

What We Can All Learn From Sean Spicer

The biggest Jewish news story during Passover this year was the latest example of a rule of political argument: He who mentions Hitler first always loses. I refer, of course, to Sean Spicer, the White House press secretary and the man who, along with his boss, President Donald Trump, has made the *Saturday Night Live* comedy show relevant again.

Spicer hit a new low when he seemed to say that Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad was worse than Adolf Hitler. In condemning Assad for his use of chemical weapons, Spicer asserted that even Hitler “didn’t sink to using chemical weapons.”

Perhaps Spicer was thinking about the fact that the Germans didn’t employ chemical weapons when fighting Allied armies as they had in World War I, when both sides used poison gas as a military weapon. But you don’t need to be a historian to know that poison gas played a prominent role in the Nazis’ war on the Jews. After a couple of inadequate attempts to rationalize his statement, Spicer apologized unreservedly. The president ought to fire him for stupidity, but to those committed to all-out political warfare against all things Trump, Spicer’s statement couldn’t be walked back and deserved to be put down as “Holocaust denial,” if not support for Hitler (as *The New York Times*’ Andrew Rosenthal implied) or outright anti-Semitism, despite there being no reason to think that was Spicer’s intention.

While Spicer was a fool to compare anyone, even someone as bad as Assad, to Hitler, the anti-Trump “resistance” appears to have no such compunctions about the objects of their disdain. It’s not enough to disagree with Trump and his minions or even to point out the alleged dangers of their policies. The

political left has embraced White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon's credo that politics is warfare, in which anything may be said if it helps delegitimize a foe.

The Trump administration opened itself up to criticism earlier in the year when it omitted a reference to Jews in its International Holocaust Remembrance Day statement and when the president was slow to unreservedly condemn a spate of bomb threats at JCCs. But Jewish liberals weren't content with blasting these blunders. Instead they claimed Trump was responsible for inspiring the threats and a new wave of anti-Semitism. But unlike the foolish Spicer, the groups that made those charges didn't apologize when suspects in the JCC threats turned out to be a disturbed Israeli teen and a left-wing American writer. Nor have liberal pundits who analogize Trump to Hitler or called his policies fascist issued mea culpas, let alone anything half so contrite as the apology from the wretched Spicer.

The Spicer gaffe also overshadowed a deliberate attempt to demonize Jews in the service of the war on Trump just a few days earlier. The Politico website, one of the most well-read and respected sources of political news, published a lengthy piece on the eve of Passover linking the Hasidic movement Chabad to a nefarious network of real estate moguls that tied the Trump family to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The piece, titled "The Happy-Go-Lucky Jewish Group That Connects Trump and Putin," seemed to allege that the activities of Chabad, whose hallmark is Jewish outreach, provide some sort of proof for the charges that Trump is in cahoots with Moscow (an argument that has less cogency now that Trump has taken on Russia over Syria).

But it proved nothing of the sort about Chabad or Trump. Filled with errors and innuendo, the article was as much an example of "fake news" as anything cooked up by the far left or far right. The Anti-Defamation League correctly condemned it as a "calumny" that "invoked age-old myths about the Jews."

As Bethany Mandel noted in *The Federalist*, “Who needs alt-right conspiracy theories about the Jews when you have Politico?”

Liberals guilty of anti-Semitism don’t excuse offensive conservatives. But the moral of the story is that if you complain about Jew-hatred when it can be linked to false narratives about Trump, yet you don’t get worked up about what Iran or the Palestinians are saying, let alone about Politico or liberal politicians with backgrounds as apologists for anti-Semites—such as the Democratic National Committee’s deputy leader, Minnesota’s Rep. Keith Ellison—then maybe it’s time to question your motives.

Sean Spicer should teach us that the “anyone I don’t like is Hitler”—or worse—approach to politics or history always fails. Unfortunately, many of his liberal critics need to learn the same lesson.

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