

NEW OPPORTUNITY?

There was great ferment in this local Jewish community last year, about the Israeli incursion in Lebanon.

At that time San Francisco area Jews registered overwhelming support for the initial action to establish "peace for the Galilee." But a substantial minority felt that Israel had "gone too far" in moving up to Beirut. Many were doubtful about the grander objectives that developed: to completely destroy the PLO and to reunify Lebanon.

In the current measurement of local Jewish opinion, there is still overwhelming approval of Israel's initial move; but an increased number of local Jews think Israel went "too far."

However, the effects of that "further" Israeli action are still being weighed in the balance by history. There is not much hope about unifying Lebanon. Apparently both the United States and Israel were too optimistic on that score, and miscalculated Syria's resolve to stay.

On the other hand, it seems clear that the PLO ain't what she used to be. An early hope last fall was that the demolition of the PLO would remove the PLO blackmail of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and allow some accommodation in Judea and Samaria. That possibility still exists. It seems that the remaining PLO will be largely a subsidiary of Syria. Such a PLO will not have great loyalties among the Palestinian Arabs on the West Bank; and nothing under Syrian control will have much attractiveness for Jordan.

And there are some signals to that effect. When the recent tragic bombing of an Israeli bus took place, a number of Palestinian Arab leaders -- among the most militant against Israel -- went out of their way to publicly condemn that act of terrorism. And the rumors of Hussein flirting with the idea of negotiating with Israel on the future status of Judea and Samaria have been thicker than usual.

This is perhaps a new "window of opportunity" with respect to finding some peaceful arrangement between Palestinian Arabs and Israelis. If so, it would be a result of the Israeli drive last year against the PLO in Lebanon. Arafat, even if he had been the "moderate" some people think, could never have provided that opportunity because he could never stray far from the boundaries set by those PLO forces who have now taken it over. The nature of this new PLO is clearer, and may be liberating.

Of course, this "opportunity" is two-edged. It could be taken as an opportunity to complete a definitive Israeli takeover of Judea and Samaria. On the other hand, it could be taken as an opportunity to find a peaceful accomodation between Palestinian Arab aspirations and Israeli security needs.

The latter is the way that two out of three San Francisco Jews would like to see it go. We are not citizens of Israel. But we are citizens of America -- and we should urge our government to push Jordan to become an active peace-player. This opportunity will not last forever.