

Earl Raab

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EMBATTLED JEWS

To look at the bright side, most Jews are *not* living in countries which are oppressing them.

That is because almost nine million of them are living in the United States and Israel. Another million and a half live in fairly hospitable countries like England or Denmark.

That leaves about three and a half million Jews who are living in uneasy situations of one kind or another. About two and a half million of those are, of course, in the Soviet Union. At least a third of the remaining million live in countries which are actively dangerous: Argentina, Ethiopia, Iran and Syria.

Many Argentinians are in jeopardy from their government. But when individual Jews are singled out, they seem to be in special jeopardy. The Anti-Defamation League has compiled a list of over 900 Argentinians, mostly Jews, who are political prisoners or have "disappeared."

One of those Jews in whom the A.D.L. now has a special concern is Mauricio Alberto Poltarak. He is a 36 year old member of the Argentine Jewish community who was kidnapped on his way to work on July 21 of last year. Poltarak has a wife and baby, and has been involved in neither political nor trade union activity.

It has happened in the past that if enough public fuss was raised, the Argentine government sometimes "found" the missing person. The A.D.L. is suggesting that letters be written to Argentine Consul General Nanclares (870 Market Street, San Francisco), with copies to your Congressman and Senators. Ask that the Argentine government make a greater effort to find Poltarak, in the name of humanity. That kind of spotlight sometimes helps.

According to the American Jewish Congress, Iranian Jews have not been singled out for persecution since the execution of Elghanian. Of the many Iranians arrested, only about four have been Jewish. But a number of Jews are in hiding, and there is little sense of security. Although the Iranian government still insists that Iranian Jews are a "protected group," the anti-Zionist tone is fervent, anti-Jewish bias is always in evidence, and the economic condition of the country is deteriorating. If ever a group was ripe for scapegoating, it is the Iranian Jews.

Of course, both the Argentine and Iranian Jews can still leave their countries, although they can only take out small sums of money. But so far not many have been leaving.

Neither the Jews of Ethiopia or of Syria are permitted to leave their countries. Ethiopia says that since it is at war, none of its people will be allowed to leave. Meanwhile, Ethiopian Jews are being attacked every day. Neither the United States nor Israel has much leverage on Ethiopia, which is in the Soviet orbit, but Israel is being urged to find whatever means it can to rescue the Falasha remnant.

Syrian Jews continue to be kept in a state of disadvantaged hostage. Syria is also in the Soviet orbit. Israel can be of no direct help. The United States has only the slim leverage suggested in this statement just released by a U.S. Congress Subcommittee:

"The Subcommittee deeply regrets that Syria, despite U.S. requests, has not relaxed its restrictions against emigration of Syrian Jews over the past year. The Subcommittee believes that Syrian cooperation on this matter can enhance the prospects for U.S. economic assistance for the future."

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In short, the situations of these embattled Jewish groups differ substantially and require different remedies. Other enclaves of embattled Jewry, with yet different situations can arise at any time. The American Jewish Committee is now exploring problems with respect to South Africa. This year we will have to juggle many different efforts on many fronts.

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