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## Not to be intimidated

By GEOFFREY BERG 03.JUL.08

On June 14, 2008, the Houston Chronicle ran a piece that I wrote (titled by the Chronicle as "Critics of our Israel policy are outside mainstream"). Its premise was simple: Despite accusations to the contrary, the American Jewish community and AIPAC exercise no diabolical control over political candidates. Instead, AIPAC asks that candidates who seek its members' support express theirs for the continued existence and security of Israel. What AIPAC does is nothing other than to participate in the democratic process – participation guaranteed to it no less than any other group in this country.

That AIPAC is effective is a function of the support for Israel at large among our fellow citizens. I cited in my essay two recent polls showing support for Israel among the general population at 60 percent. (Contrast that with support for the Palestinians among likely voters, which one of the polls found was holding steady at 8 percent.)

Criticism of Israel or AIPAC, of course, does not amount to anti-Semitism. Some American Jews and Israelis are critical of Israel, as they should be. But, I wrote, those who constantly criticize Israel and AIPAC, and who don't seem to care about any other foreign country or lobby, aren't really interested in our elections, but in the delegitimization of the Jewish state.

The Chronicle published my email address at the end of the article.

Most of the response to the piece has been complimentary, and there has been some thoughtful criticism. There also has been plenty of knuckle-dragging Jew-hatred.

"Augie" was the most direct. In an email sent the day after my article ran, he wrote (the grammar and punctuation are his):

"Why did Hitler select Jews and not Arabs to eliminate? I see Jews as money-hungry scum, who are destroying this country by buying politicians with AIPAC money, they did a good job on our governor! As long as Israel is allowed to exist this world will never rest, Hitler should have finished the job."

Nearly a week after the piece ran, I received an email from someone who was too cowardly to provide his name. He called himself "sMan53" and had this to say:

"YOU BASTARDS ARE WILLING TO BLEED USA DRY FOR RICH PROPEROUS ISRAEL. ONLY IMAGINE WHAT USA COULD DO WITH THAT MONEY---  
"your time is coming---past fed up-----"  
(The all-caps and punctuation are his.)

I thought sMan53's email address seemed familiar, so I did a quick search. Turns out he has made his views known before. In a June 6, 2007, email to a local radio station sent from the same email address, he gave his name as "sam" and asked a (non-Jewish) host: "why are U on the board of the Jewish Holocaust Museum? no group have done more to trash Euro Americans than the Jews. Are U Jewish – Who isnt in our polluted media "tired of being disappointed

"signed fed up"

(The lower case and punctuation still are his.)



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On the Chronicle website itself, which provides space for comments below articles, someone calling himself "thequinn" posted this below my essay: "typical bull \*. israel plays america for a sucker. always playing the holocaust card, begging for more money. that what their friendship is based on. and no one else in the world really gives a crap about israel. stop taking our money, stand on your own. remember the u.s.s, liberty, with friends like israel, who needs enemies[.]"

Another genius, calling himself "wjneill," complained in the comments about the ring of Jewish traitors to which I obviously belong. Referring me to Front Page Magazine, he said: ". . . here's a sample comments page that illustrates quite nicely what the Jewish-American fifth column thinks about those US citizens who dare express dissent with them. . . [m]aybe Mr. Berg claims Richard Perle and Jonah Golberg, two reality-challenged skills for Jewish and neo-con causes, as fellow travelers."

But "CelticKnight" was even more frank in expressing his opinion that Jews control the government. Referring to the Chronicle headline, "Critics of our Israel policy are outside mainstream," which I didn't write, CelticKnight said: " 'outside mainstream' of zionazi KKK thought and do not salivate as 2.5% of America's population commandeer our presidential elections! Berg, typical jewish liar setting forth more zionazi poopaganda for the mentally lame." He then went on to claim that Israelis and American Jews "pulled off" 9/11.

Frankly, I couldn't care less what the Augies, sMan53s or CelticKnights of the world think. Judging by their grammar and argument, they seem dumber than the average anti-Semite (and that's saying something). More importantly, though, they are, thankfully, a very small minority in this country.

But the fact that they exist at all reminded me of how important it is for our community to continue to unapologetically exercise our rights as Americans by remaining involved in politics – wherever we stand. The existence of conspiracy theorists, lunatics and idiots ought never to intimidate a single one of us from forcefully exercising our rights to advocate on behalf of the U.S.-Israel relationship, or any other issue in which we believe. The hecklers can have their addle-minded opinions, but they never should have a veto.

Geoffrey Berg is a Houston attorney and a graduate of the Human Rights Institute of Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

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