

# Cairo's souring relations with Tel Aviv



Then-president of Egypt Anwar al-Sadat (L), then-president of the United States Jimmy Carter (C), and then-prime minister of Israel Menachem Begin sign the preliminary Camp David Accords in 1978.

● WALLY MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES



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## OPINION

Under President El-Sisi's leadership, ties with Israel have increasingly focused on economic and energy cooperation, aligning with Egypt's attempts to overcome its economic challenges. Since El-Sisi took power in a coup in 2013, Egypt has worked with Israel on security measures such as dismantling tunnels used to smuggle commodities and weapons into Gaza and establishing a buffer zone along the Egypt-Gaza border. Despite this collaboration, Egypt condemned Israeli officials' claims of Hamas weapons being smuggled across Egyptian borders. President El-Sisi

Egypt's relationship with Israel endured several challenges during the Middle East conflict, including Palestinian uprisings and Israel's occupation of the West Bank, East Al-Quds (Jerusalem), and military operations in Gaza.

criticized the widespread devastation and civilian fatalities in Gaza and expressed support. Cairo is also presently facilitating several rounds of discussions between Israeli and Hamas representatives, aiming to secure a cease-fire in Gaza. However, the support has been limited to mere rhetoric and discussions, as Egypt passively watches the escalating genocide in Gaza, refraining from taking any significant action.

### Egypt-Israel peace deal

Former US president Jimmy Carter arranged the Camp David Accords, which were

a series of peace talks held at Camp David, a presidential retreat outside Washington, D.C., between Egypt's then-president Anwar Sadat and Israel's former prime minister Menachem Begin. These accords set prerequisites for a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, as well as a framework for Israeli-Palestinian peace, and were based on UN Resolution 242, which called for Israel's departure from lands captured during the 1967 Six-Day War.

According to the deal, Israel committed to remove its soldiers from the Sinai Peninsula

in exchange for diplomatic ties with Egypt and access to the Suez Canal, a crucial trade route. Egypt seized the canal in 1956, prompting a failed invasion by Israel, the United Kingdom, and France in an effort to reclaim it.

Despite demands, many believe Cairo is unlikely to forsake the Camp David Accords. Egypt receives substantial help from the United States as part of the deal and maintains tight military connections with Washington. Furthermore, a large military expansion would put further burden on Egypt's already ailing economy.

By Hassan Zaidi  
Guest contributor

## EXCLUSIVE OPINION

As global outrage grows over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's vow to carry out a ground invasion against the southern Gaza city of Rafah, all eyes turn to Egypt. The pressing question arises: Would the North African powerhouse continue to be a silent spectator, enabling the Tel Aviv regime to intensify its unabated crimes in Gaza, or will it follow through its threat to revoke the so-called "peace treaty"?

### Egypt's role in Gaza crisis

## Will Cairo stand by or act?

It's important to note that Egypt was the first Arab nation to establish diplomatic ties with Israel in 1979, following the Camp David Accords. However, Israel's involvement in the Gaza conflict has soured relations between the two countries.

This month, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry rejected reports that Cairo intends to withdraw from the 1979 peace agreement. However, he made it clear that Egypt would only uphold the contract if the other party reciprocated.

Authorities in Cairo are fully aware that Israel's plans to create Jewish settlements in Gaza are dependent on Egypt's aiding in moving Palestinian refugees to parts of the Sinai Peninsula. This effectively amounts to the

ethnic cleansing of 2.3 million Palestinians from Gaza, opening the door for a Jewish-only settlement zone. Nonetheless, a huge impediment remains in Rafah, where over a million and a half Palestinians forcefully driven from the north live in appalling conditions in makeshift shelters, suffering constant bombing, deprivation, and an absence of medical supplies.

The threat of military action looms large, with fears that it will escalate into some of the most intense violence witnessed in a conflict that has already claimed over 28,000 Palestinian lives.

### Egypt's response so far

Since the recent conflict started, President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi has continuously rejected the idea of

accepting Palestinian refugees, expressing worry that doing so would weaken the Palestinian cause and jeopardize Egypt's national security. El-Sisi has urged for a cease-fire to prevent a humanitarian disaster, despite the possible impact on diplomatic ties with Israel.

Recent developments indicate a shift in Egypt's standpoint. According to reports from Egypt's local rights organizations, Egypt is reportedly building a "buffer zone" in the Sinai area to house Palestinians who may evacuate Rafah. However, the claims need formal confirmation from Egyptian officials. Furthermore, CIA Director William Burns' recent visit to Cairo indicates talks on a possible interim truce to facilitate negotiations between

Hamas and Israel for the exchange of prisoners.

Another significant factor is that since Israel launched its onslaught on Gaza on October 7, prominent Israeli officials' rhetoric asking Palestinians to "emigrate" from Gaza — a thinly veiled reference to forcible displacement — has alarmed Egyptians. There is concern about a potential influx of refugees crossing the border into Egypt. Egypt, along with numerous Arab countries, is concerned that Israel could ban displaced Palestinians from returning to Gaza. The concern is heightened by the historical context: nearly 750,000 Palestinians were evicted from their homes during the 1948 ethnic cleansing (Nakba), that preceded the formation of

Israel. Despite worldwide pleas for their right to return, Israel has continuously blocked the return of Palestinians who were displaced during the Nakba.

Furthermore, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's suggestion in December, indicating his desire for authority over the Philadelphi Corridor, which serves as a short corridor dividing Egypt and Gaza, sparked Egyptian outrage. Diah Rashwan, the chairman of Egypt's State Information Service, condemned the idea, noting that the "occupation" of the 14-kilometer-long and 100-meter-wide corridor would violate the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty. Since Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Egypt has retained authority over this territory.



The file photo shows Egyptian soldiers patrolling a road parallel to the Philadelphi Corridor buffer zone between Gaza and Egypt on March 19, 2007.

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