

Those

Have Known

Anwar el – Sadat

www.anwarSadat.org

INTRODUCTION

The dates of May 16 and October 6 stand out as landmarks in the life of Anwar el-Sadat. For Sadat, October 6 was his day of victory and honor, the day he took office as the third elected president of Egypt. It also revived sad memories for him, for on that day in 1973 he lost his younger brother, an air force pilot who took part, under the command of Husni Mubarak, at that time commander of the Egyptian air force, in the aerial attack that led to the recapture of the east bank of the Suez Canal by the Egyptian army.

Sadat saw October 6 as the day on which he achieved victory for Egypt after a series of defeats at the hands of the Israelis. The Egyptian soldier thus regained confidence, and the Egyptian people regained confidence in Sadat's leadership and in the army. Sadat always believed that if it had not been for the action of October 6 there would have been no subsequent peace. The state of no war-no peace that followed the defeat of June 5, 1967, led to complete paralysis in Egypt and throughout the Arab world. This is why when Sadat thought of offering a contribution to the Egyptian press he launched the magazine known today as *October*.

When Sadat created his own party, the National Democratic party, two years after his historic trip to Jerusalem, he started planning a party newspaper and at once thought of another important date in his career: May 16, 1971, when he overcame his political opponents and started his process of internal liberalization.

It took Sadat one year, thinking and contemplating, talking to many people and asking for new ideas and advice, for this was his style whenever

he undertook an important task. Finally, he was satisfied with the quality and design of the paper he planned, which was to be called *Mayo* to commemorate his May 1952 anniversary.

In December 1980, he held his first meeting with Abdallah Abdel Bari, chairman of the new publication, and Ibrahim Saada, the editor in chief. It was decided at that meeting that the president would write a historical narration for the paper, connecting the prerevolutionary period and the post-1952 period with today.

After considering the idea, Sadat said it was almost impossible for him to write the complete story, for that was the job of a professional historian. But suddenly his eyes sparkled, and to those who knew him it meant he had found a solution. Sadat said he would devote one page a week to writing about different personalities, politicians, heads of state, in Egypt, the Arab world, and world-wide. The president said this would provide a good opportunity for the youth of Egypt to learn something of their recent history, for those who had no past would have no future.

The president said he had stopped his journalistic writing nine or ten years ago, and it would be difficult to resume. He then suggested that a tape recorder should be used in weekly sessions with him. The recording and writing sessions began early in 1981 and went on every week until October 6, 1981, when he was assassinated. Some were published in *Mayo* at the time, others were written or recorded for later use. Those assembled here, for the first time, represent fragments of an unfinished life story.

THE BIRTH OF THE REVOLUTION

When the July revolution broke out in ١٩٥٢ we considered the old warrior, Aziz al-Masri, its uncontested godfather. This is why when we differed about handling the issue of the king we went to him for advice. Those days that shook Egypt started with our decision in January ١٩٥٢ to carry out the revolution in three years' time. The founding committee of the Free Officers' movement met in the home of Hassan Ibrahim in Heliopolis and decided to plan for the revolution to take place during November ١٩٥٥.

It appeared to us that we needed this time in order to complete the Free Officers' Association, so that it could carry out its responsibilities to the revolution. Though the base for the Free Officers' movement was there in ١٩٥٢, we thought the "moment" was not yet ripe.

We chose the month of November because during that month the king returned from his annual summer vacation in Alexandria. We did not want to carry out our revolution in the summer, which would mean our forces would have to be split between Cairo and Alexandria. We wanted to strike at one place and at one time. After making that decision we went back to the barracks. Abdel Hakim Amer, Salah Salem, and myself served at Rafah, while Gamal Salem served at al-Arish, and Gamal Abdel Nasser in Cairo.

Soon after we had made our decision, Cairo was in flames caused by rioting, and Gamal Abdel Nasser felt that the fire provided an opportunity to begin the revolution immediately. The capital was under curfew with the

army the only force in control. So we reasoned, what if the army (it was in the center of the capital) announced it was taking over governmental authority? It was an appealing question, but the situation was not that simple. The important thing was not the strength of the forces in Cairo but the number of those who were loyal to us. Our estimates were that upon the outbreak of the revolution we would have no more than one battalion on our side. Gamal Abdel Nasser went around the city to find those who were loyal to us, and he tried to meet some officers in a camp in the center of Cairo; but he found the situation was not encouraging, so we postponed the date. This time, however, it was not postponed to November ۱۹۵۰, as we had previously decided, but to November ۱۹۵۲. We thus brought the timing of the revolution forward three years. One of the reasons for this was that according to information which I had conveyed to Nasser, the king's reign was over and he was thinking of leaving the country.

Yousuf Rashad, the confidant of King Farouk, had informed me that after the fire in Cairo in January the king was preparing to leave. He had chosen the people to accompany him, ten in all, among them Yousuf Rashad himself. The king had not informed anyone of his planned departure except Rashad, whom he trusted deeply, and Rashad had passed on to me this grave secret. During one of my holidays I told Nasser: "The king is completely broken and is thinking of escaping. Then I related to Nasser the secret that Rashad had told me. This is why the timing was advanced first to November ۱۹۵۲ and then to July of the same year.

The political developments that had taken place from January to July ۱۹۵۲ also led to our conviction that the time was ripe. During that period

four cabinets were formed. And on the twentieth of July Naguib el-Hilaili was asked to form his second cabinet for six months. This cabinet lasted only a few hours, after which the revolution took place. While the cabinet was being formed, we were informed that Naguib el-Hilaili had chosen Hussein Sirry Amer for the post of minister of war. Nasser knew that his name had been sent to the king among the new nominees and that el-Hilaili had chosen him for that post to please the king. But what was more serious was the fact that Hussein Sirry knew seven of us personally, and he was quoted as having said: "I will show you who are the free officers".

Thus we expected that he would round up those of us he knew as soon as he took up his new cabinet post and so kill the revolution before its birth, or at least force us to postpone it for several years.

When Nasser was informed about these developments, he said: "If we wait Hussein Sirry will destroy us. We will have to eat him before he eats us." On the basis of this Nasser issued his orders to start the revolution. But what Nasser did not know at the time was that the king had omitted Hussein Sirry from his cabinet and chosen his brother-in-law, Ismail Shirin, for the post of minister of war. Ismail Shirin did not have a chance to exercise his authority for even one day.

Nasser sent Hassan Ibrahim to inform me about the decision at the al-Arish airport. On the evening of July 20 I received a telephone call asking me to be at the airport the next day, the twenty-first of July, because Hassan Ibrahim would be arriving from Cairo with a message from "Abou Menkar," which was the code name we had given to Nasser. As soon as we met he said, "Abou Menkar asks you to leave for Cairo tomorrow. The revolution

has been set to take place between July ٢٢ and August ١٥. It could happen any time during that period.”

I left Hassan Ibrahim to inform Carnal Salem, who was also at the al-Arish airport, and went back to my unit commander to ask for a holiday. I told him my mother was very sick, and he granted me an immediate leave of absence.

Next day, the twenty-second of July, I took the military train from Rafah at eight o'clock in the morning and arrived in Cairo by four o'clock in the afternoon, but I couldn't find Nasser. In the past I used to find him waiting for me with his second-hand Austin whenever I came to Cairo, but this time he was not there. I went to my home and, as it was summer and I enjoy outdoor movies, I took my wife Jihan to the cinema.

When we returned to our home, I found a message from Nasser who had written to tell me that the project would take place that night and that we were to meet at Abdel Hakim's home at eleven o'clock. I asked the porter about the officer who left the message. He said: “The officer, your colleague came twice, once at eight o'clock, and the other at ten o'clock I told him you were at the cinema; I had no idea which one so he left the card.”

Later I learned that Nasser did not wait for me at the station because he was busy with the Free Officers preparing then for the night's operation. I had never imagined that the message I received would lead to them carrying out the revolution immediately upon my arrival in Cairo. I put on my uniform and hurried to the headquarters at Kubeh Bridge. By this time it was between twelve-thirty and one o'clock in the morning. I heard gunfire. The

operation had begun, and our forces were clearing the area. An officer stopped me and prevented me from entering headquarters, as his orders were not to allow in any high-ranking officers. I tried to convince him that I belonged to the revolutionary group, but he would not listen; then I heard the voice of Abdel Hakim Amer telling them to release me and informing me that the operation had succeeded. We were in control of army headquarters. We walked to the headquarters, which is now the ministry of defense. The same place that had witnessed my interrogation was now the command post of the revolution. All of us spent the night there and stayed until the king left the country on July ٢٦. Next morning I sat down to write the communiqué announcing the revolution, and broadcast it myself. Then we discussed the steps that were to follow.

The first step was to choose a prime minister. At the same time we wanted to enlarge our conflict with the king, but we wanted to carry out a careful and calculated plan so that our forces could arrive in Alexandria where Farouk spent the summer. We discussed the nominee for the post and decided upon Ali Maher. I was known to the public for my political activity; so Nasser asked me to meet with Ali Maher and request that he form a cabinet on behalf of the whole revolutionary council.

I did not know where Ali Maher's home was, since pashas at the time were a remote class. I called Ihsan Abdel Koddeus (a leading Egyptian journalist and novelist) and asked him if he knew where Ali Maher lived. He said that he did; so I asked him to accompany me. His home was at Giza where the Vietnamese embassy is located today. Ali Maher received us on a small balcony on the second floor. I told him that I had come on behalf of

the revolutionary council to ask him to form the new cabinet. As we were talking four planes passed over our heads, and he asked: "Are they with you?" I answered, "Yes, of course." He sighed and continued his conversation with me. Ihsan Abdel Koddeus was continually nudging me as the conversation progressed, and when Maher left us for a while, I asked Ihsan: "Why are you nudging me, is anything wrong?" He said: "Yes, the publisher Idgar Galad is in the next room and is eavesdropping, and you didn't notice." Galad was a king's man, and it appeared that Maher had asked him to listen in on the conversation in order to report it because Ah Maher wasn't yet ready to abandon the king. I told Ihsan: "Yes, I wanted Galad to overhear the conversation; this is why I was talking in a loud voice so that he will convey it to the king."

Ali Maher returned after a while and looked at me and said: "Truly, I would like to form a cabinet, but you know that for the past ten years I have had my problems with the king and Ahmed Hassanein, and also with the parties. I don't know whether you will continue on your path or not, or whether I will wake up one day and find you out of office. If that happens, then the king will cut off my head."

I then asked him: "Is this your final decision?"

He said: "Give me time to consult with the king and to reach an understanding with him." I agreed. I left Ali Maher and returned to headquarters, and after a while Ali Maher called back and said: "I have called the king and he agreed that I should form a new cabinet. I am scheduled to meet him at five." But before Ali Maher went to see the king in Alexandria he called us back and said that he would like to see us.

Both Nasser and I agreed to meet Ali Maher again at his home in Giza. But before we left we decided we should be ready to break openly with the king. We concluded that if we presented a number of unacceptable demands to him he would become emotional and reject them. That would then give us a pretext to open fire on his guards. So we carefully chose six demands, insignificant to us, but calculated to enrage him. The most important of these demands were the appointment of Muhammad Naguib as commander in chief of the army, and the removal of all the king's men from command positions.

Ali Maher received us at his home in a state of great satisfaction, thinking he had won both the king and the revolution over to his side. We presented our demands and were surprised to hear him reply: "I think the king will be quite receptive to your requests. From the telephone conversations I have had with him today, I have sensed his readiness to reach an understanding with you. He is unlikely to raise problems with the revolution; so hopefully this issue can be quickly resolved."

Ali Maher bade us farewell and left to see the king, who was waiting impatiently in Alexandria, admitting him to the palace without protocol. Shortly after I was surprised to receive an urgent phone call from Ali Maher in Alexandria. "What's happening?" I asked. He responded by saying that the king had agreed to all our demands. He had not only appointed Muhammad Naguib commander in chief of the army, he had also promoted him to the rank of general. I asked: "And his entourage? Are they excluded?"

“All your requests have been granted,” said Ali Maher. “But I think that you and one of your colleagues should come to the palace to sign the visitors’ book and thank the king for what he has done. By so doing we shall be able to solve any other problems, and everything will proceed smoothly.”

“All right,” I said. “I will answer you tomorrow.” I informed Gamal about the telephone call with Ali Maher on the night of July ٢٤. I then allowed a day to pass without replying to Maher and he finally called me to ask why I had not turned up to sign the visitors' book. “I shall come today,” I replied. “Meet me in the cabinet building in Alexandria.” Meanwhile our revolutionary forces were moving toward Alexandria so that we would have a firm grip on the city when the time came. I had agreed with Gamal that I should go to Alexandria and present an ultimatum to the king as soon as our forces had complete control of the city, but not before. I would present the ultimatum and demand his abdication. But we could not do this until we were ready. Hence the delays.

It seems that some of my colleagues were jealous of the role I was playing and of my contacts with Ali Maher, but this was a quite natural role for me because of my previous political activity and because Maher knew no one else on the Revolutionary Council.

I spoke again with Nasser before leaving on my mission to Alexandria. I told him my analysis was that the king had been completely broken since the events of the Cairo fire-the evidence for this was the list he had prepared of people he would take abroad with him. There was going to be no problem with the king, I concluded. Faced with our ultimatum, he would abdicate and there would be no reason for us to waste our energy fighting a battle we

were winning anyway. Gamal was satisfied with my analysis and said: “The important thing is to rid me of this headache over the king, then we will have control of the situation.” I can see him to this day, thirty years later, standing there smoking a Craven A cigarette.

Then Muhammad Naguib came in and asked to accompany me to Alexandria. This had not been in our plans, but Gamal and I both welcomed him and we flew together in an air force plane from an old airport close to Nasser's home in Heliopolis. From the el-Nozha airport in Alexandria we went directly to the cabinet offices in Bolkly, where we were received by dozens of journalists and photographers. Naguib and I found Ali Maher waiting for us in his office with a worried frown on his face. “Why were you delayed?” he asked. “Is anything wrong?”

“No, nothing,” I answered. He told me the king was worried because of our delay. He again asked us to sign the visitors' book, thanking the king for responding to our demands. Such a request obviously reflected the king's concern as well as Ali Maher's. They were unsure of our real intentions. But I had to keep them waiting a little longer until I was sure of our control over the city. So I said I would come and see them again at six o'clock, in three hours' time.-

I went immediately to Camp Mostafa Pasha to see Zakaria Mohieddin, then chief of staff of the revolutionary council and responsible for the movement of our forces. He told me he could not be ready until eight o'clock the following morning because troops were still arriving and would need rest and food. He had to make sure he had control of all the palaces, or else the king might manage to flee from one palace to another. So once again I had

to postpone my meeting with Ali Maher, which of course had only one real purpose: to deliver the ultimatum to the king.

When I told him I was postponing my visit until nine o'clock, his voice was full of concern. The king had been asking him about the troop movements in Alexandria. I tried to reassure him, saying it was simply to ensure the security of the country and of foreigners. Of course, he was thinking all this time of supporting the king while at the same time making sure he remained prime minister. My main concern was to ensure our military control so that I could present the ultimatum and bring the nightmare to an end.

We spent the night working at the camp, with Zakaria Mohieddin reviewing all the army postings so that the king could not escape. Gamal Salem arrived from Cairo. He had been in al-Arish when the revolution broke out and had been sent up to Alexandria by Nasser to help with the ultimatum.

My view all along had been that we should not involve ourselves in a battle if we were going to win our ends anyway. But Gamal Salem thought it would be best to kill the king. I said there was no need to kill him because he would flee the country the moment we presented the ultimatum. Our aim should be to keep control of the situation so that we could proceed with our work and achieve our goals. I told Salem that Nasser had agreed with me that there should be no unnecessary bloodshed. Once blood started to flow it might never stop. The discussion went on and on, with Naguib sitting between us as umpire and Mohieddin arranging the placement of his troops on a map. By two o'clock in the morning Gamal Salem said he was going to

report back to Nasser and consult with him. We were not to make any moves until we heard from him further.

We continued writing out the ultimatum in longhand until it was finished. Then I folded the paper and went to bed.

Next day I headed out for Bolkly without waiting to hear from Gamal Salem, because I had agreed on everything beforehand with Nasser. Ali Maher had told the press we were on the way, and we found about two hundred journalists waiting for us. We entered Ali Maher's office and were given two chairs facing his desk. He seemed to be delighted because everything, he thought, was moving in the direction of his own interests and he figured that he would receive the blessings of both the king and the revolutionaries. He thought he was on the way to becoming the only center of power in the country, once he had gotten rid of the old political parties.

Maher was very content as he sat there and asked us to have coffee with him. He leaned back in his chair with confidence and said to us: "I hope you have come with your decision".

"Yes, of course," I replied. I reached for my briefcase and got out the written ultimatum, moved to his desk and read it out in a loud voice. Then I dropped it into his hands. I saw him shrinking in his chair as a minute passed, seeming like a century. He took a breath and then said to us with difficulty: "Are you confident you will succeed?"

"Of course," I said. "Good for the king and Ahmed Hassanein," he answered. "They deserve it."

Then Maher began to narrate to us stories of corruption in the palace. When he had finished, he looked up at me and said: "Farouk thought the end had come on July twenty-third. He said this would not end calmly and I tried to comfort him. But he was right." He then told us the king had become very concerned that morning when troops encircled the Ras al-Tin Palace at seven o'clock and skirmishes had broken out between the royal guards and the revolutionary forces. But the king had ordered his men to cease fire and close the palace gates. He was terrified that the guards were about to slay him and called on the American ambassador to protect him.

After Ali Maher had finished his story about the king's reactions, I asked him to deliver the ultimatum to the king, saying that if he did not leave the country by six o'clock that same night we would not be responsible for the consequences. Ali Maher stood up to receive the ultimatum, and I asked him to sign a receipt for it. Then I called Mohieddin to escort him to the palace. The meeting with the king did not take him five minutes. Soon he was calling me again from Bolkly, the cabinet office, to say: "Congratulations. The king has accepted the ultimatum and will leave the country by six o'clock." We then met with Soliman Hafez, the cabinet's legal adviser, to draw up the abdication formula, and Hafez took it to the king for his signature. The king's hands were shaking so much Hafez had to ask him to sign it twice.

My task was to start preparations for the departure of the king's yacht, the Mahroussa, which took six hours to get ready to sail. I then ordered the air force and the coast guard to salute the king as he was leaving. I had received notice that the coast guard was preparing to fire on the royal yacht,

and I wanted to be certain that the operation ended without bloodshed. The hour that divided two eras came. At 7:00 p.m. on July 26, 1952, Muhammad Naguib, Hussein el-Shafei, later a vicepresident, and Gamal Salem all boarded the royal yacht to pay farewell to the king while I stayed on board the command destroyer Ibrahim. The historic moment passed peacefully, with no bloodshed as Nasser and I had desired.

But Gamal Abdel Nasser had in the meantime had another session with Gamal Salem in Cairo. Salem had told him about our disagreement over how to handle the king and woke him at three in the morning to say the king had to be killed. Nasser told him to go and see Aziz al-Masri, who would judge who was right and who was wrong. They both went around to al-Masri's house and woke him up to tell him of our disagreement about the fate of the king: Salem wanted him executed; Sadat wanted him to abdicate and leave the country peacefully.

Al-Masri was a revolutionary who believed in the use of force. So he told them they should not leave the king alive; he must be slain. But Nasser decided in the end not to follow al-Masri's advice, although we considered him our tutor and-as I have said-the godfather of our revolution. During his final years, we wanted to give him his due, and when he asked to go as ambassador to Moscow, where he had many friends, we allowed him to do so.

After his retirement al-Masri lived peacefully at his apartment in Zamaiek until his death. All of us marched in his funeral parade and afterward boarded a helicopter to Borg el-Arab, which after our long service

in the desert was closest to our hearts and where we always liked to go for contemplation and relaxation.

There I sat, surrounded by all the solitude, liberating my soul and thoughts. I said words that nobody heard: “God bless his soul, the fighter who never gave up. God bless the soul of the man who prepared the way for our revolution. May the soul of Aziz al-Masri rest in peace.”

www.anwarsadat.org