Ms. Mary McGrory
Washington Post
1150 15 St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20071

3.3.91

Dear Ms. McGrory,

Your today's column might appropriately have been headed "The Limitlessness of American Power and Influence in the Middle East." In a sense it has less of two dimensions than previous column on this subject and what effect it may have will, I am confident, be the exact opposite of the good you intend. You make no reference at all to what for Isreal is the most basic of all questions, its survival and how that can be assured, not even the remote and slim hope of your letter of the 22d, that the Arabs "would have no excuse for their dreadful behavior if we were to solve the Palestinian question."

Your column does attempt, if in a vacuum, to say that "we" can "solve the Palestinian question." We can't!

On any other of the many questions about which you have written that I can recall you have never in the past endorsed the concept of the U.S. as policeman of the world.

In no column you have written that I can recall have you been as completely out of contact with reality. I can't recall that on any other subject you ever were. A few illustrations:

Carter "could not follow up on his Camp David victory because he was too weak domestically."

"The problems of the Middle East have lingered and festered because everyone involved would rather talk about something else."

"The Palestinian question requires George Bush to show his Middle Eastern Allies [do you include in this Jordan, Arafat, the PLO and its many factions?] the same implacability he decanted on his arch-enemy Saddam."

Bush should tell "the interested parties" that "You owe us. We pulled your chestnuts out of the fire." (Jordan, Arafat and the PLO etc., too?)

"The Israelis are beholden to us because we rid them of the greatest menace to their security." (Not, of course, because we encouraged Saddam into the horrors that included doing so much damage to them with his Scuds.)

Those you describe as "knowledgeable people think" Shamir can be "nudged" into talking to the Palestinians. and not that it is all but I stop quotation with your statement that it is a "myth" that "the Golan Heights, the West Bank - can bring Israel security." (Did anyone ever claim they could? Or deny that holding them has reduced the murders and other casualties from them when Israel did not control them?)

How in the world did or could Carter's domestic situation have had any influence over the totality of the Muslim world's refusal to agree to that agreement, other than Egypt, which was bribed into it?

This leads me to a reality you have never faced: no Arab leader and no other of whom I know has survived even the suspicion that he recognized the right of Israel to exist. Sadat didn't. Abdullah didn't. Now how in the world can any American president have any influence at all on those multitudinous assassins? On this level, can Arafat even control his own of the many discordant PLO factions? What happened to those Arab West-Bank mayors who tried of be in accord with Camp David? How could any American president have any influence with those who assaulted them? Did Bush pull their chestnuts out of the fire?

Everyone involved would rather talk about something else than reaching some accord?

History, and I did refer you to a source on this, says the exact opposite: the Jews were always willing to talk and tried to, and did agree to many, many proposals all of which all Arabs refused to even consider, leave alone discuss.

On Bush's "implacability" and the magic he can do with it, history again refutes you.

I did remind you that when Arafat and the PLO so much wanted a great favor from the US and the government here required as a precondition that they recognize the right of the state of Israel to exist, the PLO itself refused, as Arafat also did at first. When he was pressured he mumbled an evasion in which he refused to recognize the right of the state of Israel to exist. He did not even use the word. Now when the administration here, knowing better, said that he had recognized the right of the state of Israel to exist, how can any US administration hope to accomplish anything by pressure on those people?

You ignore the omnipresent reality when you say that Saddam was "the greatest menace to" Israel's security. It is the total opposition of the entire Muslim world and all the multitudinous factions in it and in the PLO that are the greatest danger to Israel, Egypt at least for now the single exception. More damage was done to Israel, more murders and other casualties, came from Syria, Jordan and Lebanon than from Iraq.

How can ~~any talk~~ Shamir (for whom I repeat I have no sympathy at all, or agreement with the Likud's philosophy) accomplish any meaningful security for Israel by talking to any Palestinians when the rest, except for Egypt, of the entire Muslim world remains in a state of war with Israel - and not one has even suggested that it would end the state of war if Israel reached any agreement with the Palestinians?

You have raised false hopes, official and popular, when there is no present basis for any hope. In this you have further reduced the remote possibility of any progress, no matter how little.

When no Arab leader can hope to survive recognizing the state of Israel, how can they? And if they did, what would it mean or could it? How could any Arab leader, were he to somehow do what none before him did, survive, influence the many PLO factions and get them to end their assaults on Israel and Israelis? (Have you ever undertaken to calculate the number of these casualties to Israeli?) What Arab ruler can have any means of ending the terrorism of the Nidals? Or for that matter of the Fatahs when Arafat can't, or won't control his own gang's terrorism?

There are many other considerations your column ignores. I've mentioned some to you in letters. One major factor you ignore is the fact that Arab leaders, since World War II in particular, have made ending the state of Israel and wiping Jews out a matter of religious faith. Remember Khoumeni, currently Saddam, and the recently quite visible influence Saddam's irrelevancies had on so many Arabs in so many lands, including our own? My personal recollections of this (I'll be, hopefully, 78 next month) go back to the freeing, I believe by Perfidious Albion, of the Nazi, a genuine Nazi, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, so he could go back there and begin inflaming Arabs with his Nazism as religion.

As Robert Nathan wrote when I was a young man in a long forgotten book, a Jew is primarily something else. I am primarily an American. My interest in Israel is so that those Jews who want to return to their homeland, who had for the most part never enjoyed any meaningful freedom, may do so. (The book was "Road of Ages.")

When I mentioned to you that you lack the fervor for the return of the Prussians to Germany, there were many other similar illustrations in recent history and innumerable ones in the past. Remember the Tyrol? Currently eastern Europe? The one exception of which I can think is Jews. They alone have no right to repossess their homeland from those who by a number of holocausts, notably one we never mentioned now, by Mohammed himself, stole it from them.

If in the future there is to be any hope for any meaningful solution, may I suggest that you espouse an essential first step? It cannot be definitive, but it can be that halting first step. Propose that the PLO, as an organization and by Arafat or any who may replace him, change the charter, which calls for driving the Jews into the sea, and make a meaningful and unequivocal declaration that a state of Israel has a right to exist, and in peace and security.

Whatever you have in mind, and I do not think it is what your column represents, you have made yourself part of a gangup on Israel and the lives of its Jews. This was, without reference to you, so clearly probable as soon as Saddam first moved I wrote friends of my youth that it is what would happen as soon as Saddam was beaten. Santayana was right so I was right, too.

I'm sorry you have evaded the question I asked you on the 26th,"But were some agreement to be imposed, think over only the past two months and ask yourself, if you headed any Israeli government, if you would agree to any kind of a deal that required them [the Arabs] to 'have no excuse for their dreadful behavior'?" You have yet to express either a concern for or a means by which Israel can hope to survive as a state and for its people to live in peace and security. You may have this in mind but you have not written it or offered any commonsense means of even hoping for it...Again I hope you will take the time to learn more of the recent history of this problem before you write harmfully on it again.

Sincerely, Harold Weisberg

Ms. Mary McGrory
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1150 15 St., NW
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2/26/91

Dear Ms. McGrory,

You conclude your letterm of the 22 saying,"...but I think they (the Arabs) would have no excuse for their dreadful behavior if we were to solve the Palestinian question."

Can "we" solve that question? Can we impose any meaningful solution? I think not.

But were some agreement to be imposed, think back over only the past two months and ask yourself, if you headed any Israeli government if you would agree to any kind of a deal that required them to "have no excuse for their dreadful behavior."

And hope to survive, personally and as a state.

Until there is a formal, meaningful and dependable Muslim-wor[illegible]agreement for any state of Israel to exist and to exist within secure borders no negotiations could have any meaning.

Neither would any agreement.

Until there is some form of authentic democracy in the Muslin world its leaders will not agree for the state of Israel to exist and will not end their enmity because they cannot tolerate in their midst any state that is democratic and has social concerns. This is one of the reasons they inflame their peoples about Israel.

How I wish these things were not true!

I do hope you find the interest and time to read at least the last chapter of the Johnson book. I believe it will be informative and help you understand what from your columns I believe you do not really understand.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

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MARY McGRORY
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February 22, 1991

Dear Mr. Weisberg:

Thank you for your thoughtful letter about the Palestinian problem. I agree with much of what you say, but not with your conclusions. I know that the Arabs are intransigent, and vicious and all around impossible from our point of view, but I think they would have no excuse for their dreadful behavior if we were to solve the Palestinian question.

Sincerely,

Mary McGrory