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JEWES WORRY BARACK OBAMA IS ANOTHER JIMMY CARTER, ASSERTS FORMER AIPAC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR NEAL SHER

Domestic issues, not Israel, drive Jewish voters -- *Washington Post* Political Columnist Dana Milbank

American Jews are afraid to critique the black community -- USA Radio Commentator Micah Halpern

April 1, 2008 (Fort Lee, NJ) -- In a Shalom TV program exclusive focusing on Barack Obama and his relationship to his longtime pastor, the Reverend Jeremiah Wright, Jr., former AIPAC Executive Director Neal Sher says that what concerns many in the American Jewish community is that "Barack Obama is 'Jimmy Carter revisited.'"

Sher explains that while Obama publicly rejected Reverend Wright's characterization of Israel as a "state sponsor of terror," he did not reject the man. Sher believes this leaves questions unanswered.



"What concerns me is that...[Obama] said he's known this man, who was his spiritual advisor, a mentor, [and] never saw him display anti-Semitism, racism, hatred," reports Sher. "Frankly, I can't accept that. If you are that close to a man for two decades, it defies credulity to think that Wright wouldn't come out with something that showed he harbored those views. If he could not see this in the reverend, I have to wonder about that." For Sher, the issue is not guilt by "association;" it is guilt by "relationship."

In a phone interview, *Washington Post* Political Columnist Dana Milbank, who also appears regularly on MSNBC, believes that "we can do better than guilt by association in politics. That just comes with the territory. Obama's policies regarding Israel are largely indistinguishable from Senator McCain's, [and] certainly different from those we've seen in Reverend Wright's vociferous sermons.

"It's the same for Hillary Clinton with respect to things said by Geraldine Ferraro. And John McCain has some rather outspoken pastors supporting him," acknowledges Milbank. "You will always attract people who are not necessarily savory characters."

Syndicated columnist and radio commentator Micah Halpern, another Shalom TV program guest, feels it's easy for Obama to say, "What Wright said was wrong, and what Wright did was wrong. Going to Libya was wrong. Meeting with Farrakhan was wrong. I don't agree with these things.

"It's harder to say, 'this influence on me has been detrimental,'" Halpern continues. "If he doesn't do that, then all hope is lost in terms of support from the Jewish world, and that includes Jewish financial support.

"From the Jewish perspective, he has to make a trip to Israel. He's got to make very clear stands on Israel and he's got to absolutely repudiate not just the single message of Wright, but the general concept of disunity that Wright creates."

However Milbank, an award-winning former White House correspondent, contends that "Jews are voting not because of Israel but because of domestic American interests. American Jews in the last four presidential elections have voted

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80%—and in some instances, 90%—for Democrats, whereas Republicans have generally taken a harder line on foreign policy."

Commenting on the remaining Democratic and Republican presidential hopefuls—senators McCain, Clinton, and Obama—Milbank finds "the overall Israel policies are largely the same. There's not a whole lot of distinction between the three. When you get to the question of Israel, they do their best to outdo each other in fealty and support."

"The bottom line," per Milbank, "is the number of Jews who are basing their vote, in this election, on the question of Israel is a very tiny number."

Neal Sher and Micah Halpern both maintain that Obama should have resigned his church membership once Reverend Wright's comments became public.

"If I had a rabbi who, from the pulpit, said the equivalent of what Wright said, I'd be out of that synagogue," remarks Sher.

But Dana Milbank quotes former US Ambassador to Israel Dan Kurtzer, who came to Obama's defense by pointing out that Jews can belong to a temple where they feel like "strangling the rabbi" but often remain for other reasons, such as other synagogue members or the religious school.

"And that essentially was Obama's answer," explains Milbank. "There were larger reasons for his relationship with Wright and for his affiliation with that church."

"Can you imagine if John McCain or Hillary Clinton had a similar association with someone who had praised David Duke?" observes Sher. "There would be a firestorm. It would sink McCain. [McCain or Clinton] would sink like a rock." Part of American Jewry's reticence to call out Obama may stem from a fear of challenging the black community, suggests Halpern. "The Jewish community is petrified to critique the black community; they were afraid to raise questions; of being labeled 'racist.'"

"The Jewish community is not doing itself any favors by saying 'I don't want to be accused of being a racist, so I'm not going to raise this,'" agrees Sher. "If you had someone Jewish who made comments that were troubling to the black community [or] the Hispanic community, their leaders would go after that candidate. They wouldn't be afraid of being charged with anti-Semitism."

Shalom TV is a mainstream Jewish cable television network available nationally on Comcast; in New York and New Jersey on Time Warner; and in Pennsylvania on Blue Ridge Communications. The free English-language "Video On Demand" network features news and event coverage, a Jewish film festival, Israel updates and travelogues, kids programs, and Jewish studies. Shalom TV's offices and production facilities are located in the New York City metropolitan area.

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