

Orthodox Jew: The Fine Line Between Honesty and Offense

Recent reports have slammed Republican Congresswoman Lauren Boebert for comments that were offensive to her colleague, Democratic Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. Boebert shared a security-related incident in the U.S. Capitol, quipping that she saw Congresswoman Omar and noticed she didn't have a backpack, so everything would be fine.

Since her comment, Congresswoman Boebert has been slammed by the media, other Congressional members, and more. There have been calls for her to be censured. Omar herself called out Boebert for "real consequences" of her "anti-Muslim hate."

I'd like to share another perspective. Recently I visited with a friend, a pastor from Georgia, at a café in central Jerusalem. I arrived early, got a seat in the back, opened up my backpack, and set up my computer to get some work done. After a few minutes I noticed someone walking toward me and glanced for a moment. I looked up and did a double take. It was a woman, dressed in traditional Arab Muslim attire, less fashionable but no different from how Ilhan Omar dresses.

It's never unusual to see Arabs almost anywhere in Israel and certainly not in Jerusalem. A total 20% of Israelis are Arabs, full-equal citizens. After Jerusalem was reunified in 1967 as Israel's capitol, Israel offered citizenship to all of the Arab residents. Mostly for political reasons, so as not to recognize Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem, most of the Arab residents rejected citizenship

Rather, they have the status of residency that provides all the social services and benefits of citizenship, with the main exception of the right to vote in Israeli national elections. As Jerusalem residents, they do however have the right to vote

in municipal elections. But most choose not to do so, both so as not to recognize Israel's sovereignty, and so as not to be seen as traitors, and consequently be subject to physical threats from other Arabs.

I didn't know the status of the woman approaching me, but as an Israeli living through the end of what's known as the Second Intifada (the period between 2000-2004 where Palestinian Arab terrorists blew up buses, hotels, malls, and cafes like where I was sitting), I have enough awareness and PTSD to look at such a situation as being a possible threat. The woman was not wearing a backpack, carrying an oversized bag, wearing a loose coat under which she might be hiding a suicide vest, or had wires protruding from her pockets. So, I acknowledged my PTSD, and the sometimes-awkward reality in which we live here, and continued working until my friend arrived.

One might say I am crazy for even having that thought. Maybe. Does that make me anti-Muslim? No. It's the reality within which we live. As the woman passed me to go to the bathroom to my left, I recognized that it was all quite normal. Did I hate her for being an Arab Muslim? Not at all. I just didn't want her to blow me up.

Today, the café is a branch of a popular Israeli chain where you can get a great cup of coffee and just about any baked good imaginable. Some 20 years ago, it was a Sbarro pizza franchise. It was also the site of one of the most gruesome terror attacks, not just in that period, but in Israeli history.

Sadly, ask most Israelis about the "Sbarro massacre" and it is remembered painfully as the sight of the Aug. 9 Palestinian Arab terror attack in which 15 civilians were killed, including seven children and a pregnant woman, and 130 wounded.

Most Israelis will also know that a young Arab woman, Ahlam Tamimi scouted for sites before leading Izz al-Din Shuheil al-Masri, the suicide bomber, to Sbarro. So as not to create any suspicion, Tamimi deliberately did not dress in her traditional Arab-Muslim attire, but as a Jew. At lunchtime, when the restaurant was packed and foot traffic outside at its peak, Tamimi left Al-Masri, to detonate a suicide bomb packed with nails, nuts, and bolts to inflict the maximum death and injury.

The body of one 15-year-old girl was riddled with 60 nails, a hole blown out of her right leg, and third degree burns on 40 percent of her body. An eyewitness described the horrific bloody scene and had been thrown a meter into the air by the explosion.

A terrorist does not have to be the one carrying the detonator. Ahlam Tamimi was a student at the time, arrested, tried and sentenced to 16 life sentences. A decade later, she was released as part of a prisoner exchange including more than 1000 Palestinian Arab prisoners traded for Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit who had been held hostage by Hamas in Gaza for over five years.

Tamimi lives freely in Jordan today, despite extradition efforts by the U.S., as one of the victims was an American. She has never expressed remorse. Indeed, in an interview on Al-Aqsa TV she described leaving on an Arab bus and privy the scene where the passengers celebrated the attack, not knowing they were sitting with the accomplice.

After hearing an initial report that only "three people were killed" she recalled, "I admit that I was a bit disappointed, because I had hoped for a larger toll. Yet when they said, "three dead," I said: 'Allah be praised'...Two minutes later, they said on the radio that the number had increased to five. I wanted to hide my smile, but I just couldn't. Allah be praised, it was great. As the number of dead kept increasing,

the passengers were applauding.”

While she’s not detonating actual bombs in Congress, Congresswoman Omar is unabashed in her support for terrorists. She has no shame in this because she doesn’t think anything is wrong with it. She’s been called out for a range of offensive, antisemitic comments for which she also has had no remorse because she believes she’s correct. Yet she has the hubris to call out Congresswoman Boebert for the “real consequences” of her words. Yes, explosive words do have consequences. Omar is a master of setting off such verbal bombs and walking away unscathed, like Tamimi. Unlike Tamimi who simply celebrates her murderous acts, Omar takes it up a notch by blaming others for that for which she is guilty herself.

I suspect that Congresswoman Boebert has never been at the scene of a suicide terror attack, but is worldly enough to know from where these emanate. One can read into her comments and fault her for fanning anti-Muslim hate, or just for calling it like it is and recognizing that it is people who support and defend terrorists, like Omar, who are wrong.

Was her backpack comment inappropriate? Maybe. But maybe not. Rather than confronting only Boebert’s comment, I challenge those criticizing her to look at Omar and her record of explosive antisemitic and pro-terror comments, and question whether or not she’s (also) guilty, or at least gives legitimate reason for scrutiny, not because she is a Muslim, but because she supports Muslim terrorists. It’s one thing to wear a hijab and another thing to hide behind it, deflecting all legitimate criticism as being anti-Muslim, and then see accusations of hatred and xenophobia in the wake. It’s hard to imagine her not silently smiling each time she gets away with it, just like Tamimi did.

It may not always be easy to straddle the line between being honest and being offensive. The problem in this case is that, Ilhan Omar is both offensive and dishonest.

And by supporting terrorists, while Boebert's backpack comment and referring to Omar as part of the "jihad squad" may be offensive, based on Omar's own actions, they are not inaccurate. Knee-jerk accusations of "Islamophobia" just because Omar is a Muslim are disingenuous and dishonest.

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