Jonathan Pollard, the Irvine 11, and the Mikado

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From The New York Times **on Friday:**

> "President Obama was considering clemency [for Jonathan Pollard], but I told him, 'Over my dead body are we going to let him out before his time,' " Biden said during a meeting with rabbis in Boca Raton, Fla., according to the newspaper. "If it were up to me, he would stay in jail for life."

The headline of the piece: "Obama Turns to Biden to Reassure Jewish Voters, and Get Them to Contribute, Too." That being the case, I suppose one must give credit to the Vice President for passing up an opportunity to pander to his rabbinic audience.

Pollard's case is a source of righteous outrage for some Jews, and a source of ambiguity and unease for others. Speaking personally, I believe Pollard committed a serious crime and deserved jail time. Individual citizens cannot be free to choose which nations can see classified governmental information, no matter how harmless their choice. There is a principle at stake.

Still, for all that, the sentence is vastly -- and cruelly -- out of proportion to the crime. Pollard ought not be pardoned, but he should certainly have his sentence commuted and be freed at once.

Disproportionate punishment makes a mockery of justice as much as crime does... Therefore, I also believe the punishment doled out to the Irvine 11 was excessive. I agree with my colleague Stefanie (**who posted on this subject earlier today**) that the students' conduct was unacceptable, but three years of probation is a very serious and constraining business indeed; these students deserved a semester of academic probation, not a criminal charge.

Jonathan Pollard and the Irvine 11: not the most natural of pairings. Yet both together bring to mind what W.S. Gilbert reminded us: the punishment should fit the crime.