

# THE JEWISH ADVOCATE®

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## Our leaders: tame as lambs

We, undersigned members and representatives of the Russian Jewish community of Massachusetts, are writing to express our deep concerns about the state of affairs in our community. Enemies of Israel and of the Jewish people are raising their heads without much resistance from the part of organizations that are supposed to defend us. Here are examples:

- In January, 54 Democratic congressmen wrote a letter criticizing the Jewish state, six of them from Massachusetts.
- During the past decade radical Islamists took over the peaceful and historically tolerant Muslim community in the Commonwealth, building mosques with questionable terrorist affiliations that are providing safe haven to preachers of hate.
- Jewish students are harassed on campuses.
- Radical anti-Israel organizations like J Street are brazenly claiming and getting their seat at the community table.
- Cases of terrorist activities by Muslim youth, influenced by radical hate propaganda, are increasing in Massachusetts.

Granted, each time, when they are confronted with the facts, Islamists have a tale to tell: “Jihad is a way for self-improvement; a gun mentioned in a talk, is not a real gun, but gun of prayer; killing Jews means killing only some Jews.” Big comfort!?

Our leaders’ goodwill and credulity have no limits when it comes to Islamist radicals. Everything changes, though, when dissent comes from within the community. Just look at the vicious attack unleashed by self-selected community leadership on Charles Jacobs. While official Jewish leadership was silent, the media oblivious or intimidated, Jacobs and his group of volunteers have been providing well-documented facts about the danger of Islamist hate surrounding us. Our Jewish leaders, who were as tame as lambs in front of the Islamists, roared as lions against this brave and lonely voice of dissent.

Back in the Soviet Union, authorities would put a man like Jacobs behind bars for anti-Soviet propaganda. In the United States we are dismayed by attempts to ostracize and silence him.

We demand a community-wide dialog about the current situation. We must discover what our leaders knew, when they knew it and why they failed to act. Ary Rotman, (president, Russian Jewish Community of Massachusetts) Alex Koifman, (president, Boston for Israel) Greg (Zvi)

Margolin, (editor and publisher of Jewish Russian Telegraph) Inessa Rifkin, (founder and principal, Russian School of Mathematics) Leonid Komarovsky, (president of Boston Russian Media Group) Michael Sherman, (professor of biochemistry, Boston University)

*The letter was signed by 81 others.*

## Who can we trust?

The controversy about the Islamic Society of Boston is a local one, but it touches on an issue that is both global and ancient. This is illustrated by a verse of Psalms that is part of the Ashrei prayer. The verse is translated in a Conservative prayer book as “destroy all wickedness” and by the Orthodox as destroy the “wicked.” There is a big difference.

The difference is between battle and engagement. This dichotomy was very much in evidence at the meeting June 24 at Newton’s Beth El synagogue called by Charles Jacobs’ Americans for Peace and Tolerance. It presented the evidence that many leaders of the ISB have associations with Islamic supremacist groups.

The theme of the evening was that Islamic institutions should be engaged only after they convincingly rid themselves of such associations. As one might predict from the different translations in prayer books, the rabbis in attendance were almost exclusively Orthodox. The opposing view, championed by many Reform and Conservative rabbis, is that Jews should engage with Islamic leaders and use persuasion to advance tolerance.

The Orthodox are right about the translation in the Ashrei of the phrase from Psalm 145:20 “et kol hareshaim yashmid.” However, Conservatives can cite Psalm 104:35, which uses the formulation they grafted into their Ashrei translation. Furthermore, that formulation was the one invoked by the sage Bruriah in Talmudic times to convince her husband, Rabbi Meir, to engage with troublemakers rather than pray for their death.

In modern times, the same issue is at the crux of our foreign policy. General David Petraeus, who wrote the book on counterinsurgency, divides insurgents into “reconcilables” and “irreconcilables.” His approach straddles the Orthodox-Conservative divide, making reconcilables part of the solution.

The hard part is deciding who is reconcilable. We need the wisdom to decide which Islamic leaders are best shunned, and which should be engaged. The first step toward such wisdom is to move beyond meetings and petitions of opposing camps of Jews. Within our community we need engagement, not shunning. Before we can agree on opinions, we need to start by assembling the facts, and discussing them together.

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