

Bill Clinton criticized for saying Israel forced to kill Gaza civilians

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Detroit, November 2 (RHC)-- Former U.S. President Bill Clinton is facing a backlash from U.S. Muslim and Arab Americans after saying Israel has been “forced” to kill civilians in Gaza and suggesting the country was in the Holy Land “first” – before the Palestinians.

Speaking at a rally for Democratic presidential candidate Kamala Harris in Michigan, a crucial swing U.S. state with large Arab and Muslim populations who the Democrats are trying to win over, Clinton said he understood people’s concerns about the bloodshed in Gaza, but said Israel had no choice but to inflict large civilian losses, even as it is accused of genocide in the International Court of Justice.

“ Hamas makes sure that they’re shielded. They’ll force you to kill civilians if you want to defend yourself,” Clinton said. “ I’m going to do everything I can to convince people they cannot murder their way out of this, either side,” he later added.

Since Israel’s war on Gaza broke out, Israeli forces have killed more than 43,000 people in the Palestinian enclave, the majority women and children. A United Nations-backed commission has accused Israel’s military of “ crimes against humanity ” during the war, including forced starvation and intentional attacks on civilians, as well as blaming Palestinian groups for war crimes.

Clinton also stirred controversy when he said Israelis were in the Holy Land “ first ”.

“ I got news for [Hamas]— [Israelis] were there first, before their faith existed,” he said, avoiding reference to the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians ethnically cleansed from their homes in 1948, during the war that established Israel.

Arab- and Muslim-American leaders slammed Clinton for antagonising communities whose votes Democrats have been courting in the razor-tight November 5th U.S. election.

Abdullah Hammoud, the mayor of the U.S.’s first Arab-majority city, Dearborn, said remarks by Clinton and other Democratic leaders were not helping the party’s case with his community.

“ When you see the remarks of former President Bill Clinton, talking about how Israel is forced to kill civilians ... it gets extremely frustrating,” Hammoud told Al Jazeera. “ When you have surrogates like Liz Cheney campaigning across the state of Michigan, talking about how even Dick Cheney – the war criminal – is supporting Vice President Harris, is that supposed to be a welcoming message to this community? ”

Yousef Munayyer, head of the Palestine/Israel programme at the Arab Center Washington DC, wrote on social media: “ Hard to think of a more counterproductive way to send this message. ”

Robert S McCaw, director of government affairs at the Council on American-Islamic Relations, said in a statement. “ Bill Clinton’s callous and dishonest attempt to justify the Israeli government’s attacks on civilians in Gaza was as insulting as it was Islamophobic. ”

Despite traditionally voting Democratic, many Arab Americans are turning away from the party this year due to anger over President Joe Biden’s unwavering support for Israel amid wars in Gaza and Lebanon, a position Harris has maintained.

A recent survey suggests more Arab Americans support Republican candidate Donald Trump than Harris, a trend that could prove important in Michigan.

The Democrats have been accused of being tone-deaf in their comments on Israel and the Palestinians, and focusing their messaging towards pro-Palestinian progressives on warning of the dangers of Trump, rather than action to stop Israel from continuing its wars in the Middle East.

Palestinian American comedian Amer Zahr, who is running for school board in Dearborn, said it is “ baffling ” how out of touch the Harris campaign is with the Arab community. “ It’s hard to imagine anything more insulting than what Bill Clinton said about us. He invoked the oldest Zionist tropes in some bizarre effort to convince us to vote for Kamala Harris,” Zahr told Al Jazeera.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA]

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