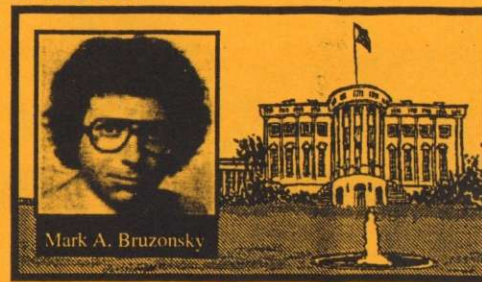


DREAM AGENTS

From



Washington

The actual situation in Washington at this moment, as the transfer from the Bush to Clinton begins to ripple throughout every institution, is that AIPAC is more in charge today when ever

JUST a year and two ago there were many here telling many there — many Americans telling many in the Mid-east — that things were getting a lot better in Washington in terms of the Israeli-Arab quagmire.

George Bush, they said, was really serious about pushing Israel in to a deal with the Palestinians. American allies — especially Saudi Arabia and Egypt — were on top in the region in the wake of the unprecedented US-led international defanging of Iraq and would now exert an important new influence in the upcoming "peace process". And American public support for Israel was on the wane.

Furthermore, these voices kept insisting, George Bush and Jim Baker were riding high in the polls and sure to be reelected, especially if the Arab regimes and the Palestinians would just show further "moderation" in dealing with Israel and engaging themselves in the "peace process".

Of course it was in this overall context that the Madrid conference, so we were also told, was to be a major historic watershed. And the subsequent Arab-Israeli talks were sure to lead, so we were further told, to a process of Palestinian autonomy and eventual independence.

The Israeli and American-approved Palestinian delegation itself said it had assurances of a firm one-year timetable for the talks to show significant progress.

New "cause" groups, some clearly pro-Arab and Arab-funded, other more independent but showing signs of being at least more balanced in their concerns about the region than had been the case in the past, were back then expressing themselves more vocally than ever before.

Then came the debate over extending billions of dollars in "loan guarantees" to Israel, there was a chorus of opposition — beginning in the White House — and then much self-congratulating when the "guarantees" were put on hold. But even on this one, the temporary victory eventually became another grand defeat. Those who had gloated before hardly muttered a whimper in the end.

It was all quite foreseeable from the start, actually, in view of the actual lineup of political forces fighting these battles — except, that is, if one listened to the "wisdom" of those who were preaching that

things had changed.

At the head of this cacophony of political dreamers was a small chorus of defeated liberal Republicans with close ties to the Arab establishment in the Mid-east who had banded together into an organization calling itself The Council on the National Interest (CNI).

More on the order of a small political club than a real lobby — which is what it misleadingly purports to be — CNI's leaders, former congressmen Pete McCloskey and Paul Findley along with once presidential candidate John Anderson, were all beating the Bush-Baker drums with great enthusiasm back then.

How the world turns.

Bush is history, a tarnished one-term president, receding fast.

The "peace talks" — other than buying Israel still more precious time to swallow what's left of the Palestinian homeland — have gone nowhere except to further Israeli designs in the region.

And a new American president clearly oriented towards domestic issues is coming to Washington — and doing so in part precisely because the pro-Israeli forces worked overtime to push Bill Clinton forward and pull King George down. Clinton owes them; and both they and Clinton know it.

Yet in today's new situation many of those who were so wrong and misleading just a short while ago are at it again.

They are joined, just as was the case before, by a number of prominent Arab-American spokesmen — among them James Abourezk, Jim Zogby, Khalil Jahshan — who keep telling their flocks, year

after year, that things are gradually improving — thanks to their efforts of course — when in fact the opposite is really the case.

Example. Even in 1992, after decades of efforts, just getting one important congressman or senator — even a former one! — to an Arab-American event is heralded as a major triumph; when it fact it simply reflects the continuing political impotence of all of the Arab American groups toto, regardless of what useful work they might do in other non-political areas of concern.

Simply put, a bit of progress in learning how to hold banquets and writing letters protesting against slurs and ethnic stereotypes does not equate with serious political power.

Example. When the Arab American University Graduates (AAUG) recently met in Washington — even though well-known and well respected Professor Edward Said gave an exceptionally provocative round-up of the state of the Arab World and the "peace process" at the banquet — quite literally no one from the media, surely no one with political stature, and not even a single camera, were there to take note of what he had to say.

Moreover, these same ever-optimistic voices that were touting Bush and Baker not so long ago urging forward the "peace process" — an approach which in reality was mostly designed by Israel and its Washington chums in the first place, as should now be more clear since the main Bush foreign policy that president-elect Clinton is loudly supporting is this very same "peace process" — are at it again.

With the same self-styled anti-AIPAC

"phantom lobby" called CNI in the lead — in reality that small collection of defeated liberal Republican politicians who have very little clout here at home — as opposed to their overseas image — these voices are now attempting to convince their followers that AIPAC is somehow on the ropes while they are continuing to come on strong.

George Bush, of course, tried to do the same — to convince us that Clinton was falling and he, Bush, was going to pull an upset victory after all. But we can and should forgive him as that's the way of political campaigns. After all even Ross Perot kept telling us he was going to win "all 50 states". Yet in the context of an election such hyperbole isn't taken seriously.

It's a lot harder to forgive those out-of-power personalities who in a sense mislead for profit and glory. No longer competing for votes they purport to be telling the truth not only about what's really happening in the Mid-east but also about the real situation within American politics, but in another they are still competing, now for the largess of those willing to back them. And this situation creates a corrupting atmosphere in which too many people more and more say, and write, what is useful and profitable for them to say, and write, rather than what is really happening.

It's a form of social control — i.e. keep everyone at least hopping that things are moving ahead, no matter how slowly, and at the same time try to convince everyone that those in charge know what they're doing. If one more and more controls the sources of information and the major me-

dia-passing out various rewards to those who play the right tunes and penalizing those who do not — it's easier to keep those on top in place and those wanting influence away from it.

And so, even if the political equation regarding Israeli influence versus Arab influence remains very much one-sided, this other game of twisting perceptions and public opinion is one that is being played with ever more sophistication, year after year, by both sides; especially here in Washington.

Furthermore, of course, most of these "dream agents" depend for their own livelihood on convincing their patrons that the work they are doing is being done well and could in the future, if just everyone will keep the wheels rolling, eventually bear results.

Example. Speaking of the recent presidential resignation at AIPAC — after release of an audio tape in which AIPAC president Steiner flouted his own as well as his lobby's influence with president-elect Clinton — former congressman Paul Findley recently insisted that this incident "may have destroyed the ability of AIPAC to be credible influence either with the new administration or on Capitol Hill".

True, many will be willing to dismiss such rhetorical excesses as little but wishful thinking.

Sadly, however, excesses of this kind have become the pattern, rather than an occasional forgivable burst of hopefulness.

Sadder yet, such excesses create a climate of misinformation and faulty political analysis that then leads to still further political misjudgements making things all the

worse as a vortex of faulty analysis and misleading commentary feeds on itself.

And so the question has to be asked, how can one possibly successfully organize in ways likely to be effective without basing plans on a frank evaluation of how the politically armies actually line up against each other? How can one seriously prepare to do political battle without knowing just what kinds of weapons are in the hands of the enemy and how much ammunition is likely stockpiled by the various forces?

Simply said, all this political dreaming of these various kinds combines to create an exceedingly dangerous situation.

Dangerous because it is grossly misleading and gives those trying to do things to change the situation an improper accounting of what the true line up of political forces really is.

Dangerous because it substitutes cheap verbal combat for actual political clout giving those who desperately want to do something about the situation a false sense of hope and a faulty reading of how much and what kinds of efforts are actually needed.

Dangerous because without a clear-sighted understanding of the real predicament one is in it's more difficult than ever to devise ways of overcoming ones adversaries in the future.

The actual situation in Washington at this moment, as the transfer from the Bush to Clinton administration begins to ripple throughout every institution in this world capital, is that AIPAC is more in charge today when ever.

It has stumbled, it has erred, it has overexposed itself. All true. All possibly inevitable to some degree.

But at the same time, during the past Reagan-Bush decade AIPAC has diversified itself into a number of interlinked and highly effective branches with a variety of tentacles all of which have their grip on things here. Meanwhile, the Arab groups in total, including their progressive Jewish allies, are simply no match at all for AIPAC's net work of power.

As for CNI... Frankly, in that it purports to be a lobby at all, is a cruel joke.

Such is the real state of affairs in the American capital in December of 1992 as the Clinton bus gets ready to roll into town.

It's a lot harder to forgive those out-of-power personalities who in a sense mislead for profit and glory. No longer competing for votes they purport to be telling the truth not only about what's really happening in the Mid-east but also about the real situation within American politics