

made 60 bn USD in return. And of course, the Allied Commander Norman Schwarzkopf has made 50,000 USD per speech to explain the details of a hammer killing a fly and to establish his “military genius” among US audiences.

More than a hundred thousand Iraqis were killed, majority of them were civilians, without a trace in history. Such were the blueprints of a new world order. Great victories are achieved against great adversaries, not against an isolated, demoralized, strikingly badly led, shell-shocked, strategically bankrupt and tactically bereft rabble. Will the American elite ever try to reeducate itself? Will it realize that victory has to be sought over any nation or people-but over ignorance, poverty, disease, and human degradation where ever they may be found. If the American elite does not change its perception, the Third World will see many more wars *à la* Gulf in the years to come

Surender K. Bhutani

Mohamed Heikal, *Secret Channels. The Inside Story of the Arab-Israeli Peace Negotiations*, Harper Collins Publishers, London 1996, 572 pp.

This reviewed book has already been translated into Arabic and published by Alsaqi Books (London) in three volumes:

– *Al-Mufāwaḍāt as-sirriyya bayna al-‘Arab wa Isrā’īl. Al-Uṣṭūra wa-āl-imbirāṭuriyya wa-ād-dawla al-yahūdiyya*;

– *Al-Mufāwaḍāt as-sirriyya bayna al-‘Arab wa Isrā’īl. ‘Awāṣif al-ḥarb wa-‘awāṣif as-salām*;

– *Al-Mufāwaḍāt as-sirriyya bayna al-‘Arab wa-Isrā’īl. Salām al-awhām. Oslo, mā qablahā wa-mā ba‘dahā*.

The author, Mohamed Heikal, is one of the most famous journalists of the Arab world. He was a close friend and advisor of the Egyptian leader Ḡamāl ‘Abd an-Nāṣir (1918-1970), and was said to have been closely involved in the writing of *The Philosophy of the Revolution*.<sup>1</sup> Heikal was the editor-in-chief of “Al-Ahrām” daily from 1957 until 1974. After the death of President ‘Abd an-Nāṣir he remained also in close touch with President As-Sādāt, contributing often to crucial decision-making. He disagreed on matters of principle with As-Sādāt, particularly over the handling of the October 1973 war

<sup>1</sup> Peter Wood, *Nasser*, Longman, London-New York 1992, p. 157.

and related policies in the aftermath of that war. In September 1981, Heikal was arrested together with a number of other outstanding Egyptians, but they were released shortly after the assassination of As-Sādāt.

Since that time, he has written a great number of articles in the Arab countries, the U.S.A., Britain and Japan. *Secret Channels* is the eighth of his books published in English. The other were:

- *The Road to Ramadan,*
- *The Sphinx and the Commissar,*
- *Nasser: The Cairo Documents,*
- *Return of the Ayatollah: Iranian Revolution from Mossadeq to Khomeini,*
- *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat,*
- *Cutting the Lion's Tail: Suez through Egyptian Eyes,*
- *Illusions of Triumph: An Arab View of the Gulf War.*

His *Secret Channels* Mohamed Heikal starts with the formulation of the main themes and historical background of the subject-matter. An overview of a century of conflict presents to us the barriers to peace, which, in effect, had created “a wall in the mind”. Hence the influx of Jews into Palestine since the 1880's. However, until the 1890's the number of Jews in Palestine amounted to something between 8,000 and 25,000, living on friendly terms with the Arabs. Later, the number of Jews increased in substantial rates, and tension between the two communities grew steadily between the two world wars.

The British withdrawal from Palestine and the establishment of the Israeli state was tantamount to the loss of any hope of the peaceful coexistence of Arabs and Jews within Palestine. Great bitterness was created by the expulsion of the majority of Palestinians in 1948/1949 and the loss of their lands and homes. Then further came six periods of struggle (the 1956 Suez crisis, the June War of 1967, the 1968-1970 War of Attrition, the 1973 October War, the Israeli invasion of Lebanon of 1982/1983, and the Intifāda of 1987-1992).

“Human misery cannot adequately be conveyed in figures, and yet the statistics give some order of scale. The Palestinian death toll from 1948 to 1993 was 261,000, with 186,000 wounded and 161,140 disabled. The refugees displaced in 1948 and 1967, and their descendant numbered 5.4 million by the early 1990s, according to UN estimates. The civil wars in Lebanon which resulted from complication of the Arab-Israel conflict claimed a further 90,000 lives, 115,000 wounded 9,627 disabled, and 875,000 refugees.

Egypt's losses in five wars (1948, 1956 1967 1968-1970 and 1973), came to 39,000 dead, 73,000 wounded, and 61,000 disabled, while 2.1

million people living in the Suez Canal area were twice displaced (in 1956 and 1967). The Canal was closed for two long periods, and the loss of revenue coupled with the war costs amounted, according to President As-Sādāt, to \$43 billion (p.7).

It was only natural that the Arabs were opposed to contacts with Israel. That was a categorical rule for the period from 1948 until the Camp David accords of 1978. The Yom Kippur War (October 1973) achieved a psychological breakthrough, strengthened by the effects of the Arab oil embargo of 1973-1974. The disengagement agreements between Israel, Egypt and Syria with the intermediary of Henry Kissinger paved the way for direct talks.

The term "taboo" is chosen by Heikal to express the state of one nation's rejection of the other. "The attitude of Palestinians (and other Arabs who shared their anguish) was not conditioned solely by the events of 1948. The taboo in the Arab mind was awakened by bitterness of expulsion, but the root of enmity ran much deeper. Buried in the collective memory were antagonisms accumulated over 3,000 years, beginning with what was supposedly a family dispute." (pp. 13-14). The author has in mind the belief on the part of Arabs and Jews of being descendants of Abraham.

Until the taboo was broken by Anwar as-Sādāt, the Arab-Israeli contacts were largely kept secret. The assassination of the Jordanian King 'Abd Allāh (1951), who openly negotiated with the Israelis, and earlier of the Egyptian Prime Minister An-Nuqraṣī (1948) showed the strength of the taboo.

Among people, who in the early period contacted the Egyptian revolutionary authorities with the intention of carrying out peaceful missions, were British politicians Richard Crossman and Barbara Castle; but the most prominent of them was Albert Einstein. The latter declined to accept the proposal of Israeli leaders to become the first president, and—in order to balance the effects of his rejection—he tried to undertake a peaceful mission. Heikal met Einstein in New York and explained to him 'Abd an-Nāṣir's policy: that lie "was not against Jews because of religion or race but as a result of their aggression against Palestinians" (p. 96). Einstein assumed that such words deal with extremists like Ben Gurion, insisting that there are many good people in Israel whom the Arabs should know "I am afraid the Zionists might become victims of a narrow nationalism of their own making", Einstein told Heikal (p. 95).

Einstein, wishing to serve as a catalyst for peace, conveyed a message to 'Abd an-Nāṣir, expressing a humanitarian attitude—the same feelings towards Arabs as towards Jews. The message was carefully studied by 'Abd an-Nāṣir's inner circle. The incentives of the approach and Einstein's position made it difficult to send him a negative reply. It was decided to leave it

without reply. The strength of the taboo was irresistible. After some time Einstein made a second approach, in writing—again without response (he enlisted the help of the Indian prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru)—with the same result.

‘Abd an-Nāṣir’s avoidance of contacts reflected his experiences during the 1948/1949 war, in which he participated as an officer, while subsequent distrust in peace initiatives had its roots in the reminiscences of Israeli violations of cease-fire agreements. On one occasion, Israel broke the truce upon the Gaza-Beersheba line and overrun the Negev desert to the south. Hence, secret encounters (like the Eisenhower, Goldman, Tito initiatives as well as the Roger plan) had no chance of materialisation.

With the death of ‘Abd an-Nāṣir (1970) and the access to power of As-Sādāt, secret channels became activated, especially during and after the October 1973 war. Already during the early stage of this war, As-Sādāt passed to the Americans (Henry Kissinger in person) an informal message to the effect that Egypt is interested in comprehensive, and not partial, peace settlement in the Middle East, and—more significantly—that there was no intention to advance further in Sinai in the direction of the Israeli border.

The October War was conceived by the Egyptian leader not to be won, but as a device to launch peace talks. The bulk of these talks were carried out through clandestine channels. After the war, they gave an impulse to Kissinger’s “shuttle diplomacy”, the political rapprochement between Egypt and U.S.A., later—to the visit of Sadat to Jerusalem, and finally—the conclusion of the Camp David accords.

Besides Kissinger, credit in the field of creating new channels and introducing peace proposals could be given to the Rumanian leader Ceaușescu (p. 254), and the Moroccan King Ḥasan II, as well as many others. As an episode, Moshe Dayan’s visit to Rabat involved an elaborate deception—a beatnik disguise and a route via Brussels and Paris (pp. 255ff.).

The Oslo agreement of September 1993 brought attention to the behind-the-scenes negotiations between Arab and Israeli representatives. Yet, *Secret Channels* makes clear to us that such contacts have been carried out for decades and on numerous occasions. The general opposition on the part of the Arab public to any whatsoever dealings with Israel made secrecy imperative. This time, the majority of Palestine Liberation Organisation and also Arab leaders were kept in the dark about the Oslo negotiations and outcome! (pp. 438ff.)

The author of *Secret Channels* presents here a profound and detailed knowledge of Middle Eastern affairs, personalities and events. Delivering such vast hitherto publicly unknown information, he remains critical as well

as faithful to the rational, pragmatic way of thinking accompanied by adherence to moral values—so rare in today's world of politics—that were cherished by the first generation of idealistic leaders of the type of Ġamāl 'Abd an-Nāṣir. This trait of Heikal is best known in his sharp criticism of the so-called "attainments" of the Camp David accords and Oslo agreement.

"Looking back over five decades of conflict, it is hard to avoid feeling that the true nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict has never been grasped by the peacemakers. Every initiative so far has been based on finding a way for Arabs to surrender with a figleaf of dignity. Such an approach takes no account of the religious, historic and cultural dimensions of the dispute. Roots of the Arab-Israeli discord reach into areas of the mind that lie beyond the antibiotics of surrender diplomacy. The bonds which tie the Palestinians to their country belong to the mysteries of faith, and of the subconscious. The land of the forefathers of the three great monotheistic religions will always be just as precious to Arab Muslims and Christians as it is to Jews" (p. 551).

The outcome of 1948 and 1967 wars violated the national rights of both the Palestinians and the entire Arab nation. These conquests divided the Arab nation territorially into eastern and western parts, whereas the military power of Israel terrorised neighbouring Arab peoples, whose only strength was inherent in their solidarity. Thus, there was the Arab taboo, resembling powerful subconscious and conscious ideas and practices.

Unable to achieve victory in military terms, the Arabs sought moral support of the Muslim world, non-Muslim Asian and African states East European countries and the Soviet Union, in addition to the Vatican, Spain and Greece. The pro-Arab "bloc" isolated Israel politically and economically on the world arena, but—having the U.S.A. as the key sponsor—could afford to defy this moral pressure. "With the principal superpower on its side, with the influence and economic power of worldwide Jewry, and with its own military strength, including the nuclear deterrent, Israel had little difficulty in remaining dominant" (pp. 551-552).

Since 1948—we are assured by Heikal—successive Israeli governments had followed a strategy based on three major pillars:

- firstly, the Arabs should never be allowed any military gains;
- secondly, the division and disintegration of the Arab world;
- thirdly, the recreation of Eretz Yisrael through the construction of more and more settlements on Arab lands, "consolidated through the Oslo agreement (which left control of settlements in Israel's hands), and the steady de-Arabization of east Jerusalem continued on an accelerated pace. The biblical imperative behind Israeli expansion remained as powerful as ever. Ariel Sharon, champion of Jabotinsky's revisionist Zionism, said on 27 March

1995 that the next Likud government would increase the number of Israeli settlers on the West Bank from 140,000 to 500,000”(p.552)

Israel's consistent policies of exploiting Arab weaknesses, periodically accompanied by exercising its military might, were adequate to achieve every objective. However, victorious Israel remained always preoccupied by security and legitimacy issues. The fact that victories had an ephemeral nature was usually grasped by a minority of Israeli intellectuals.

On the Palestinian side, the Palestine Liberation Organisation had been since 1992 steadily losing ground to Ḥamās and Islamic Ğihād. “No one can say how long the unjust peace of Oslo will last, but the strength of Ḥamās and Islamic Ğihād should be a signal. Islam is the only fortress of the old structure of the taboo still functioning. If Islam is being radicalized, it is because the Arab soul has been deprived of other defences, leaving faith as the last redoute of a taboo broken but not appeased. And therein lies the portent of coming dangers.” (p. 554)

That is how Mohamed Heikal concludes his last work *Secret Channel The Inside Story of Arab-Israeli Peace Negotiations*. The book is written in the convention of high-quality journalism. Readers on the Arab world and Middle Eastern politics would find it highly useful.

Hassan Jamsheer