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ISRAEL'S HOSTILE ACTIONS

During Israel embarked on two hostile acts against its neighbors that threatened to disrupt the peace process begun during my visit to Jerusalem. Their planes bombed a nuclear reactor in Iraq, and Israel wreaked vengeance on Lebanon by killing four hundred Lebanese in an air raid and wounding a further thousand. The story has been circulated that we did not take a firm stand against these Israeli actions because we were waiting until April to recover the Sinai. This view has no basis in fact. The date of the final Israeli evacuation from the Sinai was fixed when we signed the peace treaty with Israel in and was not negotiable or open to renewed discussion.

We cannot express strongly enough our condemnation of these two Israeli acts. But the two operations differed. Of the two, the more serious was the bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor, because its specific aim was to disrupt the peace process. The action of Israel in undertaking this raid renewed old wounds. We thought we had healed these wounds during the preceding three years, but we were wrong. Still more time was needed.

The greatest danger in the situation the raid created is that Israel has resorted to its old ways, which have been rejected by all. One may recall that during my speech to the Knesset in Jerusalem I declared that percent of the problem between the Israelis and the Arabs is the psychological barrier that divides them. In fact, I undertook my mission

to Israel to try and break down that barrier before we began with the peace process. The psychological barrier I am talking about arose because of the bitterness that prevailed for thirty years.

During that period, we witnessed four wars between the Arabs and the Israelis. Following each war, hatred increased and the psychological barrier grew higher and higher.

I went to Israel and called upon its people to help us break down that barrier. And I can say with confidence that in Egypt this barrier has indeed been overcome since my visit to Jerusalem. Why? Because after the Six Day War we were no longer in need of extending it or allowing it to continue. What I sincerely fear is that Israel's actions will lead to the renewing of this psychological barrier and the reopening of wounds I thought had been healed forever. It is, in fact, a big mistake on Israel's part.

Our attitude toward the peace process was put to the test once before—in 1973, when the Arabs met in Baghdad and severed relations with Egypt, trying to isolate her and force her out of the international organizations. All these attempts failed, and it was clear to all Arabs that there was no alternative to the Egyptian moves and its results. But Israel's bombing of the Iraqi nuclear reactor put Egypt and the peace process to a new test—the peace process in which Israel is a partner. I have said before, and I still believe it is valid to say again, that no one can shake the basis of the peace process. We succeeded against the Arab challenge by being solidly committed to peace. This should remain our position. Israel committed a

grave mistake, a mistake that represents a threat to peace, but we must not allow ourselves to be diverted from our path.

If Israel's objective was to deprive all countries of the Middle East the opportunity of acquiring nuclear reactors—and this, honestly, must be Israel's objective, even if she denies it—then this would be enough to threaten to destroy everything we have worked for. Israel's attempt to possess the sole right of building nuclear reactors and to deny the right to all others only reopens old wounds.

But destroying peace is not an easy thing. I have said many times that the peace process is the only constant factor in an area undergoing many changes. But the Israeli action remains the greatest threat to the peace process we have yet faced.

Only one of the three partners who signed the Camp David accords can upset the peace process: the United States, Egypt, or Israel. And then one of those three—Israel—undertook an irresponsible military operation. The danger is that their operation gives a blank check to the Soviet Union and Syria to renew their agitations against us.

We all know of the lies of the Syrian leader, Hafez al-Assad, we know his conduct in his country, we know what he does to his people, we know what he did to Lebanon and how he is waiting to threaten King Hussein of Jordan. We also know the attitude of the Soviet Union. This superpower does not want peace between two small countries that have been torn by war for the past thirty years; the Soviets are working against peace with the aim of freezing the current situation.

The Soviet Union did not hesitate to say no in the Security Council to peace between Egypt and Israel. For this superpower wants to impose its views on other countries. If a country in the area wants to make peace with another, it has first to obtain the approval of the Soviet Union, for it alone decides who makes peace with whom.

I must warn the Israelis against the blank check they have given to the Syrians and the Soviet Union, for it will lead to the following consequences:

- a blessing on what has happened in Afghanistan, occupied by the Soviet military;
- support of Communist insurgencies in Africa;
- condoning the conduct of the child who rules Libya;
- enclosing ourselves inside an Iron Curtain with Syria, Libya, South Yemen, Algeria, and some Palestinians.

We have to reclaim that blank check and tear it to pieces so it cannot be used. For this, I rely on the solid support of the Egyptian people, who are now facing this horrible test imposed by the Israelis. I call it horrible because it is so. Only three days before the Israeli bombing I sat discussing matters with Prime Minister Begin at Sharm-el-Sheikh and announcing our continued commitment to the peace process. Then three days later I heard that Israeli fighter planes had bombarded the Iraqi nuclear reactor on Begin's orders.

I must admit I found Iraq's reaction to the raid quite objective. I thought they might have accused Sadat of complicity and claimed I must have

known of this action during my meeting with Begin. But they reacted in a very responsible manner. Begin announced immediately that he had not informed me of anything at Sharm-el-Sheikh, but he clearly had not considered those who would take advantage of the situation. The Soviet Union quickly accused the United States of having prior knowledge of the operation.

I cannot defend the United States, because I have no idea whether they knew of the operation in advance or not, but I can tell you of certain developments that took place a few hours before Begin made his announcement.

At eight o'clock in the morning, Husni Mubarak, the vice president, received an urgent call from the American charge d'affaires who asked to meet him immediately. The vice president received him at his home, where the charge asked if Cairo had been informed of the attack beforehand, during my meeting with Begin at Sharm-el-Sheikh. Mubarak said surely this had not happened and suggested he call President Sadat to confirm it, which he did. Husni Mubarak conveyed to the charge d'affaires my assurances that I had not been informed beforehand, and I then told him the Israeli action was a big blow to peace.

Now I have something to tell my people: Don't lose hope, don't allow the psychological barrier to rise again. You have expressed your total condemnation of this act, but do not lose hope in peace. I have seen how the Israeli people want peace.

We are facing a severe test, a test of the peace process itself. But I am confident the peace process will achieve its aims and will follow the course we have designed for it.

I give the same advice to the Arabs, but my advice to them follows the advice I have given to my own people, for if my people accept it, the Arabs will follow suit. I only ask the Arabs to abandon emotionalism and allow reason to prevail in these critical moments.

My comments on the Israeli raids into Lebanon fall into a different category. Of course we do not accept haphazard bombing of Palestinians and Lebanese. Not one, not twenty rockets will help to solve the problem of the Palestinian people, but on the other hand we totally reject Israel's conduct.

For our part, we in Egypt would like to tell the PLO man who ordered the firing of the Katiousha rockets that you have to calculate before firing that you are facing Israel which is quite prepared to retaliate.

When we say such things, the other Arabs usually reply that Egypt is not in a position to condemn the PLO attacks because we ourselves undertook such an attack against Israel in .

On that occasion, I have to say, when the United States intervened to help Israel after seventeen days' fighting in the October War, we calculated that we had to call off our attack. I announced I would not proceed with a war against the United States, for I know the strength of America and I shall never drive my people or my country into such an unbalanced fight.

Could the Palestinian resistance, plus all the Arabs, match Israel's strength today? No. So why then venture on a lost battle? They talk of a cease-fire, but in my opinion this is a loss and a blow to Arab dignity, degrading all our values.

None of this hinders us from saying that what the Israelis did in Lebanon was horrifying. But the Palestinian who ordered the firing of the Katiousha also did a horrifying thing, because he brought all this destruction on his people.

Where is reason, where is right, and where are the calculations in a war? For now we hear that Syria is asking for billions of pounds to leave Lebanon. We all know Lebanon is lost between the Syrians and the PLO, and we all know the Palestinians are lost between Syria and Israel. This is the equation in Lebanon.

I think the remedy for the situation is to resort to a comprehensive peace that guarantees the solution of the Palestinian question. These were the first steps that we agreed upon at Camp David for finding a solution to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and setting up full autonomous rule there. Israel should withdraw to secure points until the Palestinian people decide, along with the United States, Egypt, Jordan, and Israel, what the next step should be.

I therefore think that the man who took the decision to bomb an Israeli settlement and who was not prepared for retaliation was as responsible for what happened as was Begin. I think the Lebanese and the Palestinians are victims of Israel in the same manner that they are victims

of those who ordered the rockets to be fired inside Israel. And they are also the victims of Hafez al-Assad, who entered Lebanon seven years ago pretending to protect the Palestinians, but who has now become the pretext for Israel to move into Lebanon.

So I ask the Arabs: Is there no sound man among you to save you from all this rupture?

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