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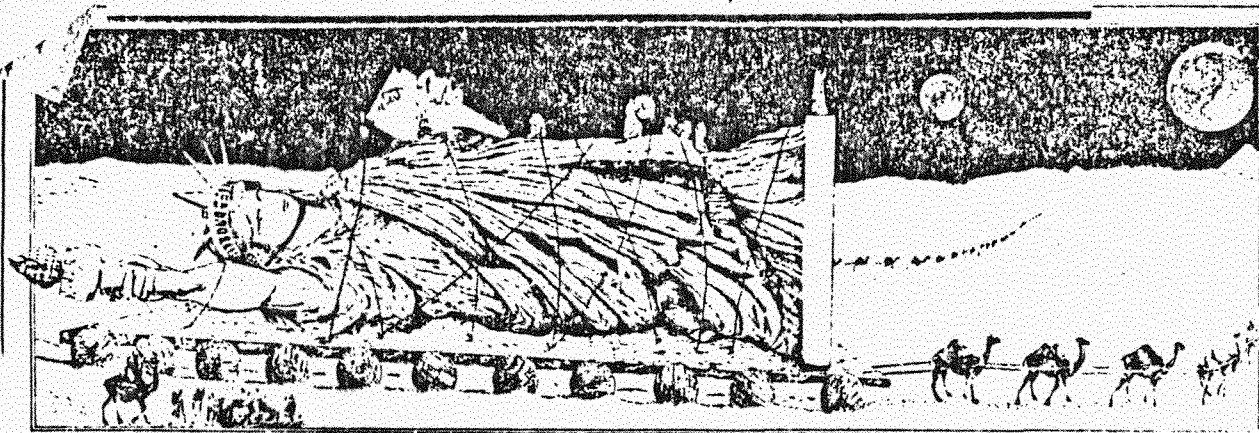


Illustration by Peter Mikelbank

Controversial Critique of Middle East Policy

THE POLITICS OF DEFEAT:
America's Decline in the Middle East. By Joseph Churba. Cyrcos Press. 224 pp. \$10

By MARK A BRUZONSKY

A PIMPLE ON THE FACE of progress" is how Joseph Churba has described his image in the eyes of his Pentagon colleagues who booted him out. Churba's job as a special adviser to U.S. Air Force intelligence was abruptly terminated about a year ago after Churba publicly castigated General George Brown of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for his widely-reported view that Israel is a "burden." "Dangerously irresponsible," Churba flared.

Bitterly looking back, Churba recently remarked in a magazine interview that Brown got him, "got the dissenter, the fellow who was fighting the Arabists in State, Defense and CIA." With *The Politics of Defeat*, Churba strikes back. "The purpose of this book," he asserts, is "to highlight the dangers inherent in the defeatist idea that Israel constitutes a 'burden.'"

Since his forced exit from the Pentagon, Churba has taken up the cause busying himself with op-eds, letters to the editor and preparation of this disguised polemic. Under the guise

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of scholarship, and always with the hint of having had access to classified materials, Churba's effort is basically an undocumented personal essay on Middle East history and contemporary Middle East tensions.

Churba's messages (if not his motivations) are straightforward enough: The Soviet Union seeks to dominate the Middle East and weaken the West; Israel is a crucial asset of "paramount strategic value" to the U.S.; and the entire American approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict is misguided. U.S. determination to bring about a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement is seriously weakening Israel and increasing the erosion of American strategic interests throughout the area, according to Churba.

Rather than seeking to buttress the U.S. Middle East position by de facto alliances with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, Churba writes that the U.S. "must finally recognize . . . that the pillars for stability in the region are Turkey, Iran and a secure Israel . . . bolstered by the fostering of a strongly independent Christian Lebanon."

According to Churba, only by totally reversing our current politics of defeat and asserting our national interest in the Middle East in the face of Soviet designs" can American security interests be achieved.

As a strategic analysis, which the author continually takes credit for, *The Politics of Defeat* is something of a fraud. At best, the book is historical interpretation colored by devotion to Israel and near-paranoid anti-Soviet impulses.

As an alternative view concerning American Middle East policy, inter-

ests and strategy, Churba's book merits consideration—but on the whole it lacks persuasiveness. Too many propositions are considered self-evident. For example, his assumptions that a Palestinian state on the West Bank would necessarily result in a "blood bath," be "a launching pad against Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the oil emirates" as well as Israel, and "would create . . . the very conditions for our final demise as a power of consequence in the region" are highly conjectural and hardly as self-evident as Churba insists.

Furthermore, Churba's surety that the notion of "Palestinian rights" is "one of the fallacies of this tragic conflict" appears to be one of a number of delusions possibly inspired by those who have aided him with his writing. "First and foremost" in his acknowledgments Churba thanks Aaron David Rosenbaum, director of research for the American-Israeli Public Affairs Committee in Washington and known as one of the most fervent believers within the American Jewish community in the necessity for Israeli retention of most of the occupied territories.

Moreover, there may be an element of deception involved with this book-essay. Churba is quick to state his purpose in writing—"to demonstrate that the vitality of Israel is crucial to the United States and that the United States must therefore categorically commit itself to the defense and preservation of that nation." But Churba completely fails to note his personal background and biases which may lie behind his motivations.

Ten years ago, shortly after com-

pleting his Ph.D. in Middle East studies at Columbia, Churba wrote another book: *The Jewish Stake in Vietnam*. It was coauthored by Rabbi Meir Kahane, founder of the Jewish Defense League, with whom Churba was working to establish a "July Fourth Movement" to quell sentiment against U.S. involvement in Vietnam.

It was General George Keegan who brought Churba, under his personal sponsorship, to the Pentagon and kept him there as criticism of Churba's attitude and ideas mounted. This is the same General Keegan who retired earlier this year and has since joined Churba in the crusade to reignite the cold war using Israel as "the single key to balancing Soviet imperialism in the Mediterranean." (Keegan's most recent outburst came last month in an interview with the conservative weekly *Human Events*. In a nuclear war, the General stated, the Soviets "would probably suffer no more than four or five million fatalities to our 160 million.")

The Politics of Defeat is a broad side against the entire Carter Administration game-plan in the Middle East. It is sure to be enlisted in the political warfare which most recently erupted over the joint American-Soviet Middle East statement.

At the annual convention last August of the American Political Science Association, Professor John G. Stoessinger, also a dedicated friend of Israel, admitted that "it is becoming increasingly difficult to make a solid strategic case for American support of Israel." Joseph Churba's essay is proof of how difficult the task really is.