

Earl Raab

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SHORT-SIGHTED JEWS?

If small bands of Nazis had marched through American streets last week, the Jewish community would properly have been up in arms. But last week some American streets reverberated with the guttural cries of marching thousands who represent a much more serious threat to Jewish survival -- and the Jewish community didn't even seem to notice.

In that sense, we are committing the same sin that we accuse the people in pre-Hitler Germany of having committed. We are ignoring the danger. We are silent in the face of the growing monster. We are willing to strike out at the easy targets, when everyone else is with us. We piously shout "never again" at ghostly images. But we are too timid, too apathetic, too confused to stand up to today's most severe dangers for the Jews.

The thousands of marchers last week were led by Iranian students. The target was presumably the Shah. The Shah was a cruel dictator. But the slogans and the make-up of the marching crowds made it clear that the Shah was only a first target. The real enemies for these crowds were the United States, Israel and the free world.

Is it a contradiction for some of those who are opposed to the cruel and dictatorial Shah to also be opposed to freedom and the free world? Not in the modern world. History may replace a terrible one-man dictatorship with a terrible systematic dictatorship, which will not be so easily displaced by crowds in the street.

Seen most narrowly, such a change would directly threaten the lives of many Jews. The ideology of this new oppression will not tolerate Jews or sympathizers of Israel. Many Iranian Jews are already fleeing, but many will be caught. And the body of Jewry in

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Israel would face a new and direct threat; the PLO would have its most potent base.

But such a change in Iran would have a less narrow portent for the Jews. Put bluntly, it would be a definitive part of the tide which promises to reduce the United States to the status of a second-rate power.

England's meek withdrawal from the Suez in 1956 definitively marked the end of Great Britain as a first-rate power. We are approaching the same syndrome, with the abandonment of Taiwan and the failure in Iran. All over the world, the New Tyrants will be taking over from the Old Tyrants. Their tyranny will be more systematic and irreversible, and more specifically anti-American. And the United States seems to be without the power and the will to stem the tide.

Some will welcome America's reduction to second-rate status. But, seen in narrow terms, his reduction of the United States will place in mortal jeopardy the two largest bodies of Jews outside of the United States, in Israel and in the Soviet Union. That is a mild statement of the matter. In larger terms, the world would be plunged into a post-industrial Dark Age from which it would again take centuries for the human spirit to re-emerge. The internal life of America would not be unaffected. Around the world, many lives would be lost and identities crushed, not the least of which would be those of the Jews.

If we ignore that possibility in 1979, we will be in the same criminal position as those who ignored the Hitlerian possibility in 1929. But it seems that, fifty years later, the Jews are still not able to see far beyond their much-maligned noses. We are understandably spending great energies and resources in trying to prevent the exact recurrence of the tragic past, while we are not addressing ourselves at all to a tragic future which is more likely.

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Hopefully, the die is not cast. America is not England. We have tremendous natural and human and spiritual resources. But the clock is running.

How can the Jewish community become involved in influencing American foreign policy in matters which extend beyond the explicit support of Israel, but which will crucially affect the survival of Israel and of world Jewry? Perhaps the usual techniques and organizations are not appropriate. But at least every means must be used, and urgently, to raise the consciousness of American Jews about the broader nature of their self-interest and the dangers that lie ahead. We are accountable to our grandchildren.

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