

On Sadat and Rabin

Nov 14, 1997



Brief Analysis

"Both [President Sadat and Prime Minister Rabin] were leaders in the sense that they understood the responsibility they had to lead their people, not to be led by their public opinions, not to be constrained by them, but rather to get out ahead of them and to try to change the thinking of their publics. . . .

"Maybe he [Rabin] learned something from Sadat, but he believed very strongly that the role of the United States was to support the process, not to lead the process . . . He did not want us in the negotiations for slightly different reasons [than Sadat], but they all amount to the same thing. Even though they appreciated the value of having a strong relationship with the United States and the importance the United States could have in the peace process, both of them chose to act behind our backs [announcing the journey to Jerusalem and at Oslo]. . . .

"It says something about these two men that they understood that when it came to making peace they had to deal directly with their adversaries, that peace was made with enemies not with friends, not with the United States but with their partners.

"Supporting the process is something we [the United States] have been doing for the past four and a half years. When Rabin was moving forward and taking these risks for peace, we had a very different role. We just had to get behind him and minimize those risks. In a situation where the process is stalled and Prime Minister Netanyahu feels that he has a different kind of mandate from the people of Israel—which is not to take risks for peace, but rather to demand reciprocity and change the nature of the process, as he constantly reminds us—in those circumstances our role inevitably changes somewhat. But it is still very much a supportive role.

"It took some seventeen years from the time that Sadat went to Jerusalem to the time when there was another agreement struck on the White House lawn and I fear that it may take another seventeen years before another leader like Sadat or Yitzhak Rabin comes along with that same combination of courage and vision and willingness to take risks and sense of urgency that combined to create the circumstances in which these two dramatic breakthroughs peace between Israel and Egypt and agreement between Israel and the Palestinians were possible.

The Need for Military Dialogue "Twenty years ago, the military on both sides led the way, whether it was the Kilometer 101 talks or whether it was Ezer Weizman's critical role in his relationship with Sadat, but the military to military relationships were critical to the process of peacemaking. Now we have a situation where Egypt is reaching the end of a long process of force modernization, shifting its armed forces from dependence on Soviet equipment to the use of American equipment. That means that the Egyptian army is now a formidable force. It has been built up as a consequence of the peace treaty and the peace process.

"The military on both sides are now barely engaging, except when it comes to the issue of arrangements in the Sinai, which means the Egyptian army and the Southern command of the Israeli army, but apart from that there really is extremely limited engagement between the military leadership, defense ministers and officers on both sides. As a result we have a situation where Israeli military planners are looking at the Egyptian order of battle are now saying, 'This is a real problem, they have real capabilities out there.' Because there is almost no communication between the

military, there is an imputing of intentions which I do not believe exists on the Egyptian side but can only be tested through a dialogue.

Doha Economic Conference "Egypt is the cornerstone of the peace process and we have learned through experience, some of it very good and some of it quite bad, that if you involve Egypt in the process of negotiations it becomes much easier to make progress and if you exclude Egypt it becomes much more difficult.

"As frustrating as it is sometimes, Egypt is a regional power that has its own calculations about its interests and they do not always coincide with our own. Nevertheless the relationship between Egypt and the United States is, I believe, critical to our ability to move the process forward, so we will work with Egypt, despite the disappointments, because of its importance to the process and our belief that we share in common with Egypt a fundamental commitment to peace and to the promotion of security and stability in the wider Middle East.

"There was a time last year when the Egyptians made the calculation that they needed to build their relationship with the Israeli business community because the business community was a force for peace. But on both sides, there is a kind of resistance which makes it so difficult even where there is a government decision to do it. And that is one of the reasons that I very much regret the Egyptians decision not to go to Doha. The economic conference in Cairo [last year] was a great benefit to Egypt, and the economic conference in Doha, which as of now has a thousand business participants registered, is a conference that will benefit the region in terms of giving countries that do not have vast oil reserves, like Jordan and Yemen, opportunities to showcase what they have to offer the international business community. I fail to see what's wrong with that, why that could possibly be against the Arab interest.

"It is in that context of supporting the process that we are going to Doha, because the conference is an institution of the peace process. Our lack of support for that process and for those that decided in the face of opposition to come would send the signal that we were not prepared to stand by those who take risks for peace. So it is that role we will continue to play with great courage.

Iraq "I think that all the leaders in the region that I have met with in the last two weeks-that covers Egypt, Yemen, and the GCC countries-are dismayed by Saddam's actions, do not understand what he is calculating, think he has made a grave mistake and believe that he should reverse himself. . . . It's a favorite sport of the press to declare that the coalition is in disarray or that the Arab world has gone south and is now sympathizing with Iraq and I don't think that in the case of the Arab world that is true. I think there is sympathy for the plight of the Iraqi people, but there is no sympathy or support for Saddam Hussein or at least none that I can detect except for a handful of Palestinian demonstrators in Ramallah. The rest is, I would say, fairly deafening silence. Now, of course, the Iraqis will claim that the Arab world is on their side, but I don't see any evidence of that being the case."

This special report was prepared by Stephanie Sines.

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