

# Reagan government is not sincere in its pursuit of peace

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Mr Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel was the foreign affairs minister of Egypt when late President Anwar Sadat, former US President Jimmy Carter and former Israeli Premier Menachem Begin met in Camp David to discuss and later sign the peace accords. Mr Kamel resigned his post in protest one day before the accords were signed. After five years Mr Kamel talks about that critical period and the consequences of the bilateral peace treaty and the future of Egypt and the Arab world in this interview, which was conducted by Mark A. Bruzonsky last July in Cairo.

**Q: I'd like to talk about the Camp David arrangement and why you resigned. Looking back, has Camp David failed? Or am I putting words in your mouth?**

A: No, not at all, I think it's a failure. I mean the essence of President Sadat's initiative was to achieve a comprehensive peace, a comprehensive and lasting peace. To get back Sinai was no problem — anytime, that's how I felt. Sinai is not one of the Israeli aspirations. They cared for the West Bank and Gaza. This was their main target, I mean, at least for Begin and his kind. So, if it was a matter of restoring Sinai to Egyptian sovereignty and rule, I think it wasn't a problem.

**Q: Did Sadat understand this, what you just explained?**

A: Well, this is an enigma and it will stay an enigma for sometime. Really, I can't say I can go inside himself. Sadat's motives were rather confused and complicated. But I presume, and this is very logical, that when Sadat made this offer of peace, of a comprehensive peace, that he was really sincere in trying to achieve it. Because if he did achieve it then he would be a lasting hero of peace all over the world. So I think he thought it might work and accordingly I presume he was sincere. Other motives, I don't know. He wanted to win the Americans to his side; and maybe one of the motives to make peace with Israel was to gain American friendship and help and so on. But....

**Q: But you look back and it's a failure.**

A: Yes, I look back and it's a failure. It's a failure because it did not achieve the comprehensive peace. This is clear. What is happening today is the biggest proof of this.

**Q: How much of what Sadat did in the final days of Camp David was the result of his relationship with Carter and the promises he got from him?**

A: As I said, Sadat, I presume, was really working for a comprehensive settlement. But in the process he committed mistakes and he lost friends. At that time Egypt had the best of relations with the other Arab countries, we were a very important member in the non-aligned group, we had very good relations with Europe, and we had good relations with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. So in the process of "peace" Sadat threw all of these assets, one after the other, away.

**Q: But you approved of Sadat going to Jerusalem, because you accepted the Foreign Ministryship after he went there.**

A: Yes, I'll tell you what happened. I have an old relationship with President Sadat going back to 1945, in fact. We were accused in a political trial, and we were in prison together. After that, when Sadat made his peace initiative, I was made ambassador in West Germany. And I came back to Cairo the end of December to arrange for the visit of Chancellor Schmidt at the time. And the day after my arrival I heard about my appointment. This was typical Sadat. And I didn't know what to do. I mean, I couldn't resign before taking the job. Especially because Fahmy before resigned, and Mohamed Riad (also after him). So, this is what happened. At the time I didn't have the chance to think over this peace initiative because it took me as all others by surprise. But I started thinking about it and I reached the conclusion that it was a good move and it was worth trying. I was critical of the Arab positions prior to that, I mean calling Israel the "so-called Israel," ...this was impractical and the Israelis were benefiting from this. They looked to the whole world as if they wanted peace

and the Arabs didn't want peace. So I thought it was a good chance. I read and heard what Sadat said in the Knesset and I thought it was a very good foundation for peace.

**Q: When did you first begin to have doubts?**

A: Later, much later. I'll tell you why. Because I had an understanding with Sadat. I told him that, of course, a separate peace is out of the question. And he said that's out of the question. But he said suppose we reach a very good agreement with the Israelis and the other Arabs refuse it. Shall we tie ourselves to them? And I told him at the time, no, if we reach an agreement on principle — mainly concerning withdrawal from all the Arab territories and realizing the fundamental rights of the Palestinians — if we reach that, we can register this at the United Nations and have an American guarantee for the implementation of this agreement. And if the other Arabs wouldn't go along we would start implementing this agreement on what concerns us, on Sinai, and then continue and help the other Arabs in realizing the other parts. So, I was rather flexible...

**Q: When you discussed these things with Sadat did he understand that he was dealing with Revisionist Zionism, did he understand that he wasn't dealing with pragmatic, political people, that he was dealing with people for whom Sinai was not important, but for whom Judea and Samaria were everything?**

A: I remember that before his peace initiative, months before, he was visiting the States and on his way back he stayed overnight in Germany. And during this particular time it was declared that Menachem Begin won the elections. And then somebody asked him — a reporter — what he thinks about Begin becoming prime minister in Israel. And Sadat said "there is no difference for me between Begin and Peres and Golda Meir". I remember afterwards a discussion with him over lunch and I said you should have reservations because Begin is a fundamentalist and his party is based on keeping Judea and Samaria.

**Q: Sadat really didn't care, did he?**

A: He didn't care, and months later he made this peace initiative. One of the traits of his personality was that he was very optimistic. And this has a reason. He had all kinds of difficulties throughout

his life and it always finished well for him. He came from a modest family and then he went to the military college and became an officer and then he was a member of the Revolutionary Council and he took the greatest positions, Speaker of the House and this and that. And suddenly without warning Nasser died — he was still young and the time, 52, and nobody thought he would ever die — and Sadat became president. Then the October war. Crossing the Canal was believed by all people including Egyptians and Israelis and everybody else to be impossible. And then it went smoothly.

**Q: Do you think if Sadat was alive when Israel invaded Lebanon and bombed Beirut that he would have accepted it like Mubarak did?**

A: What could he do? I mean he was tied with this agreement, with these accords of Camp David. I mean Sinai was demilitarized and this and that. What could he do? I would say that hadn't we signed these accords I don't think Israel would have dared to invade Lebanon the way it did.

**Q: Where did Camp David go wrong? Did it go wrong at Camp David? Was it wrong to sign the agreement? Or was it wrong a few days later when Begin said no he didn't agree to a moratorium on settlements?**

A: No, no, at the signing of the agreement it went wrong. And of course before. It went wrong simply because it gave away the target of a comprehensive peace and turned into a separate peace.

**Q: It gave away linkage?**

A: Yes, it gave away linkage. Sadat was always adamant in insisting on linkage. (Ed. note: "Linkage" between a peace between Israel and Egypt and a homeland for the Palestinians was a key concept preventing agreement during the period from Sadat's visit to Israel and the signing of the Camp David agreement). And then suddenly he gave it away.

**Q: But didn't Carter promise him linkage? Didn't Carter say to him he would bring back linkage, that he would follow-through, that Sadat could**

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Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel:

# Camp David gave away the possibility of real peace

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count on him. And didn't you say at the time at Camp David to Sadat after his meeting with Carter that a great country like Egypt cannot base its foreign policy on the promises of a weak American president?

A: I did, because I was watching Carter all the time. Carter had good intentions, no doubt about it. He was the first American president who spoke about a homeland for the Palestinians and this developed in a good way. But all this was behind him when he found...I've told this to many persons, the only consistent party since Sadat made his peace initiative was Begin.

**Q: One exception though... Didn't Begin lie about the crucial issue of freezing the settlements?**

A: Yes, but whose fault is it? Is it Begin's? Why didn't the Egyptians and the Americans insist on putting in such a clause in the Camp David agreements dealing with the settlements?

**Q: You tell me? The president (Carter) announced loudly to the world that the agreement included a freeze on settlements.**

A: I'll tell you why. When I went to Camp David, on the second day — I remember this very clearly — Vance asked to see me. And he came to see me together with Mondale. Sadat had then presented his project for peace. And Vance and Mondale told me, "what about the settlements?" I said that the settlements had to be dismantled. They said, no, no, no, no. I said I meant in Sinai, West Bank, and all over. And they said, no, no, no, we don't mean the settlements in Sinai, these should be dismantled. But what about the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza? I said they should be dismantled. And they said this is impossible. I said, why, if we are looking for a real peace, why shouldn't they be dismantled, these are islands of imperialism and they are not consistent with the peace and you have always declared that they are illegal and an obstacle to peace. This is not feasible now, they said, and they proposed, not me and I knew it was impossible at the time to dismantle them, but I insisted on that to see (what would happen). Then they proposed, it was Mondale who said, what about freezing the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza for 5 years, for the transitional period? And I said yes, I accept that. Then, after the

stick to it, and he will have every right to stick to it. So, why not put this in writing as a provision, it's a vital point.

**Q: But Jimmy Carter convinced Sadat it was OK to leave it out?**

A: He would remedy it in his next term, which he never saw, (he kept telling Sadat).

**Q: When specifically did you resign?**

A: Well, the accords were signed on Sunday. I resigned on Saturday, after a long discussion with Sadat.

**Q: When Sadat told you he was going to sign it, that's when you resigned?**

A: Yes, I saw everything in our favour was deleted — the 242 resolution was shattered, the principle of the inadmissibility of acquiring territory or land by force was thrown away.

**Q: The day before he signed, wasn't Sadat ready to leave? He had ordered his helicopter...**

A: This was Thursday, I think.

**Q: OK. Thursday. And he had told the delegation to get ready to go. And then Carter asked him personally to stay, and to try again. And on Friday this all began to happen. And then on Saturday you had your discussion and announced to him that you are resigning. How did the other people in your delegation feel?**

A: Well, it was a strange composition to our delegation. The delegation was composed of Hasan el-Tohame, who is a very strange person whom Sadat chose. He is an eccentric, and in a way a crazy fellow. He was a bad choice. Then there was Hassan Kamel who had nothing to do with the

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A: He felt so. And Carter felt that if he doesn't reach an agreement on this he has destroyed his political future. So he wanted something at any price.

**Q: So, what comes now? It's 5 years after the agreement. The Israelis are gradually incorporating the West Bank, and invaded Lebanon. The PLO is in disarray. The Arab world is completely confused. Egypt is impotent. And Israel will eventually push the Palestinians out of the West Bank into Jordan. Is Egypt defeated?**

A: Well,...peace is defeated...stability in this area is defeated. I don't know for how long. There will always be chaos, there will always be one country fighting here and another erupting here. There will be no peace, no stability.

**Q: So your advice last year was that Egypt should say that Israel had violated the Camp David agreement and it is over.**

A: Yes, it's over or it's finished. We should find a formula which will make Israel feel that things won't be left for her to do as she wants with no opposition.

**Q: Do you expect the Reagan administration if it achieves another term, to do anything?**

A: No, no, no.

**Q: Do you believe they are even sincere?**

A: No, they are not sincere and they are spoiling everything. Look at what happened in the UN Security Council recently. You remember quite clearly that the Carter administration used to repeat over and over that settlements are illegal and an obstacle to peace. Last week in the Security

**Q: The American people do not appreciate such warnings. They are told that Egypt is a country happy with the Camp David arrangement, that the US is giving Egypt much aid, that the Egyptians don't really care about the Palestinians.**

A: Well, they said the same thing about the Shah of Iran. But it doesn't mean a thing. You can never predict what is underground. What you see now from Egypt is what the government says, what the party of the government says, and that's about it.

**Q: The group that assassinated Sadat. I'm told many of the people involved were highly educated, were very respected young army people, that they were not "crazies" or "radicals" or "extremists"; that many of them were young Egyptian nationalists.**

A: Yes, yes, I think so. I mean you can judge by the reaction to Sadat's assassination. What was the Egyptian reaction? The reaction was very negative to Sadat. This is very clear and it shouldn't be ignored.

**Q: In your judgement, was Sadat assassinated because he was viewed as a traitor to the Arab cause?**

A: Yes, this is one element, of course, and a very important one.

**Q: What do you think of Syrian policy now?**

A: Well, they are condemned to their policy. They want at least to free the Golan, and what else can they do?

**Q: Is Assad trying to use Arab-Israeli diplomacy to propel himself to a position of Arab leadership?**

A: No, no I don't think anybody... Leadership of what? The Arab world is shattered, I mean... No, I think he's trying to get back the Syrian territories occupied by the Israelis. He's doomed to take this position.

**Q: And for the Palestinians, is there anything left? The West Bank has so many settlers, so many settlements, the economy is linked to Israel, the roads are linked to Israel. Is the issue still open or is it just about over? Will Camp David go down in history at the point at which a fair settlement of the Arab-Israeli problem became impossible?**

A: Yes, it was an abortion of the possibility of a real peace in this area which everybody would



And I said, yes, I accept that. Then, after the transitional period the Israelis can negotiate with the Palestinians who are the people concerned whether these settlements should be dismantled, increased or lessened — it is their business then. But I agreed to this.

Two or three days later we received the first American project and there was nothing about freezing the settlements in it. And we said, but we did agree about that so you have to include it. Of course, it had been deleted because, it turned out, there was conflicts (with Israel). After discussing the American project with the Israelis, it was deleted because they didn't accept it.

**Q: OK, so why did Sadat accept that it be deleted?**

A: Sadat was finished. He had nobody except Carter left. He lost the Soviet Union, he lost the non-aligned, he lost the Arabs, he lost the Muslim countries — he was naked, he had nobody except Carter left. All his hopes concentrated on Carter, because if he admitted his failure he was finished.

**Q: And Carter also. If he would have left Camp David with a failure he would have been very weak politically.**

A: Yes, this is the thing. That's why I say that the only person who was sticking to his grounds was Begin. Sadat and Carter were making concessions. Carter was making concessions to Begin and came to Sadat and Sadat made concessions to Carter and so on...

**Q: Didn't Carter announce in his speech before the Congress that there was a freeze on the settlements?**

A: Yes, but who cares. What's in writing is what counts. And this is what I told Sadat every time. He said, no, the language is not important, (which is what) Carter was telling him. The language is not important now, "in my next term I will do this and that for the Palestinian cause." This was repeated all the time (by Carter).

And I told Sadat that what is written is what counts and when it's written and signed Begin will

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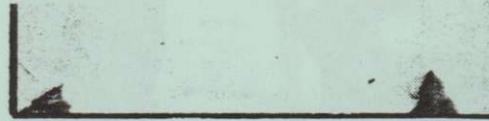
political situation. The three of us agreed we were not happy at all with what was happening. The thing is I felt my responsibility to say my mind clearly to Sadat. Butros (Ed. note: Dr. Boutros Ghali, minister of state for foreign affairs) had his reservations — I mean he's a nice fellow but I don't think he had the courage to say his opinion. Dr Osama El Bat tried his best, I must say. And then the junior members of the delegation, I mean my aides were all against. All of them, not just one. But of course they had no access to Sadat.

**Q: You had known him for 40 years. What did he say to you when you told him you were going to resign?**

A: This was after a long discussion. He was not happy, of course, with my resigning. I had a long discussion with him and he told me that Egypt has many internal problems and we can't go on like this.

I said I'm not suggesting that you should make a new war with Israel at all. This is out of my thinking completely. But why should we sign something that is not agreeable to us? Let us postpone it. We can have another Camp David. We can have all the time. We are not losing anything, because for once we cornered the Israelis in a way. we showed that we are the ones who want peace, and a peace according to the United Nations resolutions, and according to international thinking and everything. So why should we sign something which is not agreeable to us, which does not realize the comprehensive peace, which does not allow Jordan to come in? Why should we? We can always postpone it. I told him you can suggest to President Carter that here we are, there has been some progress on certain points but there are other points which the parties will not agree to, so if Carter will make another effort...

**Q: He felt that he had to agree with President Carter?**



**Kamel: 'The only consistent party since Sadat made his peace initiative was Begin'**

Council the Americans said no they refused to accept a Security Council resolution because they refused what was written in the resolution about settlements being illegal.

This is going backwards. So how can I be hopeful in the next term of Reagan? Look at the American attitude while the Israelis were invading Lebanon. It was very frustrating for the Arabs. And when I tell you that this area is bound to have bursts and eruptions here and there, this is one element: the American attitude during the invasion of Lebanon.

**Q: Do you think the Americans acquiesced in it; or did the Americans help sponsor it (the invasion)?**

A: Well, both, I think. It's a combination of acquiescence and sponsoring it. You know better about Haig.

**Q: Now Lebanon will become divided...**

A: Yes, Lebanon is divided and this will be a spot of instability again.

**Q: Let me ask the question as many Americans might looking mainly at American national interests. Are you saying that because of the way America has conducted its Arab-Israeli diplomacy that the Americans risk the possibility of a fundamentalist, anti-American, nationalist government coming to power in Egypt which would undo everything between these countries? I know that Egypt and Iran are very different countries, but, nevertheless, after many many years of American involvement in Iran the country became anti-American and blamed the US for their problems — in some cases rightly I think. Are you saying the US risk a similar thing with Egypt?**

A: I do, yes. I do. It's very difficult to predict.

real peace in this area which everybody would have enjoyed. And we are seeing the repercussions and the after effect — in Lebanon. And I don't know what will happen with Syria, I don't know what will happen in Jordan. It's crazy to leave people like Shamir and Begin run the thing here. Yes, they can invade Syria, they can invade Jordan. They can do all that, because who will stand in their way? But, what is the outcome of all this? Would it be stability, would it be peace? No.

**Q: Wouldn't the only option for the Arab world be to build up a nuclear threat?**

A: Yes, but the issue is whether this area will live in stability and peace or not. I tell you the way the Americans allowed Israel to behave has diminished the prospects of peace and stability in this area. And things will happen, if not this year, then next year...

**Q: Do you think the Mubarak government understands your analysis and doesn't know what to do about it; or do you think they disagree with your analysis. Do they appreciate the fears which you express?**

A: Well, the Egyptian government has many internal problems to face now. They cannot afford, for the time being, not to listen to what the Americans say and all that. But they are not happy, definitely they are not happy. I'm sure President Mubarak feels that what the Americans are doing — leaving the Israelis without checking them — is not a good policy for Egypt or for the area or for the Americans themselves in this area. I'm sure of this. But his hands are rather tied with the problems he is facing here, not finding other alternatives, and so on and so forth.

It is such a sad situation.

**Q: Is Heikal's book a fair portrait of Sadat? It's being condemned so loudly. (Ed. note: Mohamed Heikal, Autumn of Fury).**

A: I read Heikal's book. It's a good book. May be he's bitter about Sadat, but it is a very good book... It has good information on the rise of the Coptic movement and fundamentalism, and so on. It's fair and it's true.