

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



Israel is back in the news this week in two separate stories which, truth to tell, aren't the usual fare:

1. The kerfuffle over the Misses Israel and Lebanon appearing in a selfie together at the Miss Universe pageant, and
2. Speaker John Boehner's inviting Israeli P.M. Netanyahu to address a Joint Meeting of Congress. [Actually, it's a '**Joint Caucus**' . . . but more on that later.]

Without question, both items have political components. Let's label the former *The politics of beauty*, and the latter *The beauty of politics*. I would venture to guess that more people are up on the whys and wherefores of the former than



the issues and implications of the latter. Oh well, that's just modern times in America, where far more of our fellow citizens can spell -- let alone identify -- "Kardashian" than "Kyrgyzstan."

We begin with *The Politics of Beauty* in which Miss Lebanon, Saly Griege, was severely taken to task by her Levantine *lahntsmen* for appearing in a selfie along with Miss Slovenia, Miss Japan and -- horror of horrors! -- Miss Israel, Doron Matalan. (That's Ms. Doron on the left, followed by Ms. Griege, Miss Slovenia and Ms.

Japan.) Criticism of Ms. Griege reached such an angry state that many Lebanese urged that she be stripped of her title for appearing with an "enemy of the state." Ms. Griege attempted to calm things down -- and remain in the competition -- by declaring on her Facebook page that Miss Israel had photo-bombed her: *"The truth behind the photo: Since the first day of my arrival to participate to Miss Universe [sic], I was very cautious to avoid being in any photo or communication with Miss Israel (that tried several times to have a photo with me)...I was having a photo with Miss Japan, Miss Slovenia and myself; suddenly Miss Israel jumped in, took a selfie, and put it on her social media...this is what happened and I hope to have your full support in the Miss Universe contest."* In turn, Ms. Matalan responded on her Facebook page, simply, *"Too bad you cannot put the hostility out of the game."*

Ah, the politics of beauty!

Needless to say, Fox News, various radio gasbags and many members of Congress weighed in on the situation, decrying the utter childishness of it all; that political animosities could be so keen-edged that two contestants in a beauty pageant couldn't even appear in a selfie together without one being threatened with loss of her title . . . or even her life. Fox News, various radio gasbags and many members of Congress are undoubtedly correct . . . and more than a might hypocritical. For many so decrying are also among those who cried foul when then-Republican Florida Governor Charlie Crist or current Republican New



Jersey Governor Chris Christie were smilingly photographed alongside Democratic President Obama. Or Speaker John Boehner and 99.9% of the Republican caucus who refused to applaud virtually anything the president said at last week's State of the Union address for fear that they might be accused of "consorting with the enemy." You've got to admit: there's a haunting similarity between the responses of the Lebanese press towards Ms. Greige ("She's a traitor!") and various segments of the American right towards those who act civilly toward -- or God forbid -- say something positive about the POTUS ("He/she's a traitor to conservative principles!"). It seems to me that those who find the dustup between Miss Lebanon and Miss Israel uncivil or indefensible should take a long look in the

mirror and ask themselves if *they* are acting any differently when it comes to the President or members of the opposing party. . . .

. . . which serves as a convenient segue into what we have chosen to call *The Beauty of Politics*. The day after President Obama's State of the Union Address [SOTU], Speaker Boehner issued an invitation to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address a joint meeting of Congress. In his announcement, Speaker Boehner made clear that Netanyahu's third speech to a joint gathering of the U.S. Congress – scheduled for Feb. 11, a scant 5 weeks before Israel's national elections – was meant to counter Obama's assessments of what's going on in the region. Said the Speaker: "*There is a serious threat in the world, and the President last night kind of papered over it,*" Boehner said. "*And the fact is that there needs to be a more serious conversation in America about how serious the threat is from radical Islamic jihadists and the threat posed by Iran.*"

The scheduling of [Netanyahu's speech](#) caught the White House off-guard, since the Israeli prime minister had apparently not bothered to clear his trip with the administration. There's an expression in Hebrew, זה פשוט לא הדרך בה דברים אמורים להיעשות which means "*This is simply not the way things are supposed to be done.*" Because the invitation came from the Speaker and not from President Obama, Netanyahu's stateside sojourn will *not be* an official state visit. What this means is that he will *not* be meeting with either President Obama or Secretary of State John Kerry -- that's the way protocol works. Additionally, Netanyahu's address will not literally be before a *Joint Meeting* of Congress, but rather a "*Joint Caucus* of the House and Senate," because the invitation to speak did not come from the White House. (*Joint Sessions*, by the way are only when both houses are literally "*in session and capable of voting,*" such as the recent SOTU.)

The first Joint Meeting of Congress was held on December 18, 1874; Congress received and heard from King Kalakaua of Hawaii. Since then, there have been 118 Joint Meetings. Winston Churchill and Benjamin Netanyahu are the only people to have address two Joint Meetings. The only two *Joint Caucuses* were arranged for Presidents Oscar Arias of Costa Rica and José Napoleón Duarte of El Salvador, who gave informal addresses on September 22, 1987, and October 15, 1987, respectively.

The politics behind Speaker Boehner's invite are fairly clear; he and his caucus are looking to score major points with the electorate by putting the president in a bad light with those who support Israel. Look for them to harp on the fact that he "refuses to meet" with the Israeli P.M. -- despite the fact that it is, by definition *not* an official state visit and thus does not merit such a confab. There *is*, to be sure, a deep political flaw in the Speaker's invitation -- and Netanyahu's

acceptance of that invite: to wit, using the United States Congress as nothing more than a campaign stop in a foreign election. To my way of thinking Netanyahu, who generally speaking has pretty good political instincts, is making a huge mistake. What good does he think taking the President of the United States out to the woodshed before both houses of the U.S. Congress is going to do him? Does he really think this will redound well with a hyper-engaged Israeli public whose main issue concerns are far more about jobs and the price of housing and food than Iran or Syria? Shame on John Boehner for putting the United States Congress in the center of a foreign election; and shame on *you* Benyamin Netanyahu for agreeing to use the United States Congress as just another stop on the campaign trail.

Speaker Boehner is going out of his way to try and solidify and strengthen his leadership of a highly fractionated Republican caucus. He is also trying to send a message to the American voting public at the beginning of the 2016 election cycle: *"Hey America, it's the Republicans who really, truly care about Israel's security, not the Democrats! And while we're at it, we're the party who really, truly supports women's issues; didn't we have a WOMAN senator give the rebuttal to the State of the Union?"*

Boehner's interjecting himself and his party into both foreign policy and a foreign election -- and, from my understanding, for some pretty partisan reasons -- is as indefensible as Lebanon's expecting their Miss Universe candidate to steer clear of Miss Israel because she's "the enemy." But make no mistake about it, whether it's the politics of beauty or the beauty of politics, the script is essentially the same . . . scoring points with the folks back home . . .

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