

J Street: Perhaps Pro-Peace, but Certainly not Pro-Israel

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by [Matthew Hausman](#) (April 2011)

Good evening. I'm speaking tonight as a proud Jew and committed Zionist, and I'm here to offer my thoughts on J Street, an organization that claims to be "pro-Israel and pro-peace." In order to have some perspective, however, I think it's necessary to delve a little into some of the historical background of the Jewish Left in order to understand how such groups could come to exist. And to get there, I'd like to begin with a little story.

How Did We Get Here?

When I started as a writer in the 1980s, my publisher was a fellow by the name of Vernon Merritt, III. Now, Vernon was a southern gentleman, born and raised in Alabama, who came of age as a journalist during the 1960s and 1970s. By the time we met, he was publishing science and medical magazines, but before that he was a photojournalist covering the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War for Life Magazine and other publications. Although I'm sure most of you don't know his name, you're probably familiar with his work – particularly his Life Magazine photos. Vernon was responsible for some of the most iconic images of the '60s and '70s.

For those old enough to remember the famous Life Magazine cover portrait of Coretta Scott King, or some of the grittier Vietnam photos that graced its pages, you are recalling Vernon's work.

Vernon was a journalist during some pretty turbulent times and was in his prime when journalism was transforming into an activist profession. Starting in earnest in the 1960s, journalists began to mold the news and inject themselves into their stories rather than simply report objectively. Editors often encouraged them to infuse their reporting with a political point of view. Practitioners of what came to be called "The New Journalism" by Tom Wolfe, E.W. Johnson, and others, took literary devices from fiction and used them to craft the story to fit an agenda, which at the time reflected left-leaning sensibilities more often than

not. Thus, the point was no longer objective reportage. The truth is that journalism was never completely objective, but the standard of the profession had always been to aspire to rise above personal bias in presenting the news. In the 1960s and '70s, however, this striving for objectivity went out the window.

So this was Vernon's professional environment before we met. When our paths crossed he was the world-weary professional and I was the young, neophyte protégé. Nevertheless, our personalities clicked and, despite the difference in our ages, we developed a close relationship in the context of which we discussed many things – from literature, history, politics, and religion to baseball. Eventually, we got around to the Arab-Israeli conflict, though he was initially reluctant to broach the subject with me. One day he said to me in his mellifluous Southern accent: "Lad, I have a question that I've never felt comfortable asking before." Because we were talking about the Mideast, and since he asked me not to be offended, I knew it was a "Jewish Question." But I trusted him and told him I would not take offense. And here's what he asked.

Why, he wanted to know, did so many of the liberal Jews he knew – from journalists to Civil Rights activists – begin to question and qualify their support for Israel after the Six-Day War? Why did many of them in the 1970s and '80s become hypercritical of Israel, blaming her for all sorts of excesses, without ever chastising the Arabs who had precipitated several wars of attempted extermination, who refused to recognize Israel's right to exist, and who rejected negotiating any peace with Israel? Why did many of them so readily adopt a Palestinian narrative that was built on a rejection of Jewish history?

Vernon was a keen student of history, and the increasing criticism of Israel from some segments of the Jewish community – and the downright hostility of so many on the left – seemed to him like a repudiation of history. He wondered why so many Jews, in light of their experiences as a persecuted world minority, could readily forsake their own history and advocate for those who wished to destroy Israel and exterminate her people. The more he learned about Jewish and Mideast history, the less he was able to understand what he believed to be an aberrant position.

And this started a dialogue between us that lasted until his untimely death 11 years ago.

I often think about our years-long discussion when I write about some of the disturbing trends in the media's coverage of Israel – and of Jewish issues in general. I particularly think about it whenever I write about the vehement anti-Israel sentiments of the Jewish Left and the ambivalence of so many mainstream liberals. How can they be so critical of Israel without

condemning Arab rejectionism? How can they discount Jewish history so easily in adopting the Palestinian narrative? There are many theories as to why, but very few satisfying explanations. However, there is historical context.

The Ideological Genesis Of The Jewish Left

I believe part of the phenomenon stems from the attempts by many American Jews to separate ethnicity from religion in this country and to merge Jewish identity with secular political values. It's been theorized that the attempt to separate religion from ethnicity created a void that many attempted to fill with politics or popular culture, among other things; and ironically many approached the task of filling the emptiness with an almost religious zeal. Or they created a secular "religion" by perverting the concept of *Tikkun Olam*, which they typically define as "social action," but which according to the Talmud and Zohar is more closely interpreted as "insuring the proper workings of society" as part of a mystical process to ingather the divine sparks said to have been scattered throughout the universe at creation. What they've done with this concept is the subject of another talk, but suffice to say there is nothing holy in "social action" divorced from the Jews' religious and mystical imperatives to fulfill their obligations to their G-d and to their People.

Political progressives tend to ignore the spiritual, and seek to supplant it with secular values – or universal values, if such things truly exist. However, there's nothing about "repairing the world" that mandates an outward focus to the exclusion of Jewish self-interest and self-preservation. Moreover, there is nothing about the concept that *a priori* requires support of left-wing political agendas that conflict with traditional Judaism.

Ironically, secular progressives tend to believe they're "repairing the world" by endorsing progressive political agendas, which increasingly promote the Palestinian narrative and question Israel's Jewish character – and even her right to exist. But progressive politics do not reflect inherently Jewish priorities any more than does any other set of secular, political values.

Does "repairing the world" justify ignoring Israel's security concerns or denying her Jewish character? Certainly not; and any agenda in which Israel's Jewish character is debatable is by definition not consistent with Jewish values.

The Scourge Of Left-Wing Antisemitism

Now, another factor at work is the false perception that Jews must lean to the political left because antisemitism is a right-wing phenomenon. And while antisemitism certainly figured

prominently on the political right over the years, it's been no less prevalent a force on the left. The belief that antisemitism doesn't exist on the left arises from an idealized view of the birth and growth of European liberalism. However, the history has been sanitized to omit any discussion of the Faustian bargain that required Jews to sacrifice their religious and ethnic loyalties in exchange for membership into secular, liberal society. Most liberals are unaware that some of their most cherished philosophical icons were as antisemitic as the monarchs and despots they sought to displace. Voltaire's hatred of Jews was well-known, for example, as was the disdain of Diderot, Holbach, the French Utopians – including Proudhon and Fourier – and the later European socialists and liberals, including Georg Ritter von Schönerer, who led the antisemitic, left-wing German Liberal Party in Austria. In fact, it was Wilhelm Marr, a German socialist, who actually coined the term "antisemitism" in two pamphlets published in 1873 and 1880, in which he promoted hatred of Jews on political, economic and racial grounds.

And let's not forget Communism, which in advancing the teachings of Marx and Engels preached that the concept of nationality was a societal evil. Because the Jews retained their national identity throughout two millennia of exile, they were seen by many on the political left as the embodiment of the most pernicious of all national spirits. Nevertheless, many still cling to the belief that the left is more welcoming to Jews than the right, and that liberalism is more in sync with Jewish values than conservatism. Thus, many people aren't prepared to recognize the danger to Israel and traditional Jewish values to be found in progressive political society, which danger is often expressed as an unbalanced criticism of Israel that ignores Jewish and world history, and which is tainted by the dual lens of historical revisionism and moral equivalence.

What Is J Street?

And that brings us to J Street, an organization that claims to be "pro-peace and pro-Israel," and in so doing employs a self-definition that invites critical analysis. J Street is certainly liberal, but there can be little dispute that it tilts much closer to the left than to the mainstream. Yet, at first glance, the organization seems to be a study in contradictions. Its members claim to support Israel, but they rigorously advance the Palestinian historical myth. Some of them condemn Israel as racist for affirmatively asserting her Jewish character, but they fail to level similar charges of chauvinism at the 22 Arab-Muslim states of the Mideast in which Jews have no substantive rights or are not permitted to reside. They pontificate that Israel must recognize the dubious historical rights of the Palestinians, but don't insist with equal vigor on an Arab obligation to acknowledge Jewish historical claims. Moreover, many of them consider Arab aggression and terror to be morally

equivalent to Israel's sovereign, legitimate acts of self-defense.

I don't believe, however, that these seemingly conflicting positions present any real contradiction at all. Rather, they are perfectly consistent with the usual treatment of Israel by the political left, whether Jewish or Gentile. The only difference between J Street and other left-wing groups – I believe – is that it attempts to camouflage its predilections under layers of general declarations of support for the State of Israel.

Despite its platitudes of support, critics of J Street don't believe its stated positions truly evidence a pro-Israel agenda; and I believe an analysis of its public statements, actions, and constituent members gives weight to this criticism.

The inspiration for J Street was George Soros, whose antipathy for Israel is well known. It was originally reported that Soros did not fund the group because his identification with left-wing causes, and in particular his harsh stance on Israel, would have been imputed to J Street. In fact, J Street denied it received any funding from Soros. Since the publication of J Street's IRS Form 990, however, we now know that Soros actually has provided significant funding from the beginning. Thus, one has to wonder about his influence over the organization, particularly in light of his recent Washington Post op-ed, entitled, "Why Obama has to Get Egypt Right," in which he said among other things that: "The Muslim Brotherhood's cooperation with Mohamed ElBaradei is ... a hopeful sign." In the same article, he referred to Israel as "the main stumbling block."

The source of the rest of the organization's funding is murky, but Hilary Krieger of the Jerusalem Post and others have traced at least a portion back to Arab-Muslim sources in the Mideast and elsewhere.

Even before such disclosures concerning its funding, a review of J Street's website and published statements suggested a leftist slant regarding Israel and the so-called peace process. The bias was and is expressed, I believe, as patronizing criticism of Israel for taking actions that J Street does not deem to be in Israel's "long-term interests." Of course, the determination of Israel's long-term interests appears to be based on the presumption that more unilateral concessions and impossible restraint will solve the Arab-Israeli conflict. But this ignores the deadly results of such thinking in the past – as evidenced by the Intifada that followed the Oslo folly to the inevitable war following the unilateral disengagement from Gaza. (The lethal response to Israel's one-sided overtures is certainly one of the reasons that Israel's left-wing parties have been marginalized in the Knesset.)

The organization proclaims that it supports the Jewish State, but I believe such affirmations

are contradicted by its public positions and actions – and also by the presence among its executives and Advisory Council of persons with questionable track records concerning the Jewish State. This Advisory Council includes a number of individuals who belong to other organizations that have documented biases against Israel.

The Public Face of J Street

Any analysis of the organization must start with its Executive Director, Jeremy Ben-Ami, who has significant experience in both politics and government. Among other things, he served as Howard Dean's policy director during his presidential campaign, and he served under President Bill Clinton from 1992-1996, including two years as the President's Deputy Domestic Advisor. He also served on the board of Americans for Peace Now. As the Executive Director and spokesman, he's been the public face of J Street from its beginnings. Accordingly, many observers believe the organization's views can be gleaned from his many comments.

In J Street's early days in 2009, Mr. Ben-Ami was the subject of an on-line Q & A interview with the Israeli left-wing newspaper *Haaretz* in which he made some statements that should have given neutral observers pause.

When asked whether he supported negotiating with Hamas, for example, he had this to say:

Hamas as a significant political force in that society isn't going away. I found it very compelling that we were talking to a Lebanese government that included Hezbollah representation. Why wouldn't we do the same with a Palestinian government that includes Hamas and is willing to engage in negotiations and abide by the results? Don't forget 69% of Israelis support the Israeli government talking to Hamas.

There have been many reports, however, that poll results cited by J Street are often misleading or inaccurate. As reported by CAMERA and other organizations, objective polls at the time did not show that a majority of Israelis wanted negotiations with Hamas, whose charter then called for, and still calls for, the eradication of the State of Israel.

During that same Q & A with *Haaretz*, Mr. Ben-Ami had this to say regarding the war in Gaza:

We had reservations about the Israeli response in Gaza because we felt that, while military action was justifiable and understandable, the action as carried out was not in Israel's long-term interest.

Certainly a nation under military attack has every right to respond militarily, but we felt that the overwhelming military force used and the consequent devastation that it

caused did not advance Israel's interests. Hatred in Gaza was only deepened and anger in the broader Arab community heightened. Meanwhile, Israel's standing in the broader international community sunk even further. In return, none of the stated objectives of the operation were achieved as rocket fire wasn't stopped and Hamas remained in charge.

Left out of this analysis was any indication of what the organization believed Israel could have done differently that would have been consistent with her "long-term interests." Likewise, there was no indication of what those "long-term" interests actually were.

And when asked the organization's position on the so-called Arab peace initiative put forth by the Saudis, Mr. Ben-Ami had this to say:

Yes, we support the idea behind the Arab Peace Initiative – which is that resolution of the conflict needs to be regional and comprehensive. It should be possible for Israel to make peace not simply with its neighbors but with all 22 Arab nations and the broader Muslim world. The proposal is itself not a "peace plan" or a resolution of the conflict. It is an offer that lays out the basis for ultimate resolution to the conflict – which still leaves a lot to be negotiated.

Omitted from this colloquy was any discussion of the true nature of this so-called "peace initiative," which calls for Israel to retreat to indefensible borders, cede all of the Golan, and recognize the Arab "right of return." In return, Israel would receive nothing but the vague promise of "normalization" after these unilateral concessions. Significantly, "normalization" does not mean "recognition" and will include no acknowledgment that Israel is a Jewish nation in the historic Jewish homeland.

Furthermore, any insistence on the Arab "right of return" is consistent with the rejection of Jewish and Israeli sovereignty insofar as its purpose is to destroy Israel demographically as a Jewish nation. This is particularly poignant in light of the fact that any state of Palestine would have to be free of Jews. Thus, the Saudi plan would seem to promote ethnic cleansing.

J Street argues that being pro-Israel doesn't require one to agree with all actions of the Israeli government and military, and frankly the organization is correct on this point. There are many legitimate areas upon which supporters of Israel can disagree with the Israeli government and with each other. However, there's a world of difference between objective criticism of specific governmental policies and the acceptance of positions that are antithetical to Israel's continued viability and the safety of her people.

It's impossible to see how endorsing the Saudi plan could be "pro-Israel," particularly as it requires only Israel to make concessions, provides for neither recognition nor acknowledgment of Israel's Jewish character, and is inextricably tied to the subterfuge known as the "Arab right of return."

As to their meaning, I believe the foregoing statements speak for themselves and require no parsing. Now let's turn for a moment to J Street's Advisory Council.

J Street's Advisory Council

J Street's website describes its Advisory Council as including "over 160 prominent former public officials, policy experts, community and academic leaders." Two interesting names that immediately jump off the page are Marcia Freedman, the founder of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, and Steve Masters, the one-time president of that organization before its merger into J Street. If one can assume that their identification with Brit Tzedek provides insight into their views on Israel, then a review of that organization's goals and actions would seem to be a legitimate barometer of those views.

Among other things, Brit Tzedek collaborated with anti-Zionist groups in and around San Francisco, including the International Solidarity Movement. Brit Tzedek refused to identify itself as Zionist – which is curious for a group that claimed to support Israel's right to exist – and was reported to have criticized the singing of Hatikvah at a rally in support of the Annapolis Conference. It also lobbied against the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Bill in 2006, and accused the IDF of committing war crimes by using white phosphorous during the war in Gaza, even after the International Red Cross – which is no friend of Israel – determined that there was no evidence of war-crimes. Ask yourselves whether these kinds of activities are "pro-Israel."

Another interesting member of the Advisory Council was Ricken Patel, the co-founder and Executive Director of Avaaz.org., which describes itself as a "new global web movement with a simple democratic mission: to close the gap between the world we have, and the world most people everywhere want." A review of its website suggests that the organization is devoted to global left-wing causes. Avaaz claims to support a two-state solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, promotes the Palestinian national narrative, and fails to identify Arab rejectionism as a core obstacle to peace. How Avaaz truly regards Israel can be inferred from the statement it posted during the war in Gaza. The posting stated, in relevant part, as follows:

The people of Gaza are being squeezed to death. This week's blackouts have finally reached the attention of the world – and the international community could help end the

blockade. Our obligation is clear. This isn't about Israel vs Palestine or Hamas vs Fatah: this is about 1.5 million human beings locked up in the biggest prison on earth.... The humanitarian crisis of sealed-off Gaza is only getting worse, and a rain of missiles is falling.

Of course, Avaaz posted no such proclamations condemning Hamas for instigating the war by its daily missile barrages and terror attacks against Israeli civilians in the years following the disengagement from Gaza. Nor did it denounce Hamas for using Arab civilians as shields, or for locating artillery and other weaponry in homes, schools and hospitals. And last year it called for investigation into Israel's interception of the Gaza Flotilla. Again, ask yourselves – are these activities pro-Israel?

The Advisory Council also included Peter Edelman and Norman Rosenberg, who were, respectively, the Board Chair and former CEO of the New Israel Fund (“NIF”). That organization is known for, among other things, its support of radical groups that have attacked Jewish towns in Judea and Samaria. According to published reports, the NIF provided funds to Arab groups such as Adala, Mossawa, and the Arab Human Rights Association, which are committed to the destruction of Israel as a Jewish state. Adala, in particular, is uncompromising in its demand for an unlimited Arab “right of return,” which again is intended to destroy Israel demographically. Are these the actions of “pro-Israel” advocates?

The J Street Advisory Council also includes representatives of “Rabbis for Human Rights,” which was instrumental in organizing the “Jewish Fast for Gaza.” A description of the fast appears at the website www.fastforgaza.net and states in relevant part the following:

The Jewish Fast for Gaza is an ad hoc group of rabbis, Jews, and people of conscience who have committed to undertake a monthly daytime fast in support of the following goals:

1. To call for a lifting of the blockade that prevents the entry of civilian goods and services into Gaza;
2. To provide humanitarian and developmental aid to the people of Gaza;
3. To call upon Israel, the US, and the international community to engage in negotiations without pre-conditions with all relevant Palestinian parties – including Hamas – in order to end the blockade;
4. To encourage the American government to vigorously engage both Israelis and

Palestinians toward a just and peaceful settlement of the conflict.

In light of the foregoing statement of principles, the question shouting to be heard is this: Did the "Rabbis for Human Rights" sponsor fasts for the citizens of Sderot who were bombarded daily by the missiles launched by Hamas in Gaza? Did they fast in solidarity with Jews in the North of Israel when rockets rained down from Hezbollah in Lebanon? Can such an agenda objectively be represented as "pro-Israel"?

Further examples of the contradiction between J Street's actions and claims of fealty for Israel were evident at its first annual conference in 2009. One of the speakers at the convention was Salam Al-Marayati, the executive director of the Muslim Public Affairs Council, an organization that is clearly anti-Israel. In an account reported in the New York Times in September 2001, while the wreckage of the World Trade Center was still smoldering, Al-Marayati reportedly had this to say:

If we're going to look at suspects, we should look to the groups that benefit the most from these kinds of incidents, and I think we should put the state of Israel on the suspect list because I think this diverts attention from what's happening in the Palestinian territories so that they can go on with their aggression and occupation and apartheid policies.

How is providing a forum for somebody like Al-Marayati pro-Israel?

In addition to providing a forum for persons clearly hostile to Israel, J Street continues to advance themes that are inconsistent with Israel's continued safety and viability. Among other things, J Street has: (a) unfairly criticized Israel's action in Gaza; (b) demanded that Israel negotiate with Palestinians whose charters still demand her destruction; (c) ignored the history of Jewish habitation of Israel and the recognition of Jewish indigenous rights at the San Remo Conference of 1920 and under the Palestine Mandate of 1922; (d) advocated the creation of an unprecedented Palestinian state despite the Arab-Muslim refusal to acknowledge Jewish historical claims; and (e) stated its opposition to any military action by Israel to protect herself from the Iranian nuclear threat. Is the promotion of such counterintuitive policies "pro-Israel"? Can such policies even be considered "moderate"?

The only rational conclusion that can be drawn by anybody familiar with Jewish and Mideast history is that such positions are not pro-Israel. Indeed, many critics believe that they reflect the typical left-wing disdain for the Jewish State.

Perhaps one of the best proofs for this view was the convention participants' reception of

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, former President of the Union for Reform Judaism. Typical of many members of the Reform rabbinate, Yoffie is critical of Israel's so-called settlement policy. However, he also criticized J Street's blanket condemnation of Israel's defensive action in Gaza, and condemned Richard Goldstone for his shameful report for the U.N. Human Rights Council, which falsely accused Israel of war crimes in Gaza without a shred of objective proof. According to published reports, Rabbi Yoffie drew boos and hisses when he stated that, "Richard Goldstone should be ashamed of himself."

More than anything, the crowd's reaction to Rabbi Yoffie's criticisms appeared to evidence hostility to Israel and her right to defend herself against any attacks – whether from rockets launched by terrorists in Gaza or from the blood libel contained in the Goldstone report. Such conduct would seem to be neither moderate nor pro-Israel.

And what about those who argue that J Street's policies are consistent with the Jewish values of fairness and self-criticism? The organization is typical of those Jews who claim that left-wing values are the true expression of core Jewish beliefs, despite the historical antipathy of the political left to Jewish religion, culture and national aspirations. Left-wing political agendas are not synonymous with Jewish values; and indeed the political left today is home to much virulent anti-Zionism and antisemitism.

Do you need more examples? Then consider J Street's lobbying efforts in Congress following the "Gaza Flotilla" last summer. After Israel intercepted the flotilla, which was directed by armed belligerents, not peaceful protestors, some 87 Senators and 320 Representatives endorsed two letters to their respective Houses of Congress recognizing the flotilla's terrorist connections, calling for inquiry into the Turkish IHH and its links to Hamas, questioning Turkey's role in creating the crisis, and chastising the U.N. Human Rights Council for its knee-jerk condemnations of Israel. The letters supported Israel's right to defend herself and acknowledged the legality of her naval blockade.

In response, J Street sent its own correspondence to Congress urging Senators and Representatives not to endorse the letters supporting Israel drafted by their colleagues. By the way, although calling for investigation of Israeli actions during the flotilla incident, J Street said nothing after the dissemination of unedited video footage showed that the supposedly "peaceful protestors" were actually armed and that they attacked the Israeli personnel who boarded the vessel.

Sometime thereafter, J Street called on the Obama Treasury Department to launch an investigation into Jewish charities that support Jewish institutions in Judea and Samaria. In

a published statement attempting to justify this call for an assault on Jewish charities, the following statement from the executive director appeared on the J Street Blog:

J Street reiterates our ongoing concern over the intention and impact of American organizations and individuals that fundraise for settlement activity over the Green Line, including for many outposts that even the Israeli government considers illegal. Ongoing settlement construction is diminishing the chances of a two-state solution and endangering Israel's very future as a Jewish, democratic home. Funding such activity is both irresponsible and provocative.

("Statement on U.S. Tax Exempt Organizations' Funding of Settlement Activity," J Street Blog, July 6, 2010.)

This statement, however, only highlights the false premise that the Arab-Israeli conflict is a reaction to the so-called settlements and is being exacerbated by Israeli provocations. This explanation ignores the long history of Arab-Muslim rejectionism and antisemitism, which existed for generations before the repatriation of Jews to Judea and Samaria after 1967. Likewise, it ignores the three wars of annihilation waged against the Jews before the existence of any "settlements" and the war of attrition that has always existed between hot flare-ups. Finally, it ignores that only Israel has made any substantive concessions in the search for an elusive peace.

If the organization were truly concerned with preserving Israel's "future as a Jewish, democratic home," how could it endorse the Saudi "peace initiative," which calls for the demographic destruction of Israel and offers no guarantee of recognition? How does it justify providing forums for those who falsely claim, among other things, that Israel was complicit in the World Trade Center attacks? How does it excuse the rote condemnations of Israel for allegedly creating a "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza that has been shown not to exist? And finally, how does it rationalize lobbying against Congressional letters of support for Israel's right of self-defense?

Recent J Street Activities

A review of some of J Street's recent actions shows more of the same. As reported by FrontPage Magazine, for example, one of the guests in attendance at an event for J Street's South Florida chapter was Sofian Abdelaziz Zakkout, the former leader of a Hamas-related charity. According to the published report, he was welcomed with warm applause. Is that pro-Israel?

The organization also endorsed recent efforts to condemn Israel in the U.N. Security Council.

As reported by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Representative Gary Ackerman (D.NY) publicly revoked his support for J Street after it called on the Obama Administration to withhold its veto of a U.N. Security Council resolution regarding the “settlements.” In a Washington dateline, the JTA reported Congressman Ackerman’s change of position as follows:

“After learning of J Street’s current public call for the Obama Administration to not veto a prospective U.N. Security Council resolution that, under the rubric of concern about settlement activity, would effectively and unjustly place the whole responsibility for the current impasse in the peace process on Israel, and – critically – would give fresh and powerful impetus to the effort to internationally isolate and delegitimize Israel, I’ve come to the conclusion that J Street is not an organization with which I wish to be associated,” Ackerman (D-N.Y.) said in a statement Tuesday.

“The decision to endorse the Palestinian and Arab effort to condemn Israel in the U.N. Security Council is not the choice of a concerned friend trying to help . . . It is rather the befuddled choice of an organization so open-minded about what constitutes support for Israel that its brains have fallen out. America really does need a smart, credible, politically active organization that is as aggressively pro-peace as it is pro-Israel. Unfortunately, J Street ain’t it.”

(“Ackerman and J Street, the Full Exchange,” JTA, January 25, 2011.)

Clearly, J Street devotes considerable energy to chiding Israel for her supposed transgressions, but has it ever seriously criticized Islamist terrorism, acknowledged the existence and doctrinal basis of Muslim antisemitism, or challenged the historicity of Palestinian national claims? While it seeks governmental scrutiny of Jewish charities – which many believe to be similar to the way Jewish New Dealers lobbied the IRS to investigate the Bergson Group and other Jewish critics of Roosevelt during World War II – has it likewise demanded the investigation of charities that give aid and succor to Hamas, Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations?

Unfortunately, many Americans are ignorant of Jewish and Mideast history, and thus lack the tools to recognize the inconsistency of the claims of “pro-Israel, pro peace” camp, especially when juxtaposed against its questionable actions. Far too many folks are willing to accept at face value the claim of J Street’s supposed moderation simply because President Obama anointed it as a major American Jewish organization – despite its smaller constituency and, I submit, its philosophical deviation from the mainstream – and because they have come to believe in the two-state solution as political orthodoxy.

However, many secular progressives are unaware of polls showing that a majority of Palestinians actually reject the concept of permanent peace with a Jewish State. And those who believe in “two states for two peoples” are less inclined to recognize the discounting of Israeli sovereignty implied by the conflicting words and actions of the so-called “pro-Israel, pro-peace” camp. In order to understand the true orientation of such groups, then, it is necessary to expose the incongruity of the most seemingly neutral part of their agenda – the two-state solution – which will be discussed later in the program. If more people realize that this paradigm has no real historical basis, much of the “pro-Israel, pro-peace” illusion would fall away.

The Misapplication Of Civility

So what are sincere and informed Israel advocates left to do? Is it enough merely to educate those who naively accept the “pro-Israel, pro-peace” fantasy simply because they’re unaware of the disconnect between the claims and actions of its proponents? That’s a good question, with some thoughtful answers for another day. What I do know is that we have to stop exhibiting timidity when discussing these issues. We need to purge the ghetto mentality that causes many to put their own interests second to those of people who reject the very concept of Jewish sovereignty. And we need to stop giving free passes to their enablers in the name of free speech.

J Street is certainly free to provide a forum for any persons or groups to express whatever views they might have regarding Jews and Israel, no matter how odious. This is America, and we believe in the free exchange of ideas. However, those seeking to challenge such views in the interest of fairness should not be prevented from speaking out in support of Israel under the false pretense of “civility.” Restricting pro-Israel speech does not promote the free exchange of ideas. Rather, those who permit the presentation of slanted views regarding Israel by groups such as J Street need to be criticized for inconsistency when they refuse to grant equal time to opposing groups who truly support Israel for reasons of history and justice.

Thank you.

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