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Israel Can't Yield to Frustration, Cynicism

By HENRY A. WAXMAN

Two events of the last week, the Peres-Mubarak summit in Alexandria and the synagogue massacre in Istanbul, illuminate the confusing terrain of the Middle East peace process. They point out radically divergent roads that Israelis can travel in the months and years ahead.

Israel and Egypt made some progress in their just-concluded burst of diplomacy, bringing their relationship essentially back to its pre-Lebanon war condition. While not a lot has changed, this is a step in the right direction and yields some hope.

In the aftermath of the butchery in Istanbul, Israel's controversial "voice on the right," Ariel Sharon, pointed toward a different road. In unsolicited remarks to Israeli army radio, he declared that the killers had been encouraged by "peace overtures and concessions" made by Prime Minister Shimon Peres: "Concessions to the PLO, King Hussein and King Hassan, including the grave concessions on the Taba issue, were interpreted as Israeli weakness and invited the aggressiveness of the Palestinian terrorism."

Although Sharon was forced to retract his statement, the outburst points up a serious danger to Israel: frustration with the implacability of the peace process. For two years Israelis have watched with increasing weariness and cynicism as Peres' efforts yielded nothing. Even with last week's limited progress, grim facts remain: Jordan's King Hussein will not talk to Israel without the Palestine Liberation Organization, but cannot agree with the PLO on how to do so. Syria is as implacable as ever, and Palestinians moderate enough to want dialogue with Israel are assassinated.

Throughout the Arab world, the most elementary tenet of peace talks—that Israel be allowed to exist—is still taboo. The bland U.N. resolutions 242 and 338, which imply major territorial concessions

by Israel, are considered treason. Even Israeli doves are beginning to realize nothing can be done with no one to talk to.

Into this miserable situation comes Sharon and his ideological companions. Not content merely to criticize Peres' lack of success, they insist that his efforts have actually harmed Israel and world Jewry. They try to paint Peres as an appeaser, a latter-day Neville Chamberlain whose "concessions" in return for peace will ultimately bring disaster upon his people.

In fact, nothing that Peres has done even

illogical. Savageries such as the one in Istanbul have occurred throughout Israel's history, under Labor leaders like David Ben Gurion and Golda Meir, as well as hard-liners like Menachem Begin. The cycles of this violence lie in the internal politics of the Palestinian "movement." In that murky world, such a bloodbath brings status to the group that perpetrates it.

Before proclaiming that Peres has blood on his hands, Sharon ought to have reflected on the debacle in Lebanon that he piloted. If his view is that "the tank, not the

negotiating table, is the way to peace," his own experience says otherwise. More than 600 Israelis died in his three-year attempt to create a unified, friendly Lebanon. They are still dying there, with Lebanon less stable and less friendly than before the war began.

Israel is now at a critical point in its attitude toward the peace process. Next month, Peres will trade places with Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir, who will inherit an electorate jaded and frustrated with the search for peace. Shamir will be representing a party closer to Sharon's view than Peres was, over which Sharon will likely try to assert more influence. That climate could breed yet more hostility to the peace process.

Clearly, Israel cannot afford to relax its defenses or appear weak in dealing with its adversaries. At the same time, it

needs leaders with the vision and shrewdness to make the best of a bad situation. They will have to be watchful for even slight changes in the Arab world that could open avenues to rapprochement. And they will have to lead Israel away from those who, like Sharon, counsel only militarism, chauvinism and xenophobia in the face of undeniable frustration.

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remotely resembles Chamberlain's sell-out at Munich. He has approached the Palestinian issue by angling for talks with Hussein, but he has made no "concessions" because there have been no talks. He has not even spoken to the PLO, much less conceded anything. His talks with King Hassan of Morocco yielded nothing. And the Taba agreement only sends the matter to arbitration, bringing an Egyptian ambassador to Jerusalem in the process.

The Sharon view is not just unfair; it is