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Carter laments U.S. role in Middle East

PHILADELPHIA

Former President Jimmy Carter says the Reagan administration is partly to blame for the turmoil in the Middle East.

Carter said Tuesday the United States should play a stronger role in the Middle East by becoming "a full negotiating partner."

Carter, who as president negotiated a peace plan between Israeli and Egyptian leaders, said the Reagan administration was not making "any efforts to enforce" accords reached during historic discussions at the mountain retreat of Camp David.

"For too long ... our country avoided or ignored its written obligation under the Camp David accords to play an equal role as negotiator," Carter said.

Commenting on the massacre in Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut, Lebanon, Carter said he could not believe that Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin would permit such killings to occur.

"I probably know Begin better than any American," said Carter.

Carter said he did not know if the presence of U.S. Marines could have prevented the deaths.

Carter was in Philadelphia to receive a sculpture for his presidential library and museum being built in Atlanta. He met with a small group of bankers, lawyers and political leaders, including state Democratic Chairman Edward Kozvinsky.

Philadelphia attorney Harry A. Kalish presented Carter with the sculpture, a scale model of "The Signer," by Philadelphia artist Evangelos Frudakis, which depicts George Clymer, who signed both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The 12-foot original stands in Independence Park.

In answer to reporters' questions, Carter confirmed that Iranian leaders had offered to release the Americans held hostage if the CIA would kill the Shah, as former presidential aide Hamilton Jordan said in his recently published book.

"Of course it was never seriously considered," said Carter.