

The Strange Bedfellows

Taking risks in Israel

The secretly drafted peace plan was, if nothing else, ambitious. It upheld Israel's right to "safe and recognized borders" (a concession that has always been rejected by the Palestine Liberation Organization). It identified the PLO as "the legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people (the PLO is outlawed in Israel). With those old obstacles out of the way, the plan moved on to new business. Pending later negotiations between Israel and the PLO, the Israeli-occupied West Bank would proceed to govern itself for three to five years, printing its own currency and issuing its own passports. The provisional government would have its "administrative capital" in East Jerusalem—never mind the fact that 20 years ago Israel formally annexed the city. Meanwhile, Israel's troops would remain in place on



SHILOMO ARAD FOR NEWSWEEK

'Hit by the hard-liners': Nuseibeh at home

the soil of the new "Palestinian entity."

The scheme's authors made an odd couple. Moshe Amirav, a former paratrooper, is a veteran member of Israel's right-wing Likud bloc; Sari Nuseibeh is a Palestinian professor of philosophy at Birzeit University on the West Bank, with close ties to the PLO's top leaders. Three months ago Amirav asked Nuseibeh to help him find a

way to end Israel's two-decade occupation of the West Bank. He was concerned, he said, that Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's "disastrous" refusal to give up the West Bank would turn Israel into a "bina-national state": demographers have warned that in 30 years half the Israeli population will be Arab, threatening the country's identity as a Jewish state. After arduous discussions, the two men were finally able to agree on basic terms for an accord, and Amirav began a quiet search for support. Then someone leaked the plan to Israeli television.

Mangled arm: Last week Nuseibeh and Amirav found their work taken seriously—but not in the way they hoped. The extremist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine denounced Nuseibeh's collaboration with Amirav as "treason," and Nuseibeh himself wound up in the hospital with a gashed forehead and a mangled arm after four masked thugs gave him a savage beating. The attacks against Amirav were verbal but no less furious. Shamir went on television to excoriate the "stupidity and naiveté" of Amirav's "embroilment" with the PLO. "He probably regrets his actions," Shamir suggested. "If he does not today, he will tomorrow." Another rightist member

of the Israeli Parliament, Meir Cohen-Avidov, officially demanded the expulsion of the "lunatic" Amirav from the Likud. "Nuseibeh and I are in the same fix," Amirav complained. "We've both been hit by the hard liners."

But moderates on both sides rallied with unexpected fervor. The West Bank's 15 Palestinian newspapers and periodicals united in condemning the assault against Nuseibeh. The governing body of Birzeit University, where the incident occurred, swore to "spare no efforts" to find the "criminals" who committed the "barbaric attack." In the Likud a group of rising young leaders successfully stopped the drive to oust Amirav. Several of the party's branches actually invited him to brief them on the peace plan. (PLO chairman Yasir Arafat also wanted to meet with him.) Amirav was jubilant at the Likud's decision not to expel him, calling it "a legitimization of my views." He was exaggerating, but as Nuseibeh more modestly noted, "Some new doors to peace have been opened." For once the voices of the peace seekers seemed louder than the invective of the extremists.

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