

BETWEEN IRAQ AND THE HARD PLACE

Who believes the following set of propositions?

The Iraqis obviously intended to build nuclear bombs. The Iraqis obviously intended to threaten Israel, with which it is in a state of war. Israel was right to bomb that nuclear facility. America must continue to give Israel full support.

Who believed all that? Most Americans. Most Congressmen. Most of the White House staff. All members of the American delegation to the UN.

Then how explain the U.S. joining in the UN condemnation of Israel? Well, you have to add one more item to that set of propositions: *However, since no one pays any attention to UN resolutions anyway, Israel won't be hurt and will understand if we make a rhetorical gesture towards the Arabs -- and avoid having to veto a stronger resolution.*

So it's a game, and the President promised the Israelis that, *in real life*, the U.S. will not move away from Israel. But, game or not, there may be a couple of unintended consequences.

The less serious consequence: Everytime the UN is used so frivolously, it becomes that much more cheapened. But the UN may already be defunct as a serious world forum for peace, and beyond remedy. Perhaps in San Francisco, the hopeful birth-place of the UN, we should just take up a collection for a new plaque, to be placed outside the UN building, using a Psalm of David: "There is no sincerity in their mouth; their inward part is a yawning gulf, their throat is an open sepulchre; they make smooth their tongue."

A more serious consequence of the U.S. compliance with the UN resolution may have to do with its effect on American public opinion. Recent reports have indicated

Earl Raab

"Between Iraq and the Hard Place"

page 2

that the American public's support of Israel has been higher than ever before. That support is based on such threatening events as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iranian anti-American orgy -- *and* on the American public's conviction that Israel is America's most stable friend in the Middle East. But *that* American public opinion is heavily based on the constant reiteration by American public officials that **I**srael is *indeed* America's close friend.

Most Americans are not serious students of the devious games that the U.S. might play in the UN. What they see are the headlines about American condemnation of Israel, which many take at face value. Such games, in short, could serve to erode American public support of Israel.

More than that, such games could serve to disorient the American public with respect to world affairs in general, and American policy-makers may live to rue that day. In an editorial last week, the Wall Street Journal asked:

"Do we really have to endure the spectacle of the French, the international nuclear proliferation cops and a U.S. Under Secretary of State assuring us the nice cuddly Iraqis would never dream of building an atomic bomb? Statements from these sources have been the height of the mushy-mindedness that is the root of so much instability in the world today. On what planet have these folks been living....?" Is the U.S. government, by its UN actions, contributing to the mushy-mindedness of the American public? Those diplomatic games become most serious when we begin to play them on our own people.

Last week in Washington a group of Congressional aides told some of us that letters have become more important than ever in influencing public

Earl Raab
"Between Iraq and the Hard Place"
page 3

officials. "Community spokesmen" are treated with more suspicion; grass-roots opinion and letters from the grass-roots are "in." We assume that everyone concerned with Israel is, during this season of danger, writing a letter a week to the President, copies to their Congressmen.

This week the plea might well be for "truth in foreign policy," especially for the American public, using the U.S. vote on that UN resolution as an example. The American public now needs double reassurance from the President and Congress that Israel is our close friend, the UN resolution to the contrary notwithstanding. This calls for explicit public statements on that score. And the UN resolution makes it all the more important for the Congress to reject sophisticated arms sales to the Saudis -- because such "gamesmanship" sales would send another anti-Israel signal to the American public.

(Syndicated by the San Francisco Jewish Bulletin)