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MY PEACE INITIATIVE

When I am faced with a problem, no matter how impossible a solution might seem, I am careful to avoid losing my temper and flaring up. More importantly, I do not limit myself to finding one solution to a problem but consider it essential to look for alternative solutions; so if the first fails, I can move on to the second, then to the third, and so on.

I have learned that purity of intention is very helpful in creating an atmosphere conducive to the solution of the most difficult and complex issues. This is what happened when I began to think of how to solve the most difficult and complex problem we face: the Arab-Israeli conflict. It is true that a comprehensive solution to the problem has not yet been reached, but it is equally true that we have been able to take a first step in the direction of that just and comprehensive solution we seek.

The beginning was not easy . . .

It all started when Jimmy Carter invited me to visit him in February —just one month after he had taken over as president of the United States. The problem posed by the Arab-Israeli conflict was the basis of our talks in Washington. The agenda consisted of three items: Item 1 : The problem of the Arab lands occupied after the Six-Day War.

Item 2 : Relations between the Arabs and Israelis.

Item 3 : The Palestinian question, which we considered the basis of all the other problems. I myself had added a fourth item to the agenda: namely,

the situation in Lebanon. Civil war had broken out there, with many implications.

We did not differ greatly in our discussions over the first item concerning the Arab territory occupied after the Six-Day War. We differed, however, over the second. This emerged when I said to Carter: "How can you ask us to have normal relations with the Israelis while they continue to occupy our lands? Israel is anxious to normalize relations before a withdrawal agreement is reached, in order to justify the occupation and its continuation—just as they once used Israeli security as a pretext to occupy the lands of others. The October War gave the lie to the theory of Israeli security. Because of this, they have come up with a new excuse: their call to establish normal relations with the Arabs before they agree to withdraw."

I also said to Carter: "It is unacceptable for the Israelis to call upon us to normalize relations before we agree to end the occupation and draw up a timetable specifying the stages of a complete Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands. To talk of normalizing relations while the Israeli occupation of our lands continues is unacceptable to any Arab thinker."

We discussed that item at length. Carter was unable to convince me of his point of view. But the visit was nevertheless a very important one, for we pledged to work together toward solving the Arab-Israeli conflict, no matter what difficulties this created. I remember my words to Carter: "We shall never lose hope. We shall certainly find a solution to each problem we are faced with. What is important is that we maintain direct contact between the two of us, so that we can exchange points of view on

every step we take.” Carter was sincere in his pledge. He wanted to participate in the search for a just and comprehensive solution, acceptable to all parties.

It is enough that he was the first American president to call unceasingly for the right of the Palestinian people to a national homeland. No American president before Carter had dared to voice such a view. Carter alone stood up courageously, expressing his opinion firmly. He promptly incurred the hatred and wrath of world Zionism, which did everything in its power to destroy him. For Carter to have been faced with the enmity of the Zionists and the Israelis is understandable. What is not understandable is the antagonism of the Arabs toward the only American president who had called for a national homeland for the Palestinian people. No one else had given a thought to this, from the days of Harry Truman, in whose term the Israeli state was first created, right down to the time when Carter took over the U.S. government.

I remember the time Crown Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia went to Washington and said to Carter: “Rest assured. Yasser Arafat has agreed to accept the Security Council resolution number ” (which recognizes the right of Israel to exist as a state within secure frontiers). Fahd added: “Here is Arafat’s signature on this written document, testifying to this.” The very next day, Yasser Arafat stood up and announced that he did not recognize resolution and that he had not spoken with Prince Fahd on the matter. Prince Fahd was infuriated.

As soon as he returned to Saudi Arabia he issued a violent condemnation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in which he referred to the

signature on the document. He had realized beforehand how he should deal with Arafat and his supporters. Unfortunately, I never followed that procedure in my own dealings with Arafat. The PLO people would sit with me and approve issues and resolutions, but as soon as I announced them, they would evasively deny they had anything to do with them.

Carter received the same treatment from the Syrians. They baffled and bewildered him, wearing him out. At the beginning, they agreed with Carter that the Arabs should go as one delegation to deal with the Israelis, instead of in separate groups. Carter asked for my opinion. Knowing the political maneuvers to which the Syrians are addicted, I rejected the proposal, saying to Carter: "One delegation will achieve nothing. The conference will be transformed into an auction for never-ending slogans."

After that, everything came to a standstill as a result of Syria's insistence on its demand. After a while, Carter was in touch with me again and tried to persuade me to accept the Syrian point of view. He said to me: "It will be to the Palestinians' advantage if the Arabs go as one delegation. In that way the Palestinians will be represented. Israel won't object to the presence of a Palestinian representative within a single delegation; but if they go as a separate delegation, then they will object." I knew this was another maneuver on the part of the Syrians, but I agreed to Carter's request nonetheless. The Syrian rulers were taken aback. They found themselves in an extremely embarrassing situation. The road to the conference had been paved—but in reality they had no desire to see the conference take place. So they went back on their word, refusing to participate in a single delegation. They began to pose problems as to how

the delegation would be chosen, with never-ending objections to everything proposed.

Carter did not know how to handle the Syrians, for these were his first dealings with them. He imagined they would be as good as their word and was taken aback when he found that the word of a Syrian was in fact a thousand and one words, and that what they agreed to one day they rejected the next, returning to it the day after. Carter's bewilderment grew. He found himself at a loss. Taking up his pen, he wrote me a letter in his own hand, sending it to me through an intermediary. Neither the American embassy in Cairo nor the Egyptian embassy in Washington knew anything about the contents of that handwritten message.

In it, Carter confessed his bewilderment at these political maneuvers, whose aims he could not fully understand. He had been working toward a solution of the problem, and he had imagined his efforts alone were enough to secure for him the cooperation and gratitude of all concerned. He had therefore been stunned by the maneuvering, and the complications had left him at a total loss. I answered Carter's letter with an assurance that I was still resolved on what we had pledged to do during my visit to the White House. We would find a solution that would not only get us out of the vicious circle they were forever trying to keep us locked into, but we would also reach a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. I admit here that when I wrote my reply to Carter I had no ideas in my mind about the shape of that comprehensive solution. All I had were good intentions, coupled with a firm resolve.

I sat down to think. All the possibilities gathered before me. The issue was a major and complex one, requiring in turn a major and complex solution. From the newspapers, I learned that Menachem Begin had won the Israeli elections and, as prime minister, intended to travel to Rumania to meet President Ceausescu. Ceausescu is one of my closest and oldest friends—and was also a friend of President Nasser. He had often pressed Nasser to allow him to take on the role of mediator with the Israelis. His insistence had greatly embarrassed Nasser, who tried to get rid of it by saying: “You go and speak to the Israelis yourself instead of me.”

When I took over from Nasser, Ceausescu repeated his proposal to me, advising me to negotiate directly with the Israelis. I excused myself each time with the words: “The time is not yet ripe for such a step.” I always made a point of staying with Ceausescu on my visits to Europe. In Rumania, I stayed in a district called Sinaia, which received its name because the king of Rumania once visited St. Catherine’s Monastery in the Sinai. He had been impressed and, upon his return, ordered a smaller version of St. Catherine's to be built in a mountainous region that he then called Sinaia. With its green mountains. Bowing waters and magnificent views, it is among the most beautiful spots in the world. Each time I visited it, I would stand in awe before the splendor of the Creator who had fashioned such natural beauty, owing nothing to human artifice. Then I would tell Ceausescu in jest: “In the near future, when the Sinai is once again returned to us, I will invite you to the original St. Catherine’s.”

Thinking about these things, and having read that Begin would visit Rumania soon, the idea of a solution to our problem came to me. I

recalled how Begin often challenged the Arabs, saying: "You Arabs have a problem with us. Your lands are in our possession. You have rights that you talk about and are always calling for. How can you regain them without coming to sit with us around the conference table?" This was a question Golda Meir directed to the Arabs, before Begin. It was a question echoed by the world at large. Our image before the world was truly an ugly one. We were calling for our land, but we were refusing to ask it of those who occupied it. We were calling for our rights, but we were refusing to sit down with those who had deprived us of them.

All we did—what the Arabs still do, even now—was to sit in our capitals and issue warnings to Israel and her friends. Every day we would hear an Arab leader threaten the Israeli leaders, calling upon them to return the occupied lands—"or else." Then the Arab leader would direct another warning to America to put pressure on its protege, Israel—"or else." The world heard those threats and warnings and laughed scornfully at us, making fun of our peculiar methods of obtaining our rights and recovering our occupied land.

We had waged the October War, and God had ordained victory for us. Through this victory, we have proved ourselves and retrieved our confidence in our own abilities. Why not, then, put aside slogans and think anew about how to solve the problem in a modern way that the civilized world could accept and understand? I remembered how Ceausescu had urged me to negotiate with the Israelis. I did not think of him as a mediator, negotiating in our name. I thought of how he had urged us to negotiate directly. I resolved that Egypt should take its

problem into its own hands and not leave it in the hands of others.

Ceausescu could be of some help to me in that.

Shortly afterward, I boarded the plane for el-Taef to make my first visit to Saudi Arabia. I met my Saudi brothers: King Khaled, Prince Fahd, and other princes. But I did not inform them of another approach to peace that was growing in my mind at that time: the initiative to end the state of hostilities with Israel. At that point, the initiative itself had not finally crystalized. Some time earlier, I had had in mind a plan to call the big five to meet in Jerusalem, in order to guarantee peace and security for both parties in the Middle East conflict. This was the idea that had concerned me as I flew over the Ararat mountains on my way from Rumania to meet the shah in Iran. But for several reasons I decided then and there not to carry that idea further.

First and foremost was that Brezhnev would be among the big five, and while Brezhnev was a friend and a reasonable man, he was nonetheless tied by a number of political considerations that would have hindered him from taking a positive stand. He was also restricted by the points of view of his Syrian and Palestinian allies. And he could never forget my blow to the Soviet Union in the Middle East (when I decided to expel the Soviet advisers in Egypt). The second reason for abandoning this idea was the position of China. Though China supported the Arab cause completely, I felt she might abstain from coming to the meeting as she did in the Security Council.

The third reason was that some heads of state could have been tied up with their programs, and this could have hindered their movement for six

months or more, making it difficult for them to come to Jerusalem on the date I proposed.

For all these reasons, I changed my mind about the form of the initiative while flying over the Ararat mountains. I wanted to prove to the whole world that I was a true man of peace and that I was not calling for an initiative just as a maneuver. This is why I did not inform my Saudi brothers about my plan. When I left Saudi Arabia on my return to Egypt, the idea of the initiative started to take further shape. My thoughts centered around a simple idea: Why should I go round in circles to reach my target? My obvious and only target was peace, and peace cannot be achieved under just any circumstances. It can be achieved only through direct meetings between the parties to the conflict.

I was thinking along the following lines: Why shouldn't I go to the Israelis directly? Why shouldn't I stand before the Knesset and address the Israelis themselves as well as the whole world, putting forward the Arab cause and stating its dimensions? As I thought about it, I conjured up what the reaction might be to such a move, which no one would expect. It would be said that it was an uncalculated gamble. How can you venture to go to your own enemies? What guarantees do you have? Are you sure they would not shoot you on the streets of Jerusalem as they did before with Count Bernadotte, the chief UN mediator in Palestine?

My answer was ready: This is my fate. No man can escape his fate. The day of my death is set beforehand by God. It might take place in Jerusalem or in Cairo, on a bridge or under a bridge. The hour is coming, have no doubt. How can we forget the words of God almighty:

“Wherever you may be, death shall overtake you; even though you be in fortified castles.”

At that point, I felt the intellectual strain. Then happiness overwhelmed me—a happiness previously unknown. It is the happiness of a man when he gets hold of the truth after a long and painful search. I made my decision and I never hesitated. On November 19, 1977, witnessed by the whole world, I was moving out of the plane to set foot on Jerusalem’s soil. The effect of my initiative was to show the Israelis they were dealing with a new style of Arab leadership. Before I went to Jerusalem the Israeli leadership had been able to mobilize its people against Arab attitudes, and these attitudes had spread to Zionist organizations throughout the world. The Israeli leadership had been able to persuade them there was no hope for peace between Israel and the Arabs and had portrayed the Arabs as monsters who wanted only to drive Israel into the sea. All the slogans ever written in the Egyptian and Arab press were used by the Israelis to perpetuate the idea that there was no hope of security with the Arab world.

This is why the reaction to my peace initiative was so strong inside Israel. The Israelis just could not believe it. Before my initiative, Israel talked peace and made war, while the Arabs talked of war and did nothing. The situation was always volatile as a result. But after the initiative, the Israeli people themselves became a pressure group in favor of peace. They were impressed by this new style of leadership in the Arab world. Sadat’s conduct shows that the Arabs are not so bad as we thought they were, they said. And so Israel's public opinion was affected.

If we look back through history we see the horrors brought upon Egypt by war—the martyrs, the destruction, the delays in development. Egypt became a backward country because of the slogan “war is supreme.” This is why I opted for peace. I thought that without it Egypt would revert to the old attitudes, and I thought it was important to create an atmosphere that fostered development, so that Egypt could survive and become a partner in the twenty-first century before it was too late.

These were the thoughts that were constantly in my mind during the period between the visit to Jerusalem and the signing of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel.

Why did I always think we could achieve so much through peace? By a simple calculation: how much war had cost Egypt and the Arab world since Until the October War, . . . percent of the economic burden was borne by Egypt. Even after the October War, when the entire Arab world made a lot of money out of oil and added to their wealth, Egypt by contrast was drained of its resources. So whenever the Israelis created problems during the peace negotiations, my thoughts would go back to the burden we had to bear, and I would opt for peace.

I also thought of the direct results of the October War. What did that war achieve for us? We regained a very small portion of the Sinai and we managed to reopen the Suez Canal. Against this we have to set the cost to Egypt of . . . billion pounds, plus all the losses in men and equipment.

We all know that Israel was taken by surprise in the October War. But it also taught us that we could gain less by war than by our peace initiative.

In the October War, the United States sided militarily with Israel, and we knew we could not fight the United States. We also know the Soviet Union would never side with an Arab country as the United States did with Israel. These were my thoughts and calculations about the difficulties of embarking on a new war to regain the rest of the Sinai. Such a course would have set us back by more than a century. As a ruler, I felt I had a responsibility before God and my people, even though it would have been easier to act like any other Arab leader and drag my people to destruction while acting as a her of slogans.

This is why I chose peace and did not drag my country into war. I found I could achieve the same goals through peace.

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EGYPT AND THE ARABS

Egypt has been bitterly attacked in the Arab world for concluding the Camp David agreement with Israel. But the sad truth is that those who attacked us so vehemently did so even before the Camp David accords were known. They attacked an agreement they knew nothing about, even though it could have led to the realization of our Arab goals. They did so simply because we dared to negotiate with the Israeli enemy.

The pattern began even while the negotiations were underway in .

At that time. King Hussein of Jordan was in London, staying at the same hotel as one of my aides. The king approached my aide, a comparatively young man, and asked him: "Are you in contact with Sadat?" Hussein then asked him to call me in Camp David and inform me that Jordan was

ready to join in the peace process. The young aide was astonished at the king's attitude—Hussein had come to see him secretly in the aide's room—and called me immediately to tell me with enthusiasm of what the king had proposed.

I asked him for King Hussein's telephone number and called him back. At that point an agreement with the Israelis seemed unlikely; so when Hussein asked me how the negotiations were going I told him no progress had been made and the gap between both sides was still very wide. He then asked if there was any hope of success. I told him we would have to wait and see but promised to let him know as soon as we made any progress. I thought it was not wise to include Hussein in the negotiations until we had reached a concrete agreement with the Israelis. To my astonishment, King Hussein was quoted by Barbara Walters on American television next day as saying that Sadat had called him in London and invited him to join the peace talks. The king said he had refused the offer and decided to cut short his journey to Europe and Morocco and return home to Jordan.

I had to ask my aides to make an official denial of the American television report. What Hussein had done was a typical piece of international auctioneering. He called me and offered to join the talks. He then told the Saudis, who issued order to him to act to the contrary. King Hassan of Morocco acted in the same manner. When the negotiations at Camp David were over, I had planned to head directly for Cairo. But King Hassan insisted that I should stop in Rabat where King Hussein of Jordan was also scheduled to meet me.

After the Camp David accords had been announced, it was clear the entire Arab world had turned against me. So I asked Dr. Ashraf Ghorbal, the Egyptian ambassador in Washington, to inform the Moroccan ambassador that I would prefer not to stop in Rabat so as not to cause any embarrassment to the king. But the king refused to accept my apologies, which were conveyed to him twice. I therefore stopped at Rabat on my way home and met the king. Again, King Hassan took the same course as King Hussein and announced some time later that I had insisted on stopping in Rabat.

Subsequently, I refused to see the Moroccans' former ambassador in Cairo, Abdel Latif el-Erraki, because of the conduct of King Hassan. When the shah was in exile in Morocco, Hassan had sent his ambassador to request that I extend an invitation to the shah to live in Egypt. In exchange, he offered to defend Egypt's position at a forthcoming conference in Baghdad. I then called the shah by telephone in Morocco and offered to fly back with him to Cairo the following week. The shah said he was bewildered at what was happening, because Hassan had just ordered him to leave the country that same week!

What does all this mean? It means only that King Hassan does not know how to take a firm stand. He had urged the shah to live in Morocco in the first place, then asked me to invite him to live in Egypt; and when he thought my invitation was delayed, Hassan immediately issued orders that the shah should leave Rabat in twenty-four hours. That was very strange conduct indeed. For all these reasons, I therefore refused to meet with Hassan's ambassador when he came to Cairo in . He came with

a message from the king saying Morocco would restore diplomatic relations with Egypt if we in turn would sever our relations with Israel and renounce the Camp David accords. The envoy returned to Rabat with the message that his mission had been rejected and Sadat had refused to see him. All this has come about because of the Camp David accords. The entire Arab world turned against me after that.

For their part, the Saudis took a relatively moderate stand, although King Khaled both privately and publicly denounced my visit to Jerusalem from the very first day. But I harbored no ill feelings against him since his stand was consistent from the very start. Some other Saudi officials wanted to carry out secret measures against me and met at a camp in the desert to plan their action. But the news was leaked and nothing came from it. Some contacts of course did take place between Egypt and the rest of the Arab world after the Camp David accords. For example, Qadafi's cousin came to see me on my birthday at my home village. He offered me a reconciliation with Qadafi on one condition: that it should be kept secret.

I replied by saying: "You do not respect the deals you make in public, so how can I respect a secret one?" The Libyan envoy told me Libya was in agreement with the first part of Camp David, which dealt with the peace treaty, but was against the second part, which concerned the future of the Palestinians.

I said this is what I had expected to happen. Yet anyone who read the Camp David accord would find that it did not seek to impose a solution on the Palestinians. All we did at Camp David was to show we wanted to

end the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, setting out a transitional period before the Palestinians ruled themselves. Was not such a move better than occupation?

I repeated that we never claimed to speak on behalf of the Palestinians. We told Carter and Begin we could not act on their behalf, but wanted only to end the Israeli occupation. This at any rate is what I told the Libyan envoy. But I am sure Qadaffi would deny it, like Hussein and Hassan did before him.

During the days of the late King Faisal of Saudi Arabia and the late Shah of Iran, we all three dreamed of constructing an oil pipeline to link Suez with Alexandria. This was at the time when the Suez Canal was still closed and* just after Israel had built a pipeline linking Eilat to the Mediterranean. Our idea was for a pipeline to bring Iranian oil to the Mediterranean, where it would be carried in turn to Europe. The capital we needed was estimated by foreign experts at \$ million.

I called King Faisal and asked for the money. Faisal said we could borrow the money from Saudi Arabia or pay for it out of our share of the oil revenues, but I told him we would like him to become a partner in our project. Our objective was not just to create a project that would bear fruit for Egypt, but that all the Arab nations should share the benefit of such strategic projects. My aim, I told Faisal, was that the Arabs should think with one mind and move toward one single Arab nation. I always wondered why the others were satisfied by depositing their money only in banks and receiving interest. I thought it would surely be better to invest our money in industrial and commercial construction projects

involving the whole Arab world. The model I had in mind was that of the European Economic Community. When King Faisal realized that I was insisting that Saudi Arabia should participate as partners, he said his country together with Kuwait and Qatar would raise percent of the capital and Egypt would have the remaining share. The three Arab countries were very generous and participated immediately. The project succeeded and each country made a percent profit from it.

One of the projects I had contemplated was to exploit our Mediterranean coast for the benefit of our brothers in the Gulf area who suffer from the strains of uncomfortably hot weather. I thought the Mediterranean coast could be divided into free zones and that each country could invest in one of these zones, leading to real economic cooperation among us. Thus the Arab world would be presented to others as a true political and economic power.

Unfortunately Faisal died and Arab relations suddenly deteriorated. It was no longer appropriate to think of economic cooperation instead of the sort of cooperation that is built on sheer slogans.

We also thought the Shah of Iran would welcome our Mediterranean project and invest in one of the free zones. After the War, the shah had telephoned me and made a similar gesture by investing in the redevelopment of Port Said. I thought an offer of a free zone on the Mediterranean would help to repay this debt. But events in Iran moved too quickly, and before we could make any progress the project was buried under the Iranian revolution.

Sudan was now the only power in the area that was still able to benefit from our scheme. That is why Egypt has made the offer to Sudan of a gift of land on our Mediterranean coast to act as a port for them. I discussed the plan with President Nimeiry and agreed that we would, in effect, be trading off property—so that just as the Sudan would own property in Egypt, so Egypt would be able to own property in the Sudan. This was my initiative, although according to our constitution it had to be approved by the National Assembly.

I thought such a project would lead to true Arab cooperation and always looked forward to creating an even greater project, with a small Saudia, a mini Kuwait, a tiny Qatar, and so forth, on the Mediterranean coast. I am really sorry about the ruptures that have occurred in the Arab world, because before the Arabs launched their campaign against Egypt, I was always thinking of true cooperation along the line I have explained. But the Arabs revealed their true features when they decided to start a boycott of Egypt at their Baghdad summit meeting. So today, the door for cooperation is open only to the Sudan.