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October 6, 2003 "Sadat and Arafat: Different Paths, Different Results" By Kenneth W. Stein

Thirty years to the day after the outbreak of the 1973 October War, striking differences exist between Egyptian President Anwar Sadat then and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat now. Leaders can change the course of history by being prepared to alter traditional outlooks. We tend to admire those who take risks, become pragmatic: Richard Nixon's overtures to China, Charles DeGaulle's peace with Algeria, or Yitzhak Rabin's recognition of the Palestine Liberation Organization. But leaders also can choose to stay with the status quo. As Mr. Arafat has successfully demonstrated, defiance cultivates staying power; it keeps the national dream from withering. Antithetical to Mr. Arafat was Mr. Sadat. When Egypt and Syria collusively attacked Israel 30 years ago today, also on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, Mr. Sadat changed the course of Egyptian history. Since neither Washington nor Moscow was as yet prepared to use diplomacy to force an Israeli withdrawal from the Israeli-held Egyptian Sinai peninsula, Mr. Sadat went to war to force a negotiating process. Negotiations meant achieving tangible end products: the eventual liberation of all of Sinai and bidding good riddance to the unproductive Soviet relationship with Egypt. Constraints on the Egyptian Army's preparedness and lack of sufficient weapons dictated a quick surprise crossing of the Suez Canal, with the army inflicting damage on Israel and halting on the Sinai side of the 200-yard waterway. Mr. Sadat's objective was not to make peace with Israel or to change the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but to align himself with the United States for military and other aid, all for the good of Egypt. Though appearing whimsical to outsiders, Mr. Sadat was clever as a cat. Whenever the status quo needed breaking, he shattered it. When the pace of what he wanted lapsed, he jump-started the process anew. The October War surprise followed his unceremonious removal of Soviet advisors from Egypt in July 1972. When the Carter administration became bogged down in trying to convene a Middle East peace conference, Mr. Sadat feared Sinai's return would be held hostage to Syrian or Palestinian interests. Hence he refocused Washington on Egypt's requirements with his startling visit to Jerusalem in November 1977. Mr. Sadat did not mind cultivating an aura of inconsistency or uncertainty. It added to the attention he loved, though his unpredictability caused Israeli and U.S. leaders endless bouts of angina. By recognizing Israel as fact, he made it kosher for Americans to accept and appreciate an Arab leader. From him we expected every Arab leader to negotiate and sign a treaty with Israel if reason, logic and full withdrawal or its equivalence were offered. Mr. Arafat could not accept what Israel Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered him at Camp David in July 2000, regardless

of how forthcoming were Mr. Barak's offers, because to do so he would have had to concede to sharing the land west of the Jordan River with a Jewish state. Argue that Mr. Arafat is more interested in symbols than substance, but to him substance means not conceding the Palestinian dream to return to all of Palestine. His history is one of cleverly using starts and stops in negotiations, aimed at not reaching an "end of conflict" agreement with Israel. When Mr. Arafat alienates Arab kings or presidents or foreign leaders, it adds luster to his image. Defiance demonstrates political will; it is also his currency for legitimacy. As a staunch nationalist, he has used violence and intimidation to suppress opposition. Patronage and cronyism ensure loyalty. Mr. Arafat dismisses changing international and regional political realities and casts aside a superpower's outstretched hand to create a Palestinian state in only a part of Palestine. His absence of moderation led to more Jewish immigration and more settlements. He made no lasting concession to Zionism. No, this is not merely a description of Mr. Arafat, but of Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the leader of the Palestinian Arab Movement in the 1930s and 1940s. The consistency in leadership is remarkable; the end result remains the same. What if the Palestinians had a different leader in the 20th century, or if Mr. Sadat had accepted the status quo?

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