

SANITY SOMEDAY?

Baseball's Casey Stengel once said: "Good pitching will always win against good hitting -- and vice versa."

It would take a mind like Casey Stengel's to fully understand all the self-cancelling perversities of Middle East politics, including the tangled inter-Arab rivalries. No matter what may have happened since then, the first week of Israel's action in Lebanon was significant in terms of Arab response, or the lack of it. There was no convincing burst of spontaneous outrage from countries like Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

One line of belief holds that the Saudis and the Hashemite regime in Jordan are more afraid of the PLO than they are of Israel. The logic of the PLO would eventually bring it to try to overthrow the Saudi and Jordanian regimes; and those regimes are more vulnerable to PLO attack than is Israel.

The Saudi and Jordanian regimes have been playing both ends against the middle. They have been paying money and lip service to the PLO in order to keep the PLO leaders diverted, dependent and down-wind. A permanently unstable situation would superficially seem to serve Saudi purposes, e.g.: the PLO engaging in perpetual terrorism against Israel from Lebanon, but not ever prevailing.

Thus, in the first week of the Lebanese action, the Saudis and other Arabs seemed to be satisfied to have the PLO apparatus cut down to size -- knowing that they could then again at some point pick up the Palestinian Arab and anti-Israel cause, and return instability to the area.

Such games, of course, require some constant pawns -- in this case, the Israelis and the Palestinian Arabs, both victims. If the Saudi and Jordanian regimes would decide to join with Egypt and Israel, peace could come to the Middle East and a satisfactory compromise could be found with the Palestinian Arabs who understandably want self-rule.

There was a recent clue to the larger considerations which might take over, if the short-sighted roadblocks to peace were removed. Last month it was revealed that a large multi-national corporation with substantial Arab investors, including members of the Kuwait ruling family, had decided to invest in Israel. The corporation is LONRHO (London/Rhodesia), based in London, with a 5 billion dollar a year turnover. LONRHO is interested in joint ventures with Israeli private and government companies in the fields of aviation, defense industries and energy.

The Managing Director of the corporation, England's Roland Rowland, visited Israel to discuss these investments and he was asked about the complicating factor that LONRHO had so many Arab investors. Sheik Sabah Al Sabah, Kuwait's Foreign Minister and his two sons alone own 15 per cent of the corporation's stock. The corporation also has extensive investments around the Arab world.

Asked why the Arab investors weren't balking at investment in Israel, Rowland said: "They are only interested in money, profits. After all, they do understand business."

Nothing so rational will easily prevail in the Stengeloid Middle East. There are "holy war" zealots like Khoumeini, and unfortunately his tribe is flourishing. There are political leaders, in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, who think they need *instability* in order to hang on. But regional economic development, based on something more than gushing oil, will be needed if profits are to be made, and if people are to be fed. That will happen only if there is regional *stability* and cooperation. Sadat realized that. Won't everyone have to realize that someday?