EGYPT's former Foreign Minister breaks his long silence on recent Mid-east diplomacies...

'American treaty game —a military mockery'

WHEN Anwar Sadat announced his "sacred mission" to Jerusalem in November, 1977, Egypt's Foreign Minister, Ismail Fahmy, resigned.

Today Fahmy is writing his memoirs from his memento-filled apartment overlooking the Nile in the Cairo suburb of Zamalek.

For five years Fahmy was Sadat's front-man, opening and closing doors in both Moscow and Washington. Next to Sadat, only Ismail Fahmy knows the intimate details of how the world powers conducted their Mid-east diplomacy from before the October War through to Egypt's decision to make a unilateral arrangement with Israel.

Fahmy rarely grants interviews. He has said very little publicly since his resignation. But now Fahmy has broken his silence on Mid-east developments, to journalist Mark Bruzonsky, the *Saudi Gazette's* Washington correspondent.

Ismail Fahmy

PART 1: The road to Geneva

• BRUZONSKY: When President Sadat first went to Israel, do you think he had it in mind even then to reach what most people consider to be a separate peace with the Israelis? Or was it only later that he realised that this was the most he could get from the Israelis and the Americans?

▪ FAHMY: One of the main reasons why I declined to join Sadat on his visit to Jerusalem is the fact that the only thing that could come from such a visit was a separate agreement, no more than that. And that is why I resigned.

• You negotiated with the new Carter administration for almost a year before you left the Egyptian government. Why do you think the Carter administration acquiesced in the notion of a separate agreement after insisting so loudly that there be a comprehensive settlement and a Palestinian homeland?

▪ First of all, President Carter and his Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, and their colleagues, right up to Sadat's visit to Israel, were working very hard to get the Geneva Conference convened. And they were going to succeed! There is no doubt about it!

• In holding the conference you mean, but not necessarily in getting an agreement from the conference?

▪ Sure. First they were going to have all the parties go to Geneva to sit and negotiate. And Geneva was going to be convened, almost definitely, sometime in the last week of December 1977. And the Russians were going to participate.

Concurrently, Carter and Vance negotiated for a long time with the Russians on a framework for solving the Mid-east crisis once and for all. Then the Joint Statement came on October 1, 1977.

So there was serious work being done already.

And as a result of this you had the Joint Statement on October 1. What was this Joint Statement? Really, it was the proper framework for the comprehensive settlement with all parties concerned attending and the two superpowers as co-chairmen.

And this is why Carter and his colleagues were reluctant at the very beginning when Sadat went to Jerusalem, to go ahead and support him.

I don't think Sadat went to Jerusalem with the intention of sabotaging Geneva. I don't believe so. Egypt itself was co-operating with Carter formally on the convening of Geneva. We were not against it. We even accepted the one Arab delegation and the whole Carter formula.

• Is that how the PLO problem was going to be solved with PLO people coming as part of the overall delegation?

▪ Exactly. And before that you may remember again that Carter took, in August 1977, the unusual step of proposing that a formula be accepted by PLO leaders so that he and his administration could sit down with PLO people, thereby overcoming that very well-known difficulty with which the Carter administration found themselves saddled as a result of the Kissinger agreement with the Israelis in connection with the second disengagement on the Egyptian-Israeli front, namely that the Americans would not sit down to talks with the PLO without prior consultation with the Israelis.

And I was the intermediary between the Americans and the PLO.

It happened, really, when the process was just starting. The PLO proposed a different formula, and the Americans proposed another formula, a second formula. So the process of negotiations started through me on various formulae. This was a major step.

Do you understand what it meant? Suppose that we had succeeded? We *were* going to succeed with one formula or another. Do you understand the political and legal and even psychological meaning of the Americans sitting with the PLO?

• The actions of the American government, now, do not seem compatible with the stated plans of the American government in 1977.

▪ You know, you will find that ultimately, if there is to be any comprehensive peace settlement, it will be in accordance with the Joint Statement, which is amazing. Five years, ten years, you know.

• Let me shift from the history to the treaty that was signed recently and ask you about the superpower interests.

The treaty has a large military component for both Egypt and Israel. And there has been some discussion that the Americans are planning to buttress their military potential in the Mid-east in three ways:

1. By strengthening Israel as a potential arm of Western military might.

2. By strengthening Egypt as a potential gendarme in north Africa and possibly other Mid-east areas.

3. By a Fifth Fleet plus the preparation of American interventionist forces.

Do you believe that the military component of the treaty is unusually large?

▪ (unusually long pause) ... So far as Israel is concerned, I believe the Americans paid a very high price. (Pause) And this will appear in the future, because it will backfire.

• How? Why?

▪ **The only** thing which really generates peace is to have a balance between the major countries in any region of the world. Why? If Israel realises that Egypt alone, militarily speaking, is not that weak, then Israel will divert its attention from physical misuse of force to ways and means of reaching peace.

If Egypt is weak militarily, it will be in a very bad position even when to negotiate peaceful conditions.

The upshot of this second scenario is that there will never be a permanent peace. Egypt, as soon as it gets stronger, will say "No, we were forced to accept this under duress, this must be changed." The Israelis will say "No", and the whole thing will start all over again and either you will have another armed conflict or some sort of massive outside pressure will be needed to convince Israel to agree to the new Egyptian demands to right the wrongs that were done as a result of this imbalance in power.

The man who declined that Jerusalem journey

In fact, the military help which the Americans are giving to the Egyptians now is far inferior to what they are giving to the Israelis. Take for instance the F-5s deal. Why the hell do we need F-5s? They're obsolete. They are giving them to North Yemen now and to Sudan.

But Egypt is not Yemen or Sudan! Haile Selassie used to have the F-5s! The Israelis used to have F-5s about 10 years ago!

Now they give Egypt, the biggest and strongest country in the Arab world, 50 F-5s! And they give the Israelis the most sophisticated airplanes in the American arsenal.

It's a mockery! This is not American military help! This is a block to keep Egypt as it is militarily, or even to peace? years!

TOMORROW PART 2: The autonomy issue ...