

## The “Lobby” and the “Nominee”

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March 14, 2009

And now it is time for a pop quiz. No pencils or writing – it’s Shabbat. You can just call out your answers. The first three questions are short answer identification. I am going to read three quotations you. Your assignment is to identify the source. The second part of the exam is the essay question: What do the three quotes have in common?

1. “There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples in all the provinces, whose laws are different from those of any other people and who do not obey the king’s laws; and it is not in your majesty’s interest to tolerate them.”

The answer of course, is Haman, and the source is the book of Esther, the Megillah, which we just read earlier this week.

2. “Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them...otherwise in the event of war they may join our enemies in fighting against us and rise up from the ground.”

Had you said Pharaoh, in the beginning of Exodus, right before he enslaved the Hebrews, you would be correct.

3. The third quote comes from one who voiced an eerily similar complaint about an “unscrupulous people with a passionate attachment to the views of a political faction in a foreign country.” Here it is: “The aim of this lobby is control of the policy process through the exercise of a veto over the appointment of people who dispute the wisdom of its views. The inability of the American public to discuss, or the government to consider, any option for US policies in the Middle East opposed by the ruling faction in Israeli politics.”

This one is a bit more contemporary, but amazing how similar it sounded to the Biblical ones. It was Charles Freeman, who until a few days ago was slated to be the chairman of the National Intelligence Council, an interagency group that prepares national intelligence estimates for the president.

Now the hard part, the essay question: What do the three quotes have in common? Since it is Shabbat, I will provide the answer to the question for you.

I had a number of thoughts once I heard the vitriolic response of Chas Freeman to his own resignation, of his ranting and raving against the Jews whom he accused of denying him the opportunity to serve as head of the National Intelligence. His tirade confirmed some of the worst things that were said about him. Who would want a person with this kind of temperament in such a sensitive position analyzing intelligence information and reporting to the President on his conclusions? So my first reaction was a feeling of relief and sense of good riddance.

It is disturbing that this man's sense of reality is so distorted that he saw only the hand of the Jews and the "Lobby" at work in undermining his appointment. He did not lash out at Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi who opposed him because of his offensive statements about China. He did not express or harbor resentment towards those who raised questions about the wisdom of having someone in this position who had served on the advisory board of a state-owned Chinese oil company. His China connections are as disturbing as his positions on Israel and caused alarm among many, for China purchases oil from Sudan, which is conducting a campaign of genocide in Darfur. China has been the biggest obstacle to ending the Sudanese genocide in Darfur. Freeman has shown insensitivity in his remarks about human rights protesters in Tibet. And he demonstrated a serious lack of objectivity when he expressed the notion that Chinese authorities should have intervened earlier to "nip" the Tiananmen Square protests "in the bud" and should not have allowed the demonstrations to take place.

Plenty of people lined up to protest his appointment for multiple reasons. Yet it was only the Jews whom he singled out to excoriate.

We were supposed to believe that this man who once served as ambassador to Saudi Arabia and who headed a Saudi funded advocacy group, who praises King Abdullah in a bizarre way, the same Saudi kingdom where it is illegal to practice any religion other than Islam, where sharia law is strictly enforced, resulting in one of the most archaic systems of justice and repression in the world, whose second greatest export after oil is fundamentalist Wahabism, and who blamed the 9 - 11 attacks on America's ties with Israel would be anything other than a lackey of the Saudi government?

Buying into the argument of his patrons, he contends that Arab and Islamic terrorism against the United States is the result of America's support for Israel, implying that if only the United States turned its back on its alliance with Israel and abandoned its ally, all Arab and Moslem terror against the United States would end. In 2002 he wrote that Hezbollah and Hamas should not be labeled as terrorist organizations, falsely stating that they have not acted against American interests in decades, and that calling them terrorists would lead them to act against America. Just about every aspect of his statement and analysis was incorrect.

Having someone like this in this position is problematic, for the role of the National Intelligence Council is critical in advising the president on issues of national security. As one of member of Congress who opposed his selection said, its members are supposed to be independent intelligent analysts, not highly opinionated prognosticators.

He did have his supporters, including David Broder, who apparently can be blinded by a nice breakfast. The most spirited defense of Freeman came from his son, Charles Freeman Jr., a former assistant U.S. Trade Representative for guess where -- China. In a recent blog post (<http://www.thewashingtonnote.com>.) the younger Freeman declared that he would like to "punch some of these guys in the face" and said his father's "appointment is being challenged by a small cabal of folks that believe first and foremost in the importance of

allegiance to Israel as a core U.S. priority”, as well as a few other choice words for opponents of his father’s nomination which I cannot utter here on the bima. I guess he makes his father proud to know that the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.

Back to the essay question of today’s exam -- What do the three introductory quotes have in common?

They all see Jews as the cause of their problems. They blame Jews irrationally and attribute sinister motives to the Jews. They imply that they cannot be trusted to be loyal citizens and they prey upon people’s fears to plant suspicions about the Jews. Using demagoguery they fault the Jews and portray them as members of a conspiracy to do them in. They see Jews as conspiring to act against the interests of the country where they reside, of being disloyal. There is a name for this -- it is called anti-Semitism.

It is always easy to make accusations against Jews, to appeal to the worst in people, to their fears of the other. As a minority with unique customs we make convenient targets and scapegoats.

The truth is that Jews usually are loyal citizens wherever they live. That is why during the Civil War Jews fought on the side of both the Union and the Confederacy. I recall being in a synagogue in Vienna, Austria many years ago where I saw a wall with the names of the sons of the congregation who had died serving in the Austrian forces in World War I. Jews had disproportionately enlisted and fought on behalf of Austria. A few short decades later, however, all of that was forgotten. Once the Nazis entered Austria, and the Germans annexed it, its Jews were seen as outsiders and sent to concentration camps.

I recall on that same visit going to Budapest, Hungary, where I saw a tombstone with Hebrew writing from the fifth century, several centuries before the Hungarians had arrived. In other words, Jews had lived there hundreds of years before Hungarians, and yet in World War II they were rounded up and deported, and sent to their death.

In synagogues around the world we say a prayer for the government in our Sabbath liturgy. I recall the absurdity of being in Communist Russia one Shabbat in the late 1980’s, when the prayer for the government was recited, the very same Soviet government that was oppressing the Jews and not allowing them to immigrate. Thus the famous joke from Fiddler on the Roof, when the rabbi is asked if there is a prayer for the czar, he says, “Of course. May God keep the Czar..... far away from us.”

I am not ashamed to say that as an American citizen I was deeply troubled by the prospect of having a person in such a sensitive and critical position who describes Jews as an "unscrupulous people with a passionate attachment to the views of a political faction in a foreign country". And the fact that he had Jewish defenders does not alleviate any of my concerns.

The argument of Freeman is the same as Walt and Mearsheimer, whose book about the power of the Israel Lobby, not surprisingly, Freeman praised and embraced. But it is they who are guilty of argument by intimidation. Rather than debate the issues, rather than discuss the merits of various approaches to the Middle East, they attempt to bully us into silence, for fear that we would not want to appear to validate the very thing they contend is true. It is perfectly fine for them to parrot Arab interests while questioning the patriotism of their critics. They constantly protest the power of Jews to influence American foreign policy, while ignoring the activities of all other ethnic groups in America who do the exact same thing, and who are entitled to do so.

What is the alternative? Are we supposed to sit by and not express any opinion on the Middle East? Are we the one group in America who is to be silenced by these nefarious innuendoes and not participate in the discussion?

He, like Walt and Mearsheimer get tremendous mileage out of peddling the absurd notion that debate about American policy in the Middle East is stifled by the pro Israel group. Maybe they do not read the same opinion pages, columns or newspaper articles that I read, or hear the radio and television talk shows. There is plenty of healthy debate in America. It just so happens that supporters of Israel support Israel, and that Jews happen to be among Israel's strongest supporters. But we are not the only ones to express support for Israel. Plenty of other people do as well, and they have a name also. Like us, they are called Americans. And that is precisely what bothers and irks Freeman, Walt, Merarsheimer and the like. It is far easier and more convenient to contend that there is some kind of mass conspiracy that shuts them out, as they overlook the irony that they are appearing on major media outlets expressing their drivel than to recognize the correctness of Israel's advocates.

I would like to ask: Where is the debate in the Arab world over policies towards Israel? The truth is that they are guilty of the very thing they falsely accuse Israel's supporters of doing, of attempting to stifle debate.

We are acting as loyal American citizens when we participate in the political process.

Let no one challenge our right to advocate on behalf of the one democracy in the Middle East, on behalf of the one nation that shares our values, on behalf of the one place in the Middle East which guarantees freedom of expression to all, on behalf of the one place in the Middle East which protects the rights of women, homosexuals, and all minorities, on behalf of the one place which opens its arms to accept refugees expelled from lands around the world, on behalf of the state of Israel. Let no one question our loyalty or our right to express our love of two great democracies, the United States and Israel.

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