

The Jewish Dilemma, Or Not?

I have written about the American Jewish community as a political football. Perhaps that was an understatement. Thanks to President Trump's latest tweet war, it appears that the Jewish community, including Israel, is more like the European football; kicked, head butted, thrown from the penalty sidelines, and tossed into the stands.

President Trump suggested that Representatives Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Ayanna Pressley, Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar go back to the countries they came from and cure the problems in those countries. He also noted that the four Representatives hated Israel and were anti-Semites.

I could not help but think about the first time I was told to go back to where I came from. I was nonplussed. Did the attacker want me to go back to Washington, D.C. where I lived, New York where I grew up or the land of my ancestors, perhaps Swiss-Germany or Poland? Of course it did not matter. The anti-Semite who uttered those words simply did not approve of something about me and wanted a Williamsport that fit his image.

President Trump's words were bigoted notwithstanding that he was talking about some pretty awful people. The best way to give an enemy power, assuming that they are not physically attacking, is to give them attention. Is it possible that President Trump wants to empower these four women who certainly do have a record of fomenting anti-Semitic fervor? Why would the President want to do that?

Powerful political people unite their own forces and try to cause derision among others. The President may feel that by uniting Democrats against him, he will solidify his own base. However, the President's behavior may cause at least part of his own base to crumble. The Jewish community was already heavily split over Donald Trump who has made great efforts to combat anti-Semitism and to support the only Democracy the Middle East has ever or will ever know. At the same time his outrageous, offensive bigotry towards others has divided a Jewish community committed to the justice and humanity taught by our Prophets and leaders. As Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the former Chief Rabbi of the British Empire has pointed out, the entirety of Judaism is a rebellion against a status quo enforced by power and justified by tyranny. It is this wall of historical Jewish commitment to fairness and equality that President Trump has mindlessly crashed into.

The fact that President Trump has attacked those he perceives as his enemies and the enemies of the Jewish people cannot be condoned under any circumstances. The President has placed Jewish community leaders and the State of Israel in a completely untenable position. No responsible and reasonable person in the Jewish community or Israel is going to support the President's tweets given their obvious ugly connotations. By the same token, it is true that the four Congresswomen named have

shown hypocritical and unjustified hatred towards the State of Israel and a complete misunderstanding of the American Jewish community.

I have been asked many times in the past why more Jewish Americans are not Republicans. It was after all the Republican Party during the height of genocide against the Jewish people in World War II that supported a national homeland for the Jewish people in Palestine. That 1944 platform of the Republican Party, if carried out against the wishes of the Roosevelt Administration, would have saved millions of Jewish lives from the European inferno. It is also true that there probably never would have been a State of Israel had President Roosevelt lived. Thankfully, President Truman thought differently. It is also correct that it was the Republican party which realized, and understands today, that Palestine was given to the Jews numerous times since 1919 by the League of Nations, by treaty between the United States and Britain, and by the United Nations as a national homeland for the Jewish people which includes modern Jordan and the entirety of the west bank of the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Although Israel has been willing to accept less and less as a safe and secure homeland, the world nevertheless continues its war of annihilation against the Jewish people in the Middle East. At the same time, the presence of Christians, Ba'ha'ists, Druze, and Muslims are protected in Israel as nowhere else in the Middle East.

A recent editorial in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled, "Can Ilhan Omar Overcome Her Prejudice? I was born in Somalia and grew up amid pervasive Muslim anti-Semitism. Hate is hard to unlearn without coming to terms with how you learned it," written by a Somali woman, explains how she was taught anti-Semitism and how she has worked to unteach herself. The American Congresswomen who Donald Trump attempted to call out have a terrible track record when it comes to the exercise of fairness against anyone they consider to be their enemy. While the President has every right to criticize those he perceives to be in opposition to his policies, the President does not have a right to speak for the Jewish community anywhere in the world in a way which draws that community into a vortex of dissension and hatred.

The American public and the Jewish community hopefully will not be drawn into either self-hatred or demonizing the State of Israel simply because the President articulates that issue in a repulsive fashion. In the long run, no one should partner with a concept where viciously attacking others in a discriminatory manner can be good for any other group.

President Trump's bad judgment and at best questionable motives should not prevent any member of the Jewish American community from voting Democrat or Republican, as they see fit. By the same token, the President and the Democrats need to stop using the Jewish or Israeli community as a football in the war against his enemies.

Cliff Rieders is a Board-Certified Trial Advocate in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a past member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.