

Commentary/Morris Kelsey

# Facing the buzz-saw of opinion

**O**n the anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor and during the virtual collapse of the Soviet Union, *The Frederick News-Post* devoted an unusual amount of space to issues concerning the Middle East but not the Middle East peace talks in Washington.

In discussing the release of Western hostages, Roy Meachum equated the holding of innocent American Citizens by radical Moslem fundamentalists in Lebanon with Israel's detention of political terrorists who have attacked Israel. This linkage is ludicrous and certainly represents a leap of logic.

However, Mr. Meachum's obsession with activities in the Middle East and his constant condemnation of Israel (even when Israel has nothing to do with the issue discussed) is troubling since it is the role of a journalist to present both sides of the story. He never considers the fact that the other players in the region could be contributing to or even causing the problems.

For example, Mr. Meachum moved from the release of Terry Anderson to the general subject of hostage-taking in the Middle East, focusing on an alleged incident by the Israelis in 1970. What about the horrible treatment of our innocent citizens who were beaten and tortured for the past five to seven years somewhere in Lebanon by these terrorists? Why are the deaths of two American officials (Buckley and Higgins) caused by these radicals not worthy of mention?

Mr. Meachum summarily dismisses Israel's concern regarding a missing pilot and claims this is not as important as thousands of Palestinians who are purportedly shivering in an Israeli detention camp. When Mr. Meachum complains of his problems of running into a "buzz saw of vented spleen and hate" by certain readers, he should re-examine the contents of his articles to understand why this happens.

Mr. Meachum's articles have found a receptive ear as seen in Louis Willhauck's article in the same edition concerning his unhappiness with Israel, the economy, and other unrelated matters.

I will focus on his negative comments regarding Israel since they contain numerous inaccuracies and misconceptions. It is true that the request for the \$10 billion loan guarantees comes at a time when we are having domestic problems. However, one should remember that this is not a loan but a loan guarantee which will permit Israel to borrow money at a more favorable rate. In addition this is humanitarian aid to help settle Russian refugees. Israel has always repaid its debts to the U.S. and has never failed to make payments on time. This is a matter of public record. Israel's cooperation in not entering the Gulf War, despite damages that Iraq inflicted on its innocent civilians, was rewarded by the Bush administration's repeated postponement of dealing with the loan guarantee issue. In contrast, Egypt's active role in the Gulf War was rewarded by the Bush adminis-

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# on the issue of Israel

tration's forgiving a \$7 billion debt to our country; and Syria received monies which it is using to purchase missiles and other major arms from China and North Korea. (I wonder what they have in mind.)

Mr. Willhauck's charges that Israel is a racist country is not sup-

ported by the facts. He should note that Israel, which is a Jewish state, has rescued some 30,000 Ethiopian Jews from starvation and persecution and offered them a homeland. Furthermore, Israel is home to numerous Middle Eastern Jews, who had to flee from their homes in

surrounding Arab countries because of life-threatening persecution. These actions do not support the charge that Israel is racist.

Mr. Willhauck has forgotten the real discriminatory countries in this region such as: Saudi Arabia, which does not tolerate members of non-

Moslem faiths to live in their country (remember how our soldiers had to conceal their religious services while defending the Saudis); Syria, which has one of the most despicable records on human rights; and

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remember that Israel's inability to provide non-Israeli Palestinians in the West Bank with free gas masks during the war was due to economic restraints (thus taking care of their citizens first). Eventually, gas masks were provided to the Palestinians despite their support of Iraq. Mr. Willhauck should also appreciate that Israel did not ask Saddam Hussein to send Scud missiles into Israel to kill Palestinians — Saddam must have known that this was a possibility.

Mr. Willhauck, like Mr. Meachum, is concerned that some readers of this paper take issue with Mr. Meachum's version of Israel-bashing and feels that they are "more narrowly focused" than Mr. Meachum. What Mr. Willhauck forgets is that Mr. Meachum routinely distorts facts and rewrites history to satisfy his fantasies regarding problems in the Middle East. While everyone is entitled to express his/her opinion, it is to the credit of *The Frederick News-Post* that it publishes views that differ significantly from their own.

Finally, there are more important concerns for Washington (and Frederick) these days with our own economy in distress, the real threat of nuclear proliferation and ethnic unrest and violence in the independent republics of the former Soviet Union, the ethnic strife in Yugoslavia, etc. These and other world issues will continue to be reported more accurately in cos-

mopolitan publications (including newspapers which have foreign correspondents on site). We do not need to have local columns and commentaries on these issues since there are more knowledgeable people out there who can do the job better than all of us.

Frederick newspapers and their readers should address issues of local and regional interest. These are the things we can do best. However, until these policies change locally, letters offering a different point of view will continue — buzz saw and all.

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# Israel

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Kuwait, which has persecuted and expelled Palestinians for their support of Saddam Hussein. Mr. Willhauck has also ignored the fact that Turkey has done nothing to ease the plight of the Kurds fleeing from Iraq and that Germany is in turmoil regarding the presence of dark-skinned foreigners in their country.

The concern regarding the lack of distribution of gas masks to Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza during the Gulf War is misleading. Gas masks were distributed to all Israeli citizens including Arabs and Palestinians who are citizens of Israel. Saddam Hussein's targets were Jewish citizens living in Israel and not the Palestinians living in the territories. It is also important to