

Earl Raab

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REAGAN, ISRAEL AND SOVIET JEWS

The Reagan administration's approach to the Soviet Union may have a less beneficial impact on Soviet Jews than on Israel.

So far, the foreign policy makers in this administration have spoken strong words on behalf of Israel and against the PLO. This stems from their strategic stance towards the Soviet Union. However, the so-called "European Initiative" will be pressed on Reagan next week. The Common Market's "Venice Declaration" calls for Palestinian self-determination and unilateral recognition of the PLO. It would badly distort the Camp David agreements, and play into the hands of the Soviet Union, whose instrument the PLO is.

British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and Foreign Minister Lord Carrington are meeting with Reagan next week, and will be selling the "European Initiative," which goes counter to everything our new administration has been saying so far. The JCRC has wired the President, on behalf of this Jewish community, commending him on his forthright statements on Israel and the PLO; and urging him to press *our* position on our European allies. Copies have been sent to our Congressmen and Senators, asking them to similarly speak out. Similar wires and letters to the President and Congressmen, from individual citizens such as yourselves, would add strength to the message.

The matter of Soviet Jewry is a little more complicated. Next week will also mark the opening of the 26th Communist Party Congress in Moscow. It is an occasion on which to campaign for an increase in Soviet Jewish emigration, by which means the Soviet Union might lighten its image as an oppressor of human rights. In 1980, 21,471 Jews were allowed to emigrate from the USSR, a 58 per cent decrease from the 51,320 who were allowed to emigrate in 1979. There are reports that the Soviet Union has been raising its emigration quota somewhat in recent days, in preparation for the 26th Communist Party Congress. So, it *is* an educable moment.

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On behalf of the Jewish community, the JCRC has also written area Congressmen, asking them to use the occasion of the 26th Communist Party Congress to register -- with Consul General Aleksandr Chikvaidze in San Francisco (2790 Green Street)-- their concern over restrictive Soviet emigration. Again, *individual* communications to Mr. Chikvaidze, using this occasion, would help assure the Soviet Union that the Soviet Jews have not been forgotten.

Our Congressmen are overwhelmingly sympathetic to the plight of Soviet Jews, and are constantly reminded of the continuing problem, both in Washington and at home. The Union of Councils of Soviet Jewry just held a successful briefing of hundreds of Congressmen and Congressional aides in Washington. But in order to be open to enlightenment, Congressmen have to know that their home-town constituents care.

The Reagan administration is also sympathetic, but its global strategy may not be as helpful for the Soviet Jews as it could be for Israel. Reagan's negotiating agenda is different than Carter's or Nixon's. Because Reagan wants *more* from the USSR than did previous administrations, the USSR is likely to get *less* for a liberal emigration policy than it might have previously. In brief, our main leverage at the moment is the USSR's world image, rather than American quid-pro-quo.

In that connection, while some think that Reagan's "de-emphasis of human rights" might reduce his interest in Soviet Jews, it might not work that way. The new Reagan head of the human rights desk at the State Department, Ernest Lefever, believes that we should not use human rights as a stick with which to hit our friends. But the Soviet Union is not our friend. It would serve Lefever's purposes to highlight the USSR's oppression of Soviet Jews.

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In sum, the Reagan administration should not be taken for granted on Israel; nor written off on Soviet Jewry. Because of next week's events, it is *now* important to urge our government to repel the "European Initiative" on the Middle East; and to raise the issue of Soviet Jewry in connection with the 26th Communist Congress.

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