

## LOS ANGELES NATIONAL JEWISH NEWS

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### "What Unforeseen Results Started with Sadat?"

By Kenneth W. Stein

More than twenty-five years ago, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat opened the Middle East's door to the U.S. Unknowingly and through subsequent events, Sadat's 1970s grasp of Washington foreshadowed America's present sway over the Middle East-- a foreign influence as great as the British possessed there seventy-five years ago. A major difference between the British and current American periods: Great Britain wanted to be physically there and was there for more than a century; we are there with a noticeable reluctance not to make the stay a long one. Through a delicate balance of war and diplomacy, Sadat engineered a radical shift in Arab attitudes toward the West and Israel in the 20th century. Except for the disintegration of Eastern European Communist regimes, he provided the United States with its most significant success in the Cold War: he voluntarily turned his country away from the Soviet Union and willingly embraced the United States. In the context of the moment, with a defeat in Viet-Nam fresh, no American administration could avoid coveting such a spectacular prize.

Courageous, impatient, and cunning, Sadat took unprecedented political risks for two specific objectives: Sinai's restoration to Egyptian sovereignty and Egypt's economic and military attachment to the United States. The price: recognition of Israel. Sadat and Egypt paid dearly-- Sadat was assassinated in 1981, and for abandoning Arab unity, Egypt was ostracized from the Arab world for almost a decade.

Unexpectedly in October 1973, Sadat astonished the U.S. and surprised Israel when he launched his war against Israel. Without telling his Syrian ally, Sadat secretly reached out to Secretary of State Kissinger asking for American diplomatic intervention to end the war but opening the prospect of Sinai's ultimate return to Egypt.

When the war ended, Israeli and Egyptian troops were entangled; they needed to disengage their forces. When Egyptian President Anwar Sadat reviewed with his Chief-of-Staff, General al-Gamasy, the final details of the proposed separation of forces agreement ten weeks after the war ended, al-Gamasy, a proud Egyptian, reacted angrily to Sadat's willingness to keep only twenty to thirty tanks on the east side of the Suez Canal. At the outbreak of the war, his troops quickly and triumphantly seized land in Sinai from the Israelis. "Impossible. No," said

al-Gamasy to Sadat, "This is Egyptian land conquered by the Egyptian forces, with the price of blood, of sacrifice. How can I withdraw my Army like this? I don't accept that [twenty or thirty tanks]." With tears in his eyes, al-Gamasy left the discussion, returned about fifteen minutes later, and apologized to Sadat for his outburst. Slowly, Sadat turned to al-Gamasy and said, "Never forget, I am making this [disengagement] agreement with the United States, not with Israel."

Sadat enticed Israel with fulfillment of its most cherished dreams: recognition and normalization. Along with Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, Israel received contractual acceptance but cold, if not at times frozen, normalization. Actions by these Egyptian leaders made it possible for both the PLO and Jordan to enter into negotiations with Israel, also mediated and monitored by the United States.

In promoting Egyptian national interests, Sadat opened a traditionally autocratic Arab world to the U.S. Events in and around the Persian Gulf in the 1980s and 1990s hastened cultural proximities and sporadic U.S. engagement. America's reaction to 9/11 and with a proclaimed "War on Terrorism," Middle Eastern countries continue to be at the center of our political screen and we on theirs. When the British departed, their legacy left a hybrid of indigenous autocracy with Western-European-styled institutions: constitutions, parliaments, and political parties.

What will America's legacy be besides Michael Jordan, McDonalds, and Madonna? One can be reasonably certain that Jeffersonian democracy will have great difficulty germinating in Middle Eastern political soil.

It is possible that with Sadat's opening to the Unnoted States, something just *less* than one-man one-vote might emerge in parts of the Middle East?

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