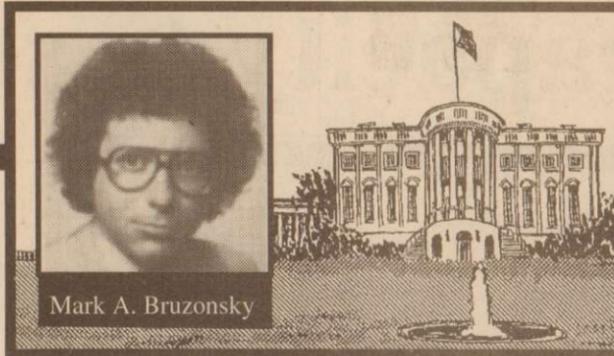


ABSOLUTELY NOTHING AT ALL

From



Washington

IN the 1970s, as Lebanon erupted into civil war and before the era of Western hostages, it was the PLO that helped to protect the US embassy and American personnel in Beirut. At the time, everyone knew this to be the situation. Articles even appeared about this seemingly incongruous situation in major American newspapers.

Specifically it was primarily Yasser Arafat's circles in Al-Fatah to which American officials turned, more and more this was the case during the Carter administration but it remained true, more or less, during the Reagan administration as well. Specifically it was to one of Arafat's closest proteges, Ali Hassan Salameh — the "Red Prince" assassinated by Israel in 1980 — if my memory is correct, who liaised with the Americans on the chairman's behalf.

Then, in the early Reagan years, specifically designated private contacts with the PLO, and with Arafat personally, were at first continued through the personage of Jonathan Mroz who was followed by a variety of others including current and former American diplomats.

Still in the late 1980s the US was continuing to dance, albeit behind the scenes, with PLO chief Yasser Arafat. It was in 1988 that the Jewish delegation of five led by Rita Hauser and Stanley Scheinbaum went to Stockholm culminating a great deal of indirect negotiations between the US and the PLO and with specific messages from the White House and State Department promising Arafat this and that if only he would say the magic words and "recognise Israel".

And once more Arafat com-



In short, American policy for some time now has been essentially to front for Israel on matters involving the Palestinians. America the "Good Cop", Israel the "Bad Cop" — is what's been going on for a long time now with the US in reality usually coordinating its positions and especially its overall strategy with the Israelis.

Indeed, it's been this duality of an ongoing American-Israeli alliance over more than two decades now with periodic ventures to the negotiating table arranged by Washington that has bought Israel the time and given Israel the money and the arms to conduct itself as it has. In the process, of course, no matter what public utterances come from today's White House and State Department, the situation has been created in the occupied territories whereby "facts on the grounds" rather than schemes at the negotiating table are increasingly dominant.

President Arafat's downed plane — and the US had been asked through direct PLO contact with Jimmy Carter who then personally phoned the White House — the official American response to President Arafat's ordeal was the now-familiar ostrich-in-the-sand one.

We did "absolutely nothing at all" to help Arafat or to locate Arafat", State Department spokesperson Margaret Tutwiler intoned. And there was no expression of any kind regarding Arafat's well-being.

Obviously with one eye to the upcoming election, and near in time to when Vice President Dan Quayle and other ranking administration officials were paying homage to the Israeli-Jewish lobby meeting in convention a few miles up Connecticut Avenue from the White House, the Bush administration was far more interested in distancing itself from any

This particular writer hasn't thought this way in the past, and still doesn't. And this particular writer sees in the unfolding of events this week, in the "absolutely nothing" approach of the Bush administration to President Arafat's plight, a clear paradigm of just what can really be expected from the government of the United States, regardless of who wins the White House next November.

So far, and for a very long time, most aspects of US involvement with the PLO has worked to the benefit of the US while the overall Palestinian situation has continued to degenerate.

Looking back just a few years, after years and years of negotiations then Chairman Arafat "recognised" Israel and the American secretary of state then made a big thing about beginning a "dialogue" with the PLO. The big thing "dialogue" turned out to be a series of ambassadorial meetings in Tunis whose primary goal was to get the PLO to publicly give up the armed struggle and accept some kind of Camp David autonomy. When the PLO kept coming to the negotiating table with its own proposals for an independent Palestine, the US found a pretext and refused to deal with the PLO at all once again.

More recently, in the wake of Iraq's destruction and with feelings running very high in the region, Arafat gave the go ahead for Palestinians from the occupied territories to go to Madrid, and then to Washington, to negotiate with the Israelis under another Washington-inspired umbrella.

In the end, after many months of pressures and probably some as yet unspecified bribes as well, Arafat agreed to the PLO being kept in

the Israelis wanted to veto.

Indeed Arafat has been inexplicably accommodating to the Americans for so long now that an awful lot of unanswered questions have been generated about his overall strategies. Had it not been for the plane crash a few days ago Arafat would be in Tunis as I write answering a whole list of complaints that have been brewing within PLO circles for a very long time.

Furthermore, Arafat has surrounded himself with a group of weak-minded Arab establishment personalities, such as Nabil Shaath and Hani Hassan, who have themselves been extremely excessive in their acceptance of American dictate and who usually seem to do so at the behest of Arab leaders who themselves have reasons of their own, having nothing to do with the Palestinian cause, to want to be cooperative with the Americans.

And furthermore still, Arafat has continued to allow rampant corruption — both political and financial — to surround him. For instance, the long-time PLO representative in Washington, Hassan Rahman, is widely known to have siphoned off considerable PLO money for his own uses and is generally despised even by loyal Palestinians.

While the destitute masses continue to adore Arafat as a kind of cultish personification of the Palestinian quest and with little serious knowledge about his actual policies, inadequacies and mistakes, there should be little wonder why Palestinian intellectuals are so uneasy about the state of the PLO as well as the personality who has come to symbolise the movement.

While everyone was stunned by the news that Arafat's plane was down and the president's well-

— actually the subject of a coming column — in short the Palestinians can expect to be further pushed, cajoled, manipulated and threatened, by both the US and Israel who to my mind are still working together on strategic matters while juggling a series of squabbles, into some kind of autonomy which would resemble more a Bantustan than anything that could be termed self-determination.

In the 1970s the Israelis tried local elections in the occupied territories. When that didn't work they brought about the destruction of the local leadership that was elected.

Then the Israelis tried the "Village Councils" and when that didn't work this concept disappeared.

Then the Americans tried the "dialogue" in Tunis; only to find a convenient excuse for bringing the direct US-PLO connection to a close.

Now today it's Faisal Husseini and Hanan Ashrawi who have been anointed with legitimacy in hopes they will bring about the long-sought settlement which will deliver a coup de grace to the Palestinian quest for independence; and if they fail to do the deed they too will be pushed aside one way or another.

It should be clear that whatever tactical differences between Washington and Tel Aviv, both the Americans and the Israelis want to take today's "peace process" down the autonomy road providing a cover for Israeli authority and nullifying the Palestinian quest for unity and statehood. Down the road, maybe not to far down the road, one can again expect the American secretary of state to again start talking about this being the only bus and one either has to

NURAY BAMANIE
Special to Saudi Gazette

The concept of democracy is expanded to all institutions of life with the Shoorā. Such is the middle ground that the Muslims are required to hold and not to revert to extremism or isolation

SHOORA System for the Mid-east

THE decision of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Fahad, to implement the Shoorā comes at a time of many changes in the world political environment. The enlargement of societies and their demands are increasing as systems are becoming more complex. It was only natural that King Fahad answered the needs of the new era in the Kingdom to maintain the advancement and progress of a developed Kingdom.

It was King Fahad's leadership that Saudi Arabia affirmed its belonging to the world of mankind when it stood with the world community and the UN against the Iraqi aggression of Kuwait

FOZAIL AQDAS GHAZALI
Special to Saudi Gazette

PRODUCTION

TANKS ▲ BATTLE IN SOUTH ASIA

THE arms race between India and Pakistan is heating up. India is getting ahead, in fits and starts, though, somewhere losing sight of its larger aim. Pakistan is meanwhile plodding along unimaginatively, but managing in the end to get where it wants to. And nothing illustrates this better than the decades-old race between the two countries for a main battle tank — MBT.

On July 10 last year, Pakistan unveiled its new T-90/MBP 2000 tank called the *Khaled* at its Taxila Heavy Rebuild Factory. This was a prototype and Pakistani military leaders declared that they would start rolling out 300 of them every year starting 1993.

Pakistan's approach to indigenous armaments production has not been as ambitious as India's. Instead of thinking in terms of quantum leaps, the Pakistanis have concentrated in taking small incremental steps in tank repair and production to available expertise, opening offered by foreign collaboration and the availability of proven design. In this manner Pakistan has continually developed its ability to maintain and upgrade its tanks. At the same time, it has succeeded in producing high value sub-systems like laser range finders and advanced ammunition.

It is this systematic, incremental approach of Pakistan which is more commendable than the products themselves. Its approach to defence research and development displays a single mindedness which, in turn, stems from national aim: to keep India at bay while catching up with it militarily. It has been successful in the MBT race.

It was in 1974 that the project to manufacture Indian MBT, *Arjun*, was launched. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which embarked on this project, had planned to start the production of the *Arjun* by 1984. Though more than Rs2.037 billion have already been spent on designing and developing the MBT, the project not only is nowhere near completion but it has also run into rough weather on more accounts than one. The cost of production of a tank, which was Rs2.5 million in the early 1970s, will not be given the current rate of inflation and devaluation of the rupee, less than Rs45 million when it is finally produced.

The *Arjun* is likely to be made available next year for trials. And if its performance is satisfactory, production will be taken in hand. But this is a tall *if*. By the time the first prototype of the *Arjun* was unveiled in April 1984, Rs300 million had already

been spent on the project. Of the 20 prototypes planned to be produced for extensive trials, 12 which have already been put on test have revealed a host of serious defects.

At the trials early last year, a former chief of army staff, General V N Sharma, an armoured corps officer himself, was angry to see the performance of the tank as only three of the five rounds hit a five-metre square target at an 1,100-metre range and no hit was scored on the moving target. Incidentally, the design requirement is to hit a 60-cm square target at a distance of 2,000 metres.

As for the other defects, the dimensions of the tank are larger as compared to the others MBTs in the world. Because of its size and 60-tonne weight, it will create problems of tactical and strategic mobility. Its engine, imported from Germany, gets overheated and sucks in dust in the Rajasthan deserts where the tank is likely to be deployed. Its hydro-pneumatic suspension requires excessive maintenance. The rubber-seals cannot withstand high temperature.

After rectifying several defects, the *Arjun* 12 prototype was taken to Balasore for further testing where it was found that the firing defects arose not so much from the inefficiency of its 120-

mm indigenously designed gun as from the defective ammunition. No doubt, some defects have been removed, but a large number of them, including overheating of the engine, still remain un-tackled.

The post-Coalition War scenario has added to the problems of the MBT because European firms which have been producing essential items for the *Arjun* are reluctant to supply the components as they do not want their technology to be transferred to developing countries. Oldest, a Dutch firm which had accepted the order to supply the sighting system for the tank, is reluctant now to make the deliveries. Though initially it was planned that the MBT would be totally indigenous, it has 43 percent foreign components, and this is likely to create more problems resulting in a further delay in the production of the tank.

In 1961, India undertook the production of its first tank, *Vijayanta*, in collaboration with Vickers of Britain. More than a decade later, when the first lot of tanks was about to roll out of the factory, Vickers experts regretted their inability to align the sight with the gun. This caused a lot of delay, and a sizable number of tanks had to be imported to meet the operational requirements.

Seeing the *Arjun* pro-

duction programme moving at a snail's pace in the late 1970s, the government of India decided to import 300 T-72 tanks from the Soviet Union. Though a licence of production agreement was concluded in 1980, the production of the tank did not start until 1987 and that too with only 10 percent indigenous parts. There is a strong opinion in favour of adopting T-72, which as the MBT is among the best tanks in the world. But then, no country can afford to pitter away its finances and other resources on developing two competing tanks as MBTs of the future. The Indian army has now to make up its mind whether it wants the *Arjun* or the T-72.

The phasing out of the *Vijayanta* and T-55 which was to start in 1986, was stalled due to an ordinate delay in the production of the *Arjun*. Not only that, instead of phasing these tanks out, it was decided to upgrade them by 1990-91 at a cost of Rs19.7 million to meet operational requirements. This project too has been delayed and would, according to the current planning, be completed by 1996. The Comptroller and Auditor-General (CAG), in his report placed in parliament on August 6 last, rapped the army for excessive delay in the upgradation project, resulting in heavy cost overruns and a setback to defence

preparedness.

Pakistan, on the other hand, seems to have stolen a march over India in its MBT project. It was in January last year that a decision on the MBT was taken, and in July this year the Heavy Rebuild Factory at Taxila, 40 kms from Islamabad, unveiled the *Khaled*, which is co-produced by Pakistan and China. Pakistan expects to start the production of the *Khaled* next year after the extensive trials of its prototypes which will be produced in Pakistan and China. The secret of the fast production of the tank is that Pakistan has proceeded systematically into the process by starting with the Chinese T-59 as the basic tank and then by gradually improving it into T-69 followed by T-85 and culminating the effort in the *Khaled*.

The *Khaled* is as good in performance as the Russian T-72, the American M1A1 *Abram* and the French-German *Leopard II*. But where it scores over other tanks is that it carries a three-man crew, while the other tanks have a crew of four. This is because some of the tasks in it are performed electronically and mechanically. Some other plus points of the *Khaled* are that its 125-mm smooth bore gun has a higher velocity than the 120-mm smooth bore gun of the M1A1 and *Leopard*.

Also, the *Khaled* has an automatic loader for ammunition which the other tanks do not have. Besides, like most modern tanks, it is designed to ward off chemical and biological attacks.

The *Arjun* is not the only project that has been languishing for years. Add to it projects like the HF-24 *Marut* fighter, the light combat aircraft (LCA) and the advanced light helicopter (ALH), among some others which have not only dragged their feet for years but also cost the exchequer heavily.

Although, since 1987, India has started assembling T-72 at Arabi, and imported 300 of it from the Soviet Union, Pakistan could do well start equipping its armoured regiments with the *Khaled* from 1993 onwards. A production sum of 300 per annum, as claimed by them, might be a gross exaggeration but even a smaller indigenous production capability of an excellent MBT would put India at a distinct disadvantage in the later years of this decade.

Currently, as much as half Indian armoured regiments are equipped with the *Vijayantas*, another fourth with T-56s and other tanks, and only about a quarter of the total Indian regiments have the T-72s. And even these T-72s could be outmatched by the Pakistan's *Khaled*.

plied. This time he gave his famous press conference in Geneva, squeaked out a few words that he'd actually been saying for some time, and within a few hours outgoing secretary of state George Shultz — clearly taking the heat on himself in coordination with the incoming Bush-Baker duo — went before the cameras to announce what was said to be a major change in US policy and an official "dialogue" with the PLO.

Ironically turns out it's usually been Arafat who has tried to accommodate the Americans, even though there is now such a lengthy record of American complicity, of purposefully missed opportunities, of broken promises, and of American double-crosses.

Most recently, just a few days ago — even though PLO diplomats seemed to be going quite out of their way to thank all who had been asked for assistance in locating

possible involvement, no matter what the PLO had done in the past for Americans in Beirut and elsewhere in the region.

Many will insist one shouldn't make much of such incidents and expressions. Many will insist that the Bush administration is pushing ahead, after all, with the "peace process" and can be counted on, after November, to push the Israelis into some kind of a deal with the Palestinians.

pariah status, agreed that the negotiations would be about an interim autonomy arrangement even though the PNC had declared statehood just a few years ago, and further agreed that most of the Palestinians would be disenfranchised in these talks by not being represented in the official Palestinian delegation which not only excluded the PLO but also excluded Palestinians from occupied Jerusalem as well as anyone

down and the president's well-being was in doubt, there was a very clear undertone of relief that Arafat's death would have forced the PLO to rise beyond the personality of Arafat and renew itself at a very crucial time. It's tragic, of course, that the situation has come to this; but it would be foolhardy and dishonest not to discuss the "realities" of today's situation.

In this context, and as for what's likely ahead in the "peace process"

the only bus and one either has to get on it in one way or another or be left behind.

But if the Palestinians really want to face their contemporary situation and really want to at least try to come up with a sound strategy for dealing with their predicament, then they should take very much to heart that what they can expect from the Americans on the big issues that really matter is "absolutely nothing at all".

the world community and the UN against the Iraqi aggression of Kuwait and the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. The Shooraa was a natural consequence to these events, to show the Islamic teachings in government and daily life in order to maintain strong national bonds. Such moderation in thought demonstrates understanding of the need of the new environment and a rational choice as opposed to dictatorship which is not Islamic.

There is no alternative to the Shooraa as a solution for the Mid-east. It is the explains the spirit of Islam in this era. Unlike Western democracies, it is a system of government and a way of life. Unlike democracy, the Shooraa does not satisfy itself with the majority vote. It is a consensus in every aspect of society, even down to the family, where agreements are reached on plural interests without excluding the interest of any individual in the society.

Thus the concept of democracy is expanded to all institutions of life with the Shooraa. Such is the middle ground that the Muslims are required to hold and not to revert to extremism or isolation.

Saudi Arabia which always held a middle ground on issues concerning the Mid-east and the Muslims by international consensus, is now seeing its advancement in its society. It stood firmly for Palestinian rights in the Arab-Israeli conflict and continues to do so in order to maintain the strength of the Ummah. That exactly is the road King Fahad has chosen.

This concern of King Fahad for the welfare of his society and the region as a whole was discussed in the Kuwaiti magazine *As-Siyasah* in which King Fahad affirmed Saudi Arabia's moderation and stand away from what the West describes as "Muslim fundamentalism". He confirmed that Saudi Arabian atmosphere is far away from "fundamentalism" and that Saudi Arabia does not encourage such systems, does not interfere in internal affairs of other nations as does not allow others to interfere in its internal affairs.

Moderation and advancement in both intellect and national aspirations have always been there to be culminated in the Shooraa. King Fahad said that the people have a right to live up to the progress of the society and share in it.

To protect the citizens of the Kingdom, the region and the Shooraa, the King reiterated the need to unite the armies of the GCC after the unification in military education and military equipment so that eventually there would be a common defence policy to protect the region. He sees that it is necessary to have a strong bond because the danger still looms and strength and unity would stand and succeed against any evil.