

From



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Washington

EVER SINCE A FEW QUOTES appeared in a gossipy section in the back pages of The Washington Post last week there's been a grand firestorm of protest calling one of the better-known Arab-American insiders here in Washington every name in the book.

Jim Zogby — the Arab-American who is being subjected to unprecedented scorn — just loves to see his name in print, to be quoted by the press, to be courted by those with power ... and money.

Most people in Washington who are involved in one way or another with matters relating to the Mid-east know all this very well. Everyone also knows that Zogby is a bit like the Wizard of Oz — lots of smoke and mirrors in front of the microphones while in reality it's just a little guy behind the screen yelling his head off and trying to pretend he's powerful.

But the Wizard of Oz proved to be somewhat humble in the end. Not so Jim Zogby who has become for many Arab-Americans the epitome of duplicity, deal-making, backbiting, and political chicanery.

Zogby's Arab American Institute (AAI), promoted to the press and the politicians by him and his cronies as a major and important institution that represents Arab Americans, is hardly that at all in reality. At the grassroots level Zogby actually has very little support of any kind — and what there was has actually diminished over the years as his reputation for self-aggrandisement and politically selling out has spread. More and more, it has been widely realised, Zogby has simply been capitalising on his his Arab-American name while pursuing an agenda all of his own and meant primarily to benefit only himself.

The other side of this particular coin is that even though Zogby has little Arab-American grassroots support, he does have the backing of a small click that has attempted to push Zogby and AAI forward at

A FIRESTORM OF PROTEST ERUPTS AGAINST ZOGBY

tempting through Zogby to co-opt the political involvement of Arab-Americans. Zogby has become, over the past few years, a rather crass creature of the special interests he serves — both overseas and in the US — a man always manipulating his contacts and exploiting to the full his considerable self-promotional skills on behalf of those who have their own self-serving political agendas.

In short, rather than a serious think-tank, lobbying organisation, or gathering place, Zogby has made AAI a kind of self-styled public relations firm, lending his articular voice for one cause or one politician today, another tomorrow, always bending in the political wind, always twisting as the situation of the moment warrants, always focusing on the primary goal of self-promotion.

AAI under Zogby is in these senses a PR firm not that has much support or involvement from any large segments of the Arab-American community, but rather one that gets its means from a few well-headed Arab-American (and their powerful and wealthy Arab friends overseas). As a conduit for these special interests, Zogby's primary mission in life, and AAI's role in Washington, seem to be to cater to whomever has power and influence in the US.

One of Zogby's primary allies in all this is Spencer Abraham who is a political big shot on the conservative Republican side of the

We Arab-Americans strongly condemn Jim Zogby of the Arab-American Institute (AAI) for his repeated attempts to speak to the press in the name of Arab-Americans. Zogby's misrepresentations and duplicitous conduct have gone on for some time now with his excesses and abuses escalating year after year. Zogby's recent comments to the press endorsing the appointment of an AIPAC-sponsored operative, Martin Indyk, to the Clinton National Security Council are outrageous and are unacceptable to a great number of Arab-Americans. Jim Zogby in no way represents Arab-Americans or speaks for them. Rather, Zogby is no more than a self-promoter who has abused the trust of those few Arab-Americans who are affiliated with his self-created Institute.

We call upon the board of AAI, even though we are aware it was mostly chosen by and controlled by Zogby, to nevertheless remove him as president and spokesperson immediately. We further insist that AAI cease portraying itself as representative of Arab-American thoughts and feelings.

fence — fit him in somewhere between John Sununu and Dan Quayle — and who was until recently being considered for the position of Republican National Chairman.

These two together — Zogby the Democrat, Abraham the Republican — set up AAI during the mid-1980s and have been prancing around Washington ever since, always seeking entire attention from the press, and, of course, funds.

But at least Abraham does so partly on his own merits as a Republican political operative. However out of step he might be with most Arab-Americans, in fairness to him he doesn't try to come off as "Mr Arab



President Bill Clinton

American".

Zogby, on the other hand, does his political dancing always at the expense of those far more in touch with Arab-American concerns than he, always trading on his Arab-American name while more and more stomping on Arab-American interests — a modern Uncle Tom approach, though Zogby always reacts with great indignation at such characterisations.

Ever since his huge brawl with Jim Abourezk at the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee, which resulted in Zogby's abrupt termination from ADC, Zogby has been off trying to prove his political manhood it seems — and more and more doing so at the expense of the very basic concerns of the Arab-American community he claims so erroneously to speak for.

In one sense there's really nothing new in all this, it's been going on for years in one way or another. And the disdain that exists among many Arab-Americans for Zogby personally, precisely because of his political immorality, has been rampant for some time now — though not always well-known outside Mid-eastern circles.

Yet this considerable undertone of hostile thoughts and feelings regarding Zogby — expressions of disgust which hardly ever find their way into print but rather find their expression mostly in private conversations — has for years pretty

Petition condemning JIM ZOGBY of the Arab-American Institute

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- Asa'ad Abu-Khalil Professor
Aida Abu-Zayyad Public Relations Consultant
Hisham Ahmed Professor
Tony Kandah Film Producer

much branded Zogby as an opportunist of the first order and left it at that.

But even before the recent explosion of anger that has so many Arab-Americans up in arms against Zogby — more about that in a moment — in recent months the Washington Mid-east grapevine has been rife with enraged sentiments against Zogby for his increasingly crass attempts to find favour with the new Clinton administration.

It seems Zogby has been willing to go to just about any length to try to have "access" with the new Clinton people and to try to be perceived as someone who can get to those in the new team now that all the Bush folks have departed.

When it comes to self-promotion Zogby seems to have no limits.

For months now, even before the election, stories have been heard about Zogby's repeated attempts to cozy up to the so-called "moderates" in the Israeli lobby — playing footsie in order to ingratiate himself with a variety of establishment Jewish groups knowing that together they are a powerful group that has a very good foothold inside the new Clinton administration.

The petition, printed here separately at the top of this column, is now being circulated against Zogby by a few initial signers.

In this process, it seems, Zogby seems to have jettisoned all sense of discretion and come to believe he

can do anything he wants to do and say anything he wants to say without anyone standing up to him in public.

That may well be the mind-set which cause him to think he could say in public, last week, what so many Arab-Americans are so enraged about.

In short, Zogby — in the name of Arab Americans — endorsed the Clinton administration's bondage to the Israeli-Jewish lobby.

Okay, true enough, it was a bit less direct and more subtle than that. But not much this time!

As commented on in this column shortly after Bill Clinton's election in November, as a payoff to the Israeli-Jewish lobby that helped propel him into the White House and to push George Bush back to Texas, Clinton was strong-armed to bring into the White House one of their men.

The Martin Indyk story is in itself a telling example of Washington intrigue, behind-the-scenes manoeuvring, and jostling for power and influence. But more on that some other time.

At the moment, the focus here is on just how much some people are willing to do, how big a sell-out some people are willing to become, in order to court power and influence and money.

Under the little headline An Olive Branch Over NSC Appointment on page A21 of The Washington Post



JIM ZOGBY

on January 21, here's what has finally ignited the quite unprecedented torrent of protests against him.

Here's how the Past story read, along with Zogby's specific quotations:

"Word that Australian-born Martin Indyk, head of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy — which is often seen as pro-Israel — is headed for the National Security Council does not seem to be sparking fireworks in the Arab-American community.

"Indyk, who recently became a US citizen, was formerly a researcher for the premier Israel lobby, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Even so, Arab American Institute President James J Zogby says the Clinton team overall is very good and appointing Indyk might help 'move things forward and develop rust' by the Israelis in the peace process. 'Nixon went to China,' Zogby observed, referring to the conciliatory gesture that only a strong anti-communist like Nixon could have gotten away with.

"I'm really pleased with everyone who's come up so far," Zogby said. Former US ambassador to Israel Samuel Lewis 'is exceptionally open and thoughtful' despite having gotten some bad press in the Arab World. 'The whole crew is balanced,' said Zogby.... Indyk's White House work on the peace process should be 'no problem', Zogby said."

No further comment seems necessary after such crap. Zogby and Indyk deserve each other plain and simple.

But for stepping on the Arab-American community in this way, and for selling out the Palestinian cause which he has always claimed to support so strongly, Zogby deserves to get the political equivalent of being tared and feathered.