

I N T E R V I E W

given by

PRESIDENT ANWAR EL SADAT

to the

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Question : You have cancelled the 'Friendship Treaty' with the Soviet Union at a time when Moscow is endeavouring to extend the sphere of its influence in Africa.. What are the reasons behind this relatively unusual step in dealing with a super-power ? and what is the wisdom behind the timing ?

President : I never poke my nose in the policies of the super powers, on the contrary, I always ask my people here and in the Arab world not to meddle in the policies of the big powers.. Therefore, it never occurred to me that this could have any bearing on the Angola problem.

Question : Then, why this particular timing ?

President : This happened in conjunction with the way our affairs were proceeding, I felt that the Soviet Union was exercising enormous pressure on us with regard to the problems of armament, the matter of supplying us with spare parts and our debts.. As the Soviet Union refused to supply me with the spare parts necessary for the MIG planes we have, we were losing many of these planes.. Not making the necessary overhaul to one of the

MIG planes only means the loss of another one. Therefore, it was imperative that we should obtain the spare parts from some place else, and I did not go to any of the socialist states in this respect.

Question : Not even Yugoslavia ?

President : No, I asked Yugoslavia..

Question : Has Yugoslavia offered you the required equipment ?

President : They had given us as much as they could from what they have, but they do not have all what I need. However, I did not ask any of the other socialist states such as Czechoslovakia, or East Germany because I did not want to cause them any troubles with the Soviet Union.. Instead, I contacted India, which is, supposedly, one of the major states which took part in establishing the non-alignment movement. You do remember Nehru, Tito and Nasser.. India has aircraft factories.. The Indians do not only use the MIG planes, but they have been manufacturing them for a long time, and can undertake any overhauling necessary for them. When I contacted them they informed me that they will first ask the Soviet Union, according to their treaty with Moscow.

Question : And then ?

President : Well, four months later they informed me that the Soviet Union refused, and that they would not give me anything.

Question : Was this the point at which you decided the break with Moscow ?

President : Exactly, and not Angola.. When we received India's reply, it was incumbent upon us to take our decision accordingly.

Question : There are some hints about a further deterioration in relations between Egypt and the Soviets, and many say that Egypt will close its ports in the face of the Soviet fleet..

President : No, there is no deterioration.. On the contrary, we are re-establishing normal relations with the Soviets who previously occupied a very particular position in Egypt.. our relations will be similar to those we have with any other state.

Question : Cannot you see a kind of risk for you and your country as a result of dealing with the mighty Soviet Union in this way ?

President : Why should I see any risk or feel the presence of any danger for me or for my country ? !

Question : Because cancelling a treaty with a big power is not a matter which takes place in our daily life, and no one dared do this with the Soviet Union except the Hungarians in 1956 and the Albanians. Even China is still maintaining its treaty with Moscow.

President : But we are not scared of anything at all.. I have absolute confidence in my people and myself.. We feel that we should always work and prove to the whole world that we are independent. Let us be frank; we do not like to have any relations imposed on us, and the treaty with the Soviet Union was no longer put into effect. Therefore, there is no use in maintaining it.

Question : The Egyptian Minister of War, First Lieutenant General El Gamassy, went to France recently with a view to buying weapons.. So, will Western Europe replace Russia as the main supplier of weapons to Egypt ?

President : This matter had actually begun a long time ago.. In other words, since I took my decision to diversify the sources

of armament in 1974.. As you know the Soviet Union stopped all arms shipments immediately in the wake of the October 1973 War. Thus, the trip of First Lieutenant General El Gamassy is only made to sign the agreements we had already concluded.

Question : Is that matter simple ? I mean if the European States are ready to deliver weapons to Egypt on a large-scale, you are required to pay price in cash, yet it seems as if Egypt were on the verge of bankruptcy..

President : No.. absolutely not.. We are just going through a difficult economic situation, but we are not on the verge of bankruptcy.

Question : Isn't it really more than that ? There are terrifying figures about the volume of Egyptian debts, so would you give us some more precise figures ?

President : We presented the precise figures to representatives of the People's Assembly.. In fact there are only two figures, one concerns the civilian aspect, and the other concerns the military one. On my last trip to six Arab states, we agreed to set up a fund during the next five years, provided the International Bank will assume a consultative role, to straighten up the drive of our economy. I am really very grateful for everything our Arab brothers have done for us.. But I would like to reaffirm that we are not suffering from bankruptcy at all. As we now sit on the bank of the Suez Canal you can see for yourself the number of ships coming from all over the world to pass through the Canal.

Question : Is there any danger of Egypt being stranded between the two now ? I believe there is no guarantee that the United States, the second super-power, is ready to fill the gap; or have you obtained any guarantees from the U.S. ?

President : You had not understood us in 1972, nor did the entire world, when I gave my orders to the Soviet experts to leave the country. . . Our people are very proud of themselves and of their country, and are characterized by a certain nationalist tendency. . . So, if anybody is going to extend assistance to us, he is most welcome; and if there is no one to assist us, we shall depend on ourselves. If you go back to the fifties, you can recall the problem of the Aswan High Dam. . . Dulles had said something in the sense that this country was broke, and suffering from a state of chaos and confusion that would prevent us from building the High Dam. However, we built the High Dam which is considered one of the miracles of the modern world.

Question : Well, the Soviets helped you.

President : Well, and if the U.S. helps us now, it would be marvellous; if it does not, neither my people nor I will recant. . . We enjoy independence, and shall never allow anyone to interfere in our home affairs or harm our independence in any way. This is what I would like to confirm repeatedly.

Question : Then, you did not consult the U.S. before taking the decision of the break with Moscow ?

President : Certainly not. . . and why should I consult anybody at all ?

Question : But the Suez Canal does not bring in enough money.

President : Well, for the first time this year we are considered one of the petroleum exporting countries. . . We have 22 concessions for exploration for oil in the Western Desert and all over the Delta. . . We do not have any problem with regards to energy. . . Our industry and agriculture are prospering, and I think it will not take us more than a few years to overcome all our difficulties.

Question : Mr. President, you have lately affirmed that western Europe should play a more important role in the Middle East. You even proposed that Western Germany should take part in reaching a settlement for the Middle East crisis. . How could this be achieved ? Is it possible to conceive a German force stationed to maintain peace in Sinai and the Golan ?

President : Look, I am really happy I declared this a year ago. In his speech before the 25th. Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Mr. Brezhnev declared that England and France should take part in ensuring these guarantees. . Therefore, it was obvious that he accepted my proposal. . You see, we do not differ with the Soviet Union on the method of reaching a solution for the Middle East problems. Their only objection is that they do not like us to accept any steps they had no part in. . As regards Europe, maintain my opinion that Western Germany should take part in these guarantees.

Question : Why ?

President : Because of its political and economic position, and the guarantees concerning the agreement should be offered to both parties, the Arabs and Israelis, whatever their nature. . In case these guarantees would stipulate the presence of a U.N. force along the borders, then why should not German forces participate.

Question : Will you discuss this question, in Bonn ?

President : Certainly I shall discuss it with Chancellor Schmidt. . West Germany should assume its full responsibility since it is one of the principal states in Europe. . So why should we exclude it ? Do not forget that the security of western Europe depends mainly on our area.

Question : What are the other subjects you will discuss with the German Chancellor ?

President : There are many important issues such as the aid we shall request to build up our state. . . As you know we had already started the implementation of an extremely ambitious programme of reconstruction in the Canal zone since 1974.

Certainly, we shall also deal with the world problems, the policy of detente and the changes which take place around us in general. . . There are also some other subjects I prefer not to talk about now. . . I have not seen Chancellor Schmidt before, but I heard a great deal about him from my friend Dr. Kissinger, and that is why I am really looking forward to meeting him.

Question : You are aspiring to obtain aid from West Germany, as well as from Austria which is a model followed by the Egyptian society in building up the future. . . If I am quoting you right, why did you choose Austria in particular, and not Sweden which is often described as the ideal model in this respect ?

President : Circumstances in Austria are similar to those of our country. . . It is a small state like us, and the socialist system which Chancellor Kreisky applies is really a magnificent one, and I shall discuss it with him during my tour.

Question : So, you intend to visit Kreisky too ?

President : Yes. . . this visit, in fact, was not included in my programme but I sent him a message saying that I shall spend one night in his country with a view to carrying on talks with him. The system applied in Austria is really acceptable to us because, as I said, our circumstances are similar. As regards Sweden, it is an extremely rich country, much more rich than both Egypt and Austria.

Question : Mr. President, it is not in the power of either Chancellor Schmidt or Kreisky to solve your grave problem, namely,

that conflict which still exists between the Arabs and the Israelis. . . You had personally declared that the step by step policy, which Kissinger pursued, had reached its end. . . Then, you expect a global settlement to be prepared for and reached in Geneva. . . Is this practically possible ?

President : Of course I know that this is the year of elections in the U.S., and it is their system not to take any important decisions during this year. So, I believe that if we can go to Geneva together with the Palestinians, we shall be able to set down the right framework for a global solution. After the election of the American President, the U.S. can join us in Geneva, and we can work together in preparing and setting down the final solution. . . There is something very obvious as I said before, namely, that America holds all the cards of the game in its hand, whether we accept this or refuse it. . . They are holding all the cards of the game for one simple reason : they give Israel life.

Question : But you are not obliged to deal with America alone. . . There are your Arab colleagues. . . Do you and President Assad agree in this respect ? And why does not Egypt cooperate with Syria with more amity and understanding ?

President : Why do you not direct this same question to President Assad ?

Question : Well, because we are making this interview with you and not with President Assad.

President : Well. . . as far as I am concerned, I do not pursue a dual policies, one behind the curtains and another in front of the microphone. . . I do not differ with anyone with regards to the strategic objectives we agreed upon in the Arab summit conferences, namely, no relinquishing of an inch of the Arab territory to Israel, and, secondly : no bargaining over the Palestinians' rights.

Thus, I really do not know what are the exact points of difference, and I prefer you to direct your question to President Assad.

Question : What about the Palestinians' rights ? you declared that 1976 will be the « Year of Palestine ». What can the Palestinians gain during this year ?

President : Well, you know my proposal and the resolution adopted by the U.N. later with a majority of 101 votes calling for the necessity of the participation of the Palestinians in any meetings to discuss the Middle East problems. Thus, I paved the way before the Palestinians, and declared in the joint session of the American Congress, and with complete frankness, that without solving the Palestine cause, we shall never be able to stabilise peace in the area. The Palestine problem is no longer a mere human problem or merely that of refugees.. No.. It represents more than that.. There is a political problem and everyone is of the same opinion.

Question : There are maps already distributed outlining the future Palestine. So, can you visualise a map of such a kind ?

President : First and foremost, I have my special map of Sinai which you can clearly see in front of you across the Canal.. The Israelis were maintaining one of their formidable strongholds there, but you can now cross the Canal and penetrate for 50 Kms. in the inland of Sinai. This, is, in fact, my map. As I have my special map of Sinai, President Hafez El Assad should have his special map of the Golan Heights. Concerning a map of Palestine, the Palestinians themselves, should draw it up and present it.. However, if you want to know my own ideas..

Question : This is exactly the question I have in mind and would like to direct to you..

President : I would like to tell you that it is very necessary to begin with the Western Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Question : This is something agreed upon.. But would Egypt, and perhaps Syria and Jordan be ready to add some additional areas from their land to that of the State of Palestine ?

President : I believe you jump to conclusions.. First of all, the reality of the Palestinian State should come to light, then we can further discuss any other measures.. However, it is not in my power to take any decision concerning the problem of land, this is a matter to be fully determined by my people.

Question : It is said that Jordan and Syria favour with the idea of establishing the to-be State of Palestine.. Could such a matter be applied from the practical point of view ?

President : No.. It could not be practically applied for one simple reason, i.e. The Palestinians, themselves, will never agree to this. Any arrangement between Syria and Jordan will be most welcome on our part, and I am declaring this loudly, because they both constitute one front. Nevertheless, this is not applicable to the Palestinians who have their own ideas and goals which others may not approve.

Question : Mr. President, it seems that each Arab State favours, or rather has its own group of Palestinians.. So, why does not Egypt have its own group as well ?

President : Because we do not wish to cause any troubles with the Palestinians. There was a secret resolution adopted by the Arab Summit Conference in Rabat stipulating the necessity of non-interference by anyone in the affairs of the internal organisation of the Palestinians. Nevertheless, and as everyone fully realised, Syria is imposing its trusteeship on the Palestine Liberation Organ

sation through its special group. For this reason, we, in Egypt, consider the Palestine Liberation Organisation the sole representative of the Palestinians.

Question : Do you believe, Mr. President, that establishing a Palestinian government in exile could be considered a step towards reaching a solution to the Palestine question ?

President : Well, as you see this is the problem with my Arab colleagues. I called for this four years ago and declared it in public and in front of the Palestinian representatives in Cairo. Had they agreed to my proposal, perhaps they would have obtained the recognition of at least one hundred U.N. member-states after the October War. Unfortunately, they could not do such a thing for one simple reason, namely, that Syria did not, and still does not agree to my proposal until this very moment. I really feel deep sorrow for the trusteeship imposed on the Palestinians.

Question : It is not imposed on the Palestinians only, but Syria also greatly interferes in Lebanon. . . What is Egypt's attitude vis-à-vis the Lebanese crisis ?

President : Our attitude is very clear. The Lebanese problem will never be solved save by the Lebanese themselves, and without any foreign or Arab intervention.

Question : But there is a large-scale interference ?

President : We all know that there is an interference on the part of Syria, but look at the result of all this. . . Yesterday fire was opened on a Syrian plane that was supposed to be carrying some Lebanese leaders to Syria. . . I believe nothing will be solved except by the Lebanese themselves as you will see.

Question : But it is not only Syria which interferes. . . President Kazzafy of Libya also interferes, besides his provocations to

Egypt now.. He sends 6 saboteurs to Egypt and dismissed about 20,000 Egyptian workers.. So, how will you deal with Colonel Kazzafy ?

President : Well.. We do not take him that seriously, and do not give him much importance.. We are prepared to receive our workers, and working opportunities are available to them here and in other Arab countries.. On the other hand, we arrest all the saboteurs he sends.. So, why should I give any importance to such boyish acts ! ?

Question : They are really boyish acts.. However, it seems that Kazzafy obtains huge quantities of modern weapons from the Soviet Union and other states.. but on the other hand, he continues to send these weapons to regions of tension, even to Uganda whose President is Idi Amin.. So, do you believe that Moscow is gambling over Kazzafy now ?

President : Kazzafy has only money, and money never creates strength in anybody.. Money does not bestow personality on any person however much he may possess.. Let me remind you that before my meeting with President Ford in Salzburg, I had declared that according to the agreement concluded between Kazzafy and the Soviet Union, the value of the arms deal was worth 12 billion dollars, and nobody believed me at the time. Perhaps they thought I had some spite against Kazzafy.

Question : Well, do they all believe you now ?

President : Yes, and they are all obliged to admit the fact that despite the weapons worth 12 billion dollars, Kazzafy does not have the technicians and personnel necessary to operate these weapons and equipment, and it has become imperative that someone else take over this mission, and who else could it be ? I very

simply declare that it is the Soviets who will be in charge of this task.

Question : Does Kazzafy still want to wipe out the state of Israel; this state about which the CIA sources said that it possesses a number of atomic bombs? Was this one of the reasons which made you direct your efforts towards reaching a peaceful settlement as soon as possible?

President : It is not that at all. . . Let them have ten or twenty or more bombs. . . This is not the reason at all that urged me to work for reaching a peaceful settlement. . . The reason, very simply, is that the October War had proved to Israel and to the whole world, that no one can impose his will on the other. . . We and the Israelis are equal in this.

Question : Even with or without the presence of atomic bombs?

President : Even with the presence of atomic bombs or whatever else they may possess. When we were about to inflict a defeat upon Israel in this place, America immediately rose to its help. . . As this fact was explicitly proved, no party to the dispute can impose his conditions on the other. What is the alternative? It is the peaceful settlement, and we are working towards this end alone and not in fear of any weapons that Israel might possess, even the atomic bomb.

Question : Do you really think that Israel has obtained an atomic bomb?

President : I think it may, but so far, it did not obtain it.

Question : Is there any danger of a nuclear armament race in the Middle East?

President : No. . . Absolutely not.