

## Moderates Find Life Perilous in Israel Dilemma

By DAN FISHER,  
Times Staff Writer

JERUSALEM—Moshe Amirav knew he was skating on thin political ice, but he thought what he was doing was more important than the next election or even the future of the rightist Herut Party to which he belongs.

So for two months last summer, the former government functionary turned suburban Jerusalem businessman held a series of secret meetings with West Bank Palestinians to explore what, in Middle East terms, is a revolutionary idea—that the Israeli government talk to the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Everything seemed to go well until word of Amirav's meetings leaked in the Israeli press. Then one of his two principal Palestinian contacts was imprisoned for six months without trial as a security threat. The other suffered a broken arm and a seven-stitch gash in his head during an attack by masked Arabs.

### Compares to Purges

Amirav himself has twice been put on trial in Herut Party courts, and he has been threatened with expulsion in proceedings that he compares with ideological purges in totalitarian countries.

The incidents reveal the continuing perils of those who champion moderation and compromise as means to resolve one of the world's most impassioned and seemingly intractable conflicts.

The point was buttressed further last week by the case of Mubarak Awad, a Palestinian-American political activist and proponent of nonviolent resistance to Israeli

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military rule on the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Awad was ordered to leave the country despite the protests of the U.S. government and many Israelis, who contend that the principles of nonviolence and peaceful change deserve encouragement, not punishment. He was told to leave by last Friday, when his tourist visa expired, but he defied the order and stayed.

No official reason was given for ordering Awad to leave, but Israeli government sources have complained about his political activity.

Yossi Sarid, a Jew and a leftist member of the Israeli Knesset (Parliament), argued in a recent commentary in the Jerusalem Post

newspaper that "With extremism there is no problem. There is no need to take it into consideration, and certainly no need to enter dialogue with it. All you have got to do is take aim at it."

But he went on to write that "With moderation, there is a big problem. You must sit down and have coffee with it. You must, eventually, make some sort of proposal to it."

A member of the Citizens' Rights Movement and an outspoken advocate of territorial compromise with the Palestinians, Sarid said Israeli leaders view Palestinian moderates with suspicion, regard their moderation as a ploy and praise them only after they have been assassinated by Arab extremists.

The clear suggestion, Sarid wrote, is that the Israeli leadership believes "a moderate Palestinian is a dead Palestinian."

To be sure, the more ominous threat to Palestinian moderates still comes from their fellow Palestinians who see compromise with Israel as a betrayal of the Arab cause.

Sari Nusseibeh, a professor of political philosophy at the West Bank's Bir Zeit Palestinian University, said in an interview that "If I stand up now and say I believe in a two-state solution [to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict], I wouldn't be ostracized as much as I might have been 10 years ago or five years ago."

But he still prefers to keep his

political activity "in the background," he said. "I don't like to be in front because I know what happens."

Nusseibeh recalled the fate of Zafer Masri, a moderate Palestinian who agreed to serve as temporary mayor of Nablus, the West Bank's largest city. Palestinian extremists opposed the move as *de facto* acceptance of Israeli occupation, and Masri was assassinated on March 2, 1986, only weeks after he took the post.

Nusseibeh himself was beaten up for participating in Moshe Amirav's initiative last summer. "I thought if anyone would know anything about this, it would be 20 years from now—not now," he said of his meetings.

As Amirav tells it, he wanted to make contact with well-connected

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West Bank Palestinians to sound them out on an idea for shared rule that he had been developing for nearly a year. "I did it on my own initiative," he said in an interview, "but people in the Likud knew about it."

Amirav sits on the central committee of the Herut Party, the dominant faction in the right-wing Likud Bloc. Currently Likud shares power in the national unity government with the centrist Labor Alignment of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir heads both Herut and Likud.

"My positions are accepted not by the majority, but by a significant minority of the Likud," Amirav

said.

What he proposed was a complex legal arrangement that would preserve Israeli sovereignty but at the same time yield "something very close to a [Palestinian] state" on the West Bank. It would be a national entity that would give the Palestinians their own flag, anthem, stamps, currency and administrative capital in Jerusalem.

Perhaps the most radical element of Amirav's plan, however, was that he proposed to recognize the Palestinians' right of self-determination and the right of the PLO to represent them in exchange for PLO acceptance of Israel's existence and security.

The Israeli government has long rejected the PLO as an illegal,

terrorist organization, and the current coalition government not only has a stated policy that it will not negotiate with the PLO but has also made contacts with the organization illegal for ordinary citizens.

Peres and Shamir are at odds over how to proceed in the so-called Middle East peace process. Peres favors an international conference to get talks started, and Shamir unalterably opposes such a conference. But both agree that the ultimate goal is direct negotiations with Jordan, not the Palestinians.

In contrast to Peres, who backs territorial compromise in exchange for peace, Shamir's Herut Party is pledged to what it calls a "Greater Israel" policy. That is usually interpreted as meaning Israel would

neither give back any captured West Bank lands nor compromise Israeli sovereignty there beyond approving some vague form of local Palestinian autonomy. That is why Amirav's proposals are so controversial within his party.

Amirav conceded that for any of Likud's leaders to publicly endorse his ideas at this point would be "political suicide. . . ."

However, he said he believes that Likud must offer its own initiative rather than simply reject formulas offered by others.

Nusseibeh thought Amirav's ideas interesting enough to introduce him to Faisal Husseini, who is considered the most prominent of the West Bank Palestinians supporting the PLO leader, Yasser

Arafat. By August, the two sides had agreed upon a two-page working paper that Amirav was to take to a September meeting with Arafat in Geneva. On the eve of his scheduled departure, however, Amirav demurred.

He decided that he had taken the idea far enough. "I would love for Shamir to meet with Arafat, but it's not my duty," he explained in the interview.

The story broke in the Israeli media in mid-September, triggering the attack on Nusseibeh as he left his university classroom one afternoon. Husseini was jailed in an action that some on both sides of the conflict believe was inspired by Israeli officials anxious to scuttle the Amirav initiative.

Nusseibeh said he is not sure. "It may have been a coincidence," he said.

Herut's hard-liners immediately

launched a move to expel Amirav, and a party court is expected to take up the case this week.

Nusseibeh views the entire experience as an illustration of a desperate situation.

"I don't see any hope for a settlement," he said. "This is why we have Amirav, and on the Palestinian side somebody like me saying, 'Let's go ahead with [Israeli] annexation' of the West Bank. 'It's to draw attention to a situation that is intractable.'"