

The Impotence of Power

BY ALON BEN-MEIR

During the past several months, on numerous occasions I have accused the Carter Administration of lacking moral courage. However, moral courage, when related to the actions or inactions of a government, should not be interpreted as adventurous or reckless behavior.

The fact that the Khomeini government dared to challenge the U.S. government is predicated on past experience where the U.S. has been a true "helpless giant." The creeping capitulation to the oil kingdoms; the equivocation on the stationing of a Russian combat brigade in Cuba; and above all, the abandonment of the Shah himself in Iran which led to his downfall, all demonstrate weak and ill-conceived American foreign policy.

These and other experiences of American capitulation in the face of real or imagined threats have convinced the Khomeini regime that the U.S. lacks not only moral courage, but by now, national purpose. Listening to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance deliver a plea to "anyone who can help" is not only a pathetic development, but indeed, a revolting one. How can a nation of this size, power, and international stature afford to appear so helpless and hapless? If, in the face of a minor threat such as the current one in Iran, this administration loses its composure, how will President Carter act, for example, if the Soviet Union poses a serious threat?

Certainly, every rational person wants to save the lives of our countrymen in Iran. However, the question is: at what price should this be accomplished? To add insult to injury, U.S. officials were instructed to open seek the "help"

of the PLO if their intervention on our behalf would secure the release of the American hostages unharmed. Indeed, it is a sad day for America and a black day for its basic values when a terrorist organization, which has undermined American interests and position worldwide, is now asked to save our pride. How low can America sink and how far will we go in abandoning every moral code under the guise of saving American lives?

I do not advocate sacrificing the lives of some 60 American hostages in Iran on the altar of morality. Yet who is to say that these lives will be lost if we do hold to our moral codes and principles?

The Iranian government stands to lose much more than the U.S. if we act firmly and decisively rather than seeking the assistance of "anybody who can help," a position which only reaffirms our impotence, ineptitude, and inability to deal with crises.

Tens of thousands of Iranians reside in this country, and billions of dollars of Iranian funds are deposited in our banks. Iranian

military personnel and scores of other civilian diplomats also live in the U.S. It is outrageous to give the Iranian government an ultimatum demanding the release of the American hostages.

Regardless of how this sad episode at the American Embassy in Iran ends, the question is, will the American people be awakened to the bitter reality and learn from this lesson? As awesome as the experience and outcome in Iran might be, I dread the tomorrows. How will the enemy survey our conduct? How can we reconcile this national humiliation with our responsibility toward our allies who look to us for guidance and protection? Yes -- I dread the tomorrows. The only half-consolation I have is that perhaps the American people will use this experience to express their outrage at and abhorrence of this situation when they cast their ballots next November. Will the American people heed the call and exercise what remains of their tradition and values and say: "We've had it!" We have had it, Mr. President.

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PUBLISHER SAYS JEWS IMPORTANT

NEW YORK (WNS) -- Jacobo Timerman, the Argentine Jewish publisher and editor who was recently released from house arrest after years of worldwide protest and who now resides in Israel, said in a taped interview that "it is very important to be a Jew. After that we can discuss all the other points."

The interview at the United Jewish Appeal headquarters here, conducted by Rabbi Mark Golub, will be broadcast on a syndicated radio program over WMCA and also aired in Palm Beach, Florida, and Tucson, Arizona, under the auspices of local Federations and with UJA assistance. Timerman will receive the UJA-David Ben Gurion Award at the UJA national conference at Lincoln Center, December 7 for his "struggle against oppression and for the right to live a Jewish life."

Timerman said in his interview that the decision of Soviet Jews to fight for their right to be Jews "is something that I think we don't realize the importance of." He said Soviet Jews show "to us" that Jews really "can survive."



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