

Twisting the Tiger's Tail

The Jews are being used again. This time, as a weapon against the United States.

Last week, a group of Jewish women was flailed with sticks. Hot water was poured on a prominent Jew, Vladimir Slepak, when he held up a sign on the balcony of his own home, asking to be reunited with his son. Then he was arrested. Another prominent Jew, Josef Begun, was imprisoned because he did not stay out of the city in which he lived. These were just a few of the more flagrant events.

Obviously these were physical actions against Jews -- but they were also political acts against America. They were all done to Jews by the Soviet government partly to challenge the United States.

Modern industrial states do not mount anti-semitic programs because some officials hate Jews. They do so because it seems to have some practical political purpose. The Nazis used Jews as unifying scapegoats for Germany's internal ills. Stalin used the Jews for the same purpose. Now the Soviet leaders have found a use for anti-semitism in the conduct of their foreign affairs as well.

It is everyone's devout prayer that the Soviet-American conflict can be contained; that is the importance of a SALT agreement. But the conflict will continue, as long as the Soviet Union and the United States are what they are. They stand for incompatibly different principles, having to do with government's power to totally manage personal lives, thoughts, beliefs, movements.

And that is what the "human rights" issue is all about. The status -- and the security -- of the United States depends on the credibility of its intent to uphold the value of freedom in the world; and to support the free world, and the "uncommitted" world against Soviet adventurism.

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So, right after the United States freshly urged the Soviet Union to avoid governmental violations of human rights, the Soviet Union deliberately engaged in an orgy of illicit brutality. Indeed, President Carter had previously expressed a specific personal concern about Vladimir Slepak.

Thus, while the world is watching, the Soviet Union is saying to the United States: "You don't have the commitment or the will to alter your relationships to us no matter what we do. On you, no one should depend."

The U.S. has a strong national interest in responding to this challenge. The attack against the Jews is a double violation of human rights: not only the brutality, but the denial of the basic human right to emigrate. These Jews are not people who want to subvert the Soviet system; they are just people who want to leave, and they have a place to go.

Our Senators and Congressman will monitor all trade agreements and relationships with the Soviet Union. They should know and speak out about these acts of last week, not just as morally reprehensible, but as deliberate political aggression against the United States. The Soviet Jewry Commission of the JCRC has so communicated with our area's Congressmen, on behalf of the organized Jewish community. But this must be backed up by individual letters and wires from many hundreds of their constituents.

And it must be backed up by something else: a communal expression of moral outrage. There will be such an expression for a half hour outside the Soviet Consulate, at 5:00 p.m. on Thursday, June 15th, coordinated for the Soviet Jewry Commission by the Bay Area Council on Soviet Jewry. We should all be there -- for the women who were beaten, for Vladimir Slepak, for Josef Begun, for Anatoly Shcharansky still imprisoned -- and for ourselves.