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NOTE OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF EGYPT, MR. MUHAMMED HUSNNI MUBARAK, IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS ON 14 JUNE 1979 AT 1715 HOURS

Present:-

The Prime Minister
Sir Anthony Parsons
Mr. B.G. Cartledge

Vice President Muhammed Husnni Mubarak
HE The Egyptian Ambassador
Mr. al-Baz

After welcoming the Vice President, the Prime Minister said that the British Government supported the position of the Egyptian Government on the West Bank issue: the negotiations which lay ahead would clearly be very difficult. Vice President Mubarak said that the Egyptian Government expected them to be so. President Sadat had asked him to convey his warm regards to the Prime Minister; he felt that there was strong support among the new British leadership for the peace process.

Vice President Mubarak went on to summarise the discussions between President Sadat and Mr. Begin at El Arish. President Sadat had told Mr. Begin that the delegations which were about to begin their negotiations in Beersheba would need a firm directive from their Heads of Government if they were to make progress. When the Egyptian Prime Minister, Dr. Khalil, had met the Israeli delegation in Alexandria shortly afterwards, however, the Israelis had taken a tough and difficult stance, with all media representatives present, taking the line that the settlement of the West Bank by Israel would continue and that the United States should be given only observer status in the negotiations, rather than that of full participant as the Camp David Agreements required. Moreover, Vice President Mubarak said, Mr. Begin had delivered a series of statements about the West Bank and Israeli settlement policy before the Beersheba negotiations had even begun. This was all the more regrettable since the moderate Arab states were looking for an excuse to split away from the rejectionist camp. The Israeli Defence Minister, Mr. Weizman, had, moreover, threatened

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that if Egypt were to violate the peace treaty Israel would reoccupy Sinai for the fourth time. Egypt had done everything to promote the spirit of the treaty by opening her borders and the air corridor between Egypt and Israel and by issuing visas at Cairo Airport to Israeli tourists. Provocative Israeli statements nevertheless continued to be made. This was putting President Sadat in a difficult position in front of his own people but he had refrained from engaging in a war of statement and counter-statement, since he knew that this would not help the negotiations on the West Bank.

The Prime Minister said that she wished she could say that she was surprised by what the Vice President had told her. Mr. Begin had visited London three weeks before and she had tackled him about Israeli policy on settlements: to suggest a freeze on further statements was, after all, not much to ask of Israel. The Prime Minister said that she had been unable to make any headway with Mr. Begin, who was already angry that the question of settlements had been raised with him at a meeting with Members of Parliament. Mr. Begin had handed over a copy of the Judgement of the Israeli Supreme Court in justification of Israeli settlement policy; but this amounted to acting as judge and jury in one's own cause. The settlements raised the basic issue of sovereignty. If the West Bank territory belonged to anybody it was to Jordan. But Mr. Begin had refused to accept that this land was not part of biblical Israel.

The Prime Minister told Vice President Mubarak that her meeting with Mr. Begin had been one of the most difficult she had experienced. She had told him that, in international legal terms, she had never come across an arrangement by which a people were given political autonomy without having sovereignty over the territory on which they lived. The Prime Minister said that she had gained the impression that not all Mr. Begin's colleagues supported his position. She had emphasised to Mr. Begin that President Sadat, after his courageous moves, deserved support not only for his own sake but for that of Israel as well.

/Sir Anthony Parsons

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Sir Anthony Parsons said that he thought the Prime Minister had made some impression on Mr. Begin when she had asked him if he valued the peace treaty with Egypt: when Mr. Begin had replied that he did, the Prime Minister asked him why, in that case, he was willing to endanger it. The Prime Minister went on to say that when Prince Salman of Saudi Arabia had called on her at the beginning of May, she had told him that the British Government strongly supported President Sadat's efforts. Prince Salman had made clear that the Saudis were prepared to judge the peace treaty and the negotiations which were to follow it on their merits. The position of Saudi Arabia was clearly of great importance to Egypt, and also to the West as a whole.

Vice President Mubarak agreed that Mr. Begin seem impervious to reason or criticism. Mr. Vance had told him in terms that the West Bank settlements were illegal. Some people thought that Mr. Begin was actually trying to undermine President Sadat's position. He was giving the moderate Arabs no grounds for supporting Egypt. The Prime Minister commented that if this was Mr. Begin's policy, he risked losing everything. It would be important for Egypt to keep close to the Saudis, despite the occasional hot words which passed between them.

Vice President Mubarak agreed and said that Saudi Arabia was trying to find an excuse to split away from the rejectionists. The Saudis had told Egypt that if President Sadat could find any possibility of bringing about a change in Jerusalem, this would give them the excuse they sought. President Sadat had put this to Mr. Begin, but without result. The Prime Minister agreed that Jerusalem would be the most difficult aspect of a settlement for the West Bank. The Prime Minister repeated that the British Government supported Egyptian arguments in every way and fully shared Egyptian concern about the prospects.

Sir Anthony Parsons said that the harder the line Mr. Begin took, the more open the split within the Israeli Cabinet and in the Knesset was becoming: this could have a real effect on the prospects for the negotiations. Vice President Mubarak said that Dr. Khalil had been told by Mr. Burg that Mr. Begin still held complete power in Israel. The Prime Minister

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commented that in politics a great deal could change in 24 hours.

Vice President Mubarak went on to say that Mr. Robert Strauss would be coming to Cairo on 4 July and Mr. Begin would also come there to meet him. If Mr. Begin could not be made to understand that everything depended on finding a solution to the problem of the West Bank and the Palestinians, there would be no hope for an agreement. If he persisted with his policy of new settlements, that would be the end of the negotiations; Egypt was already being urged by other Arabs to break them off. After a further discussion of Mr. Begin's tactics of brinkmanship, Sir Anthony Parsons expressed the view that if the negotiations could only be kept going the change which was taking place in Israeli public opinion might produce a helpful effect. It was true that Mr. Begin would probably win an election now but not if the negotiations were to collapse.

Vice President Mubarak said that Mr. Burg had been told frankly that the negotiations could not continue if Israel's policy on settlements went on.

Sir Anthony Parsons said that he had just returned from visits to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and had found the Saudis in a more pessimistic mood than at the time of Prince Salman's call on the Prime Minister. They showed understanding for the UK's position of support for the peace process, while disagreeing with it. They believed that time was running out for President Sadat and that the Arab world would become increasingly rejectionist. The way to return to "total negotiation", which meant Geneva, was blocked.

Vice President Mubarak said that no other Arabs had so far done much for the cause of peace. He thought that King Hussein wanted the West Bank as part of his Kingdom, or so he had told President Sadat in confidence. (The Prime Minister expressed some doubt as to whether King Hussein could really relish the prospect of taking over the West Bank.) President Asad, for his part, was quite content with the present situation since Israeli

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occupation of the Golan Heights was helpful to his regime politically. But if Israel kept Golan for another five years it would be theirs for good.

The Prime Minister said that she would certainly take up the whole problem with President Carter when she met him in Tokyo at the end of June. It was clear that if there were not some move forward the whole peace process would fall apart. Quite apart from her friendship for Egypt, it was not in the UK's own self-interest that this should happen. She hoped that President Sadat would do his best to keep close to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf rulers.

The discussion ended at 1755.

Bym.

15 June 1979

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