

Another view on Meachum, Weisberg

A pair of recent columns by Roy Meachum and a letter to the editor by Harold Weisberg (noted for his "Whitewash" books on the Kennedy assassination) have prompted me to write to you. The columns and letter have a number of interesting and debatable points.

Mr. Meachum wrote that "This country implicitly denies the existence of the only organization recognized by the Palestinian people themselves. Like him or not: Yasser Arafat is the legitimate voice of his people." First, some, not all, Palestinians recognize the PLO. Others are residents of Arab countries and have no dealings with the PLO. I have seen Arab Palestinians on TV disavow the PLO and wish it never existed.

Second, Yasser Arafat is chairman (as Mr. Meachum notes elsewhere) of a collection of organizations; Arafat is head of an organization within the PLO. There are other organizations within the PLO and Arafat heads the chairmanship body. He is elected, and not unanimously, by the other chairmen. Therefore, Yasser Arafat is the legitimate voice of some organizations which represent some Palestinians.

It would be impossible to recognize the PLO as if it were a government. What is its currency and the exchange rate? Its methods of elections? Its citizenship requirements? Its national holidays? Its national airline, national banking system, its sports federation? Does it have a postal system, any subdivisions (states, provinces, towns, etc.), a passport office, an educational system, and so on? No, and despite all anyone can say, the PLO is not a government.

Why Meachum and others speak of the PLO as if the U.S. and other countries should recognize it, I fail to understand. Some countries which do so do it only to curry favor with others like themselves and the Arabs; and also, I suspect, as a sign of anti-Semitism and anti-Americanism. Mr. Meachum seems to feel that as the U.S. negotiated with North Vietnam and North Korea, negotiating with the PLO is allowed. I would

remind him that many Americans were very upset when the U.S. dealt with those two communist countries and I'd insist that they do not form a valid basis for comparison.

Finally, I should note, as Mr. Weisberg emphasizes correctly, the PLO is chiefly a terrorist group of groups, supported by other terrorist countries, both communist and non-communist. As with North Vietnam, North Korea, Libya and others, the U.S. should have no dealings if possible with brutal evil people and governments. We in the U.S. can effectively avoid all contacts with the PLO just on these grounds, and so be firmly committed to keep away from the PLO.

Mr. Meachum stated that Washington supports the right of a people to self-determination, and adds "while enforcing a denial of that right to the Palestinian people." That last remark I flat challenge — I want details when the U.S. has prevented Palestinians from voting, from filing a slate of candidates, from registering to vote, from making election speeches, holding rallies, etc. I want when, where, who, what and why (the official reasons given by official U.S. representatives, not Mr. Meachum's viewpoint). Then I will listen to Mr. Meachum's commentary of the U.S. actions taken to enforce a denial of the right to vote by the Palestinian people.

I should note that many Arab countries refuse Palestinians citizenship. They refuse citizenship to all except those born of citizen parents of the specific country. This is a hardship for many Palestinians and Iranian exiles, Iraqi exiles, and so on. Palestinians who have adapted U.S. citizenship, French citizenship, Israeli citizenship, etc. vote as Americans, Frenchmen, Israelis, etc., of course.

Before I spend all my time against Mr. Meachum, let me point out an area where I generally side with him, and am against Mr. Weisberg. Mr. Weisberg strongly objects to this quote by Mr. Meachum: "Since World War II the United States has opposed any nation retaining territory gained by military conquest — except those lands swept up by the Israelis in the 1967 war." Mr. Weisberg replies: "Forget that no lands were swept up and that the small areas of territory involved are both the territory from which Jews come and was to be made into Israel after World War I..."

Mr. Weisberg's reply has several problems. The first is that at least one area, the Golan Heights, was Syrian clear as can be; it became Israeli. Kunetra on the Golan was destroyed by the Israelis. The reasons, from the Israeli point of view was clear — the heights were used by Syrians to incessantly shell Israeli Kibbutz below. The second problem is that the south of Lebanon is another area, where many suspect that the Israeli will never leave;

another location is a very small piece of land on the Red Sea claimed by Egypt from Israel.

It is sadly true that Israel, in responding to attacks, has taken land, killed innocents, and in the end, exacerbated the situation. The various Israeli governments have not intended to worsen their circumstances, of course. Yet the Israeli occupation of land not voted to them in the May 1948 U.N. decision to create Israel will not be forgotten easily by many Arabs. It does not matter what was to be made into Israel after World War I; Israel is a creation of the United Nations in 1948. The deliberate Israeli policy to "create history as a fact" in building houses on and settling the West Bank area was directly contrary to the U.S. policy.

The French have a saying which can be slightly modified to "The Israelis are like wounded animals — when attacked, they fight back." Who can forget the great Israeli rescue at Entebbe? A marvelous moment for Israel. But what of the destruction of the Iraqi atomic reactor not yet on-line? Was that justified? Whether yes or no, it is not just Iraqis who will not forget and seek to avenge it.

It has been said that where there are two Jews, there are three opinions. This illustrates the argumentiveness of people in general; in fact, of how we cannot always decline what should be and how to go about it. I am pleased that your paper is open to comments from all sorts of people — keep it that way.

VINCENT J. MOONEY JR.
607 Wyngate Dr., Frederick