

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 1978. 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 1981. 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, Qadaffi's cousin came to see me on my birthday at my home village. He offered me a reconciliation with Qadaffi 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 \$400 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 50 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 30 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 1973 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.