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Subject: Schumer on HRC, PJ & Israel

From Ben Smith today:

Schumer: Obama's 'counter-productive' Israel policy 'has to stop'

New York Senator Chuck Schumer harshly criticized the Obama Administration's attempts to exert pressure on Israel today, making him the highest-ranking Democrat to object to Obama's policies in such blunt terms.

Schumer, along with a majority of members of the House and Senate, signed on to letters politely suggesting the U.S. keep its disagreements with Israel private, a tacit objection to the administration's very public rebuke of the Jewish State over construction in Jerusalem last month.

But Schumer dramatically sharpened his tone on the politically conservative Jewish Nachum Segal Show today, calling the White House stance to date "counter-productive" and describing his own threat to "blast" the Administration had the State Department not backed down from its "terrible" tough talk toward Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Schumer, a hawkish ally of Israel since his days as a Brooklyn Congressman, described "a battle going on inside the administration" over Middle East policy.

"This has to stop," he said of the administration's policy of publicly pressuring Israel to end construction in Jerusalem.

"I told the President, I told Rahm Emanuel and others in the administration that I thought the policy they took to try to bring about negotiations is counter-productive, because when you give the Palestinians hope that the United States will do its negotiating for them, they are not going to sit down and talk," Schumer told Segal. "Palestinians don't really believe in a state of Israel. They, unlike a majority of Israelis, who have come to the conclusion that they can live with a two-state solution to be determined by the parties, the majority of Palestinians are still very reluctant, and they need to be pushed to get there.

"If the U.S. says certain things and takes certain stands the Palestinians say, 'Why should we negotiate?'" Schumer said.

Schumer described the recent confrontation over construction in Jerusalem as a "kerfuffle."

"Israel apologized and when Biden left, and Biden is the best friend of Israel in the administration [and] everything was fine," Schumer said. "But then what happened is the next day Hillary Clinton called up Netanyahu and talked very tough to him, and worse they made it public through this spokesperson, a guy named Crowley. And Crowley said something I have never heard before, which is, the relationship of Israel and the United States depends on the pace of the negotiations."

Schumer was referring to State Department spokesman PJ Crowley's description of Clinton's conversation with Netanyahu, in which he said that Clinton "made clear that the Israeli government needed to demonstrate not just through words but through specific actions that they are committed to this relationship and to the peace process."

"That is terrible," Schumer said today. "That is the dagger because the relationship is much deeper than the disagreements on negotiations, and most Americans—Democrat, Republican, Jew, non-Jew--would feel that. So I called up Rahm Emanuel and I called up the White House and I said, 'If you don't retract that statement you are going to hear me publicly blast you on this,'" Schumer said.

Schumer said the White House had backed off that statement, but that now "many of us are pushing back, some of the Jewish members will be meeting with the President next week or the week after, and we are saying that this has to stop."

"You have to show Israel that it's not going to be forced to do things it doesn't want to do and can't do. At the same time you have to show the Palestinians that they are not going to get their way by just sitting back and not giving in, and not recognizing that there is a state of Israel," Schumer said. "And right now there is a battle going on inside the administration, one side agrees with us, one side doesn't, and we're pushing hard to make sure the right side wins and if not we'll have to take it to the next step."

The full transcript of Segal's interview with Schumer is after the jump.

Chuck Schumer Interview with Nachum Segal 4/22/10

Nachum Segal: Straight to what has become one of the most concerning issues in the Jewish Community certainly, and for anybody in the United States, and anywhere in the world who cares somewhat, or more, about Israel. There is a perception that the White House and Jerusalem are not enjoying the same type of relationship that the White House and Jerusalem have enjoyed in the past. Need we be concerned?

SCHUMER: Well of course we should be concerned, and the thing we should most be concerned about, of course, the threat to Israel... I mean it always changes but it's always there it seems to be the fate if Israel and it seems to be the fate of the Jewish people. Right now what are the threats? I would rank them in this order: Greatest threat- Nuclear Iran, obviously as Netanyahu has said that's an existential threat. Second greatest threat- SCUDs in Syria these are rockets that can go four or five hundred miles and carry a bigger payload and could be launched by Hezbollah and hit any part of Israel far more damaging and devastating than the katyusha rockets. And third actually is what everyone is focused on, which is the disagreements between the United States and Israel, very real, on how to sit down and negotiate with the Palestinians. The irony is Nachum, on the first two, if you talk to the Prime Minister if you talk to the Israeli military, US-Israeli cooperation continues strong and hand in glove. Both the US and Israel greatly fear a nuclear Iran, and there are very serious discussions going on as to how to deal with it. We in the Congress Senator Lieberman and myself, Senator Bayh, are working up our sanctions bill, which even if the UN sanctions are weak we could have unilateral sanctions by the United States, for instance, if you cut of

gasoline. Iranians do not produce their own gasoline, and by the way the Iranian people are ready to rebel and overthrow this regime, and if we would squeeze them economically that could happen.

SEGAL: If in fact all this is true, and let's assume there is no reason not to believe that it's true, that in fact Israel and the United States continue the same cooperation level they have had in the past, and we know that when it comes to serious matters, especially military matters, it's been great cooperation, Why wouldn't the President of the U.S. want that perception to be out there? Why would he want to alienate so many who care about Israel.

SCHUMER: Nachum this is the question I talked to Rahm Emanuel about, and the President about this week. I told the President, I told Rahm Emanuel and others in the administration that I thought the policy they took to try to bring about negotiations is counter-productive, because when you give the Palestinians hope that the United States will do its negotiating for them, they are not going to sit down and talk. Palestinians don't really believe in a state of Israel, they, unlike a majority of Israelis, who have come to the conclusion that they can live with a 2-state solution to be determined by the parties, the majority of Palestinians are still very reluctant, and they need to be pushed to get there. If the U.S. says certain things and takes certain stands the Palestinians say, "Why should we negotiate?" So that's bad and that should change and we are working on changing it. But the other two are very good, according to both the Israeli government and the Israeli military and the U.S. government. But we should make that known, why don't they? I asked them to do just that, I said we should make it public because it will, at least, give people, who are supportive of Israel, Jew and non-Jew alike, a little bit of solace.

SEGAL: That I agree with. But then you see the Gates memo which has become its own sort of entity out there, and you wonder about what type of support the United States could give Israel if, god-forbid, they were attacked by Iran.

SCHUMER: I do think that this administration, like previous ones, realizes a nuclear Iran is devastating and is a very bad thing. By the way, not just for Israel but for the whole Middle-East and for world peace and I think they're working strenuously to avoid it. They are having more success in this area than the previous administration, they are trying to get some of the Europeans, and even the Russians and Chinese to impose sanctions, but we are moving in the Senate and the house to achieve any unilateral action that the U.S. can take. If we tell any major oil company that if they sell gasoline to Iran, directly or indirectly, they can't sell any oil product in the U.S., then they will stop selling gasoline to Iran and the Iranian economy will have real problems. This will, at the very minimum, divert the leadership from their nuclear strategy and could bring down the regime. This is important and good. Let's talk about the bad. Let's talk about, what I'm sure your listeners are most aggravated about, is what's happened in the last while in Israel. Let me say this: things were going pretty well, until a couple of months ago, for this reason—the Netanyahu administration, with money from the U.S., had gotten the PA on the west bank to have their own police force and have them come down on the terrorists, for their own self interest not to protect the Jewish people. It has worked, not only are there fewer killings of Jews on the Israeli side of the fence, but there are many fewer in the other side because there is a Palestinian police force and they have put those terrorists in line. As a result Israel has been able to take down 27 of the checkpoints and as a result of that there is some economic growth in the west bank. Its growing at 7-8%, Netanyahu brags that -- when he came here I spent a lot of time with him -- That there are multiplex theatres in places like Ramallah and Janeen. At the same time that is happening, there is prosperity with the more moderate Palestinian Authority in the

west bank, and Hamas in Gaza is being squeezed and people there are doing very badly. Not only because Israel has blocked off the border and not let anything into Gaza, and I support Israel in doing that, and it may be tough on the Palestinian people, but when they vote for Hamas they are going to have to suffer the consequences. But also because Egypt is preventing all the tunnels from going under the Gaza-Egyptian border, not so much because they want to help Israel but they don't want the terrorists infiltrating from Gaza into Egypt. So the Palestinians were beginning to see those who talked about living in coexistence with Israel, and not terrorism, and not wiping it out, such as the PA on the west bank would do better, and those who talked about destroying Israel, and shooting rockets into it were doing horrible.

SEGAL. I don't think the checkpoint and open highway point is one we are going to agree on Senator. But I want to move to another hot point which is Syria, it seems, and I'm not sure how many people would consider these confirmed reports or not and I'm sure you know more about this than I do, but Syria is making sure that Hezbollah, north of Israel is being armed with SCUD missiles at this point. And you know that Washington is making efforts to try and strengthen the diplomatic relationship with Syria. Do you think that's outrageous?

SCHUMER: I do, and think that's stopped. They are working very hard to put pressure on the Syrians both diplomatic and then maybe economic, to stop this and it's intolerable and that has to change. Let me just finish this dialogue about Israel for a minute. All we have to do is leave things alone, and you might get the Palestinians more willing to sit down and actually discuss peace because they would see the contrast. When Biden was in Israel and there was this kerfuffle over settlements which is in Israeli Jerusalem 5 minutes from downtown and should never have been an issue to begin with, but they probably shouldn't have made the announcement when Biden was there. But Israel apologized and when Biden left, and Biden is the best friend of Israel in the administration everything was fine. But then what happened is the next day Hillary Clinton called up Netanyahu and talked very tough to him, and worse they made it public through this spokesperson, a guy named Crowley. And Crowley said something I have never heard before, which is, the relationship of Israel and the United States depends on the pace of the negotiations. That is terrible. That is the dagger because the relationship is much deeper than the disagreements on negotiations, and most Americans—Democrat, Republican, Jew, non-Jew--would feel that. So I called up Rahm Emanuel and I called up the White House and I said, "If you don't retract that statement you are going to hear me publicly blast you on this." Of course they did retract it. Now what's happened, and many of us are pushing back, some of the Jewish members will be meeting with the President next week or the week after, and we are saying that this has to stop. You have to have, in terms of the negotiations, you have to show Israel that it's not going to be forced to do things it doesn't want to do and can't do. At the same time you have to show the Palestinians that they are not going to get their way by just sitting back and not giving in, and not recognizing that there is a state of Israel. And right now there is a battle going on inside the administration, one side agrees with us, one side doesn't, and we're pushing hard to make sure the right side wins and if not we'll have to take it to the next step.

SEGAL: You know Senator Schumer, the perception among New York state residents, and I'm one of them as you know, is there likely is no one closer in the Senate to the President than you.

SCHUMER: That's not quite true, but I have an ear and frankly I spent time on the phone just yesterday talking to him about this, and telling him that I didn't quite understand the United States policy, because even if the goal is to bring about talks of peace, it was counter-productive because it's encouraging the Palestinians not to sit down.

SEGAL: More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of the Senate, including a lot of democrats, signed the letter to Sec. of State Clinton rebuking the administration for these confrontational stances toward Israel. Were you surprised that names like Kerry, Dodd, Durbin, Leahy and Reid were not included in that letter?

SCHUMER: well I think Senator Reid signed the letter, some didn't sign but the majority of both parties signed. And we'll have other letters and other meetings to keep pushing that. I think you can say there are a handful of people who are not sympathetic to Israel in the Senate of each party, but 90% of the Senate is overwhelmingly in support of Israel. And one of my jobs, as you know is to rally those forces to do strong poll work for this year (couldn't hear this part perfectly). Believe me I think the policy has to change, and I'm working hard to make it change and I think it will. Every administration at the beginning has this view even Ronald Reagan, the best friend Israel ever had, do you remember his first 2 years?

When George Schultz wanted to sell AWACs to Saudi Arabia? Every administration has this idea to talk tough to Israel and make nice to the Arabs and the Palestinians and that's the way to bring about peace. It's counter-productive, it's actually the opposite. The only way the Palestinians will sit down and talk is if they know Israel and the United States are as close as could be. And each administration learns it. Schultz had to learn it and Reagan had to learn it. Clinton did it in the early years and later became a very good friend of Israel. George Bush the first did it and never got over it, (SEGAL laughing muffles SCHUMER). We are at a crucial moment here and I am hopeful that administration will see the right way to go. I am working on it. I don't believe that have made any definitive decision, and as I have said on both Iran on Syria there is close cooperation, you can check with your Israeli contacts Nachum and they will confirm that. So we just have to get this third part right and I'm working hard to do it and I'm optimistic that that can happen.

SEGAL: Good to hear that. Finally Senator, just for our own curiosity, just like the most recent justice appointed to the Supreme Court, will the next one also be a New Yorker?

SCHUMER: I don't know. I would like it to be, I recommended the first one. I have 3 criteria for Supreme Court Justices: they should be legally excellent, they should be moderate as is typical of my politics I don't want too far right or far left, and diversity, which means different ethnic groups and everything else. Luckily in terms of Jewish people we have good representation in terms of the Supreme Court. That will continue. One thing I want to assure your listeners

Nachum, my name as you know comes from a Hebrew word. It comes from the word shomer, which mean guardian. My ancestors were guardians of the ghetto wall in Chortkov and I believe Hashem, actually, gave me name as one of my roles that is very important in the United States Senate to be a shomer to be A. a shomer for Israel and I will continue to be that with every bone in my body for of the other is against me.

SEGAL: can I ask you one other favor Senator? To be a shomer against the value-add tax?

SCHUMER: I am against it. I'm not sure it's needed but I will be a shomer against it.

SEGAL: always a pleasure Senator, thanks so much for joining us.

SCHUMER: Nachum, nice to see you and I hope you readership continues to go in peace and prosperity.

Posted by Ben Smith 08:24 PM