

Hero or Coward? (3/27/20)

Sitting in Israel in self-quarantine, one cannot help but wonder at the unfolding Greek drama involving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his one-time chief opponent, Benny Gantz. As an American with lots of family in Israel, as pro-Zionist as any foreigner can be, the political machinations of this country demonstrate both the best and worst of democracy in action.

The question for those of us not permanently immersed in Israeli politics is whether Netanyahu is a remarkable, irreplaceable leader of the country, or a crook and a villain. As to Benny Gantz, is he the loyal opposition, a patriotic hero, or simply gutless?

It seemed to the Anglo community that Blue and White was poised to run the Knesset and to show BiBi the exit door. In the alternative, the crisis in government would become so unsustainable that the country would either fall into disarray or simply cease to function.

In American politics, there are many similarities to Benny Gantz choosing to be in a government with Benjamin Netanyahu rather than to continue to push the country towards political suicide. John Kennedy, in *Profiles In Courage*, wrote about the heroes of American politics who chose country before ego. There are those in Israel who say that Benny Gantz has broken his pledge to assure a Prime Minister who was not Benjamin Netanyahu. On the other hand, Gantz ran on the proposition of “country before personality”. To me, and many who have a much greater right to speak than I do, Benny Gantz is a hero. He is a true patriot.

Is the political career of Benny Gantz over? Most pundits say “yes”. The very opposite may be true. He did not have any political experience prior to forming Blue and White with the avowed purpose of ousting Prime Minister Netanyahu. Gantz will now get to work in government for a year-and-a-half, hopefully getting ready to become a capable Prime Minister. Has Benjamin Netanyahu been chastened by his experience, and will he suddenly become more honorable and a better example to other politicians? Probably not. Netanyahu will continue to be an extremely capable and a smart leader, a political magician of unrivaled proportions.

In the early days of the American Republic, the Federalists, led by Washington and Adams, were extraordinarily anti-Jefferson. They accused Jefferson of being an agent of the French, which he may have been, and Jefferson, in return, claimed that the Federalists wanted to reimpose the British monarchy on the newly independent nation. As it turned out, the Federalists wound up supporting Jefferson when the Electoral

College became deadlocked over the successor to Adams. Jefferson, believed the leaders of the Federalist Party, was a less bad choice than Aaron Burr. History proved those Federalists correct.

There are many other examples from the historical narrative around the world of politicians who chose patriotism over self-aggrandizement. There are those who have claimed that Benny Gantz was gutless. What takes more courage; fighting to the bitter end, even if it means destroying country during difficult times or stepping back and letting the opponent lead the way?

No one can say whether it would have been better for the country had Netanyahu stepped away from the epicenter of politics and let another Likud member form a government with Blue and White which would have had Benny Gantz as Prime Minister. Perhaps that would have been a good thing, but there certainly were risks to forming that type of government based upon the agenda of some of Blue and White's more unreasonable leaders. Benjamin Netanyahu has served long enough for any democracy. George Washington was smart enough to walk away after two terms, even though there were no term limits in his day. Historians have looked at that example as showing both genius, courage and patriotism. Washington set an example that stood until the ego maniacal personality of Franklin Roosevelt combined with war and depression to keep him in office for almost 16 years.

It is unlikely that Netanyahu will stay in office as long as Franklin Roosevelt did. Good leaders train and encourage successors. My own job these days as Chief Mentor for a bunch of young lawyers and staff has been perhaps the most gratifying time in my life. Sharing the power and training new vital blood to take over is ultimately what both society and political establishments depend upon.

Yasher Koach to Benny Gantz; may the coalition of Netanyahu and Gantz work out for the Israeli people and the nations in the region.

*Clifford A. Rieders, Esquire
Rieders, Travis, Humphrey,
Waters & Dohrmann
161 West Third Street
Williamsport, PA 17701
(570) 323-8711 (telephone)
(570) 323-4192 (facsimile)*

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.