

12/3/91
Harold Weisberg

15 min written
his usual manner app

Propaganda vs. 'independent columning'

“W

elcome to the
club, Mr.
President,” Roy
Meachum wrote

In September, referring, modest as always, to his own club, of those accused of being “an anti-Semitic and a liar.”

Meachum was referring to the name-calling of a minority-party Israeli cabinet member, there only because that democratic society has proportionate representation.

“In Mr. Bush’s case,” Meachum wrote, this was because of Mr. Bush’s “reluctance to guarantee immediately \$10 billion in loans for Israel” for housing for Russian refugees.

Typical of Meachum’s inability to report anything relating to the Middle East with the accuracy expected of a high-school reporter, all of what he says is not true except that there had been agreement for those loans and that they were to be guaranteed by the United States. (There is no basis in anything but Meachum’s prejudice for what he later suggests, that the \$10 billion might come from U.S. taxpayers.)

“Immediately” was not up to the President. It was up to the Congress, where all legislation originates. The guarantee also was up to the Congress.

“Reluctance” does not describe what anyone who reads any newspaper or hears any radio or sees any TV news knows very well what Mr. Bush said.

He did not want Congress even to discuss the agreed-to legislation for at least a third of a year, during which time those refugees would be

without any place to live, with thousands more arriving weekly. And that in a country already short in housing.

Not only did he not want Congress to even consider it for at least that long, and not only would the legislative process take still more time, but Mr. Bush said that if it were considered and were enacted before he said it could be, he then would veto it. This amounts to an invitation for additional Arab stalling.

Meachum’s explanation of Mr. Bush’s position is: “He wants the matter delayed until after next month’s hoped-for Middle East peace conference.” If Meachum does not know that there is very little likelihood of any such peace, at any time in the foreseeable future, he has no business writing a column at all.

Why had there been no peace conference in the 40 years since Israel was established? Because the Arabs refused peace, all states other than Egypt remaining in a state of war with Israel.

Long ago Israel agreed to this conference. Some of the Arab powers also had. Syria, for example, still on the U.S. terrorist list despite Secretary of State Baker’s frequent visits to its dictator, Assad, the Assad to whom Mr. Bush has been cozying up since the beginning of the Gulf war, agreed.

But he stipulated that all he wanted to obtain at the conference be guaranteed in advance. This, naturally, made any conference irrelevant.

So, what Mr. Bush did in the name of assuring that there would be a conference is the exact opposite: He

may well have wrecked it entirely and he certainly delayed it.

Why did Mr. Bush do this? Because, he said, congressional consideration of the proposal would be objected to by the Arabs, who then would not have attended the conference.

Not a single Arab power had made this objection, for all the publicity; not until some time after Mr. Bush went public with his threat. And then, for the first time, it was the day before this Meachum column appeared. Taking the hint from Mr. Bush, there was a protest.

There was hardly a single thing Mr. Bush dared do that had a better chance of wrecking the conference he wanted us to believe is so important to him than what he did do, order the Congress not to consider the agreed-to legislation, under threat of veto, all the time telling the Arabs they were supposed to oppose it, until they finally took the cue and did.

This column is still another of the endless examples of the grim fact that the one way readers of the papers are certain not to have any real understanding of the on-going Middle East tragedy is to read Roy Meachum’s columns. I don’t think I’ve missed one and I can’t remember a single one that was straight, that did not mislead and misinform readers, a single one that was not so pro-Arab it amounts to propaganda rather than independent columning. It follows that all have been anti-Israel and intended to incite dislike if not hatred for Israel in particular and Jews in general.

There are innumerable other illustrations in this one column. It began with this distorted account of what caused the immediate crisis and it ends with still another incitation of American Jewish leaders: “Israel’s prime minister had ordered his Washington lobbyists to turn the Congress against the president on the loan guarantee.”

Those were not Israeli lobbyists; they were about 1,000 Americans, the leaders of American Jewish organizations and a variety of other people, many prominent in American public life. They were not “ordered” by anyone, least of all Shamir.

And it was not a question of turning the Congress against the President. It was the President who interfered publicly in the functioning of the Congress and then threatened it with another veto. While this interpretation can be disputed, the fact is that the legislation had been agreed to and it was Mr. Bush himself who inspired the first opposition by any Arab power.

It was a partisan intrusion that he knew without question Israel might not accept and might find cause for not going to an already-stacked conference. He also knew that the veto he was giving were calculated to make it appear as though Israel opposed the conference when the opposite was true.

So, from beginning to end, vintage Meachum — nothing straight.

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