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Gregory S. Marx

The San Francisco Jewish Film Festival is the largest and most important event of its kind in America. This August, the film festival has sent off shock waves through the Jewish community. The festival's director, Peter Stein, scheduled the showing of Simone Bitton's documentary, "Rachel," an overly sympathetic version of the life and death of Rachel Corrie. Rachel Corrie, you may remember, was the twenty-three-year-old, Washington State student and International Solidarity Movement militant, who died in Gaza. An Israeli soldier accidentally killed her with a bulldozer as she was trying to stop the demolition of Hamas tunnels used to smuggle in weapons into Rafa, located on the southern section of the Gaza strip.

To appease the growing outrage against the showing of the film at a Jewish festival, the leaders invited Dr. Mike Harris, a respected physician and Israel activist, to make a ten-minute presentation to the audience before the showing of the two-hour documentary. You can see Dr. Harris' courageous attempt at bringing balance to the film on Youtube.

Harris reminds the audience of the other young people who died, not while taunting a bulldozer in a war zone, but for no other reason than standing on Israeli soil. The munitions for some of those deaths came

through the Gaza tunnels for which Rachel Corrie was willing to put her life on the line. Then there were the forgotten Rachels, Harris noted, young women with the same name who were victims of terrorism, who died while dancing at a disco or eating a pizza at a Sbarro in downtown Jerusalem.

In a revealing lack of civility, the audience, mostly Jews, kept interrupting Harris. Hisses, boos and jeers punctuated sentence after sentence. “Your time is up,” one woman yells out. “Doctor? More like Doctor of Death,” yells another female voice. The more effective Harris was, the more the audience booed.

The event was a hate fest with the audience cheering for Hamas, divestiture from Israel, and even Ahmadinejad. There were boos for any positive mention of Israel. Some of the Jews in the audience wore the Palestinian keffiyeh. Everyone gave the film a standing ovation. After the event, an elderly couple, the woman wearing an, “I love Israel,” pin was followed to their car and spat upon by these Jews in Keffiyehs. ¹

This past summer I learned that a group of left leaning rabbis announced a public Jewish fast, to “atone for the sins of the Jews State perpetrated against the people of Gaza.” You heard me. A Jewish fast to atone for the sins of Israel. Let them call out for justice. That’s fine. But

¹ Abraham H. Miller, “Fear and Self-Loathing at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival.” Pajamas Media.com; July 29, 2009

their sympathies were clearly with the people of Gaza, many of whom wish nothing but ill on the citizens of Israel. There was no mention from these rabbis about solidarity with the victims of terror, instead they focused on the their discomfort with Israel and her practices. This is not prophetic Judaism, as I'm sure they'd like to think of themselves. This is not about standing up for justice. This is something far more insidious.

It is a sad fact: we can be our own worst enemy. How easy it is to turn a healthy level of self-criticism into self-loathing. The Biblical prophets of old, criticized Israel for their moral failings, but they always spoke to the Jewish community out of love for their people. Sadly, I saw no such love amongst the Jews of the San Francisco Film Festival. Second, too often our own community simply doesn't have the right information. Rachel Corrie supported not freedom fighters who wanted their own state, but rather terrorists bent on destroying another. Her allies don't want to be integrated into Israel, as the blacks of South Africa did. They want to destroy Israel, refusing even to utter her name. And third, we better be prepared to stand up to defend Israel, not only to those who distain us from the outside, but now sadly to those who do from within.

This morning, I'm going to address four major issues that motivate the increasing hostility that we are seeing in so many places. These are painful issues, but we must confront them.

First, I want to talk about the settlements. As Ambassador Michael Oren said recently, "Settlements are an issue, they are not the issue." Settlements are going to be dismantled. I hope that there is a Palestinian state that lives side by side peacefully with Israel. I know that settlements are going to be taken down, in order to make that possible. But sadly, too many are focusing on Israeli settlements as the largest obstacle to peace.

Do we really accept that assertion? What about Iran, and its nuclear ambitions? What about Arab rejectionism? Most countries won't even utter the name of Israel. What about the consistent teaching of hate for Jews in thousands upon thousands of schools all across the Middle East? What about the messages to kill Jews being delivered from the pulpits of Gaza and West Bank? Aren't these obstacles to peace as well? Settlements are a problem, and I wish that Israel didn't insist on them, but they are not destroying prospects for peace.

Elliot Abrams, former deputy national security advisor, wrote in the Washington Post, "Ten years ago, in the Camp David talks, Prime Minister Ehud Barak offered Yasser Arafat approximately 94 percent of the West

Bank, with a land swap to make up half of the 6 percent Israel would keep. According to news reports, just (nine) months ago, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered 93 percent, with a one-to-one land swap. In the end, under the January 2009 offer, Palestinians would have received an area equal to 98 to 98.5 percent of the West Bank (depending on which press report you read), while 10 years ago they were offered 97 percent. Ten years of settlement activity would have resulted in a larger area for the Palestinian state.” Incidentally, the Palestinians rejected both offers of 97 and 98%.

Second, we need to talk about refugees. As a result of Israel’s creation, there were refugees on both sides of the conflict. About 700,000 Jews were expelled from Arab countries, and an equal number of Arabs left Israel and were placed in refugee camps, where they remain to this very day. Every Jewish refugee from Iraq, Iran or Yemen was settled in Israel. No Arab country (with the exception of some in Jordan) has taken in one Palestinian and given them citizenship in their country. Instead the Arabs wish to keep the problem festering, by keeping them in squalid refugee camps. Now, the Palestinians want to make this a pivotal issue in negotiations, claiming that Israel must repatriate every one of them and their descendants, which number over 4.2 million (according to the Palestinian narrative)

But Israel did not cause the Arab refugee problem. Israel did not fire the first shot of its war of independence. Israel was invaded by 5 neighboring armies who told the local populations to flee. Itamar Marcus and Nan Jacques Zilberdik of Palestinian Media Watch have done great service in collecting several examples of "Palestinian leaders, writers and refugees [who] have spoken out in the Palestinian media, blaming the Arab leadership for the creation of the Palestinian refugee problem."

Even Arab historians are beginning to admit that most Palestinians fled in 1948, not because they were expelled by the Israelis, but because they were told to leave by their own leaders. Some snippets:

* "The radio stations of the Arab regimes kept repeating to us: 'Get away from the battle lines. It's a matter of ten days or two weeks at the most, and we'll bring you back.'"

* "The 'Arab Salvation Army' came and told the Palestinians: 'We have come to you in order to liquidate the Zionists and their state. Leave your houses and villages, you will return to them in a few days safely. Leave them so we can fulfill our mission (destroy Israel) in the best way and so you won't be hurt.'"

* "Our District Officer issued an order that whoever stays in Palestine and in Majdel [near Ashkelon in southern Israel] is a traitor."

When a Palestinian State is created, and I think it should be, the refugees should be resettled there. Any attempt to resettle them in Israel proper would destroy Israel demographically and is totally unacceptable.

Third, Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of Israel. A divided city like Berlin of the 1960s is untenable. Open borders between a newly created Palestine will allow for free access of Palestinians from all over, including Gaza, into the heart of Israel. This is too great of a security risk. Second, Jews have been integrated all around the city, making it impossible to resegregate the city. What do you do with the tens of thousands of Jews living in cities like Gilo, Maaleh Adumim and Talpiot? Also, Israelis cannot return to pre-1967 borders where it was impossible to have access to Jewish holy places in the old city. Let's remember, pre-1967 the western wall was used by the Jordanians as garbage dump and every synagogue in the Jewish quarter was destroyed. The only solution must be giving partial access to the Temple Mount and to another section of the city thereby allowing the Palestinians to claim that as their capital.

Fourth, we must not allow our attention to be diverted away from Iran's nuclear ambitions. First the IAEA, the International Atomic Energy Agency claims that Iran is continuing to test more advanced centrifuge designs in order to reach its ultimate goal of 55,000 centrifuges. Such a

capability would enable Iran to produce enough highly enriched uranium for up to 50 nuclear warheads per year. And let's never forget that Israel is according to the Iranians, a one-bomb country. Second, the mere existence of an Iranian nuclear weapon would enable Iran to shelter its terrorist proxies from reprisals, persuade its neighbors to further distance themselves from the US and export its radical theology. Third, since 2006, more than a dozen Middle Eastern nations have announced plans for their own nuclear energy programs, citing "economic concerns." The Saudis and the Egyptians are more concerned with a nuclear Iran than the Israelis are. Imagine the conflict in Iraq between Sunnis and Shiites expanding throughout the Middle East with the largest Shiite nation possessing a nuclear arsenal. Egyptian President Mubarak declared, "the Persians are trying to devour the Arab states." Morocco recently severed relations with Iran, citing Tehran's effort to spread its own version of Shiite Islam in the predominantly Sunni country. Fourth, Ahmadinejad has said that Iran is building new rockets that can travel farther than their current missiles, which have a range of 1,000 miles. This is the same man who has said Israel should be wiped off the face of the earth. To make matters worse, last month, Ahmadinejad appointed an internationally wanted terrorist, the

mastermind of the attack on the Jewish Center in Buenos Aires in 1984, as his Minister of Defense.

Some believe that we should ignore Iran. Israel and the US are poorly equipped to confront them militarily. Israel is too small and the US is over taxed in Iraq and Afghanistan. Others think that an attack is inevitable. Israeli leaders have often said that they will not tolerate a nuclear Iran. That is a terrifying option. A third option is more engagement. This is Obama's strategy. Frankly, I have little faith in this plan. As we saw from this summer and the stolen elections, this is a rogue regime, with little interest in truth, diplomacy or compromise. There is a fourth option, and that is more sanctions. Congress should pass the **Iran Refined Petroleum Sanctions Act** and the **Iran Sanctions Enabling Act**, both of which are currently under consideration in Congress. The first would limit Iran's ability to import and produce gas and diesel. The second would authorize state and local governments to divest from companies investing in Iran. This is, in my opinion the best option.

Let me return to where I began this morning. How could it be that a group of Jews at a Jewish film festival would shout down, insult a man who was merely trying to bring balance to the conflict? How could we get to a

point where a group of Jews, dressed in keffiyehs would accost an elderly Jewish couple for supporting Israel?

Many of you have shared with me your growing ambivalence about Israel. And I'm glad you do. I empathize with you. Some of you have told me that you feel more comfortable in a European city with its liberal bent that you do in Jerusalem with its religious, oftentimes stifling pious culture. You are becoming increasingly pained with images to tanks confronting youths throwing stones. You don't know how to explain the need for a 20-foot security wall, at times dividing cities in two. For some that ambivalence is now morphing into open hostility. I too can be critical of Israel. I think the settlements should stop, but I also believe that our support of Israel is essential to her survival.

Sometimes husbands and wives grow out of love with each other after seeing too many of each other's flaws. But if they want to save the marriage, they must work at falling back in love with each other. Dates, honest talks, and remembering the beginning of their relationship will help. We must do the same with Israel. We must go to Israel. We must speak with Israelis and learn about the issues. We must remind ourselves why Israel exists and what the world was like for Jews before 1948. We must never allow our love of Zion to die. For 2,000 years we kept that love alive,

when there was no state. Now that there is one, we must not lose our nerve, our passion, or our commitment.

The time has come to reenergize ourselves in active Zionism. First, we must **educate ourselves**. We can read, go to the Internet, and bring ourselves up to speed. It's as easy as going to AIPAC.COM, or going to an AIPAC policy conference. We are also going to begin to communicate with our youth by sending them regular emails about the Middle East. If we don't have your child's email address, please send it me. Second, we must **speak out in defense of Israel**, not only to those who are not Jewish, but now it seems to those who are. We must not be timid. We need to speak to our friends and our co-workers, and do our best to inform and persuade. Third, we must continue to **engage our legislators** and to support those who understand our concerns. We must **join our dedicated Israel committee** and help them to educate, elucidate and motivate.

It is from the synagogue that we have long been at the forefront of political activism. It is from the synagogues that the Jewish community called attention to the horrors of the Holocaust, marched in support of Soviet Jewry and remembered captured or missing Israeli soldiers. There are many places that are well equipped to defend Israel in her fight for survival. But I believe that the synagogue is its most effective tool in the US. This is where

the Jews are. This is where the passion is. This is where all of those worthwhile organizations come to recruit members. Beth Or is not only a place to educate and to pray, it must be a proactive community that is engaged in the world in order to make a meaningful difference.

Back in 1991, Avrum Harman, former Ambassador to the United Nations and President of the Hebrew University, said to a Jewish audience, “If I have one regret in all that I have done for this country, it is the many times over the years that I addressed Jews and said to them: this is the most challenging time in Israel’s history. This is the most dangerous time in Israel’s history. This is the most exciting time in Israel’s history. I’ve said that so many times over the years, in ’48 and in ’67, with the PLO and Lebanon and the Intifada, I regret having ever said it. Because the truth is, right now is the most difficult, exciting and challenging time in the history of the State of Israel.” That was in 1991!

That’s the way it is with our people. The time, it seems has always been urgent. But therein lies the miracle of Israel. We have always faced crises. We have always thought that today is the worst when compared to the past. But remember: Israel has survived. Israel survived its war of liberation where it lost 6000 people. We survived a Yom Kippur War where we lost 2,522 of our best and finest. We survived terrorist attacks in Munich

and Maalot and in Kiryat Shemona and countless other places. We survived the hijacking of a plane full of Jews and rescued them in Entebbe. We survived Scud missiles, Qassam rockets, bus bombings and suicide bombers. And we will survive Achmandinajab, Simone Bitton and the depressing lack of faith made evident in San Francisco.

We must not lose faith. We must not lose hope. We must not fall out of love. We have come so far. The fight for a lasting peace must continue with Beth Or and others like us, forging the way.