drawing the latter two into the peace process. Brown would explicitly link peace and security cooperation, highlight the deteriorating regional situation and the opportunities it presented to the Soviets and their allies, and seek reactions to the prospect of an increased US military presence in the area.⁷¹

Anxieties about regional stability became more evident during Brown's trip. Talking with Saudi and Jordanian officials, he plainly conditioned US military and economic aid on their participation in, or at least support for, the peace process.⁷² Brown concluded that the United States needed to hasten the signing of the peace treaty using economic and security inducements, and that 'the most likely threats' came from domestic instability and cross-border support for internal violence. Rather than prescribing massive military aid, he stressed the 'need to promote regional security cooperation' against Soviet and radical advances.⁷³

Despite the radical threat, only moderates like Saudi Arabia received high-level attention from the United States. For example, Saudi Crown Prince Fahd asked Brown which states Washington considered 'moderate', besides Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Jordan. After adding Israel, the Gulf States, North Yemen, and Sudan to Fahd's list, Brown opined that Syria was seemingly moderating its position, and that Iraq might as well. Fahd asked if his guest planned to visit Damascus, implying that he should; Brown

⁶⁵Edward C. Keefer, *Harold Brown: Offsetting the Soviet Military Challenge, 1977–1981*, (Washington, DC, 2017), 265.

⁶⁶See, for example, Department of State to AmEmbassy Tel Aviv, 'Message From President Carter to Prime Minister Begin on Resuming Middle East Negotiations', 6 February 1979, 1749Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 174.

⁶⁷Carter to Brown, Washington, 9 February 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, doc. 19.

⁶⁸Christian Emery, 'United States Iran Policy 1979–1980: The Anatomy and Legacy of American Diplomacy', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24 (2013): 619–639.

⁶⁹CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 'Implications of Iran for Middle East Peace Negotiations', RP M 79–10094, Washington, 16 February 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 177.

⁷⁰Christopher Dietrich, '"We Must Have a Defense Build-up": The Iranian Revolution, Regional Security, and American Vulnerability', in Arang Keshavarzian and Ali Mirsepassi, eds., *Global 1979: Geographies and Histories of the Iranian Revolution* (Cambridge, UK, 2021), 245–289.

⁷¹Carter to Brown, Washington, 9 February 1979.

⁷²Secretary of State to Multiple Posts, 'Summary of Secretary Brown's Visit to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel and Egypt', 28 February 1979 (State 047733), AAD.

⁷³Brown to Carter, 'Middle East Trip Report', Washington, 19 February 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 178.

said no, and resumed discussing American strategy in the region.⁷⁴ It was not the last time a major Carter administration mission would snub a radical state.⁷⁵

Events on the Arabian Peninsula soon heightened the administration's sense that it needed to act. Tensions between the Yemen Arab Republic (YAR, aka North Yemen) and South Yemen, mounting since summer 1978 despite Soviet attempts to pacify both sides, exploded into a border war in late February 1979.⁷⁶ The conflict escalated quickly and on 23 February, PDRY forces—reportedly supported by Soviet, Cuban, Ethiopian, and East German military advisors—invaded North Yemen. Despite conflicting accounts of who started the war, the Soviets did not approve the incursion, and urged the PDRY not to invade, but to no avail. As one South Yemeni communist told the Soviet ambassador, 'Yes, it's us who've started the war. If we win, we'll create Great Yemen. If we lose, you'll intervene and save us'.⁷⁷

The lack of a Soviet 'green light' to South Yemen, however, was not evident at the time. Given the increased importance of oil-producing states after the Iranian Revolution, Carter could not ignore the invasion and the attendant threat to Saudi Arabia. His administration adopted the view that 'Yemen is a test case . . . of U.S. security policy in the Middle East even though we might prefer other locations and circumstances'.⁷⁸ Washington accelerated and facilitated arms supply to the YAR and Saudi Arabia, engaged in diplomatic initiatives with the Soviets and Arabs, provided intelligence support, and deployed F-15s to Saudi Arabia and the USS *Constellation* to the Gulf of Aden, stopping short of military intervention. To expedite aid to North Yemen, Carter issued Presidential Directive 79-6, circumventing the need for congressional approval on arms sales.⁷⁹ Ultimately, the Second Yemenite War ended through Arab mediation, with the PDRY withdrawing from YAR territory and the two sides agreeing to peacefully pursue unification—a goal not realised until 1990.⁸⁰

Carter's actions in the Yemen crisis were an assertion of American power in a region where that power had recently been tested, not least by the Soviets and their friends. This show of resolve aimed to reassure US allies and the American public that the United States would not watch while its friends were attacked. The Yemen crisis, as Fred Halliday writes, was 'of symptomatic rather than intrinsic significance'.⁸¹ After all, the conflict was already over when Carter signed PD 79-6.⁸² Nevertheless, its import remained. An anonymous US official—probably NSC staffer Gary Sick—explained to the *New York Times* that 'our actions in Yemen and the Middle East peace process are

⁷⁴AmEmbassy Jidda to Department of State, 'Secretary Brown's Meeting With Crown Prince Fahd', Jidda, 12 February 1979, 1420Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, doc. 185.

⁷⁵A stop in Syria was never planned, presumably due to American concerns over Syria's alliance with Iraq, ties to the Soviets, and resistance to the peace process.

⁷⁶Oleg Grinevskii, *Tainy sovetskoi diplomatii* [Secrets of Soviet diplomacy] (Moscow, RU, 2000), 96–113.

⁷⁷Andrew and Mitrokhin, *The KGB and the World*, 218. See also Karen N. Brutent's, *Tridtsat' let na staroi ploshchadi* [Thirty years on the old square] (Moscow, RU, 1998), 427–428.

⁷⁸US Military Training Mission in Dhahran to Department of Defense, Department of State, and AmEmbassy Jidda, 'Joint Planning With Saudi Arabia', Dhahran, 2 March 1979, 1505Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, docs. 269.

⁷⁹Presidential Determination No. 79-6, 'Sales of Defense Articles and Defense Services Under the Arms Export Control Act to the Yemen Arab Republic', 7 March 1979, *Federal Register* 44, no. 62 (March 29, 1979): 18633.

⁸⁰For a fuller account, see Benjamin V. Allison, 'Jimmy Carter and the Second Yemenite War: A Smaller Shock of 1979?' *Wilson Center Sources and Methods* (June 28, 2021), <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/jimmy-carter-and-second-yemenite-war-smaller-shock-1979>.

⁸¹Fred Halliday, *Revolution and Foreign Policy: The Case of South Yemen, 1967–1987* (Cambridge, UK, 1990),

⁸²Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, 724.

intimately linked. Both form part of a wider policy of salvaging American influence in the area after Iran'.⁸³

This was not mere rhetoric. During the Yemen crisis, Brzezinski outlined a 'Consultative Security Framework for the Middle East'. When identifying 'the basic sources of instability' in the area, the national security advisor listed the Arab-Israeli conflict first, followed by 'political radicalism', Soviet encroachment, and economic disparities. Brzezinski warned that 'Another major setback to U.S. policy in the area—such as [the] collapse of Camp David, the fall of Sadat, political instability in Saudi Arabia . . . could put the region dangerously out of control.'⁸⁴ The Carter administration's concern for regional stability—the impetus for its securitisation efforts—was therefore directly tied to the rejectionist threat.

Brzezinski's security framework entailed a series of bilateral relationships with and between those countries sharing common security interests with the United States and each other. This framework—different from a formal alliance—would consist of a 'core' including Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, followed by Sudan, Turkey and (after it stabilised) Iran. His proposal entailed (1) concluding Egyptian-Israeli peace, (2) containing and resolving the Palestinian problem, (3) establishing a security framework and (4) launching a regional development campaign. All these factors 'are interrelated and must be advanced to a substantial degree'. Additionally, the West had to reduce its dependence on Middle Eastern oil, and the United States needed better force projection into the region. Several actions Brzezinski proposed plainly connected the peace process and efforts to stabilise the region, including the need to complete the Egyptian-Israeli treaty and broaden the peace process; to improve Egyptian military capacity against Libya; to review options for covert and overt operations against the PDRY and Libya; and to engage Syria, Iraq, and Iran.⁸⁵

Brzezinski mentioned Iran a handful of times in the entire seven-page document, whereas the rejectionists came up repeatedly. While Brzezinski acknowledged in his first sentence that 'The fall of the Shah's regime . . . has added a new and dangerous element to the crisis in the Middle East', he worried about contingencies connected not to Iran, but, in many cases, to the Arab-Israeli peace process, the Arab radicals, and the Soviets. Indeed, Brzezinski's only other significant reference to Iran—the proposal to contact the new regime after stabilisation—suggests he *expected* stabilisation and the resumption of relations.⁸⁶

President Carter temporarily held off on Brzezinski's suggestions so as to focus on other priorities like SALT II and relations with China.⁸⁷ Brzezinski's proposal, however, is remarkable not only as a watershed policy document, but also for explicitly connecting all elements of US Middle East policy, reflecting an increasing awareness both that the peace process could not be extracted from its regional context and that its success was vital to regional stabilisation.

From mid-February through the conclusion of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty on 26 March, the Carter administration worked both to close the treaty and to gain the

⁸³Richard Burt, 'Intervention in Yemen War Signals Foreign Policy Shift', *New York Times* (18 March 1979); Sick to Aaron, 'Conversation with Richard Burt', 7 March 1979, NSA 15, Box 56, Folder 8, JCL.

⁸⁴Brzezinski, 'Consultative Security Framework for the Middle East (U)', 28 February 1979, US Declassified Documents Online. He drafted another version on 3 March.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷Njølstad, 'Shifting Priorities', 32.

moderates' support or acquiescence. Although Washington concluded the bilateral peace, it largely failed vis-à-vis the moderates. Nor did the US meaningfully engage the rejectionists, despite recognising Soviet hopes to use them as proxies. US officials seemingly assumed that the Arab world was split into immutable spheres of influence. Only the moderates were up for grabs, even as they drifted toward rejectionism. Although the logic of this policy of neglecting the radicals was never stated explicitly in this period, one infers it from the administration's records.

While US officials feared Egypt would return to the Arab camp if negotiations collapsed, the Egyptians were anxious to avoid isolation. Both Carter and Sadat considered regional security their top priority, with Carter considering the treaty 'the most stabilising action'. He also shared Sadat's confidence that other Arabs would follow Egypt: 'Once [the treaty] is done, the other Arab countries cannot reject Egypt. An Arab summit after the treaty could be fruitful. Without peace, things will deteriorate.'⁸⁸ Carter said this even though the last Arab summit had protracted the negotiations by pressuring Sadat. Sadat maintained his dismissive attitude toward his Arab counterparts, openly disdaining the Saudi and (especially) Jordanian leadership and boasting that the rejectionists could not touch him.⁸⁹

The Israelis did not share Sadat's confidence, hardening their position in several key areas, the most important being the 'priority of agreements' issue. They wanted the treaty to include language stipulating that it superseded all of Egypt's pre-existing defence agreements with the Arabs.⁹⁰ Without such assurances, they claimed, Egypt would be compelled to honour its prior commitments. Begin feared that 'when the Baghdad states [i.e. rejectionists] attack us, Egypt will have to join'.⁹¹ Israeli officials especially dreaded the Syrian-Iraqi alliance and sought stronger ties with the United States to balance against it.⁹² Thus, the rejectionists further prolonged the negotiations by prompting both sides to harden their positions.

Regional security became an increasingly important point of discussion in the negotiations. Both Sadat and Begin feared regional instability and the Soviet and radical threats.⁹³ Washington saw a consultative security framework as the panacea. Before Brzezinski met in Cairo with Sadat in early March, Carter instructed him to emphasise the dangers of 'any spread of radicalism' and Soviet encroachment in the region, as well as the benefits of the consultative security arrangements that could accompany peace. He also wanted to explicitly frame the deal as a means of combating Soviet influence, noting the treaty would be a 'blow to USSR & victory for me & U.S.'. Egypt was essential 'to recruit doubtful nations away from Soviet influence'.⁹⁴

⁸⁸Memcon, Carter, Vance, Khalil, Dayan, and Brzezinski, Washington, 25 February 1979, 2:03–2:45 p.m., and Backchannel Message, Brzezinski to Carter and Vance, Cairo, 6 March 1979, 1839Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 183 and 198.

⁸⁹Backchannel Message, Brzezinski (Cairo) to Carter and Vance (White House), 6 March 1979, 1839Z.

⁹⁰Strong, *Working in the World*, 189.

⁹¹Memcon, 'President's Meeting with Prime Minister Begin', Jerusalem, 11 March 1979, 11:30 a.m.–1:30 p.m.; 3:08–3:35 p.m.; 5–5:30 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 204.

⁹²Situation Room to Odom for Brzezinski, 19 March 1979 (SITTO 089), NSA 6, Box 52, Folder 4, JCL.

⁹³Memcon, 'Summary of President's Meeting with Prime Minister Begin', Washington, 2 March 1979, 10 a.m.–12:40 p.m., and AmEmbassy Cairo to Department of State, 'Meeting With Sadat—March 4', Cairo, 4 March 1979, 1536Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 190 and 191.

⁹⁴Emphasis in original. Handwritten Note, President Carter, undated [c. 5 March 1979], and Backchannel Message, Brzezinski (Cairo) to Carter and Vance (White House), Cairo, 6 March 1979, 1839Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 195 and 198; Memcon, 'President's Meeting with Prime Minister Begin', Jerusalem, 11 March 1979.

The Soviets noticed American efforts to exclude them from the region. In a letter to Carter, Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev denounced 'the road of separate deals', in large part because it would not, he argued, resolve the Palestinian problem. Affirming that the Soviets had legitimate interests in the region, including Arab-Israeli peace, he excoriated Carter for trying to exclude the USSR, vowing opposition at the United Nations. He also cautioned that Washington's efforts to create a security framework and increase its military presence in the Middle East 'would seriously destabilise the international situation'.⁹⁵

As the Egyptian-Israeli talks concluded, Washington anticipated outright Soviet and Arab rejection of the treaty but renewed its efforts to gain moderate Arabs' acquiescence.⁹⁶ In the short term, the White House prioritised protecting Egypt over broadening the peace process. The administration hoped to expand the peace process and prevent an Egyptian reversal, thereby stabilising the region.⁹⁷

But by all indications, the moderates would not cooperate. The Saudis were expected to bow to Syrian-Iraqi pressure at the upcoming Second Baghdad Summit.⁹⁸ They also insisted on PLO participation in the talks—*anathema* to the Israelis—as a minimum requirement for their support. The CIA assumed Jordan would follow the Saudi lead due to its need for funding, its fear of the Syrian-Iraqi axis on its border, the exclusion of Palestinians from the talks, and Israeli refusal to withdraw from the Occupied Territories.⁹⁹ Recognising he could not yet draw Jordan into the process, Carter asked King Hussein not to join other Arabs in acting against Egypt.¹⁰⁰

Meanwhile, the United States made no significant moves to gain acquiescence from the rejectionists, even though they posed the greatest threat to the peace process. While PLO leader Yasir Arafat showed interest in joining the negotiations, Israeli inflexibility precluded it.¹⁰¹ The rejectionist Arabs condemned the bilateral peace, with some threatening violence.¹⁰²

In a last-ditch effort to gain Saudi and Jordanian cooperation, Carter sent Brzezinski to the Middle East in mid-March, where he emphasised the Soviet and radical threats in the region and conceived of the United States' role in the Middle East in 'three broad aspects': a consultative security framework, cooperation with the Arabs, and a comprehensive peace. He indicated that US relations with both Saudi Arabia and Jordan would suffer if they failed to support the peace process. The Saudis agreed to implement the bare minimum sanctions against Egypt, promised not to cut direct aid to Egypt, and said they would try to moderate the Arab position at Baghdad.¹⁰³ King

⁹⁵Letter, Brezhnev to Carter, 19 March 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 221.

⁹⁶CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 'Possible Arab Acceptance of an Egyptian-Israeli Treaty', Washington, 27 February 1979, and Department of State to AmEmbassy Amman, 'Message for King Hussein', Washington, 7 March 1979, 1646Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 186 and 199.

⁹⁷Summary of Meetings, Washington, undated [8–13 March 1979], and Memcon, 'President Carter's Meeting with President Sadat', Alexandria, 9 March 1979, 7–8 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 202 and 203.

⁹⁸CIA Intelligence Memorandum, 'Arab Reactions', RPM 79–10152, Washington, 15 March 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 213.

⁹⁹CIA, 'Possible Arab Acceptance', 27 February 1979.

¹⁰⁰Carter to Hussein, Washington, 16 March 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 215.

¹⁰¹Turner to Vance, '[1½ lines not declassified] Fatah Leader Yasir Arafat', Washington, 15 March 1979, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 214.

¹⁰²Situation Room to US Liaison Office Riyadh (to Odom for Brzezinski), 17 March 1979 (SITTO 047), NSA 6, Box 52, Folder 3, JCL.

¹⁰³Memcon, Brzezinski et al. and Saud et al., Riyadh, 17 March 1979, 3:30–5:30 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, XVIII, doc. 188; Memcon, Brzezinski et al. and Fahd et al., Riyadh, 17 March 1979, 6:30–8:20 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 218.

Hussein was far more negative, refusing to support the peace treaty despite Brzezinski's warning.¹⁰⁴ Brzezinski's mission to the moderates had failed.

Subsequent developments confirmed what US officials already knew: the moderates, caught between their Arab commitments and their friendship with the United States, could not defend the peace process. It was insufficient on the Palestinian question and smacked of a separate peace.¹⁰⁵ Washington had given up on the rejectionists as too far gone. Like Brown, Brzezinski did not even visit Syria during his recent tour. He recommended that after the treaty was signed, a US pressure campaign should focus on the moderates, amongst which he included Algeria, a borderline rejectionist state, and (tellingly) excluded Jordan, forfeiting it as lost to the radicals.¹⁰⁶

On 26 March 1979, Carter, Sadat, and Begin signed the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty on the White House South Lawn. But the journey to regional stability was far from over.

The Need for 'Parallel Progress' (March 1979–80)

Arab reactions to the peace treaty were predictably negative. On 27 March 1979, the Arab League met again at Baghdad. The summit featured heated debates over the proposed punitive measures against Egypt, with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman (not in attendance) refusing to sever all ties with Egypt. This precipitated a spat between Arafat and the Saudi foreign minister, followed by a Libyan-Syrian-PLO walkout.¹⁰⁷

But the moderates ultimately chose Arab unity over their ties to the United States and Egypt.¹⁰⁸ The summit suspended Egypt's membership in the Arab League, cut economic and diplomatic ties with Egypt, moved the Arab League headquarters from Cairo to Tunis. The League announced its intention to push Egypt out of the Non-Aligned Movement, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and the Organisation of African Unity.¹⁰⁹ While the resolutions hurt Egypt, the Saudis asserted they 'worked hard to prevent [the] radicals [from] carrying the day'. They claimed that the summit communiqué was a 'compromise absorbing the furor of the Arab world, which was . . . [the] best that could have been expected', especially considering the rejectionists' failed attempt to embargo the United States.¹¹⁰ The radicals were furious, deploring the resolutions as 'the bare minimum on the scale of the vacillating, fearful, uncommitted Arab countries'.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴Memcon, Brzezinski et al. and Hussein et al., Amman, 18 March 1979, 3:15–4:30 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 219; Ashton, 'Taking Friends for Granted,' 642–643; Nigel Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan: A Political Life* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 206–207.

¹⁰⁵Situation Room to AmEmbassy Cairo (to Odom for Brzezinski), March 18, 1979 (SITTO 077), NSA 6, Box 52, Folder 4, JCL.

¹⁰⁶Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report #91,' 23 March 1979 and attachment, Plains Files, Box 29, Folder 3, JCL.

¹⁰⁷US Interest Section Baghdad to Secretary of State, 'Opening of Baghdad Ministerial Conference,' March 28, 1979 (Baghdad 694), AAD; Editorial Note, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 242; AmEmbassy Jidda to Secretary of State, '(C) Baghdad Meeting,' March 29, 1979 (Jidda 2602), AAD.

¹⁰⁸Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, 196.

¹⁰⁹Resolutions Passed at the Conference of Arab Foreign, Economy and Finance Ministers, Baghdad, March 31, 1979', in 'Documents and Source Material: Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict', *Journal of Palestine Studies* 8, no. 4 (Summer 1979): 163–167.

¹¹⁰AmEmbassy Jidda to Secretary of State, 'Baghdad Conference', 4 April 1979 (Jidda 2746), AAD.

¹¹¹Revolutionary Command Council Meeting after the Baghdad Conference of 1979', 27 March 1979, Cold War International History Project Digital Archive.

Although the Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement and the isolation of Egypt seemingly strengthened pan-Arab solidarity, the summit was a clarifying moment. As Michael Barnett suggests, while the Arabs demonstrated a modicum of unity 'by evicting Egypt from the Arab fold, the dialogue among the Arab states about Egypt's policies had reduced the scope of Arabism and allowed for greater particularism', beginning a process of fragmentation in the Arab world.¹¹² For instance, Oman, Sudan, and Somalia refused to sever relations with Egypt.¹¹³ Thus, Daniel Dishon argues, while the rejectionists 'succeeded in making the total rejection of the Accords and the peace treaty into a new political dogma passionately held in virtually the entire Arab world', they 'failed to forge . . . a bloc capable of taking concerted action'.¹¹⁴

Indeed, the rejectionist position began eroding, as Syrian-Iraqi ties weakened. Syria's foreign minister publicly expressed reservations about using the 'oil weapon', contradicting the more staunchly rejectionist Iraqis.¹¹⁵ Additionally, just before Baghdad II, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko met with Assad and Arafat in Damascus. Gromyko publicly condemned the separate peace, urged the Arabs to punish Egypt, and implied Soviet openness to working with moderates like Saudi Arabia.¹¹⁶ Curiously, Gromyko did not visit Baghdad, which US officials read as possibly signalling Iraqi wariness of Soviet intentions.¹¹⁷ Gromyko reportedly warned the Syrians against reacting too negatively to the peace treaty lest it spark a crisis. Syrian-Iraqi unification also seemingly 'cooled' due to friendly Syrian gestures toward the new Iranian regime.¹¹⁸

Meanwhile Soviet anxieties regarding US moves in the region increased, as reflected in Brezhnev's letter to Carter and Gromyko's warning to the Syrians. Around the same time, Moscow drastically escalated arms exports to Syria.¹¹⁹ Soviet irritation over the Middle East joined with general concerns about deteriorating superpower relations, as Brezhnev and Carter quarrelled over US exercises simulating nuclear war.¹²⁰

As mutual suspicion grew between the superpowers, US policymakers increasingly worried about threats to the continuation of the peace process, including terrorism against the United States, Israel and especially Egypt. The US Embassy in Cairo observed that 'Syria, Iraq, Libya, and the PLO, even Jordan, have as a primary objective the overthrow of Sadat', illustrating continued American awareness of the rejectionist threat.¹²¹

¹¹²Barnett, *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, 200; Ghassan Salame, 'Inter-Arab Politics: The Return of Geography', in *The Middle East Ten Years After Camp David*, ed. William B. Quandt (Washington, DC, 1988), 319-356.

¹¹³Elie Podeh and Onn Winckler, 'The Boycott That Never Was: Egypt and the Arab System, 1979-1989', Durham Middle East Paper 72 (December 2002), 3.

¹¹⁴Daniel Dishon, 'Inter-Arab Relations', *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, vol. III, 1978-1979 ed. Colin Legume et al. (New York, NY, 1980), 234.

¹¹⁵'Foreign Minister Khaddam Interviewed on Mideast Situation', FBIS v. 4 Apr 79 (2 April 1979), NSA 25, Box 88, Folder 9, JCL.

¹¹⁶AmEmbassy Moscow to Secretary of State, 'Gromyko Takes Tough Approach in Damascus', 26 March 1979 (Moscow 7372), AAD; Grinevskii, *Tainy sovetskoi diplomatii*, 228-232.

¹¹⁷US Interest Section Baghdad to Secretary of State, 'Gromyko Visit to Syria: Iraqi Perspective', 28 March 1979 (Baghdad 689), AAD.

¹¹⁸AmEmbassy Algiers to Secretary of State, 'Syria, Iraq and Other Middle Eastern Topics', 29 March 1979 (Algiers 911), AAD.

¹¹⁹Seale with McConville, *Asad of Syria*, 311; Salame, 'The Return of Geography', 333.

¹²⁰US Translation, Brezhnev to Carter, 13 April 1979, and Carter to Brezhnev, 20 April 1979, Plains Files, Box 17, Folder 12, JCL; Secretary of State to US Mission in the Sinai, et al., 'INTSUM 775—March 26, 1979', 27 March 1979 (State 75636), and AmEmbassy Moscow to Secretary of State, '(U) Senior Soviet Apparatchik on Detente: Healthy in Europe, Hurting Elsewhere', 30 March 1979 (Moscow 7891), AAD.

¹²¹State 75636; Embassy Cairo to Department of State, 'An Overview of Destabilizing Forces in Egypt', Cairo, 27 April 1979, 1855Z, *FRUS*, 1977-1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 247.

Despite these concerns, American engagement with the rejectionists shortly after the Second Baghdad Summit remained limited and unrelated to the peace process, focusing on economic relations instead.¹²² Instead, Washington's efforts primarily concentrated on Saudi Arabia, the linchpin of its Middle East policy.¹²³ But Saudi-American relations, already tense before the treaty, bottomed out. A 15 April *Washington Post* article on divisions within the royal house claimed that Crown Prince Fahd's influence was declining.¹²⁴ The piece brought matters to a head, but Saudi anger over media criticism was just the tip of the iceberg.¹²⁵ Despite American overtures, the Saudis cut diplomatic ties with Egypt and withdrew aid, breaking their earlier promises.¹²⁶ Even then, US appeals for the Saudis and other moderates to oppose Egypt's expulsion from the Organisation of the Islamic Conference in early May had some effect, as its membership was only suspended.¹²⁷

US officials assumed the Saudis needed reassurance of their security against external threats before they would cooperate with the peace process.¹²⁸ Washington also tried to facilitate Saudi-Egyptian dialogue, but prospects of success dimmed considerably with the 14 May Saudi decision to dissolve the Arab Organisation for Industrialisation (AOI), a defence cooperative between Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.¹²⁹ This crippled Egyptian arms production, deepening Egypt's isolation from the Arab world and its dependence on the United States.¹³⁰ The AOI's dissolution increased Sadat's concerns about internal unrest and external isolation. He and Vice President Hosni Mubarak convinced Carter to consider increasing aid to ensure the Egyptian military's loyalty.¹³¹

Beyond inter-Arab divisions, Carter had a larger problem on his hands: the Soviet Union. He and Brezhnev met for the first time in Vienna, Austria in June 1979 to discuss

¹²²For example, US-Libyan relations in this period were largely confined to difficulties regarding export licenses and vehicle sales. See Ronald Bruce St. John, *Libya and the United States: Two Centuries of Strife* (Philadelphia, PA, 2002), 111; Owen to Brzezinski (and attachment), 24 May 1979, NSA 25, Box 61, Folder 2, JCL; and Brzezinski to Carter, 'NSC Weekly Report #99', 1 June 1979, Plains Files, Box 28, Folder 4, JCL.

¹²³David M. Wight, *Oil Money: Middle East Petrodollars and the Transformation of US Empire, 1967–1988* (Ithaca, NY, 2021), 200–208.

¹²⁴Jim Hoagland, 'U.S. Sees Signs Saudi Leadership May Be Shifting: Power of Prince Fahd, a Key to U.S. Policy, Seen Waning', *Washington Post*, 15 April 1979.

¹²⁵Two untitled sets of notes, undated [23 April 1979], NSA 15, Box 46, Folder 6, JCL. See Secretary of State (Christopher) to AmEmbassy Belgrade (Newsom), 'US-Saudi Relations', 25 April 1979 (State 103580), AAD; and 'Saudi uncertainties', *Foreign Report*, 25 April 1979.

¹²⁶Jim Hoagland, 'Saudis Break Cairo Ties But No Aid Cutoffs Seen', *Washington Post*, 24 April 1979; Department of State to AmEmbassy London, 'Letter to Prince Saud', Washington, 29 April 1979, 1721Z, and US Liaison Office Riyadh to Department of State, 'Saudi Arabia Withdraws Offer of Funding of F-5s for Egypt', Riyadh, 7 May 1979, 1055Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 248 and 251.

¹²⁷'Islamic Conference Suspends Egyptians', *New York Times*, 10 May 1979; AmEmbassy Rabat to Secretary of State, 'Moroccan Strategy for Fez Islamic Conference', 4 May 1979 (Rabat 3054), AAD.

¹²⁸Minutes of a Special Coordination Committee Meeting, 'Middle East Security Issues', Washington, 11 May 1979, 3:30–4:20 p.m., and Summary, 'PRC Meeting on Saudi Arabia', 27 April 1979, 3–4:30 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, docs. 23 and 190.

¹²⁹Department of State to AmEmbassy Jidda, 'Letter to Khalid', Washington, 11 May 1979, 2249Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 254; Secretary of State to AmEmbassy Cairo, 'Saudi-Egyptian Relations', 12 May 1979 (State 120533), AAD; Christopher S. Wren, 'Saudis Scuttle a Billion-Dollar Arms Consortium With Factories in Egypt', *New York Times*, 15 May 1979.

¹³⁰Carter, 'Telephone conversation with President Sadat', 25 May 1979, and Telcon, Carter and Sadat, 25 May 1979, 8:40–8:42 a.m., Plains Files, Box 1, Folder 25, JCL; US Consulate Alexandria to Department of State, 'Alexandria Negotiations: Discussion of U.S. Role,' Alexandria, 12 June 1979, 0530Z, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, doc. 261.

¹³¹Brzezinski to Brown, 'Military Assistance for Egypt,' Washington, 12 June 1979, Sadat to Carter, undated, and Memcon, Carter et al. and Mubarak, Washington, 11 June 1979, 5:30–6:20 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. IX.2, docs. 262, 259, and 260.

bilateral relations and sign the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks Agreement (SALT II).¹³² Carter blamed the breakdown of his initial comprehensive approach to the Middle East peace talks on the rejectionists. In return, Brezhnev accused Carter of violating the October 1977 Soviet-American Joint Communiqué and following ‘an anti-Arab policy’, arguing ‘that the Egyptian-Israeli treaty had failed to tranquilise the Middle Eastern situation, but it has aggravated it’.¹³³ He also promised to oppose the treaty at the United Nations.¹³⁴ Brezhnev had made it clear that the Soviets wanted the Camp David process to fail, because of their exclusion from it. After the Vienna Summit, Soviet and Arab rejectionist opposition to American Middle East policy drastically increased as détente collapsed.¹³⁵

With the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty signed, the peace process moved into its next phase: the Palestinian autonomy talks, aimed at working out the details of a Palestinian ‘self-governing authority’ in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Beginning 25 May 1979, both sides agreed to conclude a deal within a year. It quickly became apparent, however, that the Israelis would not allow the creation of any Palestinian entity, nor accede to Palestinian participation in the talks, despite Egyptian efforts.¹³⁶ Carter’s reluctance to force Israeli concessions and his need to focus on other issues in the Middle East made it impossible to expand the talks into a comprehensive peace.¹³⁷ Additionally, it increased the moderate Arabs’ resistance to joining a pro-Western security framework.

Meanwhile, Washington pivoted toward more pressing issues in ‘Southwest Asia’. Throughout the summer and fall, American policymakers directly connected the peace process with security and stability in the region, especially due to the loss of Iran and the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. Meetings in late June 1979 concluded, first, that ‘the United States has vital interests in the Middle East area and the Soviet Union, by comparison, does not’ and therefore the United States needed a preponderance of power therein; and, second, that ‘the military aspect is only half the equation . . . the other half is the need to strengthen and accelerate the peace process’.¹³⁸ ‘All of our actions on the security side are futile’, Brzezinski said, ‘unless there is parallel progress on the Camp David accords’. Drawing out the peace process, he and other US officials realised, risked radicalising the moderate Arabs.¹³⁹

The autonomy talks ultimately failed to produce a deal, let alone one that could broaden the peace process. Nevertheless, Washington continued trying to secure the region against radicalism and Soviet encroachment through a series of bilateral security

¹³² Andrei Mikhailovich Aleksandrov-Agentov, *Ot Kollontai do Gorbacheva. Vospominaniia diplomata, sovetnika A. A. Gromyko, pomoshchnika L. I. Brezhneva, Iu. V. Andropova, K. U. Chernenko i M. S. Gorbacheva* [From Kollontai to Gorbachev: Reminiscences of the diplomat and advisor A. A. Gromyko, aide to L. I. Brezhnev, Yu. V. Andropov, K. U. Chernenko, and M. S. Gorbachev] (Moscow, RU, 1994), 237–238; Grinevskii, *Tainy sovetskoi diplomatii*, 258–263.

¹³³ Memcon, ‘Fourth Plenary Meeting International Issues’, Vienna, 17 June 1979, 5:30–7:20 p.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. VI, doc. 204.

¹³⁴ Memcon, ‘Carter-Brezhnev Private Meeting’, Vienna, 18 June 1979, 10–11:30 a.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. VI, doc. 206.

¹³⁵ Allison, ‘Through the Cracks of Détente,’ 118–182.

¹³⁶ Jeremy Pressman, ‘Egypt, Israel, and the United States at the Autonomy Talks, 1979’, *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 33, no. 3 (2022): 543–565.

¹³⁷ Anziska, ‘Autonomy as State Prevention’; Anziska, *Preventing Palestine*, 135–136; Madfai, *Jordan, the United States and the Middle East Peace Process*, 49–50; Strieff, *Jimmy Carter and the Middle East*, 161–180.

¹³⁸ Brzezinski to Carter, ‘NSC Weekly Report #101’ 22 June 1979, Plains File, Box 28, Folder 4, JCL.

¹³⁹ Minutes of Policy Review Committee Meetings, ‘Middle East Security and US Military Presence (S)’, Washington, 21 June 1979, 1:30–2:30 p.m. and 22 June 1979, 9:15–10 a.m., *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, doc. 26. See also CIA, ‘Changes in the Middle East: Moscow’s Perceptions and Options’, PA 79-10230, June 1979, CIA FOIA.

deals and arms sales with Oman, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the late June 1979 meetings signalled growing US concern about potential Soviet encroachment into the Middle East, followed by the radical Arab threat and the possible radicalisation of the moderates.¹⁴¹ Iran, by contrast, was barely mentioned, as the United States sought rapprochement with the Khomeini regime; indeed, Iran would not return to the NSC agenda until October 1979—just before the hostage crisis began.¹⁴²

Anxiety about Soviet and radical threats to American ‘vital interests’ in the region continued through the remainder of Carter’s presidency, and indeed, formed the crux of what came to be known as the ‘Carter Doctrine,’ promulgated in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979: ‘An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force’.¹⁴³ This paved the way for a more interventionist Middle East policy and, coupled with the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, sounded the death knell of détente.

Conclusion

Beginning with the First Baghdad Summit, the Arab rejectionists presented serious challenges to US Middle East policy. Not only did they seek to block the peace process, but they also contributed to the growing instability in the region, revealing dangers for US policy just outside Brzezinski’s ‘Arc of Crisis.’ Rejectionist activity and Soviet encroachment in the Middle East led US policymakers to increasingly link the peace process with regional security, as they sought to reassure their friends that they would not share Iran’s fate. Despite the radicals’ clear role in prompting this policy shift, Washington failed to engage them meaningfully, instead focusing on the moderates, especially Saudi Arabia. One wonders whether more bold action by the United States on the Palestinian issue would have induced greater cooperation by some ‘rejectionists’.

This lack of engagement stemmed from the growth of Cold War thinking within the Carter administration, which increasingly viewed the Middle East in terms of superpower competition. After the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, this perspective dominated Carter’s foreign policy. The mindset that began as a response to the detection of the ‘Arc of Crisis’ in December 1978 intensified in the following months; the consultative security framework and the Carter Doctrine merely formalised it.

The rejectionist role in the hardening of US policy toward the Middle East, hitherto obscured, is now clearer. Washington feared Moscow’s growing influence in the region. While the Carter administration desired Arab-Israeli peace for its own sake, it also aimed to use the peace process to keep the Soviets out of the area, especially by using the trust gained through that process to build

¹⁴⁰See, for example, Archer Allen Montague, ‘A More Muscular Foreign Policy: Saudi Arabia and the Militarization of US Middle East Policy, 1979–80’ (Master’s thesis, North Carolina State University, 2007); and John Bernell White, Jr., ‘Breaking the Strategic Glass: The Carter Administration and Oman, 1977–1980’, *Journal of Cold War Studies* (forthcoming).

¹⁴¹Minutes of PRC Meetings, ‘Middle East Security and US Military Presence’, 21 June 1979, 1:30–2:30 p.m. and 22 June 1979, 9:15–10 a.m.

¹⁴²Emery, ‘United States Iran Policy,’ 621.

¹⁴³Address by President Carter on the State of the Union Before a Joint Session of Congress, Washington, 23 January 1980, *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. I, doc. 138; *FRUS*, 1977–1980, vol. XVIII, docs. 45–48.

a consultative security framework. That framework, however, failed to fully materialise, in part because of the rejectionists. First, the radicals, backed by the Soviets, would not join such a framework. Second, the radicals pressured the moderate Arab states to act against (or at least stay out of) the Egyptian-Israeli peace process and the subsequent Palestinian autonomy talks, while increasing Egyptian and Israeli anxieties and slowing *their* progress toward peace. This latter point combined with Israeli intransigence to ensure that the peace process could not expand beyond the bilateral Egyptian-Israeli agreement. This meant that the moderate Arabs could not cooperate with the American consultative security framework plan.

As this article has demonstrated, the rejectionist threat played a crucial role in American anxieties concerning the Middle East, from the threat to Saudi Arabia to the disruption of the peace process. In fact, while the Iranian Revolution precipitated Brzezinski's formulation of the consultative security framework, most of the perceived threats in the region emanated from the rejectionists and the Soviets—not Iran. Therefore, the radical Arabs were a significant, if neglected, factor in the formulation of the Carter administration's Middle East policy. They helped usher in both the turn toward interventionism and the continued deterioration of Soviet-American détente, setting the stage for more than forty years of American policy toward the Middle East.

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