

Earl Raab

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AMERICAN JEWS CRITICIZED

Three gentlemen from Washington criticized "American Jews" last week: Spigniew Brzezinski, Abraham Ribicoff and Jacob Javitz.

Brzezinski, the President's foreign policy advisor, angrily charged that American Jews were trying to smear him as an anti-Semite. Senator Javitz said that American Jews have been insufficiently "independent in their thinking." And Senator Ribicoff objected to strong pressure by American Jewish leadership "to support all Israeli positions."

All three of them were, in their own ways, complaining about "Jewish pressure." And all three of them, in their own ways, were indulging in the Logic of Misplaced Indignation. Example: charged with robbing the poor-box, you angrily deny that you murdered the rabbi.

Brzezinski's complaint was a classic case of "reverse smear" or "smear one-upmanship." American Jews have not been calling Brzezinski an anti-semite. They have just been saying that he is the author of wrong-headed policies.

Those who have known Brzezinski throughout his career have never known him to be anti-semitic. Brzezinski's family acted in the "Righteous Gentile" tradition in Nazi Europe, helping to save Jewish lives. And, in fact, no representative of any Jewish group has called him an anti-semite.

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But a man can be dead wrong without being an anti-semite. And Brzezinski does not like to be called wrong. Someone from the San Francisco JCRC was at that last White House meeting with Brzezinski which has been called an "unmitigated disaster." The gentlemen visibly and vocally furious with the Jewish delegation for criticizing his policy.

He was furious for another reason. Week after week, the White House had been inviting different Jewish leaders and organizational representatives to Washington. They had been invited to White House dinners, lunches and afternoon teas. A half dozen people from the San Francisco Jewish community have been to as many such occasions in recent months. This was "Operation Crack": find a crack in the organized American Jewish community, someplace. But they haven't been able to find it.

Here, it would seem, we come to the complaints of Senators Javitz and Ribicoff. American Jewish organizations are inflexible, slavish to Israeli policy, and try to create a monolithic American Jewish opinion which doesn't exist. After all, they say, Israeli public opinion is very diverse; why shouldn't American Jewish opinion be just as diverse?

There's a critical point they're missing. The Israeli and the American Jew have different agendas. For one, there's the matter of what the Israeli government should do; for the other, there's the matter of what the American government should do. American Jews, like Israelis, do have very diverse opinions about Israeli policy. They have somewhat less diverse opinions about American policy of Israel, which is really their business.

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After all, there are fewer options on the American agenda. Do we give aid, or not? Do we act as a strong ally of Israel; or a neutral, "may-the-best-man-win" diplomatic diletante in the Middle East? Do we push for negotiations, staying out of them as much as possible, or do we impose a blueprint of our own? (If we do go the blueprint route, then, of course, our agenda does become as unlimited as that of Israel).

But there is a strong consensus among American Jews on these above questions. The overwhelming proportion of Jews, and almost all Jewish organizations, agree on those questions. It is a limited agenda, but a critically important one. And we do have a community of opinion.

What's wrong with a community? And what's wrong with "pressure" from a community? Isn't that what a community is supposed to do in America? Saying that a community is a "monolith" is another example of Misplaced Indignation. The American Jewish community does not support all Israeli positions, Senator Ribicoff. But it does overwhelmingly object, to your administration's efforts to interfere with the negotiations by putting special pressures on Israel. Don't those pressures, rather, belong on Saudi Arabia, to support the resumption of direct negotiations between Egypt and Israel, and the beginning of direct negotiations between Jordan and Israel?

Brzezinski, like all politicians - and especially like most academics-turned-politician - doesn't care for any community, unless it goes along with him. An inventive man, however, he goes beyond the "monolith" gambit by angrily clearing himself of a charge which the community never made against him.

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