

American History: Carter Brings Egypt, Israel Together in Peace Treaty

AP
Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, left, shakes hands with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin as President Jimmy Carter looks on at Camp David, Maryland, in September 1978



STEVE EMBER:
Welcome to THE MAKING OF A NATION – American history in VOA Special English. I'm Steve Ember.

Today, we tell about the administration of the thirty-ninth president of the United States, Jimmy Carter.

(MUSIC)

It is January twentieth, nineteen seventy-seven. Inauguration Day. America's newly elected president, Jimmy Carter, is on his way to the White House after his swearing-in ceremony at the Capitol building.

But the new president is not riding in a car. He is walking. His wife, Rosalynn, and his daughter, Amy, walk with him. Crowds along Pennsylvania Avenue cheer. Bands play.

On this cold day in Washington, Americans look to the future. Watergate -- the crisis that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon -- is several years in the past. The Vietnam War is history, too.

Republican Gerald Ford served the remaining years of Nixon's term. Many people believe he brought respect and order back to the government. Yet he lost the office to Democrat Jimmy Carter in the election of nineteen seventy-six.

The nation still has problems. Unemployment is high. So is inflation. But the future of the nation looks bright. Jimmy Carter feels sure about his future, too. On the day before his inauguration, he said:

CARTER: "I do feel that the people of this nation and, I think, the entire world wish me well and want to see me succeed as president. And that gives me a sense of reassurance and confidence. I think I'm ready now to be president."

During the election campaign, Carter often said he would be different from other presidents. He told voters he was not a member of the Washington political establishment. So he would do things in his own independent way.

(MUSIC)

Carter was from Georgia, in the Deep South of the United States. There had not been a president born in the South in more than one hundred years. Carter studied nuclear engineering and attended the United States Naval Academy. He planned to stay in the Navy. Then his father died. And he decided to return to Georgia to operate the family peanut farm.

Carter began his political life on the committee that supervised schools in his hometown of Plains, Georgia. He also served in other local offices. In nineteen-sixty-six, he failed to win the Democratic nomination for governor of Georgia. For the next four years, he traveled around the state gathering support. He won the next election.

As governor, Carter earned praise for reorganizing the state government. He also reformed state programs dealing with prisons and mental health care. In nineteen-seventy-two, he offered himself as a candidate for vice president with presidential candidate George McGovern. But the Democratic Party chose someone else.

Carter did not wait long to begin his next political move. He would try to win the Democratic presidential nomination in nineteen seventy-six.

Jimmy Carter was hardly known outside the state of Georgia. Political experts gave him little chance. Even his mother was surprised to learn that he wanted to be president. "President of what?" she asked.

But the farmer and former governor had a plan. He would try to win his party's primary elections in the South. He believed this would give him enough support at the party convention to win the nomination.

Other Democratic candidates tried to stop him, but his plan worked. By the time of the convention, he had enough support to win the nomination on the first ballot.

In the general election, Carter defeated President Ford by almost two percent of the popular vote. He lost in the West and Middle West, but won the South and Northeast.

(MUSIC)

President Carter believed strongly in human rights. He hoped he could use his new position to support human rights throughout the world. On this and other issues, he was not afraid of being criticized when he believed he was right.

For example, he believed it was right for the United States to end its control of the Panama Canal. He won Congressional support for treaties to give control to Panama by the year two-thousand. He believed it was right to give diplomatic recognition to Communist China. And he believed it was right to continue negotiations with the Soviet Union about limiting nuclear weapons, even though he denounced human rights violations there.

In nineteen-seventy-nine, Carter and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev signed the strategic arms limitation treaty known as SALT Two. However, Carter decided not to send the treaty to the Senate for approval after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan later that year.

(MUSIC)

One of the finest moments of Carter's presidency took place at Camp David. That is the holiday home of American presidents. There, in March nineteen seventy-nine, President Anwar Sadat of Egypt met with Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel. They signed a peace treaty ending thirty years of war between their countries.

JIMMY CARTER: "We're privileged to witness tonight a significant achievement in the cause of peace, an achievement none thought possible a year ago, or even a month ago, an achievement that reflects the courage and wisdom of these two leaders."

Both men said the treaty would not have been possible without President Carter's help.

President Carter was not as successful in dealing with the economy. High unemployment and inflation continued. The federal deficit increased, although he had promised to end it. And there was a shortage of gasoline.

The shortage resulted when oil-producing countries limited production and exports. Carter urged American companies to develop new sources of energy, in addition to oil. He said the United States needed to do this, because it could not always depend on getting enough oil from other countries.

JIMMY CARTER: "This intolerable dependence on foreign oil threatens our economic independence and the very security of our nation. The energy crisis is real. It is worldwide. It is a clear and present danger to our nation. These are facts and we simply must face them.

"I am tonight setting a clear goal for the energy policy of the United States. Beginning this moment, this nation will never use more foreign oil than we did in 1977 -- never. From now on, every new addition to our demand for energy will be met from our own production and our own conservation. The generation-long growth in our dependence on foreign oil will be stopped dead in its tracks right now."

(MUSIC)

During the gasoline shortage, Americans had to wait in long lines to buy fuel. They did not like it and were angry.

Many were even more angry about a different situation. Like the gasoline shortage, it was a result of actions in another distant place.

SAM DONALDSON, ABC NEWS: "Good evening. The U.S. embassy in Tehran has been invaded and occupied by Iranian students. The Americans inside have been taken prisoner."

(MUSIC)

On November fourth, nineteen seventy-nine, Muslim extremists in Iran seized the American Embassy in Tehran. They took many hostages, including more than sixty Americans. The extremists said they were punishing the United States for being friendly with ousted Iranian leader, Shah Reza Pahlavi.

The extremists refused to negotiate. They refused to release the hostages. In early April nineteen-eighty, President Carter broke off diplomatic relations with Iran. He then ordered American military forces to try to rescue the hostages in Tehran. The operation failed. A sandstorm caused two of the aircraft to crash into each other. They went down in the desert hundreds of kilometers away.

The failed rescue attempt had a major effect on the presidency of Jimmy Carter. Many Americans felt it showed that he could not do the job. Their respect for him continued to decrease as the hostages continued to be held.

Other things were beginning to go wrong, too. The president's younger brother, Billy, admitted receiving a large amount of money from Libya. He took the money in exchange for supporting Libyan interests with American lawmakers. His mistake was that he did not list his name as a representative of a foreign government.

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Nineteen eighty was a presidential election year in the United States. President Carter was expected to be the candidate of the Democratic Party. His chances were almost ruined because of the situation in Iran. Carter hoped that concern for the hostages would unite the country behind him. Instead, support turned to blame.

Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts believed he could defeat Carter for the nomination. Kennedy won several important Democratic primary elections. But that was not enough. The party renominated Carter. Kennedy offered Carter his support, but not very strongly. This left the party divided.

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The Republicans got ready to win back the White House. They hoped to do it with a strong appeal to American voters. The appeal came from a man who would become one of America's most popular presidents -- Ronald Reagan.

That will be our story next week.

You can find our series online with transcripts, MP3s, podcasts and pictures at voaspecialenglish.com. You can also follow us on Facebook and Twitter at VOA Learning English. I'm Steve Ember, inviting you to join us again next week for THE MAKING OF A NATION -- American history in VOA Special English.

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