

THE SOUND OF PEACE

The U.S. Administration supported that UN resolution "on settlements" as a matter of flirtation with the Arab world. Then it turned around quickly to say, with a wink in the other direction, that the resolution should not be taken seriously: it was only a "recommendation" and it was obviously "impractical."

Well, you don't win the confidence of the Arabs or of anyone else with that kind of exhibition. That was not a resolution on "settlements," as advertised. It was a resolution to establish Israel as the master villain of the Middle East, which the U.S. Administration knew was untrue. The U.S. Administration also knew the overall purpose and effect of the resolution, whether or not it really made some "mistake" about one or another element in the resolution. Attacking your friends in that cynical fashion will not win you other friends.

To boot, the resolution had the designed effect of making the Camp David peace accord more shaky. To see the U.S. kick its own foreign policy in the teeth is depressing enough. But it would be tragic, in simple terms, if this bizarre behavior blighted the growing bud of peace between Israelis and Egyptians.

An audience of hundreds of thousands listened to the initial sound of peace between Israel and Egypt when San Francisco's radio station KGO did 18 hours of broadcast direct from those countries a couple of weeks ago.

Americans, by actual count, average only several minutes a day paying attention to world affairs. But in this case, KGO applied its successful formula at home, and humanized diplomatic events abroad. Hundreds of people were able to talk directly with Israelis and Egyptians ten thousand miles away. KGO made the sound of peace come alive in more ways and for more people than a thousand editorials would have done.

The series, being humanized, did not screen out the problems, the hostilities, the apprehensions which still remain. But all the more convincing was the final picture which emerged from these long hours of broadcast from the streets and studios of Jerusalem and Cairo. Camp David is not just a diplomatic event, an illusion created by politicians. It is a solid and even monumental fact of history for two peoples who desperately need and want peace.

In that sense this series accomplished a journalistic feat of unusual proportions. KGO radio has demonstrated the kind of unique and flexible role that creative radio can play in serious journalism; a role which TV's more rigid and cumbersome nature sometimes prevents it from playing. It was a courageous and expensive venture, the first of its kind in national radio annals. The station should get an award -- or, failing that, a few letters from a grateful audience.

Actually the people connected with this landmark series were at least as thrilled as the audience. Gathered together the other night, they expressed their own optimism about the future in that part of the Middle East. "The peace won't break down," one of them said. "The people in both nations want it too much."

But what the people in those countries want may not be able to stand up against the antics of the politicians at the UN.

(Syndicated by the San Francisco Jewish Bulletin)