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MY RELATIONS WITH BRITAIN

There is a traditional Egyptian saying that deep friendships can sometimes follow enmity. This has been the case in my relations with Great Britain. For many years I was an enemy of the British. I lived as a fugitive from their army of occupation. I was thrown out of the Egyptian army because of the British, I was arrested because of my opposition to them, and I suffered a great deal throughout the British occupation of my country. I never gave in to them nor deviated from my principles. Neither their terror nor the promise of reward could make me surrender.

I thought many times of blowing up the British embassy in Cairo with all its occupants as an act of protest. I saw the embassy as the symbol of our national shame: the seat of the British high commissioner, who was the real ruler of Egypt, above the king, above the government and above the people. But time passes. The British left Egypt long ago. Our revolution was successful, and since then I have been able to develop strong ties with British politicians and, more recently, with the British royal family, including her majesty the queen.

When the queen's husband, Prince Philip, duke of Edinburgh, visited Egypt in , I invited him to lunch at Ismailia. We had a very good time together and spoke about many things, including the forthcoming wedding of the Prince of Wales. Prince Philip told me the wedding day

would coincide with the birthday of my wife, Jihan. I was surprised he knew my wife's birthday, but he told me that our two wives—that is the queen and Jihan—had discussed this at a recent meeting. The queen had found this out, and Prince Philip had remembered to tell me of it at Ismailia.

I found Prince Philip to be a man of superior education, a genuine athlete, and a politician of the first order, with long experience. He is polite, gentlemanly, and frank. We discussed the political situation of our turbulent world. I said to him: "Who could have thought that relations between Egypt and Britain could have become so strong?" I added: "I really would like to praise Britain's attitude toward Egypt both before, during, and after the October War of . Britain sold us sophisticated weapons and has helped us to diversify our supplies. Its international policies today are just and positive—in contrast, I may say, to British policies during the occupation, the revolution, and the Suez War." Prince Philip accepted my praises gracefully.

His visit to Ismailia was followed by a dinner in his honor held by the British ambassador at his residence in Cairo. I wanted the prince, as well as the British government and people, to see that Egypt knows how to return a favor and express its thanks for its support—as well as how to defend its honor against their aggression.

I therefore told the British ambassador by telephone that I would be attending the dinner. The prince and the ambassador were both surprised at my decision, which was contrary to the usual protocol. But I had done

it intentionally, so that Prince Philip and Britain would feel that Egypt and its president had gone out of their way to be courteous.

So, for the first time in my life, I entered the building that had in the past been the bastion of British occupation and conspiracy, but which had now become friendly territory. The reception I received was more than cordial and all formalities were dispensed with.

I moved from room to room in the ambassador's residence and saw there the pictures of all the British ambassadors who had served in Egypt—with one exception. The portrait of Cromer had been removed. I considered that its removal was a very courteous move by the British. It respected my feelings and it showed that the British know better than anyone how Lord Cromer disgraced Egypt when he ruled our country as high commissioner in the early years of this century.

During the dinner I told my hosts that I had once seriously planned to blow up their embassy and all its occupants in protest against the continuation of British occupation. We laughed over that.

Plans for my visit to see President Reagan were laid soon after his election, when Secretary of State Haig came to Cairo with an invitation to talk with the president in Washington. I had arranged my trip for early August when I heard from Haig that some of my Arab brothers had insisted that they should see President Reagan first. I laughed at their reasoning—the timing was not in the least important. But what was unfortunate was the weight they gave to such trivial matters, which only made them look comical.

In any event, I rescheduled my trip and accepted an invitation from Mrs. Thatcher to call on her in London before I went to Washington. Before my departure, I went as usual in retreat to Mount Sinai to finish my third reading of the Koran during the last days of the holy month of Ramadan. I broke my fast with the Sheikhs of the Sinai and then visited the village of St. Catherine.

I took all my children and almost all my grandchildren with me on my trip, because it gave me an opportunity to spend time with them—an opportunity I do not often get in Egypt because of the pressure of my work. In London, we stayed at the Egyptian embassy, and all of us watched a video recording of the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana Spencer.

Next day, Monday August 1, was my meeting with Mrs. Thatcher. But before I left to see her I had an appointment with some photographers from Madame Tussaud's waxwork museum. They had already made one model of me, and I had sent them one of my suits to put on it, but when they sent me a photograph of it I was astonished to see they had made me look exactly like Dracula! Then they told me they had portrayed only what they saw in front of them. Anyhow, they became convinced by my objections and destroyed that first waxwork so that they could make another one.

The working session with Mrs. Thatcher finally started. We were received by a guard of honor outside the Foreign Office, the commander of the guard welcoming us in Arabic, saying in our own language: "The guard is ready for inspection, Mr. President." After that we had a private

meeting with Mrs. Thatcher in Downing Street. We spoke of the role that might be played in the Middle East by Europe—and Britain, in particular, as chairman of the EEC that year. I was impressed by Mrs. Thatcher's grasp of every detail, and from the first moment I felt relaxed in my conversations with her. Our views were in agreement, and I can say that a strong friendship started between us during this short meeting.

The same applies to the foreign secretary. Lord Carrington, who has an easy sense of humor, which he uses to break the ice in getting to know one. He has an aristocratic background, but in our meetings he always deferred to Mrs. Thatcher, the prime minister, who comes from a modest background.

Our meeting concluded with an agreement that Europe should play a more active role and participate with us in the peace process. The Camp David accord does not mean we are seeking only a limited or a separate peace: we are looking for a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the first stages of the peace process the United States played its role alone; in the next stage, Britain and the other Common Market countries must join in.

The next step they can help with is to achieve immediate mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestinians. I explained to Mrs. Thatcher how important it was that Israel and the Palestinians had just agreed on a cease-fire in Lebanon as a first step toward this mutual recognition. I was pleased that Mrs. Thatcher agreed with me—and more pleased that she agreed with me that it was important to build on this move in an attempt to achieve the next step. We agreed that Britain

should join in our attempts to achieve our aims. I asked Britain to intensify her consultations with Saudi Arabia on that topic. Our talks ended in complete agreement. Our friendship was cemented.

As we left Downing Street, the press crowded round me and asked how the talks had gone. I told them I always looked forward to my meetings with the “Iron Lady.” I also met with James Callaghan, the former prime minister, and talked mostly about the rise of the new party in Britain, the Social Democratic party. Callaghan told me this represented a new trend and that the Social Democrats could become the party of the future.

Next day, I went to visit the queen; it was my second meeting with her. She had postponed her holiday in Scotland so that she could meet with us. Prince Philip took us into the dining room, but I told the queen I never eat anything during the day, only in the evening. She answered: “I knew this beforehand. We shall serve you only juice.” I found a glass of orange juice in front of me. It happens that I can’t stand citrus juice because of my gastric stomach, but I had to drink it anyway. But by this time my mind was on my talks with the queen, who takes a broad interest in international affairs, revealing a deep acquaintance with developments in the Middle East.

Afterward, while taking coffee in the drawing room, I invited her to visit Egypt. She welcomed the invitation and said she would like to come as soon as possible.

That same day we crossed the Atlantic to start our visit to President Reagan. I was met at Andrews Air Force Base by Secretary of State

Haig. Some might wonder why the president himself did not come out to receive a visiting head of state. The question is a fair one, but it seems the answer lies in U. S. protocol, which does not allow the president to receive foreign guests at the airport. The formal reception is always at the White House. I did not mind this, because I always prefer to have a day of rest after a long journey. So I spent the rest of the day with my children and grandchildren playing around me and laughing in Blair House.

I went to the White House the next day to meet the new president. Because of the oppressive heat and humidity of Washington in the summer, I found myself longing for the cool breezes of our own Alexandria. This may sound strange coming from an Egyptian, used to heat, but the climate in Washington during August is really unbearable. Some people who saw me on television may have noticed that I had to change my suit before I left the White House because I was sweating so profusely.

Before our negotiations began, George Bush, the vice president, whispered to me that he hoped I was not angry about the anti-Sadat demonstrations outside.

“I asked: “Which demonstrations?”

He replied: “Those emotional shouts in Arabic, of which, I’m afraid, I don’t understand a word. “I laughed and told him: “But those are my children. They are Egyptians come here to welcome me.”

We broke off our meeting and agreed to meet with the president the next day.

I then prepared for a meeting at the State Department. Whenever I go there, I have to confess it brings to my mind the bad memory of John Foster Dulles, the secretary of state under Eisenhower, a man who did so much damage to American Egyptian relations. I could not get this idea out of my mind as I climbed the steps to the State Department building. Haig opened the meeting by telling his colleagues: "This is a working session. President Sadat is with us. Go ahead and ask him whatever you want." And the questions flowed. As the meeting progressed, a message was brought in for me. It informed me that my youngest daughter, Gehan, had been taken to the hospital with a hemorrhage. You can imagine my feelings as a father.

It was difficult for me to control my emotions in front of this gathering of politicians. But I was forced to continue with the meeting beyond its scheduled time because of the enthusiasm of the participants. I did not say a word to them about what had happened to my daughter. I split my personality between father and statesman. But God knows how worried I was at that moment!

I finally managed to get away from the meeting but had to pause on the steps of the State Department to talk to the press about what had transpired.

Speeding on my way to the hospital, I could think only of my daughter Gehan. I prayed to God for her recovery. I recited some verses from the

Koran to comfort me and give me patience. We arrived at the Washington Clinic in record time—the same hospital, incidentally, where President Reagan had been taken after he was shot. I rushed up the steps to my daughter's bedside and found her safe with my wife.

Senator Charles Percy had taken care of all the arrangements. He showed the same gallantry an Egyptian would have done in standing by a friend in need.

Over breakfast the next day, I found President Reagan an easy man to get on with. He understands what goes on in the corridors of power and the backstairs of politics. He thinks in headlines and not in details, but is clear in his thoughts, decisions, and answers.

Later in my trip, I met former President Richard Nixon at the home of the Egyptian head of mission to the United Nations in New York. As always, I found that Nixon followed international developments closely, especially in the Middle East. Nixon is, and will remain, one of the most brilliant and intelligent politicians I have met in my life.

I also met with former President Jimmy Carter and felt how difficult it must have been for him to leave the White House. It made me think of my time in prison and how I used to say: “A strong politician must be there when the people want him, and be prepared to leave immediately when they cease to want him.” Neither a politician nor an actor should stay too long on the stage, but be prepared to withdraw when the right

moment comes. For this reason, I would like my people to accept and understand the decision I shall take next year.*

My admiration and esteem for Carter increased after my meeting with him in Plains, Georgia. He had no personal hatred nor remorse over Reagan's victory, and he was prepared to continue to help to push the peace process forward, and to go to Washington at any time to meet Reagan for that purpose.

* Editor's note: Sadat had planned to retire in .