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INTERNATIONAL FEATURES

Interview with Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, former foreign minister of Egypt.

'Egypt sold itself cheaply'

By MARK A. BRUZONSKY

Q: (Mark Bruzonsky) 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: (Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel) No, not 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, 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 a while. Really, I can't say I can go inside him. 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 for making 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. It's a failure because it did not achieve a comprehensive peace. This is clear. What is happening today is the biggest proof of this.



issues—still don't quite understand the implications of Camp David for the opposition in Egypt—I don't

mean the radical opposition, I mean the Foreign Ministry people like yourself who protested by resigning. Many Americans have even forgotten that one Foreign Minister resigned when Sadat went to Israel, another Foreign Minister, yourself, left him at Camp David. Because I've had the opportunity to come here often, I know that many persons in your Foreign Ministry oppose Sadat's policies and did so back in 1978, but they needed their jobs and few could resign.

A: Yes, yes.

Q: So where did Camp David go wrong? Did it go wrong at Camp David? Has it wrong to sign the agreement? Or was it wrong a few days later when Begin said he hadn't agreed to a moratorium on settlements? Or did it go wrong...

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 it 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. You should ask Herman Eilts (U.S. Ambassador in Cairo at the time), because Eilts told him a couple of months after Camp David that he gave away linkage. Eilts himself did. And Sadat said "no I have

ways declared that they are illegal and an obstacle to peace." "This is not feasible now", they said, and they proposed, not me...

Q: They proposed, not you...

A: Yes, they proposed, not me. I knew it was impossible at the time to dismantle them, but lessened—on that to see (what would happen). Then Mondale said, "what about freezing the settlements in the West Bank and Gaza for 5 years, for the transitional period?" And I said, I accepted 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 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 collusion (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 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

prehensive peace. This is clear. What is happening today is the biggest proof of this.

Q: But you have American friendship, you have a billion dollars in aid each year, and the Palestinian problem continues to be discussed.

A: We could have had American friendship and a billion dollars a year and maybe more and still have had a comprehensive peace. Why not?

Q: In other words, you think Egypt sold itself cheaply?

A: Very cheaply, yes, I think so. That's the result.

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 Carter?

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 the 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 away, one after the other.

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 together, working in politics in a way. I was a very young man at the time. And we were accused in a political trial at the time, and we were in prison together. After that, when Sadat made his peace initiative, I was the Ambassador to Germany. I came back to Cairo at 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.

Q: He didn't ask you?

A: No, he didn't ask me.

Q: That was typical Sadat.

A: This was typical Sadat. And I didn't know what to do. I couldn't resign before taking the job, especially because Fahmy be-



Sadat and Begin in Al-Arish.

fore had 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, since they called Israel the "so-called Israel." This was impractical, and the Israelis were benefitting from this. They seemed 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. I had an understanding with Sadat. I told him that, of course, a separate peace is out of the question. And he agreed. 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 realising the fundamental rights of the Palestinians—if we reach that, we can register this agreement at the United Nations and have an American guarantee for its implementation. 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 realising the other parts. So, I was rather flexible.

Q: As a Jew who is ideologically and historically oriented I have always wondered if Sadat understood that he was dealing with Revisionist Zionism. Did he understand that he wasn't dealing with

pragmatic, political people, that he was dealing with extremely ideological people to whom Sinai was not important, but to whom Judea and Samaria were everything?

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

Q: Some of us Jews joke that he is a Jewish ayatollah.

A: Yes, he is. He is the same type. I mean really he is. So I told Sadat that Begin has a terrorist background. I told him that he was wanted in Britain before, that he couldn't enter Britain because of this background.

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 there is a reason for this. 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; then he was a member of the Revolutionary Council, and he took the most important positions, Speaker of the House, etc. And suddenly without warning Nasser died, still young at the time, 52, and nobody thought he would ever die—and he became President.

Then the October war. Everyone, including Egyptians and Israelis, believed crossing the canal to be impossible. And then it went smoothly. So, everything which looked impossible to him . . .

Q: But his dream was to be the great Arab peacemaker, not to make a separate peace. He wanted to be the great Arab leader who went down in history as achieving that historic goal.

A: Definitely. Any ambitious person would look forward to such an achievement.

Q: If he were alive today, and you were speaking with him, having known him for 40 years, do you think he would admit that Camp David had failed, after the War in Lebanon, after Israel's actions in Hebron?

A: Well, I don't know whether he would admit it, but inwardly he would be quite sure. Look at the situation now: our relations with the Arabs, what is happening in Lebanon, what is happening in the area. The whole thing has run amok.

Q: If he had been President when Israel invaded Lebanon and bombed Beirut, do you think that he would have accepted it like Mubarak did?

A: What could he do? He was tied with this agreement, with these accords of Camp David, a demilitarized Sinai, etc. What could he do? I would say that if we hadn't signed these accords, I don't think Israel would have dared invade Lebanon the way it did; it would have prohibited it. But, I tell you, maybe he started with a grandiose ambition to achieve a general, comprehensive peace, and then gradually, because he was loosing—and he was a spend-thrift by all means—he was loosing all his assets. I don't know if you have followed what is written in (Mohamed) Heikal's book (Autumn of Fury).

Q: The American who follows these

gave away linkage. Elts himself did. And Sadat said "no I have a way . . ."

Q: But didn't Carter promise him linkage? Didn't Carter say that he would bring back linkage, that he would follow-through, that Sadat could 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's 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. The Americans, the Egyptians were zigzagging all the time . . .

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 such a clause in the Camp David agreements dealing with the settlements?

Q: You tell me. The President 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 asked, "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, the West Bank, and all over. And they said, 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 that they should be dismantled. And they said this is impossible. I said, "if we are looking for a real peace, why shouldn't they be dismantled? These are islands of imperialism; they are not consistent with the peace, and you have al-

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 to Begin and came to Sadat, and Sadat made concessions to Carter and so on . . .

Q: OK, but did Begin in your mind agree to freeze the settlements, or did he not agree?

A: I don't care whether he agreed or not. Carter says he agreed, and I think he did. But why did not Carter and Sadat put a provision (in the agreement) concerning this vital point? I mean, why did they accept to delete it?

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; when it's written and signed Begin will 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: It was put in the preamble . . .

A: Begin insisted on this. It was very clear that this was a vital principle. (It was put) among other language only at the insistence of Carter and Osama (Ed. Note: Dr.

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The Soviet view

Nuclear Balance—Moscow Vs. Washington

The medium-range nuclear land-based ballistic missile