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Israel Lobby Threatens Church Groups With Congressional Investigation Over Call for Restricting U.S. Military Aid to Israel

By Richard Silverstein
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richardsilverstein.com

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A coalition of U.S. church groups recently made public a letter which called upon the U.S. government to condition future military aid to Israel on its fulfillment of obligations under U.S. law. The statement was intended to express criticism of Israel's use of U.S. weapons like cluster bombs in violation of our law and noted that U.S. military assistance provided Israel a buffer against undertaking any actions to advance a just and lasting peace. For example, its settlement policy, refusal to return to 1967 borders, and refusal to share Jerusalem, all directly contradict international law and stated U.S. policy.

Though these church groups have been critical of Israeli policy in the past, threatening to lobby for withholding military aid would really cut the Israel lobby to the quick, as it's a position held by a number of anti-Zionist groups that are much farther to the left. The fact that mainline Christian denominations, who generally support liberal Zionist positions, would be moving in a more critical direction has to be deeply concerning to the lobby.

Though they refuse to consider or acknowledge it, such a development indicates a growing alienation of American churches from Israel and the draconian positions advanced by its government. The churches are willing to lose their interfaith dialogue with the Jewish community over such an issue, which indicates how seriously they take their opposition to the Netanyahu regime.

First to lash out in anger was (typically) Abe Foxman followed by one of Israel's leading hasbara outfits, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. It appears to be taking the lead in "handling" the BDS efforts of a number of the Christian denominations. As such, it's a key player in Israel's campaign against so-called "delegitimization." Those guys at JCPA play hardball. Not content merely to criticize the churches, they lashed out at the "anti-Judaism" elements within their ranks. They used terms like "vicious anti-Zionism," "relentless attacks on the Jewish state," and "delegitimizers of Israel" to up the ante and level of vitriol. They also threatened to call out the Congressional dogs through mounting investigations of the groups themselves:

> "JCPA is considering as a response asking Congress to investigate delegitimizers of Israel and to issue a resolution against their efforts."

I'm not sure what this is supposed to gain the lobby. Do they think that parishioners will be mortified to find their particular denomination is called out by name in a Congressional

resolution? Should these groups then call on their particular Congressional allies to respond tit for tat? Should we have a mini-religious war in the halls of Congress?

For anyone who still naively believes that J Street is a real force for progressive values regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, read M.J. Rosenberg's devastating critique of their decision to join the Israel lobby coalition denouncing the churches. People like M.J. make the mistake (in my opinion) of calling J Street "Aipac lite." I don't think J Street's allegiance is to Israel particularly. I think J Street is Obama's Jewish wing. They are nothing more than a cover for him pursuing the Jewish vote. They never deviate from administration positions on any matter related to Israel. They attacked the Goldstone report, opposed Palestinian statehood at the UN, and now join with Israel lobby hysterics in railing against Christians for insisting that Israel obey U.S. law in its use of American weapons systems. In each of these positions they've betrayed progressive values, which is why they deserve support from no Jews who support a just resolution of the conflict.

Also, read Alex Kane's excellent reporting here.

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