

The Middle East Journal



- The Lebanese Forces: Their Origins and Role in Lebanon's Politics—*Lewis W. Snider*
- Ethnic Stratification and Foreign Policy in Israel: The Attitudes of Oriental Jews towards the Arabs and the Arab-Israeli Conflict—*Ofra Seliktar*
- Kings and People: Oman's State Consultative Council—*Dale F. Eickelman*
- The Last Great Game—*Milan Hauner*
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THE MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL

Winter 1984 ◦ Volume 38 Number 1

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INTERVIEW WITH MOHAMED IBRAHIM

KAMEL

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 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, I mean, 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 awhile. 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 to make peace with Israel was to gain American friendship and help and so on. But . . .

Q: But you look back and its 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: 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 a comprehensive peace. Why not?

Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, former Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs, resigned his position the final day of the Camp David Conference—September 17, 1978. Mark A. Bruzonsky interviewed him in Cairo in late July 1983.

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. I mean 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, 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 had 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 Ambassador in Germany, in Bonn. And I came back to Cairo the end of December to arrange for the visit of Chancellor Schmidt. 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 mean, I couldn't resign before taking the job. Especially because Fahmy resigned before, and Mohamed Riad after him. So, this is what happened. At the time I didn't have yet the chance to think over this peace initiative, really, 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 by 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, I mean, 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—this is something I as a Jew who is ideologically and historically oriented have always wondered—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 extremely ideologically people for whom Sinai was not important, but for whom Judea and Samaria were everything.

A: Yes, I understand you. I remember that before his peace initiative, months before, he was in the States visiting with Carter, and on his way back he stayed overnight in Germany. We stayed in the Black Forest. And during this particular time it was declared that Menachem Begin won the elections. And then somebody—a reporter—asked him what he thinks about Begin becoming Prime Minister of 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: Some of us Jews joke that he is a Jewish ayatullah.

A: Yes, he is. He is the same type. I mean really he is. So I had this discussion and told Sadat that he has this 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 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 at 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. So, everything which looked impossible to him . . .

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

A: Definitely. 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 has 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,

definitely. I mean look at the situation now, our relations with the Arabs, what is happening in Lebanon, what's happening in the area. The whole thing has run amok.

Q: Do you think if he had been President 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 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 losing—and he was a spendthrift by all means—he was losing 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 issues still doesn'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. I know, because I've had the opportunity to come here often, 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? Was it wrong to sign the agreement? Or was it wrong a few days later when Begin said no 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. And then suddenly he gave it away. You should ask Hermann Eilts [U.S. Ambassador in Cairo at the time], because Eilts told him once, a couple of months after Camp David, that he gave away linkage. Eilts himself did. And he said, "No, I have a way . . ."

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 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. I did, because I was watching Carter all the time. Carter had good intentions, no doubt about it, he had good intentions. He's the first American president who spoke about a

* [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].

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 in such a clause to 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 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, 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 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 . . .

Q: They proposed, not you . . .

A: Yes, they proposed, not me. 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 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 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 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: OK, but the question is, 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 and 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 favor 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 Ušama [Ed. Note: Dr. al Baz, one of Sadat's advisers].

Q: You know, that 24-hour period was so confused. 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, there was a strange composition to our delegation. The delegation was composed of Hasan al-Tuhami, 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 has nothing to do with the 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. Usama 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: How many aides were there?

A: There were about 5 or 6. But the point is that my ideas and my reservations, which were not only mine but represented the policies and the tactics made by the Foreign Ministry which is the competent organ, were in front of Sadat very clearly and very frankly. I used to talk to him—maybe because of my old relationship with him or because of my nature—very frankly. I could afford that. Maybe the others couldn't, but I could. And I was the Foreign Minister and I passed all this to him.

Q: With what result?

A: He would accept what I said and then Weizmann would go and speak to him and then he would agree to a new concession, one after the other and so on.

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?

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: How much did the money matter? How much did the linking of economic aid, with Egypt getting the same amount that the Israelis got, with your getting an expanded A.I.D. program, count? Did that matter to Sadat?

A: No. Well, I mean, Sadat was tied . . .

Q: The country needed the money, the country needed the help.

A: What is this billion we are getting from the United States? Had we had good relations with the Arabs we could have had more than this billion. And we could have had this billion and more from the United States itself. Why not? I mean it's not a tied price to our making peace or not. Because if they had done that then what would be the future of Egypt? It would fall, I mean for the Soviets. The Americans can't afford to throw away Egypt.

Q: So, what comes now? It's 5 years after the agreement. The Israelis are gradually incorporating the West Bank, and they've invaded Lebanon. The PLO is in disarray. The Arab world is completely confused. Egypt is impotent. And maybe 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: Isn't it possible that the Israelis, if they can get the world to accept Jordan as Palestine, will eventually win, will eventually be allowed to continue to keep "Judea and Samaria" and the Palestinians will be in Jordan, Egypt will acquiesce in this, the Lebanese will make peace with Israel.

A: Never, never. I mean, this is the end of stability, the end of peace in this area.

Q: You're saying the Arabs will fight Israel now?

A: The prospects are too many, and nobody can predict what will happen. But lots of changes will happen in this area, lots of regimes. . .

Q: What about Egypt?

A: What can we do now? What is Egypt? Egypt is now like any other country. It's not fulfilling its position, it's not fulfilling what geography and history dictates of Egypt. It has no say . . . I mean. . .

Q: Let me ask the question differently. If you were now Foreign Minister—if you had been younger and stayed an Ambassador and Mubarak now came to you and said that all the advice he got in your cables was good advice and after the war in Lebanon Egypt must regain its leadership, must play its role. So, he wants you now to become Foreign Minister. OK? What can Egypt do? Or have the Israelis won, have they defeated you? Defeat by definition is when you no longer have enough power to stand up.

A: Now the situation is very complicated. And now it's very difficult for Egypt to go back on the peace treaty with Israel.

Q: Is that your only option?

A: No. I wouldn't be shy in freezing relations. I wrote when Israel invaded Lebanon that in 1956 Israel invaded Egypt during the Tripartite aggression of the time. And Ben-Gurion said the armistice agreement was void. And they were the invaders who didn't heed this armistice agreement. So, why shouldn't we say when Israel invaded Lebanon that the Camp David agreement is also void and finished? I am the one who is attacked. Why should the Israelis throw away this armistice agreement which was the bondage of peace?

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 3 or 4 days ago what happened in the Security Council.

Q: What happened? I was in Khartoum.

A: Well, 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 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?

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: How will Egypt react if another war breaks out and hundreds of thousands of West Bank Palestinians are pushed across the river into Jordan. This seems to make sense in terms of Israel's policies, doesn't it?

A: Yes, of course, I mean . . .

Q: Is Egypt prepared to accept anything like this?

A: Well, I don't know how our President, how our Government will react. But this is irrelevant to what counts. What counts will be the reaction of the mass of the Egyptian people. I don't think they will be happy and I don't know what will happen. Anything can erupt here. We could have a fundamentalist . . . I don't know, it's open I mean.

Q: Let me ask the question as many Americans might be looking mainly at American national interests. Are you saying that because of the way America has conducted its Arab-Israeli diplomacy that we risk the possibility of a fundamentalist, anti-American, nationalist government coming to power in Egypt which would undo everything between our 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 us for their problems—in some cases rightly I think. Are you saying we risk a similar thing with Egypt?

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

Q: The American people do not appreciate such warnings. The American people are told that Egypt is a country happy with the Camp David arrangement, that we are 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.

I remember I told Ambassador Atherton after I resigned that I don't want you to be in the position of the American Ambassador in Iran.

Q: What did he say?

A: Well, he wasn't sure. Everybody is taking Egypt for granted. This might last a decade or something. But you never know what will happen . . .

How can you guarantee the behavior of Israel once it solves its problems and satisfies its ambitions . . .

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: Without Camp David that group never would have taken that step?

A: No, but I tell you that this was an element. Of course, from their point of view they think about Jerusalem, the fundamentalists, as a sacred place and all that. Of course this was a very important part.

Q: As far as Jerusalem, after Camp David the Israelis annexed it, or incorporated it, I forget. . .

A: They annexed it before Camp David. And the Camp David Accords never touched the Jerusalem point except through what I call the merry-go-round, the letters. Sadat would write to Carter telling him that the Egyptian position on Jerusalem is that it is part of the West Bank and so on, then Carter would notify Begin who would write to Carter that Jerusalem has been made the eternal capital of Israel . . .

Q: But you know a person could argue with you and say that the Israelis invaded Lebanon, they bombed Beirut, an Arab capital, and here in Egypt you had only one little demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy. . .

A: Yes, because you haven't seen our police here. This is another army now, what they call the central police force. It's an army.

Q: The secret police?

A: No, not the secret police. There is a certain branch of the police, it's a small army.

Q: People wanted to demonstrate but they were afraid?

A: Definitely.

Q: Afraid of being hit, or arrested, or . . .

A: Definitely, yes.

Q: Because we heard there was one demonstration outside the Israeli Embassy of a few hundred people.

A: Yes, but people were scared. The attitude of the government was very weak. They didn't even withdraw Ambassadors. This was a very weak position and nobody was happy about it. And I mean you see lots of people here and everybody will tell you that they were not happy with the government's attitude.

Q: When I first came here in '77 Egypt had a dead-end policy. It was called "go to the Geneva Conference and try to negotiate." Now it looks as if Egypt has another dead-end policy. It's called "hang on to the Camp David agreement."

A: Yes, yes. I wasn't very unhappy with the Geneva Conference . . . Now look what happened after the Camp David accords. Begin's position—this new Khomeini, this Israeli Khomeini—has been established. Because . . .

Q: And given the Nobel Peace Prize.

A: Maybe, maybe, Begin would have fallen, and vanished at the time. Then we could have more reasonable people to talk to and so on. But you have brought a Khomeini, that's what I tell you . . . This is all very sad because we could have a real paradise in this area with Israel among us, with everybody happy and everybody prosperous. And the Israelis would have prospered a lot through peace.

Q: What do you think of Syrian policy now?

A: Well, they are condemned to this policy. What can we do? 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. What else can he do?

Q: Do you think the Israelis are preparing for a war against Syria?

A: Well, I don't think they know. But with people like Shamir, like Begin, like Arens, I mean . . . It's not to be excluded. These people . . .

Q: Let's just assume for a moment that a war breaks out and the Israelis start defeating the Syrian army, and they shell Damascus, and they take out the Russian missiles. Do you think the Russians can afford to be so embarrassed again?

A: Well, this is a question which I really can't answer. But there comes a point, eventually, where they will have to do something or else their position in this whole area is gone. So, you never know when they reach this point. But if Begin is left to run amok all over the area this point might come.

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 have enjoyed. And we are seeing the repercussions and the after effects—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 to run things 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: Do Egyptians now begin to fear that if Israel can invade Lebanon they can also, if Egypt would stand up to them, they can also invade Sinai again, they can also take Sharm al-Shaykh again?

A: They wouldn't bother to do that. Why should they? Since we are not going to fight them,

why should they bother? It is a very sad situation. But what will the Israelis achieve? I mean why stay in this area as a foreign-dominating body? Why stay as a foreign empire imposing its will?

Q: I think there's something you're forgetting. I think the Israelis feel they fought you for 30 years and eventually you gave in. And they feel that Camp David proves that if they stay tough, if they beat the Arabs, sooner or later they'll agree to peace . . .

A: They beat Sadat, they didn't beat the area! They beat Sadat, I mean Sadat gave in. It doesn't mean a thing!

Q: It does. It means they can go to war in Lebanon without worrying about Egypt. It means they got a separate peace, doesn't it?

A: Yes, but this is not a definite, permanent situation. You never know what will come. Things are bound to change. In which direction I can't predict. But definitely something is wrong, something is wrong and it can't stay forever like that. Definitely! I mean, the way things are going to work if the Israelis have their way as they are doing now is like this. By telephone the Israeli Prime Minister will call Egypt and say, "Don't cultivate cotton except in this area". Then he will call the Saudis and say, "Set the price of oil at so much." Who will accept that forever? And why?

Q: Well, but the other question is who can oppose it successfully? The Arabs are totally divided, totally weak. The Israeli army can defeat all of them at the same time. . .

A: Well, well, well . . . You know, when you go back to history, you see that situations like this never continue.

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: It sounds as if I could come back here in a few weeks and you wouldn't be so surprised to wake up and find out that a group of fundamentalists . . .

A: No, no, I wouldn't say tomorrow morning. But these things go deep . . . And the way the Israelis are behaving is provocative and is humiliating. One shouldn't neglect the feelings of our people. So, eventually, something will happen. This something, I don't know. I don't mean that we will overcome Israel. But we will never enjoy peace or stability, we'll never see that again, unless some solution is found which is acceptable to all parties and to all peoples.

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

