

Letters to the editor
News-Post
Frederick, Md. 21701

7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21702

Roy Meachum, oft- and self-proclaimed expert on and lover of all things Arabic, after years of silence when Saddam Hussein was rivaling Attila the Hun with ^{his} ~~his~~ own people of whom he killed as many as 5,000 in a single day, now (1/16/) has the gall to defend him.

~~With~~ the experienced reporter's critical eye and questioning judgment of which he has also boasted, Mr. Meachum now says that suddenly Saddam has gotten religion, become a man of Allah (has returned to The One God). The proof? Staged pictures for which Saddam posed.

And were this not enough, Mr. Meachum characterizes those Americans who fought in Vietnam as wholesale "looters and rapists" and on this basis ^{declares} ~~declares~~ that "Presidents Johnson and Nixon should have been charged with the same crimes (as Saddam), and more."

With his customary disregard of fact and rewriting of history that typify his many writings about the Middle East, Mr. Meachum, ^{says} ~~says~~ while not mentioning the United Nations in his column, that the UN's resolution that Saddam leave Kuwait, for which most of the Arab representatives ^{voted} ~~voted~~, was "Western-dictated." He then says what is hardly a tribute to Arab belief and culture, that had Saddam complied with the UN resolution, in his words, "Backing down because of outside threats," ^{that} ~~that~~ would "have deprived" Saddam of any claim ^{on} ~~to~~ self-worth among his people."

To invade and lay waste to a neighboring country and then withdraw in response to the decision of most of the nations of the world is not ^{why} ~~what~~ Saddam should withdraw. It is in ~~the~~ Meachumese because he was threatened, this and nothing else.

Thus, our grand mufti in residence tells us, it is true Arabic belief that no matter how horrible a man's crimes are, when he is told to stop, ^{if} ~~if~~ he does he is unmanly, of no "self-worth."

Mr. Meachum attributes Saddam's taking of dictatorial powers to his "undermining Islam." This is surely one of the most imaginative descriptions of wholesale murder, including of all four of his closest associates.

Not bothering to tell his trusting readers about the UN's resolution, Mr. Meachum described President Bush's and ^{Secretary} ~~Secretary~~ Baker's efforts to get complinace with that un-^{UN} ~~mentioned~~ resolution as "harrassing Mr. Hussein into abandoning (sic) Kuwait."

Too bad that Mr. Meachum did not think to explain how Saddam ~~did~~ not lose "self-worth" ^{among his people} ~~or anything else~~ when he gave back to Iran all he ~~had~~ taken from it in eight years of the bloodiest and costly war, ~~costly~~ in lives and wealth.

Had he ^{done so} we might have a glimmer of why he now defends Saddam's refusal to give back what he ~~was~~ seized by force and awesome crimes, Kuwait. But as with his glorification of all things Arabic, no matter what, there is the ~~the~~ title of his column, "Allah bas yaraf," or "God only knows."

I suppose also that there is no other explanation of why the papers continue to publish this awful, misleading and misinforming stuff, that "God only knows."

Whatever may have been the behavior of our men in Vietnam, it is not recorded that they engaged in wholesale rape, then torturing and cutting their victims up, did not rob all the banks and sources ^{did not steal any of the autos} of lesser loot, did not strip out all the plumbing, including even the toilets, and ship ^{all} them to President's Johnson and Nixon, only some of the unspeakable crimes of the Saddamables.

For shame!

Harold Weisberg



Roy Meachum



'Allah bas yaraf'

U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar told reporters after meeting Sunday with Saddam Hussein: "God only knows if there will be peace or war in the gulf." The words came in Spanish-accented English, but they sound like a direct translation from Arabic.

"Allah bas yaraf" (God only knows) was a phrase I heard often in the Middle East. It is the ultimate response. When invoked, it shuts off further discussion.

For the first time since last August, on Sunday I feared that, however completely unnecessary, war was on its way. The next two days brought no real relief. My sole comfort rested slimly on Mr. Perez de Cuellar's observation. He said: "For me the important point is that everyone wants peace."

But in repeated public statements, Washington leaders emphasized that they would let the missiles fly unless Iraq's president proved his desire for peace by acting on their demands. They guaranteed last night's deadline would not be met.

Directly after November's elections were over, President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker set about harassing Mr. Hussein into abandoning Kuwait. They made his abject withdrawal the absolute condition of avoiding war. Their only choice: Abandon your conquest or your manhood and no later than midnight, Jan. 15.

To accept either alternative and on a Western-dictated timetable could have been tantamount to death for the Iraqi leader. Backing down solely because of outside threats would have deprived him of any claim on self-worth among his people, who suffered centuries of humiliation at the hands of foreigners.

There can be no question that in the world's eyes Saddam Hussein is an aggressor who cannot be allowed to enjoy the "fruits" of his crimes. Restoration of territory and reparations are certainly called for. They can still be achieved through negotiations, which Mr. Hussein gave early signal he was willing to entertain.

On the other hand, from the outset

Washington seemed intent on obliterating the man who for millions of Arabs during the war with Iran had become a symbol for protecting their "nation." Enmity between Arabs and Iranians goes back to the days of ancient Persia.

In Saudi Arabia and its neighbors, the land of the ayatollahs was more feared than the Israelis until its war with Mr. Hussein. Even now the gulf states have made clear they need a strong Baghdad to hold Tehran at bay. But that message never reached Washington.

Early on, Mr. Bush set the tone for the present confrontation when he described Iraq's president as "another Hitler," a phrase TV news was pleased to pick up. To win acceptance for its hardline policy from the American people, the White House was pleased to amplify reports of rape and looting in Kuwait, in every report Mr. Hussein was held directly accountable.

Lost in the anti-Iraqi propaganda were several stories about the shooting and hanging of looters and rapists, on official orders. Furthermore, no one bothered to speculate that if the same standard were applied to Vietnam, Presidents Johnson and Nixon should have been

charged with the same crimes, and more.

The tactic worked. Interviews in recent days among U.S. forces waiting to attack revealed a widespread personal loathing for Mr. Hussein. A deep-seated revulsion for Iraq's leader has generated a willingness among our armed forces to accept all sorts of horrendous possibilities, even death.

Having been completely converted into the Western world's current "devil," Saddam Hussein not unnaturally has returned to the One God he knew in his native village.

Is it credible that a man whose career and climb to power were predicated on undermining Islam among his people would now embrace the Koran? By way of reply, the World War II saying should be recalled: "There are no atheists in foxholes."

Everything I read and heard as the world approached last midnight's "brink" indicated that, in the crisis,

Mr. Hussein has sought refuge in the religion that he long denied. The simplest definition of Muslim is usually given as "one resigned to the will of God."

As the U.S.-U.N. deadline drew near, there was a noticeable slackening in Mr. Hussein's bombast. The hoods that are his eyelids seemed always closed. His gestures appeared even more constrained. At the same time, his body-language was very relaxed. Everything about the man communicated he was prepared to accept what only God, he felt, could change.

Like Christians and Jews, Muslims frequently invoke religious rhetoric to serve their personal ends. In these times, only fundamentalists, in any faith, truly keep holy God's sacred name. Still, I do not believe that, under the circumstances of his meeting with the U.N. official, Mr. Hussein would have taken lightly any use of "Allah bas yaraf." "God only knows" will provide no protection if the White House really orders the skies over Baghdad rained with missiles and bombs.

And make no mistake, the next round of Middle East slaughter looks most likely to begin on America's command. An English-speaking member of Iraq's legislature told a CNN reporter: "We will not fire the first shot."

The statement was no mere recital of his leader's position, but a reference to the Koran's teaching about the primary grounds for a Holy War, that could bring flocking to Iraq's banner Muslims from around the world. No, I don't know that will happen, not for sure.

However, anyone who thinks Islamic Iraq will collapse under air attacks has paid no attention to either the religion or the recent history of the people. Surrender will be neither quick nor easy. It can be won only by lots of blood, on both sides.

In the end, "reborn" Muslim Saddam Hussein will certainly lose his throne but can gain a more honored place among his fellow Arabs as a martyr to the faith. In death at the hands of the White House, Iraq's president could prove an even greater barrier to the West's future in the Middle East.

At this writing, I still have to hope a way can be found to negotiate a peace in the gulf. As for how, at this stage, war can be avoided God alone knows. Not me. We must trust to His "compassion and mercy," as the Arabs pray: *Allah ar-rahman ar-rahim*.