

# A POLITICAL BLIZZARD LIES AHEAD

SECRETARY of State James Baker came and went twice in recent days while I had been in occupied Jerusalem talking with Palestinian activists and Israeli peaceniks.

Israel is said to be under "pressure" once again.

Senator Dole's message about reconsidering Israeli assistance is of course a trial balloon to see just how the political winds are blowing these days on the homefront. Bush and Baker obviously want to get an initial reading on just what public opinion and congressional sentiments will bear; and to find out about the current political battle formations of the infamous Israeli-Jewish lobby.

Such are the daily headlines. The underlying realities, though, are far more complicated; and possibly quite different.

In so many ways all that's taking place before us is *deja vu*, of course...a replay of times past.

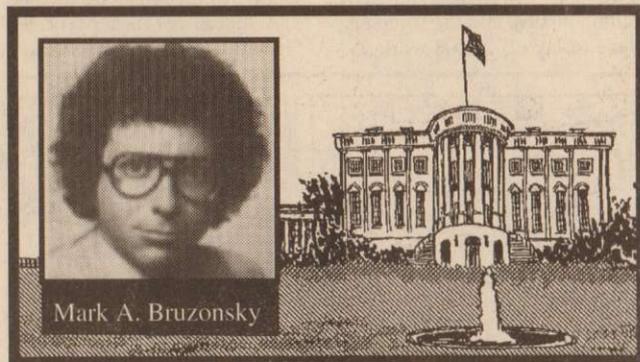
True, few analysts bother these days to put things in historical perspective. Though diplomacy without history is like salad without dressing — untasty and unfinished — the public is continually served large amounts of self-serving statements and provided little serious analysis.

The end result is a kind of rhetorical constipation which leaves everyone a bit queasy and confused.

Just in recent years there was the so-called Ford-Kissinger "reassessment" back in 1975. Then there was the Carter "Palestinian homeland" attempt of 1977 that included a

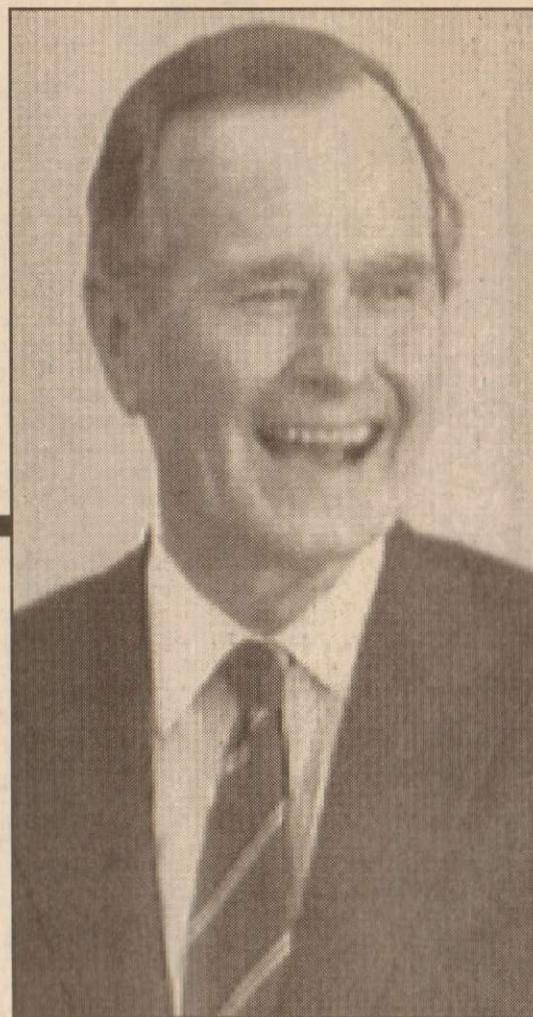
From

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Mark A. Bruzonsky

Washington



PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH -- Painful Problem!

## Israel wants water beneath occupied lands

By Jack Redden

THE lush fields and concealed ruins around the Zionist settlement in Mevo Horon, occupied West Bank tell of a struggle over water that goes to the heart of the relentless competition between Israelis and Palestinians.

Water pipes emerge from the ground beside Mevo Horon to feed the fertile soil just inside the occupied West Bank. A large pond fed by an underground spring sparkles in the sun.

But obscured by a neighbouring grove of trees lie twisted metal rods and concrete from a Palestinian village that once used the water. It was bulldozed out of existence when Israel captured the area in the 1967 war.

The nearest Palestinian community, Beit Liqya, has no wells and when the winter rain water collected by villagers runs out they now send tank trucks to buy water from the Zionist settlement.

There are concerns about that scarce resource in all the occupied territories captured in 1967 — the Golan Heights taken from Syria, the Gaza Strip from Egypt and the West Bank from Jordan.

In the Golan Heights, Israel is anxious to protect the sources feeding the Jordan river, a key supply of fresh water piped throughout the Zionist state.

The Gaza Strip shares the coastal aquifer that underlies the most densely populated part of Israel. It has been so over-used that seawater seeping from the Mediterranean has turned the water brackish.

But competition is at its most intense in the occupied West Bank. In the past 23 years, Israel has become dependent on the aquifer beneath it.

"Israel needs water and Arabs need water, but there are limited resources," said Abdel Rahman Tamimi, a ground water expert with the Palestinian hydrology group.

"We have limited resources — but unlimited military orders to prevent Palestinian development of water."

Israel recognised the importance from the moment it captured the West Bank — one of the army's first acts was to place all water under its control and declare most information on it secret.

Without Israeli approval no new Palestinian wells can be dug, dry ones cannot be replaced and existing ones cannot be repaired. Arab con-

"You can't find any Israeli settlement without water," Tamimi said. "But you can find hundreds of Arab villages without water."

The aquifer beneath the occupied West Bank is now being used almost to capacity, with 83 percent of the water going to Israelis in the occupied territories or the pre-1967 Zionist state.

Israeli wells, up to six times deeper than Palestinian ones which never exceed 100 metres (yards), are causing wells and springs that have fed Arab villages for centuries to dry up during the long hot summers.

The Palestinian hydrology group, formed by Arab engineers and geologists alarmed at the increasingly serious water problem, says the portion of farm land irrigated by the Arabs in the occupied West Bank has dropped from 27 percent to only four percent under the occupation.

Not a single new Palestinian well for irrigation has been allowed since 1967. In contrast, Israeli settlers in the area are irrigating 70 percent of their farmland.

While attention focused solely on Arab-Israeli politics — the hydrology group began the first Palestinian studies of water two decades after the occupation began — Zionist dependence on water originating in the occupied West Bank grew relentlessly.

It has become a key, though largely unpublicised complication in negotiating an Israeli withdrawal and independence for Palestinians. Both sides recognise the water, which falls on the occupied West Bank but flows towards Israel, will have to be shared.

"We will have that problem whether it is in the state of Israel or not," said Dr Ronit Nativ, a hydrologist with Hebrew University. "It's something that has to be resolved regardless of whether we stay there."

As a precedent, there is quiet co-operation between Jordan and Israel over sharing the waters of the Yarmouk river that flows along their border.

But other Israelis, whether from real concern or to buttress arguments to keep the land, say the Zionist state cannot give Palestinians control of the water even with agreement on sharing.

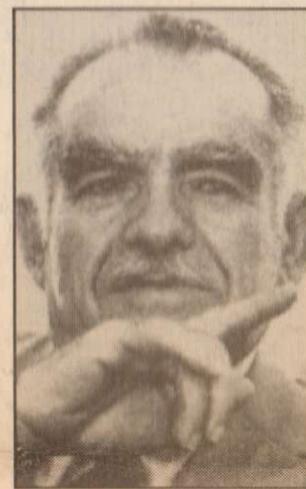
Following the installation of Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's rightwing government last year, the agriculture ministry printed full-page statements in newspapers saying Palestinians could not be trusted to manage the water or to



James Baker



Hosni Mubarak



Yitzhak Shamir



Hafez Assad

joint US-USSR plan. And some would add to this list the so-called "Reagan Plan" of September 1982 — though that one was even more political theatrics than usual — maybe more like the situation today.

Furthermore, it wasn't that long ago that there was the previous Baker plan, that one superseded by another initiative named after Hosni Mubarak, and that preceded by one by Shamir himself. In Yiddish, the expression for such goings on is *oy vel*, an expression which has no sufficient translation.

Now once again — in the aftermath of Iraq's destruction by a powerful under-the-table US-Israeli alliance — the US is pretending to distance itself from Israel with rhetorical flourishes but no serious policy changes.

Once more the State Department is playing the good-cop-bad-cop game with the Palestinians, this time with Jerusalem's Faisal Husseini, the man to have your picture taken with.

As the game is played, Congress and other power centres in Washington supposedly prevent the American government from taking firm actions to ring Israel into line — so the story goes.

Iraq was bombed back a generation or two to uphold "international law" we were just told a few months ago. But somehow when it comes to Israel, American policies become all jumbled, deceptive and helplessly feeble — and the will of the international community of little concern.

So while Baker flies hither and yon the flow of monies and arms continues to the Zionist entity gone berserk. Under these circumstances it's hardly far-fetched to conclude that only the on-stage political theatrics have been changed, not the basic policies.

The overall goal for Washington at this point is really to pacify the various audiences in the Arab World and at home as they watch nightly TV reports and glance through morning newspaper summaries — but to do so without alienating too many of Israel's supporters; without putting the Jewish lobby on a war footing; and without sacrificing Israel's dominance in the region.

Another goal is to position the US to take credit for some new kind of Arab-Israeli deal, a Camp David II if you will, should that result out of the turmoil and repositioning that shakes the region in the aftermath of Iraq's destruction.

The reality of 1991 so far is that what Baker is all about is soothing Arab, European, and some parts of American public opinion — little more.

Baker's comings and goings are purposefully designed to be manipulative of public percep-

tions without actually shifting basic, long-standing policies that link the US and Israel in symbolic togetherness. Furthermore, the US now has a more complicated task ahead of it then previously — that of attempting to shore up various Arab regimes that are linked to Washington more closely than ever, while at the same time maintaining Israel as the American gendarme in the area.

The Americans, acting in tandem with Israel, whatever the seeming tensions of the moment, do want to somehow seize this historic moment when the other party is totally divided, confused and bewildered to help Israel extinguish the Intifada and to defuse, but not settle, regional tensions.

Whether the difficulties Washington is having are real or feigned — so far the evidence suggests the latter though the images the former — there's little to this point to suggest the Americans have turned over any groundbreaking new leaf.

Meanwhile, the very tangible suffering of the Palestinian continues of course — even worse than before. And all the while the process of absorbing the rest of Palestine into Israel goes on with seemingly renewed vigour.

All this new political dancing has been stepped up to new music orchestrated in Washington as a palliative to public concerns in both the Arab World and the US — concerns aroused by the traumatic events of the past eight months.

Yet as the music blares, the realities of the slow deal of what's left of the Palestinians' Palestine continues. The march of Israeli civilisation, buttressed primarily by American money and American-Jewish backing, continues unabated. Is the analogy of the orchestra music welcoming the Jewish detainees to their Nazi death

amps too brutal?

And even if some so-called "concessions" should soon be forthcoming from Israel in future weeks and months — as they probably will be — the way the political chessboard is now arranged such "concessions" will not truly represent serious changes in either Israeli or American policies.

Could it be, perhaps, that what is really going on in public view is something the US and Israel have actually coordinated together in the darkened, smoke-filled rooms where international intrigue really takes place these days, far from public view?

Anyway, whether by conspiracy or happenstance, the Israelis have positioned themselves, in this ongoing political war, much as they do on the military battlefield. They have prepared many lines of tactical retreat, of possible repositioning, which are now available to them before there is any danger whatsoever of losing the political war and allowing the long discussed "two-state solution" to come forward.

Take, for instance, the current "roadblocks" to negotiations if we are to believe the Israeli-American version of the present — which the actual history of this conflict, of course, suggests we should rarely do.

The current political hubbub is supposedly over such matters as whether and how often the "regional" conference will reconvene.

Supposedly Foreign Minister David Levy actually agreed with Secretary Baker that every six months such a conference might reconstitute itself to "hear progress reports" — but only if Israel agrees and without any power being given to the conference to take any decisions.

Very frankly, big deal!

The underlying reality is that the Israelis have succeeded in switching the terms of reference from a serious internation-

ality Council resolutions as its basis — as has been talked about for decades — to some kind of symbolic regional conference itself into a series of bilateral country-to-country talks. Surprise, surprise...this is just what the Israelis have wanted for a long time.

So chalk this one up as a major Israeli political victory that the Israelis wisely haven't been crowing about. They have positioned their political armies well; with the help of the Americans, of course.

Then there is the matter of whether or not the UN secretary general can send an observer. My God!

After decades of UN involvement, after the devastation of Iraq and the liberation of Kuwait under cover of UN resolutions, now the Israelis want to prevent a UN "observer"! What utter nonsense!

The conference should be, must be, UN authorised and supervised; not simply "observed". And even this the Israelis are said to be "resisting".

So chalk another one up for the Zionist entity — Israel has positioned itself to eventually appear to be giving something that was until now assumed! And if "observer" is what is eventually accepted the Israelis actually get what they have wanted all along — the UN pushed from centrestage and put into a subsidiary role.

All this has been done, of course, with the help of the Americans...the same Americans who just used the UN Security Council to explain and justify the destruction of Israel's worst enemy.

Then there's the basic issue of the PLO.

During the previous two decades the Americans repeatedly assured the PLO that if they would just recognise Israel and accept Resolutions 242 and 338 then negotiations would be possible. Then just a few years ago they badgered and cajoled

Yasser Arafat to humiliate in Geneva by reading a statement written in Washington in order to get a place at the negotiating table.

But it didn't take the Americans long, of course, to wiggle out of the meaningless "dialogue" given to Arafat as his reward. And now the Americans and the Israelis are hard at work to destroy the very underpinnings of Palestinian nationalism by excluding from whatever talks lie ahead, just as they did at Camp David, the very symbol of Palestinian aspirations.

So chalk up another one here up for Israel. Again, of course, with the help of the Americans.

Finally, add to this list the basic issue of escalating settlements in the occupied territories — which in today's world has become tied to the idea of unprecedented US "housing guarantees" for Russian immigrants.

Sure enough, restrictions of various kinds will temporarily be put on the huge new American grants and loans and guarantees. But sooner or later today's influx of hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews will help Israel further spill over the greenline and absorb what's left of the Palestinians' Palestine. And sooner or later the Israelis will try to get "forgiveness" for today's outstanding loans and guarantees as well.

The Americans know this just as well as the Israelis do and the Arabs should. The rest is all theatrics and public opinion manipulation. Yet we are all so gullible and so worn down these days.

In the end, talks, of one kind or another, there will be.

But the Israelis, with American help, have positioned themselves so that what they will be trying to sell at a high price will hardly be worth much. Down the road a bit, the world is likely to be told by Washington and Tel Aviv that important concessions have been made; that US policy in the end is bearing fruit; that Israel in the end is showing considerable "flexibility."

Get ready not to believe any of it.

A political blizzard seems to lie ahead.

But when it passes there will not be peace.

More likely we will then find ourselves living into the next millennium with the rotten fruits of a Camp David II agreement manufactured by the Americans and Israelis which twists beyond recognition the terms that could have made a real peace.

And those Arab leaders who agree to take such a path, for whatever reasons, will probably find themselves commiserating their mistakes along with the late Anwar Sadat.

and existing ones cannot be repaired. Arab consumption is carefully monitored and limited, at prices more than four-times those charged to Israelis.

Meanwhile, water development for Israeli settlement in the occupied territories has raced ahead. Green lawns adorn Zionist enclaves in a desert landscape. Some 100,000 Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank use almost as much water as a million Palestinian residents.

satisfy Israeli needs.

The message dismissed historic or religious reasons for keeping the land captured in 1967, bluntly saying Israel would stay because it wants the water.

"It is difficult to conceive of any political solution consistent with Israel's survival that does not involve complete Israeli control of the water."—Rtr.

## Bais hold fast to their culture, language

By James L. Tyson

SINCE he learned to write Chinese in school, Yan Biao has had money in his pocket, but he also fears that his fortune may one day symbolise the betrayal of his ethnic heritage.

Yan, a member of China's Bai people, has prospered as the director of a metal shop. He was one of scores of youths at a Bai village to graduate from a Han high school about 40 years ago. Han people are the nation's predominant group.

The longstanding concern of Yan that he would forsake Bai traditions underscores the difficulty of China's minorities in reconciling their ethnic bonds with the need to get by in a country dominated by Hans.

Beijing has intensified the cultural quandary of many minorities by adopting a literacy campaign that promotes reading and writing in Chinese.

Many members of China's 55 minority groups refuse to risk effacing their ethnic iden-

tity by learning Chinese, official press reports say. Consequently, a large number of China's 91 million minority peoples have been left behind as Hans increasingly grasp the opportunities that come with literacy, the reports say.

"To succeed in China, a Bai or any other minority has to know how to speak and write Chinese," Yan says. "But if you go back home and start speaking Chinese, people will think you've pulled yourself up by your roots, that you've betrayed your own people. When I go back to my village, I only speak Bai."

The state literacy programme is luring some minority people away from their mother tongue by making proficiency in Chinese the sole yardstick for successful scholarship. Peasants are deemed literate when they master 1,500 Chinese characters; city dwellers must command 2,000 characters to be considered literate.

By the official count the pro-

gramme has been a triumph, reducing the number of illiterate citizens to 180 million — from 22.8 percent of the population in 1982 to 15.8 percent today.

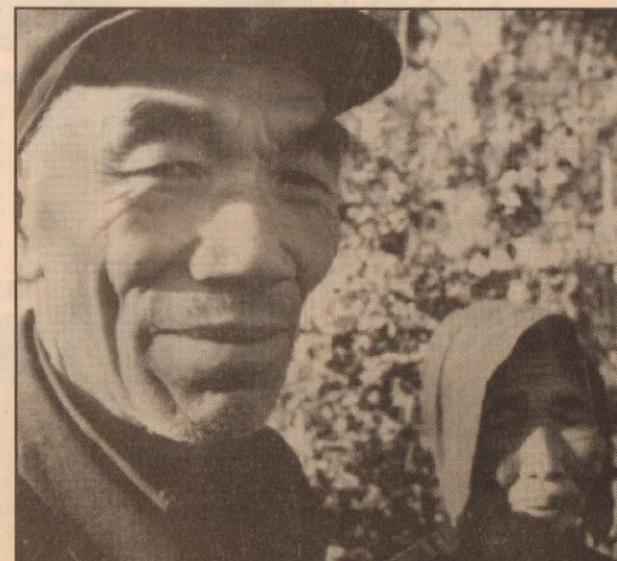
Government officials acknowledge that the focus of the literacy programme on Chinese is one sign that the Han language is the only lingual ticket to power and prosperity. The campaign bolsters claims by some minorities that Beijing, while glorifying superficial ethnic traditions like costume and dance, is bent on absorbing minorities into Han culture.

A strategy of assimilation would ostensibly help China dilute the persistent unrest of minorities along its borders. Beijing stations a large force of armed police in Tibet to suppress religious independence activists.

In the last 18 months, Beijing has also reinforced its security apparatus in Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia to ensure that the regions' natives aren't aroused by the surge in nationalism among ethnic groups across the frontier.

In the southern border province of Yunnan, China's richest melting pot with 24 ethnic groups, the emphasis of Chinese over minority languages is particularly conspicuous. For instance, the 549,000 people of the Guandu District span the two dozen ethnic groups in the province, including Han. Yet just one out of 3,070 secondary school instructors in the district teaches a minority language, and he works part-time, says Zhen Wenguang, a Guandu official.

Despite constant official prodding to speak Chinese, Yan is confident Bais will hold fast to their language and culture. "We Bais have a very strong belief in our traditions," he says.—CSM



Yao Biao (left) and Li Xiuqing are members of Bai minority that can benefit from learning Han language but worry about ethnic betrayal