

THE MEDIA CAN BE DEPRESSING

This is an unhappy personal experience which should be shared with you. One morning last week, in a discouraged state because of the terrorist world scene, I was interviewed by a local TV personality. After being interviewed, I was no longer discouraged; I was severely depressed.

First, he wanted to know why everybody in media or public life was so afraid of criticizing Israel. (Why have you stopped beating your wife?) Well, there was a short pause while I dreamily played with the image of everyone being afraid to criticize Israel. Then he was asked what that had to do with terrorists.

The TV man gave this answer -- in the form of another question: "Why has no one criticized Israel for not giving back the prisoners of war in exchange for the American hostages?"

One's mind would be boggled if a man on the street asked that question. To be asked that by a sophisticated minion of the media was stunning.

It was explained slowly to the TV interviewer: The terrorists are not interested in the release of the prisoners. Israel had already been preparing to release them, just as they already had released a first batch of prisoners. The terrorists undoubtedly rushed to hijack the plane before Israel had a chance to release the prisoners, in order to accomplish their real purpose.

What was their real purpose? Their real purpose was to embarrass the U.S. and to get anti-American and anti-Israeli spokesmen on the media to justify terrorism on political grounds. The media were cooperating nicely with the terrorists on that score, please note, Mr. TV man.

But what of the mess Israel had created over there? I looked to the cameraman for comfort, but he avoided my eyes. Which mess did the TV man have in mind, he was asked? The hundred thousand Lebanese who were slaughtered by each other before Israel was ever involved? The continuing slaughter among Shiites, Palestinians and Christians in Lebanon, now that Israel has left? The internal massacres in Syria? The Iran-Iraq war?

Well, none of this was what the TV man had in mind. He came back to his original point: why was everyone so afraid to put the knock on Israel, "which, after all, is another country?"

He was assured that there has been plenty of criticism of Israel. But if he was asking why the American Congress, administration and people continued to strongly support Israel, the answer was fairly simple: Israel was "another country," but it was a close ally, the only one in the Middle East and important for the U.S.

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"The Media Can Be Depressing"

page 2

He came close to sneering. "Would the existence of the U.S. be threatened if Israel was lost?" Yes, yes, yes. The existence of the U.S. as a free country, as a leader of the free world would be threatened if we allowed Israel to go down the drain. Not to mention the fact that Israel was doing the U.S. a service by countering the Soviet surrogates in the area, the PLO and Syria.

Now the TV man pounced. "Is the PLO really a surrogate of the Soviet Union?" And is there really a free world of which the U.S. is a leader? Aha. This was the nub. Here we had a man who believed irretrievably that everyone else would be nice if only the U.S. (and Israel) would play nicely in the world.

He called himself "cynical" because he didn't believe that Congressmen would vote for Israel if they weren't afraid of the Jews. But, aside from being massively and insistently ill-informed, he is actually an innocent. And there he was, wielding that dangerous microphone.

Later that day, a Newsweek person called. They were trying to find out whether there had been any evidence of anti-Israel hostility stemming from the belief that the terrorism had been committed because Israel was holding the prisoners of war. So far, the reporter hadn't found any. He was told that neither had we, but to stick around; the media might well make it so.