

Gloves Come Off: Israel Lobby Goes All-In for Syrian Intervention, While New York Times Self-Censors

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Today's the day I knew was coming. Despite the fact that Jodi Rudoren mistakenly said that the Lobby would maintain radio-silence about Obama's plan to strike Syria, I knew she was wrong. And she was. Today, Obama pulled out all the stops and the Jewish leadership responded: virtually all the major organizations [announced their support](#) for military intervention.

This statement by the hawkish, pro-Israel Conference of Presidents highlights the real reason for the turnabout:

...Failing to take action would damage the credibility of the US and negatively impact the effort to prevent Iran from achieving a nuclear weapons capacity.

So, Syria is really a sideshow. It's a sort of precursor to war against Iran. That's the main attraction and all Israel or the Jewish leadership cares about. All the mumbling about setting a moral example and parallels between Syria and Jews being gassed by the Nazis is a smokescreen. We want the Ayatollahs and we want 'em bad.

✘ Aipac will let loose a lobbying barrage that will leave few members of Congress uncertain about which way they're expected to vote (unless they're prepared for a primary challenge from an amply endowed pro-Israel opponent). It's safe to say that Obama is going to win this round handily. This will allow him the first opportunity in his presidency to bring the full force of U.S. military might on a Middle Eastern country. You'll recall a prior president who enjoyed that opportunity twice. Obama will score a big gain in his popularity ratings. Americans love a good Shock and Awe display. But they will soon come down to earth and wonder what we've gained from raining cruise missiles on Damascus. The answer will be: precious little.

An interesting sidebar to this story is a neat little bit of N.Y. Times self-censorship that [M.J. Rosenberg noted](#). In [this story](#), the following passage originally appeared, but then mysteriously disappeared, apparently a product of pre-emptive censorship:

Administration officials said the influential pro-Israel lobby group Aipac was already at work pressing for military action against the government of Mr. Assad, fearing that if Syria escapes American retribution for its use of chemical weapons, Iran might be emboldened in the future to attack Israel. In the House, the majority leader, Eric Cantor of Virginia, the only Jewish Republican in Congress, has long worked to challenge Democrats' traditional base among

Jews.

One administration official, who, like others, declined to be identified discussing White House strategy, called Aipac “the 800-pound gorilla in the room,” and said its allies in Congress had to be saying, “If the White House is not capable of enforcing this red line” against the catastrophic use of chemical weapons, “we’re in trouble.”

In its own explanation, the Times [noted](#) that the second paragraph had already appeared in an article the day before. Thus the paper was apparently trying to avoid redundancy. The public editor, Margaret Sullivan, [falsely stated](#) that the entire quotation had appeared previously: “the quotation remains in the earlier article.” It hadn’t, as I said. So why not retain the first paragraph?

I’d have thought the first paragraph was dropped both because it referred to Eric Cantor as Jewish (fear of the “A” word), and because it explicitly notes the muscular role Aipac was planning to play in the intervention debate. Aipac is notorious for not wanting its fingerprints to appear publicly. It prefers to operate off the radar as much as possible so when the shit hits the fan, it can’t be blamed for policy failures.

M.J., who worked for Aipac for ten years and knows the organization pretty damn well, believes there were explicit conversations between it and the Times and that it made its displeasure known at the negative portrayal in the offending passage.

On a related matter, yesterday the Russians announced that their early warning tracking system picked up a mysterious missile launch in the Mediterranean. The trajectory took the missile from its launch in the central Mediterranean to its fall in the eastern Mediterranean. Within hours, the Israeli government confirmed that it had launched a “Sparrow” missile in a routine test. The Sparrow is the missile used to test the Arrow anti-missile system. It’s the missile which the Arrow hunts and kills.

Frankly, there is something fishy about this story. Israel never intended for the launch to be public. But Russia called Israel’s bluff and did so. Either the Israelis tested a far more ambitious weapons system and lied about it being the Sparrow; or else they launched a missile as a shot across Assad’s (and Russia’s) bow, warning them that Israel would unleash its missile cache to defend from and respond to any Syrian attack.

Haaretz reporters, [writing](#) on behalf of their government sources, say Israel never dreamed of using the test as a warning to Syria. Again, I don’t buy it. If they didn’t, and the original government version of this report is true, then Netanyahu is an incredibly naïve figure who ratcheted up tension in a tinder box situation without even realizing how a missile test would be received by Israel’s enemies. Israel’s leadership is many negative things, but certainly not naïve.

Even if you accept the government version of events, the Israeli military exhibited extraordinary stupidity. It lit a match in an oil refinery. Luckily the whole place didn’t blow up. It could have.

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