



SPECIAL DOCUMENT

THE CAMP DAVID PAPERS

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The Camp David Papers, a firsthand account of the July 2000 summit and the most detailed that exists to date, were written by Akram Hanieh, editor in chief of the Palestinian daily al-Ayyam, close adviser of Palestinian Authority head Yasir Arafat, and a member of the Palestinian team. Published in Arabic within weeks of the negotiations, the papers are important not only for their detail about the content of the negotiating positions, the unfolding of the talks, and the sometimes dramatic exchanges between President Bill Clinton and Arafat, but also for the impressions they convey of the players, Clinton's style, the atmosphere, the "rules of the game," the American-Israeli negotiating dynamic, and so on.

Though the descriptions of the proposals presented and summit results are largely in line with what has emerged from other sources, there are certain differences. For example, in contrast to the official U.S.-Israeli version that the parties had reached substantial agreement on all the final status issues except Jerusalem, Hanieh shows that the sides remained far apart, especially on the refugee issue, which the author characterizes as "the greatest failure of the summit." The papers also highlight the Palestinian side's repeated warnings that a summit was premature. Moreover, coming several months before the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada, the papers' warnings on Jerusalem seem prophetic. At one point, for example, the author comments, "The Americans immediately adopted Israel's position on the Haram, seemingly unaware of the fact that they were toying with explosives that could ignite the Middle East and the Islamic world."

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THE ROAD TO THE SUMMIT

The Americans never listened to Palestinian advice.

In June 2000, Dennis Ross, the United States's peace envoy to the Middle East, arrived in the region a few days before U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and members of the U.S. advisory team, mainly State Department and White House National Security Council staff. The purpose of the visit was to discuss the possibility of convening a trilateral summit in the United States aimed at concluding a final status agreement between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel.

The Palestinian position was clear and candid. During his two meetings with the American officials, President Yasir Arafat said in effect, "Conditions are not yet ripe for holding a summit. Nothing was achieved in the earlier Elat talks, and no progress was made in the Stockholm channel either." He added that several more weeks of intensive negotiations would be needed before being able to move toward convening a trilateral summit.

The next day, President Arafat held a luncheon in honor of Secretary Albright and her team at his headquarters in Ramallah. At the end of the luncheon, he turned to Albright and said, "Madame Secretary, if you issue an invitation to a summit, and if it is held and fails, this will weaken the Palestinian people's hopes for achieving peace. Let us not weaken these hopes." Another meeting took place that same day during which the Palestinians repeatedly warned that the Palestinian problem was too complicated to be resolved in a hastily convened summit. They explained that it was doomed to fail if Israel's positions did not change, that there are Palestinian red lines that cannot be crossed. Some Palestinians went so far as to tell the Americans not to "get yourselves into a 'New Geneva'" (the failed summit between the late Syrian president Hafiz al-Asad and President Clinton).

The Palestinian side emerged from the meetings with the impression that Albright had been convinced that more preparations were needed before convening a summit. But that same evening, Secretary Albright met with Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak. This, combined with deliberations with her own team, was more than enough for her to recommend that President Clinton issue invitations to a summit.

Even when President Arafat was called by President Clinton after Albright's return to Washington, he repeated the message not to convene the summit yet and again stressed the need for intensive preparatory talks. During that call, the American president promised to confer with Barak before making a final decision.

On 4 July, President Clinton called again to say that Barak had "new offers" but did not agree to holding any preparatory talks. Clinton had therefore decided to issue invitations to a Middle East peace summit, which would open at Camp David on 11 July. During that same conversation, President Arafat tried three times to clarify his concerns about the consequences, but it seemed the White House had decided to adopt the recommendations presented earlier by Albright, Ross, and National Security Adviser Sandy Berger. The delegations were soon formed, and entry visas to the United States were quickly processed. The Middle East was about to witness a new adventure in American diplomacy.

The American peace team members who had rejected Palestinian advice had clearly been in tune with the Israeli side. The two must have come to a joint assessment that a permanent agreement ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the root of the Arab-Israeli conflict, could be reached. The Israelis, along with some on the American team, based their analysis on the assumption that, given the weakness of their situation, the Palestinian leadership needed an achievement such as statehood and would be willing to pay a high price for it. They also assumed that the Palestinians did not enjoy enough Arab support to withstand pressure. . . .

Every time the Palestinians told the Americans that it was a terrible mistake to assume that Yasir Arafat would sign an agreement that did not satisfy minimum national Palestinian rights, the response was skepticism and knowing smiles. And when they were told that the Palestinian revolution had risen from the refugee camps of the diaspora, and that any agreement that did not include a just solution for the refugee

problem would engender an even stronger revolution, the response was a silence that brooked no argument.

It was thus that Clinton, relying on the recommendations of his aides, went to the summit confident that he could achieve a historic agreement that would crown his political career. As for Ehud Barak, he attended a summit that he himself had pressed for, and this after having ended the Stockholm channel negotiations after the second round. Shlomo Ben-Ami, internal security minister and head of the Israeli negotiating team, told his Palestinian counterpart, Abu Ala' [Ahmad Qurai', speaker of the Palestinian Council], that Barak had many ideas but would only reveal them at a trilateral summit in the United States. After that, the American code word for promoting the summit became the "rabbits" that "Barak the magician" was expected to pull out of his hat.

THE RULES OF THE GAME AT CAMP DAVID

President Arafat and his negotiating team landed at Camp David by helicopter on Tuesday, 11 July, coming from Andrews Air Force Base. Upon their arrival, they were assigned to cabins scattered around the thickly wooded retreat. Yasir Arafat was lodged in Birch cabin, which is where Menachem Begin stayed in 1978. Barak stayed in Dogwood. Committee meetings were held at Holly, where Sadat had stayed. Meals were served at Laurel.

The Americans immediately laid down the rules of the game. Some of these were dictated by the nature of the place: there were to be no suits and ties, but casual clothing. It seems that the Americans assumed that the absence of formalities would break down barriers between the two sides. Daily routines reinforced this. Meals were taken together, allowing the delegations to mingle and chat informally. The negotiators' leisure time provided opportunities for unofficial meetings: a delegate could meet Madeleine Albright jogging on one of the trails or find that Bill Clinton or Barak's chief of staff Danny Yatom was working out on the next machine in the gym. The American hosts also attempted to build social relations between negotiators: Albright once invited delegates to a movie, and on another occasion the two sides were invited to play a basketball game. As none of the Palestinian delegates showed up, the Israelis ended up playing with the Marines who guarded the compound.

One of the principal rules aimed at protecting the negotiations by imposing a media blackout. There was only one telephone for each delegation, and external calls were rarely transferred to delegation members. The only official source of information was a White House spokesman and sometimes a State Department spokesman, who held daily press conferences (at which nothing of importance was said) at a press center thirty minutes from Camp David. Although the Israeli delegation was deliberately leaking a lot of news, most of what appeared in the Arab, Israeli, and international press had nothing at all to do with what was actually happening at the Camp.

Palestinian and Israeli legal advisers and experts stayed in the buildings where press conferences were held. Two or three of them were permitted to travel daily to Camp David to meet with their delegations, but they were not permitted to move around the grounds and had to leave at a certain time. The Palestinian experts, who played an important role in the negotiations, consisted of cartographers, geographers, settlement experts, and young lawyers who had been preparing themselves for the last two years. This team was able to produce at a moment's notice working papers,

legal opinions, historical references and details, responses to Israeli legal arguments, and so on.

In terms of a work format, there were full committee meetings, meetings consisting of two negotiators from each side, and meetings between Albright and each delegation on specific topics. The Americans also relied on informal contacts between members of their own peace team and various delegates in order to explore positions on specific issues or try to move the sides closer to agreement.

The Americans were confident that the atmosphere generated by the site and the rules, combined with the decisive fact that the administration was bringing all its prestige and standing to bear, would create strong pressures on the negotiators to succeed in reaching an agreement. They did not seem to realize that the reality of the conflict was stronger than the unreal world they had created at Camp David.

When the helicopter carrying President Clinton landed on Tuesday afternoon, 11 July, the curtain was about to rise on a new act in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

THE SEARCH FOR AN HONEST BROKER

President Franklin D. Roosevelt once remarked that the president of the United States had to be the best actor in the country. Bill Clinton's consummate acting skills were clearly on display at Camp David. Watching him in action, one also sees a man who is very intelligent, hardworking, persistent, and endowed with a strong memory and overwhelming charisma. Behind all this there is also a broad cultural background, numerous human interests, and a driving interest in a range of issues. He is also good at breaking barriers. He would carry his own tray at Camp David village's Laurel Restaurant, serve himself from the buffet, and sit—as he twice did—with members of the Palestinian delegation having dinner on the balcony. He would easily initiate conversations, moving from an enthusiastic discussion of the importance and implications of genetic mapping, to analyzing his wife's chances for winning the Senate race in New York, to a trip to the Balkans and his impressions of the people he met there, and so on. He spoke about his decision to open the door for trade between the United States and Vietnam, in order to close the chapter haunting to so many Americans, and about his relationship with foreign statesmen and his vision of the international situation in the new century.

These personality traits connected him with President Arafat, with whom he shared a special relationship that began on the historic day of 13 September 1993, when Arafat, a "terrorist leader" just days before, arrived on the White House South Lawn to sign the Oslo Accord. The relationship grew over the next seven years, especially during the tenure of Benjamin Netanyahu. In particular, the two leaders were able to get to know each other during the Wye River talks, which went on for ten consecutive days. Throughout the tens of hours spent together, Clinton listened to President Arafat's explanation of the Palestinian narrative with all its suffering and aspirations.

The Palestinians saw in Clinton—who had confronted Netanyahu, effectively contributing to his fall, and who had addressed the Palestine National Council at a historic moment—a person who could listen and understand. Perhaps because they suffered, and still suffer, from the total pro-Israeli bias of the U.S. peace team, they were betting on—or had convinced themselves of—Clinton's objectivity.

From the very outset of the Camp David summit, it was clear that the American president was determined to succeed and that he had done his homework. The sum-

mit represented an additional “intensive course” for him on the minutiae of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, making him aware of the difference between Kufr Aqab and Wadi al-Juz, the organic relationship between the Musrara and Shaykh Jarrah quarters, and between Salah al-Din Street and Jerusalem’s Old City. It was clear that Clinton did not want to waste a minute. At the inaugural session, he emphasized his determination to work intensively. He tried to propose that meetings to discuss water, the economy, and other issues be held on a different level from the summit, in the buildings where the experts were staying. But this proposal was quickly abandoned after the Palestinians objected that the major issues of Jerusalem, refugees, land, borders, and security had to be dealt with first. The American president also tried in his opening speech to create a link between Camp David and the Okinawa summit he would soon be attending, promising huge financial support from the G-8 for any agreement the two sides would reach.

Throughout the summit, Clinton brought his personal influence to bear in a number of ways. There were daily, separate meetings with Arafat and Barak. Often he would meet with one or both leaders several times in one day. Clinton also used to attend at least part of the meetings of the refugees, land and border, and Jerusalem committees, though from the start he made it clear that he preferred that the Jerusalem issue, because of its sensitivity and complexity, be discussed at the leadership level.

At a later stage in the summit, Clinton developed the habit of summoning delegates from each committee to his cabin at Aspen to discuss their files. He resorted to this tactic intensively during the last two days. He once participated in a discussion about security issues with two delegates from each side that lasted from 11:00 P.M. until 5:00 A.M. Clinton did not try to hold meetings with the two leaders simultaneously except on the first night (to discuss procedural matters) and the final day (to agree on the statement declaring the summit’s failure).

In the various meetings, Clinton listened to the views of the two parties, discussed details, and sometimes tried to direct the discussion. During a meeting of the land and border committee, he tried to push the Palestinians to discuss a map the Israelis put forward showing the territories they wanted to annex. Abu Ala’ rejected the map, and Clinton left the meeting in anger.

In the last analysis, the American president was simply following what had become the traditional American role vis-à-vis the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which can be summarized in three points:

1. Washington exercises its role according to the needs, requirements, and concerns of the current Israeli government. From Day One, members of the Palestinian delegation were constantly bombarded with Barak’s coalition problems and subjected to the tired refrain, “If an agreement isn’t reached, Barak’s government will fall.” In the last days of the summit, the refrain became “If an agreement isn’t reached, Barak will form a national unity government.” These statements were repeated to the point that a Palestinian delegate asked angrily: “Is this a summit to salvage the peace process or to rescue Barak’s government?”
2. Washington accepts Israel’s main demands as givens that cannot be questioned. At Camp David, Clinton and his team did not re-

fute any major Israeli request on any negotiating issue, and whenever Clinton intervened, it was to make changes on secondary issues that did not alter the substance.

3. The American administration requires “flexibility” and “concessions” in equal measure from the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Any Israeli step should be matched by a Palestinian step. Such a policy ignores the fact that the Palestinians are the victims of Israeli aggression and that the land the Israelis are offering to “give up” is Palestinian land occupied by military force.

The observance during Camp David of these three basic principles had a number of results. First, the terms of reference for the peace process as defined by the U.S. administration at Madrid in 1991—i.e., UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace—were destroyed by the U.S. administration at Camp David. Not once did the American broker intervene to caution the Israeli side that insistence on keeping Palestinian territory contradicted the very terms of references of the process. On the contrary, the Americans embraced the Israeli demands and considered them a basis, if not a ceiling, for negotiations.

Second, in keeping with Henry Kissinger’s infamous pledge not to take any positions on the Arab-Israeli conflict without prior coordination with Israel, no proposal was presented to the Palestinian delegation by the American side that had not been cleared with Israel first. On the two occasions during the summit that the American team put forward ideas, President Arafat had objected, “Excuse me, these are not American ideas. They are Israeli ideas I received unofficially from the Israelis hours before I received them from you.”

Third, from the first day, the American team concentrated all its pressure on the Palestinian delegation. The Israeli delegation did back down from certain positions it had presented during the Stockholm negotiations, but the Americans made no attempt to exercise any pressure on the Israelis. The Israelis were humored like spoiled children.

Regarding the more sensitive issue of the holy places in Jerusalem, the Americans adopted the Israeli position. They then attempted to find a deceptive legal framework without much attention to Arab, Islamic, or Christian sensitivities and without seeming to realize the explosive nature of the Israeli arguments.

The Palestinians often felt that they were negotiating with a joint Israeli-American delegation. While the roles of Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger (whose only contribution to the summit was his demand that Jews be allowed to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque) were insignificant, the fingerprints of Dennis Ross were clear on every American document and suggestion. In a behavior more suited to schoolboys than officials directing the policy of the greatest world power, certain members of the American team even became grim-faced when negotiations

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were in a crisis and stopped returning greetings from members of the Palestinian delegation.

The Palestinians went to Camp David expecting to find an honest broker, but none appeared. They then lowered their expectations, content to make do with a mere broker. But even there, none could be found.

PEACE BY GALLUP POLL

"They are not ready for peace. Didn't I tell you?" This is what President Yasir Arafat told his delegation, more than once, within days of the summit's opening. For it was immediately clear that the Israeli delegation was not prepared to take the risks needed for a historic reconciliation that would end the conflict. Their minds were elsewhere. Domestic politics, petty interests, and electoral calculations overshadowed peace considerations, and Israeli opinion polls, statements by party leaders, and press commentaries had greater weight than reaching a historic peace agreement. Arafat's misgivings that he had tried to convey to the Americans about holding the summit turned out to be well-founded.

Concerns about protecting Knesset seats were reflected in the negotiations. It became customary for Palestinian delegates to have to listen to their Israeli counterparts complaining about Barak's performance and positions. The word "moderate" became an accusation that every Israeli negotiator tried to avoid lest his popularity suffer in the polls. And after the summit ended, it was ironic to hear certain Israeli negotiators—who at Camp David had listened like freshmen to Yasir Arafat talking about history and politics—bragging on Israeli television about what they had "said," "emphasized," and "made clear" to Arafat, whereas some had not opened their mouths during the talks. Others, who had attacked the Palestinians during Camp David for "missing the opportunity" to reach an agreement, could barely conceal their relief when the summit ended.

Three observations can be made concerning the Israeli negotiating performance at Camp David. First, Barak came to Camp David dreaming of reaching a "100 percent" Israeli peace. His positions, proposals, and maps showed not the slightest understanding of Palestinian demands and rights. The Israeli proposals confirmed that the Israeli establishment is still steeped in its mythologies and occupation mentality and is still unable to deal with the Palestinians as peace partners. Second, the Israeli proposals made no reference to international legality. Not a single international resolution was mentioned, not even the resolutions that are supposed to constitute the very basis of the peace process. Third, the Israeli negotiators hardly bothered to negotiate at all: despite sessions lasting tens of hours addressing most of the issues, every new sentence of the Israeli position came through American lips and papers.

What was strange was that the Israelis thought they could, with American support, impose their peace on the Palestinians. Strange, because the Palestinians knew that the Israeli security establishment had presented numerous reports to the government clearly indicating that the Palestinians would not yield on what they believed to be fundamental. Furthermore, many of Barak's envoys heard the Palestinian positions directly from Yasir Arafat himself. Two weeks before the summit, Barak asked Arafat to meet with Shlomo Ben-Ami, who was to present the Israeli positions on the final status issues. For four hours Arafat listened to Ben-Ami, and some of what he heard made him unable to sleep that night, confirming yet again his conviction that the Israelis were not serious about peace. The meeting took place in Nablus, and, among other things, Ben-Ami proposed that the issue of Jerusalem be postponed for two years. At that point, Arafat had interrupted him, saying, "Not even for two hours!"

During that same period, another Israeli envoy, Meretz leader Yossi Sarid, who had just resigned from Barak's government, visited Arafat in Ramallah. Arafat spelled out the Palestinian red lines. Sarid said that Barak was serious, but that the Palestinians

should not expect to get 100 percent of their demands. Like all the other Israeli envoys, he said that Barak had a “surprise,” but he would reveal it only at the summit.

So the Palestinians at Camp David kept waiting for Barak to pull the rabbit out of the hat. What they got was the following:

Refugees

The greatest failure of the summit was in the refugee committee. This is not surprising, since the refugee file is the “moment of truth.” This is the issue that is ruled by history, the issue that places Israel at the very heart of the Palestinian question and face to face with its victims, the witnesses to its crimes.

In the absence of seriousness on Israel’s part, the discussion revolved mostly around the past, not the present and future. And the Israeli and Palestinian visions of the past—and more particularly of the root of the conflict, the 1948 Palestinian Nakba—are in total conflict. It seems odd that to this day Israel can continue to deny its crime, despite all the evidence. There is a complete denial of Israeli responsibility for the Nakba. Instead, the Israeli delegation tried to convince the Palestinians that there had been no massacres or terror campaigns in 1948, that there had been no expulsions or wholesale destruction of villages. According to the delegates, it was the Arab countries who were to blame for the Nakba because they supposedly urged the Palestinians to leave their homes and wait for liberation—propaganda from the 1950s by now rejected by all serious historians, including Israeli ones. When the Palestinians presented the Israelis with memoirs and testimonies of their own generals, they rejected them.

So the refugee committee did not move one inch forward. Refusing to take any moral or legal responsibility for what happened, the Israelis were willing only to express sorrow over what befell the Palestinians as a result of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. And because any discussion of the right of return was taboo for Israel—in their eyes tantamount to declaring a war of destruction on the Israeli state—there could be no talk about a timetable for the implementation of return. All that Israel would discuss was compensation for the refugees—not from its pocket, but from the pocket of the international community, and part of the funds would be used to compensate Jews who came to Israel from Arab countries. Israel only committed itself to allowing several thousand Palestinians to return over a ten-year period through “family reunification” and “humanitarian cases.”

Land, Borders, and Security

These issues would sometimes be discussed in the borders committee and sometimes in the security committee, but whatever the venue, the mentality of occupation and control prevailed on the Israeli side. The Palestinians had to sit through the absurd theories of “the danger from the East” as the basis for the strong Israeli military presence in the West Bank. In other words, an outside threat was conjured up to justify the means to confront it—bases, patrols, and, finally, early-warning stations in the Jordan Valley along the Jordanian border. Israel would also impose strict restrictions on the military personnel and capabilities of the State of Palestine.

It was in these committees that the provocative Israeli maps were presented showing Israeli annexations ranging from 10 to 13.5 percent of the West Bank. The Palestinian side refused to deal with them. In brief, the focus was the three huge settlement blocs in the north, center, and south of the West Bank. These were fattened, their area

expanded, and they were connected to each other and to Israel by large areas of Palestinian land in such a way as to control Palestinian water resources in the West Bank. Clearly, the Israelis came to Camp David not in search of a language of dialogue with a neighbor and partner but to cement the gains from the 1967 War, to restructure and legalize the occupation.

Jerusalem

For the deliberations on Jerusalem, Barak, his ministers, and the members of his delegation assumed the garb of the most extreme fundamentalist Jews. Suddenly, secularists began talking a religious line avoided even by some Israeli rabbis. Suddenly, allowing Jews to pray in the Haram al-Sharif became an essential Israeli demand. What was more serious was that the American officials immediately adopted the position, seemingly unaware of the fact that they were toying with explosives that could ignite the Middle East and the Islamic world. Nor did they try to understand that they were adding a religious dimension to the conflict in such a way as to make a conflagration inevitable.

Based on the discussions, three factors appear to have guided Israel's concept of a solution on Jerusalem:

1. Israel's insistence on sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif was a constant in all the proposals put forward. To counter Palestinian rejection of Israeli control over the Haram, American legal experts came up with a number of convoluted "solutions." The first involved an international committee comprising the UN Security Council and Morocco (as head of the Organization of the Islamic Conference's Jerusalem Committee) that would give the State of Palestine custody of the Haram while Israel would retain sovereignty over it. Next came the "vertical sovereignty" formula, whereby the Palestinians would have "sovereignty" over the surface of the land on which the Haram stands, and Israel would have sovereignty under it. Finally, the experts returned to their offer of "custodial sovereignty" for the Palestinians and "residual sovereignty" for Israel. Asked what was meant by this, the jurists returned to the point of departure: Israeli sovereignty.
2. Ideally, Israel would like a Jerusalem without its Arab inhabitants. To this end, harsh living conditions would be created to encourage them to leave.
3. While talks focused on an open city, the actual Israeli and U.S. proposals involved fragmentation and division. Different systems would apply to different neighborhoods: for example, the rules that would apply to the Christian Quarter would not apply to Wadi al-Joz; what would apply in Suwwana would not apply in the Armenian Quarter. The Americans proposed a special system for the Old City, dividing it between Palestinian sovereignty over the Muslim and Christian Quarters (as defined by Israel and the United States) and Israeli sovereignty over the Armenian and Jewish Quarters and the Western Wall. The position regarding

the Haram would remain as is. Moreover, a form of functional “self-rule” was proposed for certain neighborhoods (to be defined by Israel) near the Old City, which could include Shaykh Jarrah, Suwwana, al-Tur, Salah al-Din Street, Damascus Gate, Ras al-Amud, and Silwan, along with complete or partial Palestinian sovereignty over less central neighborhoods such as Isawiyya, Shuafat, Bayt Hanina, Qalandia, Turi, Um Tuba, West Sawahara, Kufr Aqab, Semiramis—neighborhoods that in any case were not part of pre-1967 Jerusalem. A “special regime”—to be spelled out later—would apply to the Old City, where a “sovereign compound” for President Arafat and his administration would be near the Haram.

The Israeli delegation and the American peace team coordinated step by step and word by word. For the Palestinians, it was like a comedy routine in which the Americans would go through the motions of announcing a new idea and then asking the negotiators on both sides to consult their leaders about it. Not surprisingly, in all instances the Israeli negotiators would come back with an Israeli acceptance after conducting “consultations.”

Israel and the United States wanted to fabricate a “solution” and cash in with a “golden signature” from the Palestinians that would put an end to the conflict and give final legitimacy to Israel. But it was a solution that could not survive even for a minute.

THE SUMMIT ACCORDING TO JERUSALEM TIME

In the plane en route to Washington, Yasir Arafat knew that the battle ahead was going to be tough. He had preferred not to clash with the U.S. administration on a procedural matter such as holding the summit in order to save his strength for the confrontation that seemed inevitable given the collusion of American officials with the Israeli position. He was also very aware that the battle was on America’s home turf and that he was coming from an Arab world so divided that it could not even convene a summit to forge a united front or stand up to American pressures. But his instructions to his delegation were clear and decisive: “We want an honorable national solution in keeping with our positions. At Camp David, listen and discuss, and if you find a door ajar, try to open it. If you see a small opening, try to widen it. Though I am not at all optimistic, we do not have the luxury to waste any opportunities that could achieve our goals.”

At Camp David, Arafat would begin his day at 9:00 A.M., after having negotiated until 3:00 A.M. or 4:00 A.M., sometimes even 5:00 A.M. At breakfast, he would read the papers sent from the presidential headquarters (al-Muntada) in Gaza. These included official reports about the general situation in Palestine as well as urgent papers requiring his signature or recommendations. Then he would go through tens of papers faxed from the Information and Archive Center of al-Muntada containing summaries of the day’s Palestinian, Israeli, Arab, and international press. His review of these papers would be interrupted at 9:30 A.M., when he would receive delegation members who came to prepare for the day’s negotiation sessions and sometimes to present reports about sessions the previous night.

When the delegation members left for their negotiating sessions, which would often start between 10:00 A.M. and 11:00 A.M., Abu Ammar returned to his news file. What interested him most was news about the mood in the Palestinian territories. He read with satisfaction about the various popular activities—demonstrations, conferences, etc.—held in support of the delegation. And he was hurt and saddened by statements by factional leaders denouncing “the details of the agreements and understandings reached at Camp David.” He would comment bitterly, “They could at least have postponed their slander until the end of the summit!” When he was shown articles praising his conduct at the summit by Arab journalists who had only recently accused him of “selling out” on Jerusalem, he did not show interest and would only say, “May God forgive them.” Amid the piles of paper, he always looked for news indicating a supporting Arab statement and would underline it.

Members of the delegation would return at midday to present their reports on the morning sessions of the various committees, which would resume in the afternoon. The evening and night hours were the most active on Yasir Arafat’s agenda. Sometimes he would attend an official dinner at the Laurel Restaurant. Most of his meetings with Clinton were held at night, and the longest and stormiest sessions of the negotiating committees also took place late at night, often lasting into the early hours.

At Camp David, Yasir Arafat fought tooth and nail to defend Palestinian national rights, including in Jerusalem, and he did so according to three lines of defense, as follows:

The Palestinian People

Confronted with a relentless American campaign to “salvage” the Barak government by forcing Palestinian negotiating concessions, Arafat repeatedly reminded his hosts, “You are forgetting the Palestinian people.” He went on to remind them that the Palestinian people had its institutions, that there was a government, a council of ministers, a legislative council, national and central councils, an active and determined opposition. Above all, he said, there was unanimous agreement on all the major principles, and while the people had “agreed to make many sacrifices for the sake of peace, they were not prepared to make further concessions.” He reminded them that Israel did not have a monopoly on accountability and concerns about the opposition. To the American refrain that he should be flexible and reach an agreement so Barak’s government would not fall, he replied, “But if we accept less than our rights, and if we give up Jerusalem, the entire Palestinian *system* will collapse.”

In a decisive meeting with President Clinton on 19 July, Abu Ammar said, “The Palestinian leader who will give up Jerusalem has not yet been born. I will not betray my people or the trust they have placed in me. Don’t look to me to legitimize the occupation! Of course, it can continue longer, but it can’t last forever. No one can continue indefinitely to impose domination by military force—look at South Africa.” He also pointed out, “I was elected president on a clear platform, and our political line has been laid down by our leadership bodies. Our people will not accept less than their rights as stated by international resolutions and international legality.”

Rights, History, and International Legality

Yasir Arafat’s voice would start quietly, and grow louder when his American hosts raised ideas demanding Palestinian concessions over Jerusalem and land. In a meeting with Albright, he said, “If the Israelis want to use the argument of history, we also

have our history that refutes their allegations and confirms our rights." For example, he reminded the Americans, "After the occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, Moshe Dayan, whom the Israelis consider a hero, forbade Jews from setting foot in the Haram. And now they are demanding sovereignty over these same places." On another occasion, he said, "You seem to forget that we are demanding only 22 percent of our country, and we have renounced the rest for the requirements of peace. Now it's Israel's turn. . . . We are demanding a peace based on the implementation of Resolution 242. Just as it was implemented on the Egyptian and Jordanian fronts, it must be implemented in full for the Palestinian territories. . . . During the Camp David summit

The American negotiators became strangely touchy at the mere mention of principles and rights. They kept citing the need for pragmatism.

of 1978, you didn't ask Egypt to give up an inch of Sinai, and now you want us to give up our land. It was your country that established Resolutions 242 and 338 as the terms of reference of the peace process—are you now throwing them out?"

Arafat tirelessly fought the Israeli myths with historical facts and specific references to international law. The American negotiators, however, became strangely touchy at the mere mention of principles and rights. They kept citing the need for pragmatism, as if what was at stake was some kind of merchandise.

The Arab, Islamic, and Christian Dimensions

Throughout the summit, Arafat did not tire of explaining to his American hosts the various dimensions of the Jerusalem issue, emphasizing in particular the serious strategic consequences of the American proposals. "Jerusalem is not only a Palestinian city," he would say. "It is also an Arab, Islamic, and Christian city. If I am going to make a decision on Jerusalem, I have to consult with the Sunnis and the Shi'a and all Arab countries. I have to consult with many countries starting with Iran and Pakistan, passing by Indonesia and Bangladesh, and ending with Nigeria. Do you really believe that any of these countries or groups would agree to give legitimacy to Israel's pretensions, to give up Jerusalem and the Haram al-Sharif?" In response to the American proposal that the Armenian Quarter of the Old City be under Israeli sovereignty, he said, "Do you expect me to hand over my Christian compatriots to Israel?" At one point, turning to Clinton's interpreter, Jamal Hilal, an Egyptian Copt with U.S. citizenship, Arafat said, "What would my friend [the Coptic] Pope Shenoudah say if I did this?"

Concerning the American-supported Israeli arguments on the Haram, Arafat warned, "Such arguments are like time bombs that will ignite raging fires in the entire region. Be careful—don't repeat such proposals! They are dangerous and destructive. Do you want to plunge the entire region into a new religious war? . . . Listen, if I'm not the one who liberates Jerusalem and raises the Palestinian flag there, another will come one day to liberate it and raise his country's flag there."

Meanwhile, Arafat was carrying out a three-pronged tactical offensive on Jerusalem. First, he strove to get across the idea that there could be no deal that deferred Jerusalem (Clinton soon seemed convinced of this logic). Second, he aimed at getting the "Abu Dis as substitute capital" idea dropped by making clear that Jerusalem for the Palestinians means the Old City and the neighborhoods outside its walls such as Musrara, Shaykh Jarrah, Salah al-Din, Suwwana, Wadi al-Juz, al-Tur, Silwan, and Ras al-Amud. Thanks to this insistence, the rumors peddled for months by the Israeli press

and officials to the effect that the Palestinians had agreed to give up East Jerusalem for Abu Dis ended. From then on, the focus of the discussions shifted to the Old City. Finally, Arafat firmly rejected any fragmentation of the negotiations on the Jerusalem issue and stuck to the Palestinian insistence on Palestinian sovereignty over all East Jerusalem.

The battle of Jerusalem began on the third day of the summit when Albright officially notified some of the Palestinian delegates that the American team was about to present its own proposals aimed at bridging the gap between the two sides. This was a classic American exercise to which the Palestinian and Israeli negotiators had grown accustomed, but normally it was used only when the positions had become closer. Albright said the paper would deal with all issues, except Jerusalem, which "we will deal with later." Abu Ammar was immediately informed of this, and he exploded: his fears of a plan to defer the Jerusalem issue seemed confirmed. "This is unacceptable! Let's pack our bags and leave," he said. What was conveyed to the Americans was, "We reject any ideas or papers that do not address the issue of Jerusalem, and the Palestinian delegation will leave Camp David immediately." The American response was quick: Jerusalem would be included in the paper.

The second crisis was set off on 14 July, when the promised paper was presented. It was a bad paper by any standard and made clear the fact that the American peace team had deliberately distorted the Palestinian positions to President Clinton, enabling them to make the bridging proposals that suited them. The paper was Israeli in full, especially as regards a so-called Palestinian acceptance of a "municipal solution" for Jerusalem and the Abu Dis-as-capital idea. A Palestinian response was immediately drafted and presented to Albright showing how the American paper distorted the Palestinian positions and contradicted not only the terms of reference of the peace process but the United States's own positions on Jerusalem. Again, the American response was quick. President Clinton himself told Arafat that the paper "is null and void." The Palestinian team won another round in a hard war of attrition.

These two crises were followed by marathon negotiations convened by President Clinton in the early morning of 16 July that lasted twelve straight hours. It was at this session that the Palestinians got a clear picture of what Israel had in mind for Jerusalem. Arafat felt the need to clarify the Palestinian position and sent President Clinton a letter specifying, among other things, that no agreement would be signed that did not resolve the issues of Jerusalem and the refugees in accordance with international resolutions. This step was deemed necessary because the Palestinians had become convinced that the American-Israeli negotiating strategy consisted of putting aside the explosive issues, such as Jerusalem and the refugees, which Israel wanted marginalized, and to negotiate only on those where Israel thought it could make important gains, such as land and security.

Meanwhile, the date of Clinton's planned departure for the Okinawa summit was fast approaching. A whole week had passed since the Camp David summit opened, with nothing to show for it, so the Americans decided to speed things up. On 17 July, in a private meeting with President Arafat, President Clinton read off a number of ideas from a document he held in his hand. Abu Ammar took notes. Most of the ideas concerned Jerusalem, though one line spoke of reaching "a satisfactory solution to the refugee issue" and the annexation of 9 percent of Palestinian land to Israel. Concerning Jerusalem, the paper addressed Palestinian sovereignty over the Muslim and Christian Quarters, while the Armenian and Jewish Quarters would be annexed to Israel along with the Haram al-Sharif. The UN Security Council and Morocco, how-

ever, would delegate to the Palestinian Authority “custodial rights” enabling it to administer the Islamic holy sites. The other neighborhoods of East Jerusalem were dealt with in cursory manner: Palestinian sovereignty in the outlying neighborhoods and “a special regime” for the inner neighborhoods, where Palestinians would have functional jurisdiction. The proposals ended with the need to declare an end to the conflict between the two sides.

Abu Ammar’s response was decisive: “These are Israeli ideas, I received them unofficially from the Israeli delegation two hours ago.” Things could not have been clearer. Clinton himself, and no longer just his advisers, had officially adopted the Israeli demands, marking a turning point in the summit and ending the illusions of some members of the Palestinian delegation, who had believed until then that the U.S. position was distinct from Israel’s. The American and Israeli delegations were melting into one.

That night, Abu Ammar called his delegation for an emergency meeting. After a detailed discussion of the American ideas and their implications, and after asking the Americans for clarifications on certain points, a letter to President Clinton was drafted emphasizing that the latest ideas contradicted the fundamental principles of the peace process as established by the United States itself. The letter referred to the Palestinian letter of 16 July as outlining the only acceptable bases for negotiation. The Palestinian letter was hand delivered to the Americans at 2:00 A.M. on 18 July, and the Palestinian delegates went to bed. But at 3:00 A.M., Arafat’s telephone rang—the Americans wanted a clear reply to the specific question: Did the American ideas form a basis for negotiations?

Members of the delegation were summoned again to Birch, President Arafat’s cabin. The discussion could not have been briefer—thirty minutes. The written response, though respecting the proper forms, conveyed the clear message, “We consider that these ideas do not form a basis for negotiations.” Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erakat delivered it to Bruce Reidel, deputy director of the National Security Council. Standing in the middle of the room, Erakat, who had not been asked to sit down, translated the contents of the letter. Reidel’s immediate response was, “So it’s over.”

But the “greatest actor in the United States” had a different idea.

A LONG AMERICAN MOVIE

Peace in the Middle East had become for Clinton, in the course of his presidency, a golden trophy he dreamed of winning. Although there were a number of reasons he came to focus on the Middle East, there was a historic moment that linked him to that dream: the historic handshake between Yasir Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, with Bill Clinton standing between them, on the White House lawn on 13 September 1993.

From that moment on, Clinton became tied to the cause of peace in the Middle East. In the ensuing years, Washington became a regular venue for bilateral and trilateral summits that brought Clinton together with Arafat and successive Israeli prime ministers, while West Jerusalem and later Ramallah and Gaza became regular destinations for an American peace team that made a veritable career out of shuttling back and forth to the region.

For a variety of reasons, President Clinton, encouraged by his team, had come to believe that he could succeed where the whole world had failed. Within a week of the convening of Camp David, however, the American president was beginning to realize

that the assessments presented by his aides had nothing to do with reality. The winds of failure began blowing hard in the retreat on the seventh day of the summit. The unequivocal Palestinian rejection of the “American” ideas (the ideas President Arafat insisted were Israeli ideas) upset his calculations, narrowing the Americans’ margin of maneuver and forcing them to assume the role the Palestinians had hoped they would play—that of “honest broker.”

But Clinton, known for his drive and determination, refused to accept the fact that the Palestinian letter of 19 July marked the end of the negotiations. He delayed his departure for Japan by twenty-four hours, probably hoping that this dramatic gesture would act as an additional element of pressure that could push negotiations forward. The American negotiators seemed increasingly tense: not only had their assessments and predictions started to prove wrong, but the president wanted success. That was the day the Americans began dangling the carrot of statehood in front of Arafat: “Try to imagine how things will look if we sign an agreement. A Palestinian state, recognized by the United States and Israel, will join the international community, and . . .” But Arafat was quick to interrupt, “Thank you, but the Palestinian state has existed since the British Mandate, and even if most of its territories were occupied in 1948, its legitimacy is nonetheless recognized in UN resolutions.” He then added sharply, “I will not exchange Jerusalem for a state.” Next, they offered financial inducements: “Let’s talk about our bilateral relations. We are preparing a big financial aid package for the Palestinian state as soon as the agreement is signed. The assistance item will also be placed on the agenda of the Okinawa summit. . . .” Again, Arafat interrupted, “This is very kind of you. We really do need a lot of aid, but let’s first concentrate on the main issues. Above all, I mean territory.”

The Americans then took another tack. Clinton spent much of Tuesday and Wednesday on the telephone with Arab leaders trying to get them to pressure Arafat. There, too, the president was not very frank with his listeners, reporting that great progress had been made on all the issues and that extremely generous offers had been made concerning Jerusalem, which Arafat had rejected. The Arab leaders were asked to advise him to accept the offers so that peace could be achieved and, failing that, to encourage him to sign an agreement postponing the Jerusalem issue.

But the Arab leaders disappointed the Americans. Several of them, guessing the reality, never even called. Those who did inquired first about the facts and, once briefed, expressed unreserved support for the Palestinian position. It must be said that Arafat from the very outset had taken care to keep Arab and international leaders regularly informed about what was going on. Every morning, Planning and International Cooperation Minister Nabil Shaath would take from his pocket a long list of telephone numbers of people he had to call, and he would give each and every one of them a briefing on the situation. Among those he would call were the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia; the Saudi ambassador to the United States; the European Union’s Middle East envoy, Miguel Moratinos; and a number of Russian and French officials. Every day new names would be added to the list, such as Algerian and United Arab Emirates officials. President Arafat then added two more names and numbers: the Syrian chargé d’affaires and the Lebanese ambassador in Washington. Arafat had sensed how the Americans would try to twist his arm and took precautions.

Clinton warned Arafat that he would personally wash his hands of the peace effort if the Palestinians wasted the historic opportunity offered by Camp David.

The tension was rising. Clinton, in a meeting at Aspen cabin on Wednesday, warned Arafat that he would personally wash his hands of the peace effort if the Palestinians wasted the historic opportunity offered by Camp David. Another line taken by the American team was that "a solution for Jerusalem will open the doors wide open to solving all of the other issues, making it possible to solve the issues of refugees, land, and security quickly." To which Arafat replied calmly, "Do not expect me to betray my people. I will not sell Jerusalem, I will not sell the Muslims, and I will not sell the Christians." At times that day, Clinton seemed to recognize the predicament he had been led into by his aides, but he was unable to back out. In the end, he had to defend tooth and nail the official line's unequivocal support for Israel. He was also defending his personal ambition to secure a prominent place in history.

Clinton was getting ready to leave for the G-8 summit in Okinawa, which would be his last before leaving office. How to go without being handicapped by a failure at Camp David? The failed Geneva summit with Asad, which had taken place in March, had already shaken his international image. There, too, he had listened to the bad advice of his Middle East team, calling for a summit only to discover that the Israeli "breakthrough" he was offering was nothing new. The last thing he needed was yet another failure, especially so close to the end of his presidency.

At 8:30 P.M., President Clinton entered Arafat's cabin at Birch and tried his last shot. He repeated the same arguments and listened to the same answers. But President Arafat, out of commitment to the peace process, also made an offer to continue the negotiations for another two weeks, either back home or in Washington. After that, he said, President Clinton could assess the situation and, if he thought it useful, convene another summit. But Clinton did not accept the offer and took leave of Arafat as if the summit had in fact ended.

Arafat immediately gave instructions to his staff. The PLO office in Washington was asked to start preparing Arafat's plane for takeoff, an operation which usually took four or five hours. Hearing this, the other members of the Palestinian negotiating team returned to their cabins to pack their bags. One of Arafat's bodyguards changed into his military uniform, as he always did for official trips. Alerted by this change of dress, the American protocol office immediately called the Birch cabin. "What's going on? Are you leaving?" The answer came quickly, "In fact, we are getting ready to do so."

At that very moment, the presidential motorcade was parked in the street between Aspen and Birch cabins, ready to leave; bad weather conditions had made it impossible to use the presidential helicopter. The sight of so many limousines and vehicles loaded with telecommunications equipment revving up their engines was yet another sign of pressure being exerted by the American side—a last, theatrical gesture by President Clinton. The message was clear: if you Palestinians do not take advantage of this last opportunity for Clinton doing something for you, your cause will be frozen for another year or two.

President Arafat's luggage was also gathered and loaded into a van, and members of the Palestinian delegation were arriving with their bags. Everyone was talking about what the next steps would be; how to mobilize to the maximum Arab, Muslim, and international support for the Palestinian position; and how the Americans would react to the failure.

At 9:30 P.M., the telephone rang at Birch. President Clinton wanted to speak with President Arafat. Clinton came on the line and said, "I'll be leaving in a few minutes." Arafat answered "Bon Voyage" in French and reaffirmed the Palestinian commitment to the peace process.

It was now clear to everyone that the summit was over. Members of the Palestinian delegation began calling the PLO office in Washington requesting airline reservations on the first plane out of Washington.

But Clinton had not said his final word. At 10:30 P.M., surrounded by aides, he stopped unannounced by Birch, where members of the Palestinian delegation had congregated near the entryway. "OK, guys, we'll go your way. I decided to try your proposal." Then, in the small sitting area inside the cabin, Clinton told Arafat, "Let's agree to continue negotiations in the region, and afterward we'll decide on what can be done to resume the summit." As soon as he left, delegation members were calling their families to say they'd be home tomorrow. At 11:00 P.M., CNN broadcast a statement by the White House spokesman that the summit had ended without agreement.

Then, at 11:40 P.M., Clinton, who met with Barak before and after every meeting he held with Arafat, entered the Birch cabin yet again. "I have a new deal." He suggested that everyone remain at Camp David until he returned from Okinawa. Delegates from both sides should meet and discuss issues other than Jerusalem and the Haram. He said he had spoken to Barak about the matter. A small smile appeared on Arafat's face, and he replied, "Fine, Mr. President, we are ready to stay here." Clinton got up with obvious relief. He said goodbye to each of the members of the Palestinian delegation, who had all crowded into the small room.

Minutes later, Palestinian negotiators were again loading their luggage onto the golf carts in the rain and heading back to their cabins. One of them said bitterly, "Our detention has just been extended for another few days!" And as Clinton's convoy sped toward the summit's press center to announce that negotiations would continue, some members of the Palestinian delegation had the impression of being in an American adventure movie with endless twists and turns. An hour later, Clinton was on Air Force One heading for Okinawa.

The next morning, the top story in the news was, "Clinton saved the summit after its collapse was announced." But in reality, the summit for all practical purposes ended that rainy night at Camp David.

AREAS OF FAILURE . . . LIMITS OF "ACCOMPLISHMENT"

Madeleine Albright took over at Camp David during the four days that President Clinton was in Japan. Nothing happened during that time: The Palestinian and Israeli negotiators were virtually off duty. The negotiating sessions held were strictly for form. No one wanted to give anything away to Albright; everyone was waiting for the "boss." So the four days provided a precious opportunity to catch up on lost sleep and to relax. The "time off" also enabled the delegations to reflect on what had happened so far. The Palestinian delegation, after long discussions, reached the following conclusions:

1. Camp David in fact had been a sort of dress rehearsal for a summit—these were the kind of serious talks Yasir Arafat had been calling for as a *preparation* for the summit. Despite the lack of success, both sides had been able to get beyond the "brainstorming" and "what if" sessions of the previous rounds and to engage fully in the real issues, presenting for the first time their true positions. From this standpoint, even though the gaps re-

- mained wide, the Camp David talks constituted a concrete basis for future negotiations, which would have to pick up where the summit left off.
2. The Camp David summit provided the Palestinians for the first time with the opportunity to present the Palestinian narrative and positions directly to the American president without passing through the filter of his advisers. Clinton thus discovered that the picture that had been presented to him until then was far from exact and that the “goods” he had been made to believe that the Palestinians were eager to buy did not even interest them. As Clinton remarked to Arafat during one of their meetings, “I did not know your needs and requirements as I know them now.”
 3. The American “discovery” of the limits of the Palestinian position also opened the eyes of the Israeli delegation, which had to abandon their illusions—informed by an occupier’s mentality—that the Palestinians were ready to accept just about any deal under pressure.
 4. Camp David made clear that the Israeli establishment was not yet ready for real peace. The colonialist, militaristic mentality—the occupier’s mentality, nourished by myths—still predominated and shaped their vision of peace.
 5. Israel’s adoption of the most hard-line demands of Jewish extremists regarding the Haram al-Sharif boded ill for the region, opening the way for a religious conflict. The fact that the Americans had supported these positions made the situation all the more worrisome.
 6. Israel’s goal at Camp David was to obtain the Palestinian “golden” signature on final recognition and the “end of conflict” at a cheap price—without returning all the land, without acknowledging full sovereignty, and, most dangerous of all, without solving the refugee issue.
 7. At Camp David, the Americans showed themselves, through the positions they adopted, to be incapable of being an “honest broker” or even a “broker.” The virtually unified stance of the Israeli delegation and the U.S. peace team cast a long shadow over the possibility of moving toward a solution. True, President Clinton often listened with great attention and understanding to the Palestinian viewpoint and on many occasions argued against the views of his advisers in front of the Palestinian negotiators, but in the last analysis he had his own calculations and restraints, America’s permanent policy supporting Israel and the pressure of Congress.
 8. The American envoys who had crisscrossed the region and overseen the negotiations had lost all credibility with the Palestinians and Arabs, raising questions about the U.S. administration’s continuing reliance on them, if only out of concern for effectiveness.

Meanwhile, in the midst of these evaluations and analyses, everyone was waiting for Clinton's return and wondering what would happen then.

Madeleine Albright tried hard to do something in the president's absence, but it took her a whole day just to get the sides to agree to resume committee meetings. She made several shuttle trips between Birch and Dogwood (less than 50 meters apart) to solve the question of how many delegates should participate in these meetings. She also expended enormous effort persuading Barak to attend an official dinner at the Laurel Restaurant the day after Clinton's departure. The dinner was meant to relax the atmosphere, but the attempt failed and was noteworthy only for Albright's announcement that the "American ideas" were no longer on the table—that is, they were no longer a basis for negotiations. Perhaps the announcement, which brought relief to the Palestinian side, which considered it an achievement, also brought some relief to the Israelis: with the "American" ideas withdrawn, the Israeli opposition had less opportunity to score points against Barak.

In fact, the turbulence in Israeli politics caused by Camp David was beginning to take its toll on the Israeli delegation. Their "disappointment" was palpable, and it was easy to see that the firm Palestinian rejection of the "American" ideas had blown U.S. and Israeli calculations apart. It was obvious that Barak and the American peace team had counted on the fact that the Palestinians would accept (albeit reluctantly) the "American" ideas and that a framework agreement would be signed whose most important clause would be "the end to the conflict." According to this same scenario, Barak would return triumphantly to Israel with this document and be able to threaten his opposition with early elections. The failure of these calculations mortified the Israelis.

Barak isolated himself for two days in Dogwood, meeting only with Danny Yatom and attorney Gilead Sher. But the prime minister was not just passing time. He was in constant contact with the political forces in his own country and (as later confirmed by an American source) with influential American Jews. He also worked to mend rifts within his delegation by denying Israeli press reports that Shlomo Ben-Ami and former chief of staff Amnon Shahak were pressuring him to make concessions on Jerusalem.

In the course of Camp David, it became clear that Barak was unable to establish an effective working relationship with Yasir Arafat. Aside from the two meetings with President Clinton at Aspen on the first and last days of the summit, Arafat and Barak met—but did not sit together—at official dinner parties hosted by Clinton. On one occasion, Barak initiated a visit to Birch and had tea with Arafat, but no specific political issues were discussed. No other meeting took place between the two men.

Everyone was tensely awaiting Clinton's return. At 6:25 P.M. on Sunday, 23 July, his helicopter landed at Camp David. Clinton immediately jumped into a golf cart and drove to Aspen with his daughter Chelsea next to him. He was full of energy despite the long flight. He waved to delegates he passed, calling out, "Hi guys! I'm back. Let's get down to work."

Clinton immediately did so. After a session with his advisers, who had been in constant touch with him in Okinawa, he called for two meetings, one with Arafat and the other with Barak. He proposed holding intensive marathon negotiations, with negotiators from each side, to discuss every file: security, land, refugees, and Jerusalem.

At 11:00 that evening, Clinton and some advisers took part in a Palestinian-Israeli security session. The session lasted until 6:00 A.M. In that session, the Israelis reiterated

their demands relating to security along the Jordanian border, once again on the basis of the “threat from the East” theme. They wanted mobile patrols in the Jordan Valley, the establishment of three early-warning stations in the West Bank, the establishment of five Israeli “supplies bases” in the Jordan Valley to be used by the Israeli army in emergencies, and inspection of all goods imported to the Palestinian state, which would be demilitarized.

During the session, the Palestinian negotiators left twice to consult with President Arafat, once at 3:00 A.M. and again at 4:30 A.M. In keeping with his instructions, their response was, in essence, “We will not allow the presence of any Israeli soldier on the border, in the Jordan Valley, or at the crossing points, all of which are sovereign Palestinian territory. The presence of any Israeli soldier there will render security invalid.” Arafat had also conveyed the message that the Palestinians were prepared to provide security guarantees and to accept that U.S. or international troops be stationed in these areas.

President Clinton seemed to welcome this position. He had wanted to begin the marathon sessions with security because he thought that it would be easier to achieve results in that area. Because of this, he responded to the hysterical Israeli security demands. Perhaps he left this session feeling satisfied that he had somehow bridged the gaps between the two sides.

Four and a half hours later, reality hit the American president as he sat with the two sides’ negotiators to discuss refugees. Their positions were diametrically opposed. The Palestinians, after a brief summary of the roots of the refugee problem and the Zionist conquest of Palestine, asserted the following points:

1. The right of every Palestinian refugee to return home in accordance to UN Resolution 194.
2. The need for a mechanism to implement this right, starting with the return of refugees in Lebanon, who would be given priority due to their miserable living conditions and their kinship ties with Palestinians in the Galilee (illustrated in the dramatic reunions at Fatima Gate following Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon). A timetable, including numbers of refugees, would then be established for the return of all those who wished it.
3. After the recognition of the right of return and the establishment of the implementation mechanism, a compensation regime could be instituted.
4. The issue of the Jews who left Arab countries and their compensation was not the province of the Palestinian side and would not be discussed.

The Israelis, for their part, reiterated their classic position: “We are not responsible for this problem. We do not recognize the right of return. We are prepared to allow the return of several thousands of persons spread over a number of years under a ‘family reunification’ program and for ‘humanitarian reasons.’ We are ready to discuss an international compensation fund that would also allocate compensation for Jews ‘expelled’ from Arab countries.”

During that meeting, Clinton undoubtedly realized that the refugee issue was far more difficult than he had been led to believe by his advisers, who had maintained that progress could be achieved on the basis of compensation, resettlement in the host countries, and a liberal immigration policy to some Western countries.

After this experience, Clinton decided to meet separately with the two sides on the land issue. At the Palestinian meeting, the president listened with interest as the negotiators explained how the annexations, in addition to being illegal and contrary to the terms of reference of the peace process, would destroy the geographic and demographic unity of the Palestinian state. Using maps to illustrate how the annexations were designed to control the water resources and to fragment the territory into islands surrounded by settlement blocs, the Palestinians stressed that any border amendments should be reciprocal.

After the meetings on the land issue, the negotiators on Jerusalem were waiting to be summoned to Aspen for their meeting, but no call came. Then, at 8:00 that evening, the telephone at Birch rang—President Clinton wanted to meet President Arafat at Aspen.

From the first moment, the meeting was tense and stormy. Clinton's tone was sharp: America will wash its hands of the peace process, and you shall bear the entire responsibility. We will freeze the bilateral relationship. The Congress will freeze aid allocated to you, and you will be isolated. You did not present anything new regarding Jerusalem, while the Israelis took steps forward.

When Arafat's turn came to respond, he began softly, "A revolution has taken place in these talks—the two sides now know exactly the other's positions. We did not waste time here." His voice rising, he continued, "If any one imagines that I might sign away Jerusalem, he is mistaken. I am not only the leader of the Palestinian people, I am also the vice president of the Islamic Conference. I also defend the rights of Christians. I will not sell Jerusalem. And I will not allow for a delay in discussions on Jerusalem, not even for a minute. You say the Israelis moved forward, but they are the *occupiers*. They are not being generous—they are not giving from their pockets but from *our* land. I am only asking that UN Resolution 242 be implemented. I am speaking only about 22 percent of Palestine, Mr. President."

Arafat went on, challenging and contradicting Israeli claims to the Haram and Jerusalem. Clinton continued to pressure Arafat, saying, "The offer that was made was reasonable, and you can live with it. A 'sovereign presidential compound' can be established for you and your state next to the al-Aqsa Mosque."

"So there will be a small island surrounded by Israeli soldiers who control the entrances. This is not what we are asking for. We are asking for full Palestinian sovereignty over Jerusalem occupied in 1967," Arafat said.

At one point in the argument, Clinton repeated that Arafat had not presented anything and that the Israelis had taken the initiative regarding Jerusalem. Arafat looked at the American president and asked, "Do you want to attend my funeral? I will not relinquish Jerusalem and the holy places." A long moment of silence followed, and the exchange resumed more quietly. Clinton then proposed that each delegation send one negotiator to meet with him to discuss some ideas on Jerusalem: "I respect your steadfastness, you are a true believer."

At 10:00 P.M., Clinton made his last attempt. Saeb Erakat and Shlomo Ben-Ami, representing their delegations, were present at the meeting, along with some of the American advisers. Clinton began with the options facing the summit: to announce its failure, to sign an agreement postponing the issue of Jerusalem, to sign an agreement

postponing certain aspects of the Jerusalem issue, and to issue a statement summarizing the negotiations in general terms and announcing a continuation of talks. Erakat said the fourth option was the most suitable, but Sandy Berger intervened to say that this option was no longer on the agenda.

Clinton then came to the subject of the meeting, Jerusalem. He began by reviewing Israel's position: Israel was determined to have sovereignty over the Haram because it was the site of the Second Temple. Israel was determined that Jews be allowed to pray there and rejected Palestinian sovereignty over most of Jerusalem. It proposed a series of different systems for different neighborhoods of the city. The old ideas had returned in new attire.

It was close to midnight, and Clinton outlined what he said was the final offer for Jerusalem:

1. A committee made up of the UN Security Council and Morocco would grant the Palestinian state "sovereign custody" of the Haram, while Israel would retain "residual sovereignty."
2. The Muslim and Christian Quarters of the Old City would come under Palestinian sovereignty, while the Jewish and Armenian Quarters would fall under Israeli sovereignty.
3. The Palestinians would have functional jurisdiction in what was called the "inner" neighborhoods: Musrara, Wadi al-Juz, Shaykh Jarrah, Ras al-Amud, al-Tur, Suwwana, and Salah al-Din.
4. Jerusalem's "outer" neighborhoods would be under Palestinian sovereignty. If the "inner" neighborhoods had Palestinian sovereignty, then a special regime would apply in the Old City, the details of which would have to be agreed upon.

Clinton told Erakat to take the proposal to his leader and to return with an answer. "I can give you the answer now," Erakat replied. "President Arafat instructed me not to accept anything less than Palestinian sovereignty on all areas of Jerusalem occupied in 1967, and first and foremost the Haram al-Sharif."

Clinton repeated, "Take the proposal to President Arafat and get back to me." Erakat returned to Birch and read the proposal to Arafat and the Palestinian delegation. Not much discussion was needed. It was now clear that the Americans had fully adopted the Israeli position on Jerusalem. While the letter stating the Palestinian response to Clinton was being drafted, members of the American peace team were frantically telling the Palestinian delegation: "It's a good proposal, convince the president to accept it! You can limit the number of Jews who pray at the mosque. The proposal gives you huge gains!" Their nervousness was undoubtedly due not only to the imminent failure of the summit, but worry about the fallout for their careers.

When Erakat and Muhammad Dahlan, the head of Preventive Security in Gaza, went to Aspen at 1:00 A.M. to hand over the letter, President Clinton was standing in the wide hallway of his cabin. He listened to the letter, which Erakat began translating aloud into English. The letter thanked President Clinton for his efforts, expressed hope that they would continue, and emphasized the Palestinian desire to continue negotiations. It ended by stating that international legality had to be the basis for any agreement and that the proposals on Jerusalem were in contradiction with these references. "I was expecting a response like this," Clinton said.

The Camp David summit therefore ended in the early hours of 25 July. At 10:30 that morning, Clinton received Arafat and Barak for what was to be the final session. He presented them with a draft statement on the conclusion of the summit. Arafat spoke for a few minutes, giving his evaluation of the summit, praising the role of President Clinton, and expressing the PLO's commitment to the peace process. Barak spoke briefly and in general terms.

Half an hour later, Clinton was aboard his helicopter heading for a press conference at the White House to announce the failure of the summit. At the same time, Barak's motorcade left for the press center at Emmitsburg. The Palestinian motorcade, led by Arafat, pulled out at 12:30 P.M. As they looked back at the retreat from the windows of their cars, the Palestinian negotiators heaved a deep sigh of relief. They had stated a clear No to the United States on U.S. territory. There was no bravado. It was a No that was politically, nationally, and historically correct and necessary to put the peace process on the right track.