

By Hillel Schenker

FORTY-SIX TO SEVEN SOUNDS LIKE A RESOUNDING victory in the National Football League. But in Israeli politics, 46 to seven was the comparison of the number of minutes that American President George Bush spent with Vice Premier Shimon Peres vs. the number of minutes he spent with Foreign Minister Moshe Arens in New York in late September. Just when we thought we had seen it all, Israel's extraordinary national unity government continues to come up with new entries for the (political science) books.

The latest flurry of stopwatch politics was generated by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak's 10-point proposal for resolving differences between the Israeli and Palestinian approaches to elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a step toward resolving the ongoing conflict.

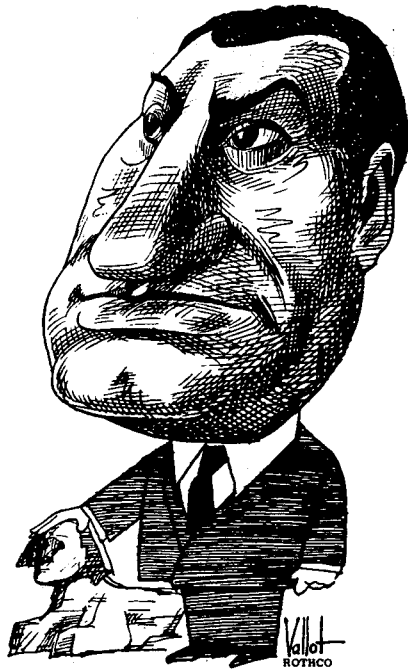
According to Mubarak's proposal, both Israelis and Palestinians will have to compromise for the sake of a possible peaceful resolution. Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leaders are being asked to accept an election formula that contains no specific reference to PLO involvement or to a Palestinian state, their ultimate goal. In exchange, Israeli government leaders—particularly Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and his Likud Party—are being asked to accept the principle of "land for peace," or a territorial compromise, which is anathema to them.

The Egyptian president has invited an Israeli delegation, to be designated by the

Israelis, U.S. threaten to squander a promising plan

Israeli government, and a Palestinian delegation, to be composed of representatives from the Occupied Territories, to come to Cairo to discuss the parameters of the elections, as well as any other matters that might promote the peace process. Realizing that Palestinians do not want their nation to be divided between "Palestinians from the inside" and "Palestinians from the outside," Mubarak has suggested that two Palestinians who have been deported from the Occupied Territories be included in the Palestinian delegation to Cairo. That way the PLO could say that the Palestinian nation was not being fragmented, while the Israelis could claim that all of the representatives were from the West Bank and Gaza Strip alone. The Egyptian president has even suggested that he would be ready to designate the Palestinian delegation, rather than the PLO—though obviously in coordination with the PLO—to make it easier for the Israeli government to digest the plan.

The 10-point plan has breathed new life into the moribund election proposal. Half of the Israeli government—led by Labor Party leaders Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Vice Premier and Finance Minister Peres—have embraced the plan. The mainstream PLO leadership has once again demonstrated its newfound pragmatism



Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak

and flexibility by indicating a readiness to accept the 10 points, and the generally hesitant Bush administration has also sent out positive signals about the plan—one of which was the fact that Bush met with Peres for 47 minutes and with Arens for only seven minutes. The missing link, of course, is Shamir, Arens and their colleagues from the right-wing Likud Party.

Stay tuned: All of this has created another episode in the soap-opera-like periodic Israeli government crises. The Labor Party is threatening to leave the government if Shamir rejects the Egyptian formula, while voices are being raised in the Likud to "throw the Labor Party out and go to the people" with new elections—in Israel, not in the West Bank and Gaza. This time the crisis could prove real. However, based on past record, it is still most likely the two combatant parties will back down and find another of their interminable compromises to ensure that each retains a portion of the power. If the compromise ena-

years, they appear to think that they can sit back and relax, cautiously defend the interests that they represent and carry out a minimum of initiatives that are necessary to get them through the four years without too many political bruises.

Unfortunately, this relatively passive approach, particularly toward international diplomacy, comes at a time of great opportunity for a reduction in world tensions and for significant progress toward the resolution of regional conflicts.

The Middle East is one of the prime examples of this new circumstance. The Soviet Union has declared, through many channels, that it is ready to cooperate with any meaningful American effort to promote a political resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a comprehensive and stable peace in the region. All that is required is American will, initiative and political acumen.

While former President Jimmy Carter may have a mixed reputation in the U.S., he is viewed in Israel, Egypt and Panama as a world-class statesman. That is because he took the initiative without which there would have been no Camp David Accords and no Panama Canal Treaty.

In retrospect, the Camp David Accords appear to be flawed because they didn't lay adequate foundations for movement toward a political resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Harold Saunders, an architect of the Camp David Accords, recently said that the Bush-Baker government has an opportunity to promote peace that wasn't available to the Carter administration—the parallel U.S.-PLO and U.S.-Israeli dialogues. The U.S. government should use this opportunity to promote support for the Mubarak formula, or for any other workable formula that promotes political movement toward a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus the 68 senators who are calling upon the State Department to deny a visa to PLO Chairman Arafat may think that they are acting in defense of Israel's interests, but actually they are undermining Israel's deepest interests, which include an effective and productive U.S.-PLO dialogue to help create formulas that will lay the foundation for negotiations.

In late September Bush finally took the initiative during his address to the United Nations, outlining a proposal to end the "scourge" of chemical weapons. But not one word of his speech was devoted to the Middle East. He missed an obvious connection: one of the most dangerous aspects of the Middle East arms race is the apparent stockpiling by Israel and its neighbors of nuclear and chemical weapons. The Middle East is a nuclear and chemical powder keg.

Today Palestinians are suffering from continued occupation and repressive Israeli attempts to put down the *intifada* (see story on page 12), while Israelis are suffering from 10 percent unemployment and low morale. But if in the months ahead prospects for peace break down and the conflict degenerates into another round of warfare, the current troubles will appear manageable.

Now is the time for action. Mubarak's 10-point plan creates an opportunity for progress that should be fully explored.

Hillel Schenker, senior editor of *New Outlook* in Tel Aviv, is currently serving as the U.S. representative of the Israeli monthly.

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If prospects for peace collapse and the conflict degenerates again into warfare, today's troubles will seem manageable.

bles a meeting between an Israeli and a Palestinian delegation to take place in Cairo, it would have been worthwhile. Otherwise, it would represent the squandering of yet another opportunity to promote a political process that could save countless lives and could lay the foundation for an equitable political solution.

Bush push: But a push is needed from President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker. As an Israeli observer of the American political process, my impressions are that Bush and his allies mobilized tremendous resources and ran a vigorous campaign to gain control of the White House. Now that they are safely ensconced on Pennsylvania Avenue, presumably for at least the next four

Hurricanes of Change

In the absence of a revolutionary party, it often becomes the role of natural calamities (or God, if you happen to think He is the Disposer Supreme) to raise consciousness and expose the contradictions. Even with a revolutionary party, a calamity like the Managua earthquake can play an important role. (And the fact that the Nicaraguan hurricane last year did not provoke serious outbreaks of militant discontent must be reckoned as evidence of the Sandinistas' achievements.) For the desperate, hurricanes can be opportunities. A hurricane once hit one of the Caribbean islands, and a youth seized his pen and wrote:

"I take up my pen, just to give you an imperfect account of the most dreadful hurricane that memory or any records whatever can trace. Good God! what horror and destruction it's impossible for me to describe or you to form any idea of it. It seemed as if a total dissolution of nature was taking place. The roaring of the sea and wind, fiery meteors flying about in the air, the prodigious glare of almost perpetual lightning, the crash of the ear-piercing shrieks of the distressed, were sufficient to strike astonishment into angels."

The pen writing those lines was that of Alexander Hamilton. At the age of 15 the future secretary of the treasury was living on St. Croix when the fearsome hurricane of 1772 struck the island. Hamilton dashed off his description and submitted it to the *American Gazette*, the chief English-language newspaper of the islands, held at that time by Denmark. It was the turning point of Hamilton's life. The hurricane struck on August 31. Hamilton's account appeared on October 3. Influential islanders discovered the article's author and forthwith dispatched him to the mainland to improve his education and carve a career for himself.

When the late summer winds had begun to knock the shutters, young Hamilton, stuck in Mr. Cruger's counting house, heard opportunity knock, too. He was not the only one in St. Croix's history to see the bright side of a dark hour. Thirty-nine years earlier, in 1733, St. Croix was afflicted, in successive order, by drought, hurricane, a plague of insects, another hurricane, starvation and then, imposed upon St. Croix's African slaves, the infamous Gardelin code, named for the Danish governor and described by William Boyer, author of *America's Virgin Islands: A History of Human Rights and Wrong*, as perhaps "unparalleled in world history as one of the most barbarous and oppressive measures ever imposed on a people."

The Gardelin code stipulated mutilation and torture for almost any manifestation of discontent by the island's slaves, who had held the island against assaults by the Danes, as well as British and French troops summoned by the panic-stricken Norsemen. Finally overwhelmed, many of the slaves chose suicide, sensibly as it turned out, since those who surrendered on pledges of amnesty were executed immediately. Those who were captured were shipped off to St. Thomas in chains and there broken on the wheel and left in the sun to dry.

There may have been some young emulator of Hamilton scribbling notes when Hurricane Hugo hit the islands of the eastern Caribbean, including St. Croix, on the evening of September 17. If so, no newspaper chose to give immediate publication

to his report. Amid headline stories two days later about the destruction in Puerto Rico and fears for what the hurricane boded for the mainland, almost nothing was written about the fate of St. Croix beyond a brief note that from 30 percent to 70 percent of the island's homes had been destroyed, along with most power and communications equipment, and that looting had occurred. Four days after the hurricane there came headlines about the ordering of U.S. troops to the Virgin Islands after widespread looting had broken out. For *CBS Evening News*, Juan Vasquez reported that "the residents of St. Croix are overjoyed to see the soldiers [1,100 military police dispatched by President Bush] from the mainland." The word "residents" means in this context "white people who have settled on the island," and Vasquez's wrap-up lines were also unintentionally revealing: "For ... tourists the nightmare is ending. For the residents, the question on shattered St. Croix is whether to stay or leave with them."

Of course the true natives of St. Croix are scarcely in financial shape to hop aboard a plane like the tourists or fearful "residents." St. Croix is at least 75 percent black, and the looting seems to have been a very understandable attempt by the black poor to obtain a more equitable allocation of the island's resources.

For most of the black native inhabitants of St. Croix, the word "nightmare" has had rather longer-term reverberations than the grim couple of days experienced by those tourists. Even the short-term mainland response was dismal. While the French and the British were rushing emergency supplies to nearby Guadeloupe and Montserrat, respectively, the best that the U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency could do was send a C-141 transport with radio equipment and a bunch of bureaucrats in search of the facts. Atherton Martin, coordinator of the Development GAP, a Washington-based policy group, says that it took three days for help to arrive in St. Croix after the hurricane, and "on the fourth day what came in were soldiers, not goods and services."

The airstrip at St. Croix was not damaged, so there was no excuse for the tardy response. Martin explains that the people of St. Croix would have needed fresh water supplies and an emergency electric grid.

There's not much rain on St. Croix, and most houses have concrete water storage tanks under them, with water pumped up by electricity. Without power most houses don't have either drinking water or sanitation or, of course, lights.

There is also the longer-term explanation for the looting. Most of the tourist development in the Virgins has been concentrated on St. John and St. Thomas. St. Croix, as Martin says, "is seen as a place for cheap labor." It is on St. Croix that most of the industrial development, bauxite and aluminum processing and petroleum refining has occurred. The lawyer William Kunstler, who once spent about a year on St. Croix representing some black youths accused in a sensational slaying, says that on St. Croix there is a division of labor in which whites have most of the good jobs and off-island blacks and Latinos dominate the tourism jobs, leaving the most menial occupations to the locals. This is not the case on the other islands, according to Kunstler, whose people are not as fiercely "independent and liberty-loving."

Island of contrasts: In St. Croix's capital city of Christiansted, "the difference between people starving and people touring is very stark." Kunstler added that St. Croix was extremely violent, with rampant official corruption. The U.S. bought the Virgin Islands from Denmark in 1917 for \$25 million, or about \$295 an acre, and the islands now have the utterly nebulous status of "unincorporated territories" with a non-voting representative in the U.S. Congress.

Statistics are extremely hard to come by, but people knowledgeable about the islands all agree that the post-hurricane uprising on St. Croix was not unexpected. Martin said, "All of this is part of a formula for an eventual explosion." Larry Birns, director of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs, called the island "a volatile situation of the immiserated conditions of a Third World country." Boyer, author of the excellent history of the Virgin Islands, says that "given the crime and disaffection of natives who are against people outside taking over their island, I'm not surprised by the instability caused by the hurricane. 'Unincorporated' means no promise of statehood, no self-determination, even though all the preconditions for statehood are there." Though the automobile license plates say "American

Paradise," St. Croix's schools, roads and hospitals are all in poor shape. A 1976 statement by St. Croix's health employees noted shortages of food, equipment and medicine, poor salaries and similar conditions sufficiently vile "to cause the strongest to cry in anguish." In 1979 both hospitals in the islands had their accreditation withdrawn, and, according to the American Hospitals Association, this accreditation has never been reinstated. Birns says that unemployment and underemployment hovered around 30 percent before the hurricane. Median family income in the Virgin Islands is \$11,914.

Until 1966 a publicly funded body called the Virgin Islands Corporation supervised development with the objective of providing employment to native Crucians. Boyer called it "one of the most extreme examples of socialism ever experienced under the American flag," adding that this definition of socialism here is "government ownership and administration of the means of production." In the mid-'60s forces strongly antipathetic to such public enterprise were becoming entrenched in the islands, and the corporation yielded to private tourist and industrial pressures.

U.S. tariff laws allowed companies to ship manufactured goods duty-free from the islands to the mainland. Between 1961 and 1966 the tax laws were amended every year, offering subsidies and tax breaks for companies choosing to operate in the islands. Between 1966 and 1971 Hess Oil, enjoying a great competitive advantage through classification of its huge refinery as domestic rather than foreign, was exempt from all real-estate taxes, excise taxes on building and raw materials, ad valorem duty on imports and taxes on gross receipts. Though a condition of these subsidies was that 75 percent of corporate employees should be legal residents of the Virgin Islands, according to Boyer, by 1970 only about 10 percent of the workforce was reported to be native Virgin Islanders.

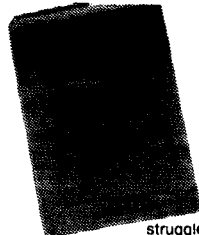
The nearest St. Croix got to revolution in modern times was the killing of seven whites and one black in 1972 on the Fountain Valley golf course, developed by David and Laurance Rockefeller in 1964. This investment fueled a speculative boom that, by the end of the '60s, saw almost all the beaches of St. Thomas and St. Croix gone to "development." Five black youths were eventually convicted for those killings, which remain as vivid in the minds of the white "residents" as, no doubt, the 1733 slave rebellion did for earlier settlers. ■

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