

Siegel, Mark, 1977-78

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THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 1, 1978

Dear Hamilton,

This is not an easy letter for me to write, but I want to assure you that it is well thought-out and not a capricious response to any short-term situation.

I am very deeply troubled by the Administration's position on the Middle East. I was and remain appalled at Dr. Bzrezinski's performance last week at the Jewish luncheon in the State Dining Room. I have listened very carefully to all the points of view on the Arms Sales, and have concluded that I have not been provided with accurate information from you, NSC and State. I have concluded that the action, and the timing and manner of the announcement, are not in the best interest of U.S. foreign policy goals, not in the best interests of Israeli security needs, and definitely an "obstacle to peace" in the current phase of Mideast negotiations. This week's lead editorial in the New Republic really shook me up, and yesterday's piece by Richard Burt in the New York Times disturbed me deeply.

Let me quote directly from the Burt piece. "[Administration officials] also argue that the process for reaching their decision embodied the best features of the Administration's open, collegian and sometimes chaotic approach to policy-making -- the effort to expose Mr. Carter to a wide range of departmental views." I do not believe this statement is true. I do not believe that the President was fully exposed to all of the views of the people working on the Middle East in this Administration. Very specifically, and by your own admission to me, he was not exposed to any of my memoranda to you, memoranda which were well-thought out, accurately predictive of political and congressional consequences. My memoranda, which represented my strongest attempt to influence you, and on a broader scale administration policy, were never considered in a serious way, and elicited but one short written response from you, a response which I labeled "totally unsatisfactory" and could better be described as an insult to my intelligence.

No one, and certainly not you, can suggest that I have been anything but totally loyal to the President's policies in my work with the American Jewish community. You are well aware that I have been traveling around the country, as well as meeting with Jewish leaders in the White House on a daily basis, over the last several weeks, strongly articulating the Administration's policies in this area. It has not been easy. While you and your colleagues make policy, I have been in the unfortunate position of going out and trying to sell it, even when I personally and strongly disagree with major aspects of it. I have been willing to do this because I felt that my job, like all aspects of modern life, was a trade-off. I believed that I could justify being the loyal trooper, going out and sticking to the Administration line among the President's Jewish constituents, pushing views and actions that I disagreed with, because internally I could effectively serve as another kind of advocate -- that is, that I would always have the opportunity

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to fully present my views, clearly and unashamedly sympathetic to Israel, and be assured that my own views and political instincts would be evaluated in the decision-making process. My view of my joint role -- external advocate of Administration policy and simultaneous internal advocate of my own judgments -- does not stand up to the test. I very clearly have no internal role, so my only function is that of the one person in this White House that has to go out and expose myself to the Jewish community, peddling actions that I not only disagree with, but which offend me as a Jew, a Democrat and most importantly, as an American. In other words, I have become a political whore. It is not a description that I enjoy, but it fits, and I cannot abide by it any longer.

I know that you have many personal problems, and I certainly do not want to compound them. I believe that you sincerely consider me your friend as well as your employee, and I am certain that my hurt and unhappiness becomes, in some way, your unhappiness as well. Unfortunately the issue has come to a head just at the same time that you have experienced the death of your father, and I have been at a loss to figure a way to deal with it without causing you problems at this difficult time. I really don't quite know what to do about it.

I appeared before the Leadership Council of the United Jewish Appeal on Monday, delivering a speech that was edited by the State Department. I was repeatedly interrupted by hissing and laughter, from 1000 people -- my peers, my community, my own people. It was perhaps the most humiliating experience of my life. I want you to be assured that I handled myself well, with professionalism and dignity, but it created scars that will not soon heal. I almost wish you could talk to someone who was there to fully understand my pain. Pain is not a word I use often, and I never apply it non-personal matters. But this has become very personal to me, it is an issue which is paramount to me, Jimmy Carter's commitments during the campaign, and the Democratic Party's commitments in its Platform on the Middle East (which I wrote) mean a great deal to me. With respect to Israel, I join my community in feeling betrayed.

Saying all of this, there are several options available to me. Of course the best option, from my point of view, would be a specific assurance that from this point on, I will be clearly and directly involved in middle east decision-making, including a direct assurance that I will have the opportunity to talk to the President when I feel strongly that he is considering options

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WASHINGTON

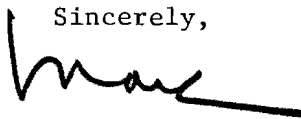
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that are dangerous to him politically and to Israel. The President himself suggested that I be involved in these discussions with him, after our confrontation in December. You have not picked up on this, and I am not in the position to do so independently from you. It is only in this context that I feel I can maintain my position as liaison to the Jewish community, and external advocate of the Administration's policies.

If this option is not possible, and I am certainly pessimistic that it is, it is clear that I should not, and no longer can continue as your liaison to the American Jewish community. If the first option is impractical or impossible, I would therefore request that I be reassigned to other subject matters where you might need my help and expertise.

I hope you understand my position. You are a good friend, and because of that I am really quite sorry. But this is a matter of conscience, and I see no other options.

Sincerely,



Mark A. Siegel

Hamilton Jordan
Assistant to the President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

March 8, 1978

Dear Mr. President,

We have known and worked with each other for five years. Therefore I write this letter to you in friendship, good will and with deep sadness. I hereby submit to you my resignation, effective at a time and under conditions to be worked out between me and Hamilton Jordan based on completion of my work currently in progress.

I take this action after careful and deliberate consideration, and with Judy's consultation and support. I have tried to serve you with dedication during this difficult first year, and have been and continue to be proud of our association. You have made courageous attempts to come to grips with major problems that have been largely ignored by your predecessors, and have restored dignity and integrity to the Presidency. Your attempt to serve as a catalyst for peace in the Middle East may be your most ambitious undertaking, and I endorse and praise your goals and your unprecedented attention, in time and effort, to the problems that plague that critical area of the world. The dramatic progress that has been made in the Middle East this year reflects, in no small measure, your determination. For this, and for many things that will remain unsaid, I thank you.

However, I am deeply troubled by certain aspects of U.S. policy toward the Middle East, and more importantly, by the decision-making process utilized by the Administration to formulate policy. I think I owe it to you, and to myself, to bring these matters to your attention at this time. As I am sure you would agree, no one can credibly suggest that I have been anything but totally loyal to you and to your policies in my work with the American Jewish community. You are well aware that I have been traveling around the country, and meeting with Jewish groups and leaders regularly in Washington. In all of these discussions, I have strongly presented and defended the Administration's policies with respect to the Middle East. Although it has not been an easy task for me, certainly not made easier by the fact that there were and are specific and limited areas of personal disagreement, I have been more than willing to exercise this function because I felt that my job, like most things in modern life, was multi-faceted. I believe that I could justify being the external advocate, going out and presenting the Administration's line to your Jewish constituents, because I simultaneously could effectively serve another role, that is, internally presenting my own views, representing a broad constituency of American public opinion, based on traditional American public attitudes, support and commitment to the security and viability of Israel and to the special relationship that has always defined relations between our Nation and Israel. My view of the joint role responsibility -- externally advocating the Administration's policies while internally presenting a broader range of policy options -- did not stand up to the test. Clearly, I had no

internal role, and with no such internal decision-making process role, became the one person on the White House staff who had as my primary responsibility the defense and advocacy of positions which I had not voice in shaping, and occasionally but strongly disagreed with.

Because I, like the vast majority of Americans, agree with your eloquent remarks in Elizabeth, New Jersey on June 6, 1976, that "the survival of Israel is not a political issue; it is a moral imperative," I made a moral judgment that I could no longer, in good conscience, continue my work for you with the American Jewish community, and so informed Hamilton Jordan on March 1. Since that time it has become clear to me that the consequences of that decision are such that I can no longer be effective in any capacity in this White House, and have therefore chosen to submit my resignation.

Although in general agreement with the thrust of your policy in the Middle East, I have strong and personal reservations about the wisdom of your Arms Sales decision, the "packaging" of that decision, and its timing. I was distressed to learn that I often did not have the fullest information available to defend your policies and your decisions, and specifically with respect to the Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia, did not have accurate information. I am also concerned about amending U.S. commitment to Israel as part of the Sinai II Disengagement Agreement by making the fulfillment of our commitments predicated on approval of arms sales to other nation, two and one-half years after the fact.

Saying all of this, I want to be certain that you understand that I hold you in the highest regard, and that my problems and reasons for leaving speak to the process by which decisions are made, and the lack of consideration of all views and options in that process. You are a fine, decent and moral man, a man I trust and admire and whom I hope I will be able to assist in some way in the future. I hope you will understand and empathize with my position on this matter, and accept my resignation as an action of personal conscience and in the spirit of respect in which it is offered. Throughout this difficult period for me, and today, I have been guided and strengthened by the words of the great Jewish teacher and scholar, Rabbi Hillel, who wrote in the 11th Century: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? and if I am only for myself, then what am I? and if not now, when?"

Judy and I extend our warmest best wishes to both you and Mrs. Carter.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Siegel
Deputy Assistant for Policy Analysis

3/1/78

Ham -
ok - I like
Mark & think
he has done a
good job.
J.C.

Mr. President:

I want to bring you up to date on the situation with Mark Siegel.

Over the past several months, he has spent almost all of his time working with the Jewish community. He has worked hard and been loyal to your policies despite the increasingly hostile reception he was receiving from the persons and groups he met with.

He came in to see me about a week ago after a particularly ugly incident when he was booed through his entire speech which was made to a Jewish group defending our arms sales. He asked to be relieved of responsibility for dealing with the Jewish community. He said that he had two concerns. First, that he did not feel that he had input into the decision-making process that was commensurate with the beating he was taking trying to defend our policies. And secondly, that although he had supported

your policy without exception, he thought that the arms sales was a mistake and that he could not in good conscience spend most of his time in the next few months defending an action he did not believe in before hostile Jewish groups.

I told him that I understood his decision and respected it as I would not ask anyone to be put in the position of having to personally support an action or policy that they found to be unconscionable.

I also told Mark at that time that he and I should review his entire situation as relates to the future. He and I have talked on numerous occasions about the problem he has with certain members of the staff who believe that he talks to the press too much. I told him that this perception - however unfair - existed and made it difficult to be as effective as he should. I suggested

that he should consider the possibility of leaving as I was not optimistic that he could make the kind of contribution here that he is capable of making. He agreed and had already begun to have interviews.

Tonight we got a couple of calls from press who had heard that he had cancelled a couple of appearances and had been "relieved of his duties working with the Jewish community". One reported wrote that they had heard from one of Mark's friends that he was leaving because of the President's policies on the Middle East. Mark's only comment was that it was a "personal decision" and didn't want to say anything else.

I talked with Mark tonight and told him that I thought protracted stories about his situation would be bad for him personally and professionally and would not help the Administration. I suggested to him that he write a letter ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

~~resignation~~^{RESIGNING}, but I let that be his decision and not mine. He agreed and is drafting such a letter.

A few comments on this situation. Mark is a brilliant person. Because he had many friends in the press and talked to them too much, he gained the reputation around the White House as being the chief "leak". This is an exaggeration of what really happened. I do believe that Mark talks to the press too much, but don't think it was ever malicious nor happened to the extent that some people like Tim Kraft thought it did. At any rate, this perception soon became reality to the point that the guy was rendered ineffective by the talk that he was the source of many stories.

He has not had an easy time - you remember he lost his child in an automobile accident a couple of years back. He is not without fault, but he will be leaving the White House under a cloud.

It is important that we be perceived as treating Mark fairly. No one expects us to have people in key positions that disagree with our policies. On the other hand, it should not look like we are unable to tolerate dissent and different points of view.

To the extent it looks like we are treating him unfair, it will protract the news coverage of his departure and will be used by some of the people in the Israeli lobby.

I am sorry for this problem. However, it is better that we not have people on the staff who question your policies.

I took Mark on my staff at Strauss' insistence at a time when it did not look like Strauss was coming into government. Strauss will help me with this and try to keep Mark's attitude positive.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be the initials 'H. Q.' with a stylized flourish.