

Interview of Prime Minister Begin with French speaking journalists- 21 March 1980

Will you accept a Palestinian-Jordanian state?

A: What difference would it be for us if there should be a Palestinian-Jordanian state which will be ruled by the P.L.O.? It would be the same danger. There should not be any wonder that at Camp David we looked for a different solution to the Palestinian question. Otherwise, how could we ever reach these agreements? The U.S., Egypt and Israel decided there will not be a Palestinian state. It should be autonomy for the Palestinian Arabs. Otherwise the agreements could not have been possible. So, let us carry out the agreements.

I would like to add that for 19 years Jordan ruled by occupation Judea and Samaria and it didn't occur to them to create a Palestinian state. Where were all these people asking now for a Palestinian state for 19 years when the Jordanians ruled? Or when the Egyptians were in the Gaza strip? Nobody asked them to create a Palestinian state or to join together with Judea and Samaria. They just took this part of the land after the invasion of Palestine during 1948. Now the demand comes up when we defended ourselves in 1967, when Jordan attacked us and other Arab countries surrounded us and wanted to destroy us.

We suggested, it was our idea, for the first time (not the Jordanians), to give the Palestinian Arabs autonomy. What is autonomy? As we all agreed upon in Camp David, to let them to elect an Administrative Council by secret ballot, to conduct the daily affairs of the people. We will withdraw our military government. It is a historic change. We will preserve security because otherwise the P.L.O. will try to create a state which will endanger us,

So, please compare the two eras. There was a Jordanian-Egyptian era in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza strip, nobody suggested a Palestinian state or autonomy; and now for the first time Israel made this suggestion of autonomy which is a serious advancement.

Q: Do we have to understand from what you have said that the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank are ready to join the negotiations?

A: I like to use this opportunity to make some corrections. You use the word Palestinians. I would like you to know that we all are Palestinians - Palestinian Jews. When you say Palestiniansi you mean Palestinian Arabs. We are Palestinians because foreign countries call this land Palestine. In our language it is Eretz-Israel - the Land of Israel. So it happens with many countries, like Japan is called by the Japanese people Nippon and the Germans call their country Deutschland. Palestinian Arabs is the true term, we are also Palestinians - Palestinian Jews. This is my first correction.

Secondly, you said West Bank (Cisjordanie) - this is the territory between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean. You speak of only a small part, of 2,400 km² which was captured by invasion and aggression in 1948 by the army of King Abdallah and this is not Cisjordanie (West Bank).

Now, to the main question which was the part of the Palestinian Arabs in the negotiations. We did not want to sign a separate peace treaty with Egypt. We wanted to sign a peace treaty with Syria and Jordan as well. We also wanted the Palestinian Arabs to be a part in these negotiations. It is so written in the Camp David agreement and in the joint letter from President Sadat and myself to President Carter. I made such statements in the press and in the Parliament. But they did not join the peace process. We cannot force them, we can only hope and must be very patient. This is a very long conflict and people should not lose their patience. Sometimes negotiations for establishing peace lasted many years. In any case, I would like you to know that we want them to come and participate. We cannot force them and bring them to the table, they must come out of their own free will. Consequently, we in good faith conducted the negotiations with Egypt alone, although the Palestinian Arabs did not show up. Theoretically, we could have said: whoever wants to conduct negotiations with us, we shall negotiate with him, and if he does not, we shall wait until he comes. Hopefully, they will come one day. The idea is positive, it was accepted at Camp David, it should be adopted and carried out.