

DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

A crowd of a few dozen enthusiastic protesters stood in front of the federal building in the small upstate Pennsylvania community of Williamsport, Pennsylvania. They carried signs and slogans mostly protesting Donald Trump and some purporting to welcome refugees to the tear soaked shores of the United States.

It was marvelous seeing democracy in action. The crowd was enthusiastic but peaceful and no police were seen anywhere in the vicinity.

This is what we teach our children to do when they disagree. Stand up, be counted, get involved and peacefully protest.

The larger question looming behind the protesters is whether our nation commits evil when it temporarily bans non-Americans from a civil war ravaged region from entering the United States while protocols are developed to make sure that the refugees are not disguised terrorists? The issue is lost in the cause célèbre. No one would seem to disagree that Syria and the other nations targeted by the Trump executive order have been breeding grounds for terrorism. Barely a peep has been sounded against European nations that have sought to restrict and stem the flow of refugees into common market nations struggling to survive.

Social media and the internet are fond of comparing those who are fleeing Africa and the Middle East to the Jews who were shut out of our nation at the beginning of and during World War II. After all, since we helped to send the Jews to German death camps, perhaps we should be more understanding of Muslims today.

The Jews in Europe were subject to more than 1,500 years of intolerance, hatred and genocide. During the first Crusade, all the Jews in Britain, for example, were killed. This was one of the first instances of European ethnic cleansing but it was not the last. In 1492 the Jewish community was expelled from Spain. The Jewish people lived more peaceably under the subjugation of Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East until World War I. Most of the Muslim Middle East in World War I and World War II sided with the Germans. The Jews fought for the British.

When the German monster who created the Third Reich sought to expel 300,000 Jews before the serious onset of the war, the West turned him down. It was the green light that genocide would be okay. Hitler was of course following in the well-worn tracks of the many murderers of the Jewish people who came before him.

The Jewish people in Europe were not caught in the middle of a civil war and they did not infiltrate to other nations with terrorists within their ranks. Rather, the Jews of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa were a tiny minority facing millennia of superstition and hatred.

The Jews who were shut out of Palestine during World War II then fought for the British and the Americans. The Jews whose ships were turned back to German occupied Europe in World War II were teachers, educators, craftsman who were indeed abandoned by the world. The Allies refused to bomb the rail links leading to death camps such as Auschwitz. Roosevelt openly stated that the best way to help the Jews was by winning World War II.

Contrast the situation with that of Muslims and North Africans today. The United States promised to help shut down Assad's war against his own people. We made guarantees that we would stop the genocide in Southern Sudan. We did not do either. Our administration either lied to those who were being gassed and burned in civil strife throughout the Middle East and Africa or simply lacked the will to help. The United Nations stood idly by, refusing to even condemn or intervene to help save refugees.

Even if the United States, Canada and Europe absorbed the millions of refugees made homeless by war abroad, the humanitarian crisis would neither be abated nor seriously addressed. The creation of safe zones in Syria, assistance to Jordan which is housing Syrian refugees in that country and the activation of a serious United Nations peacekeeping force will do more to prevent the creation of new refugees and to save those who were already struggling than any feel good symbolic measures promoted by well-meaning people.

The truth may be inconvenient but it was the Obama administration which identified terrorist caldrons against which the Trump executive order applies. This is neither to criticize Obama nor to laud Trump. Security agencies worldwide appreciate that terrorists are and will be imbedded with the refugees fleeing unrest and turmoil around the world. It is easier for the West to accept a token number of those who claim to be fleeing persecution around the world than to address the underlying root cause of the problem. Fundamentalist terrorist Islam is a corrosive force feeding many of the conflicts that the world currently endures. Boko Haram, Hamas, Hezbollah, ISIS, Fatah and a consortium of other grizzly characters seek to impose their view of a controlling caliphate on the world. They have killed or driven out of every land throughout the Middle East, the Christian, the Jew and even other Muslims.

It is a grotesque affront to the Jews of the World War II period to compare their plight to the Islamic terrorism which is driving a large portion of our immigration debate. In the 1930s and 1940s the United States, the League of Nations, Great Britain and others could have fulfilled their promise of Jewish national sovereignty by permitting the Jews to flee to Jewish Palestine. Instead, the Allies double-crossed their Jewish partisan fighters by keeping them out of Palestine. To add insult to injury, the British then turned their weaponry accumulated during World War II over to the Arabs whose multiple nations then attacked the Jewish State in 1948. How is this comparable to whether the United States should permit any person into the United States today who are fleeing a civil war that we have essentially turned over to Russian and Iranian control? The answer is that there absolutely is no similarity. Those of dubious integrity are attempting to make an analogy between the world's abandonment of the Jews during World War II and legitimate attempts to secure our borders for the safety of all Americans today.

*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, who practices law in Williamsport, is Past President of the Pennsylvania Trial Lawyers Association and a member of the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority. None of the opinions expressed necessarily represent the views of these organizations.