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Britain's Queen Elizabeth escorts President Donald Trump and First Lady Melania Trump through the Royal Collection at Buckingham Palace, in London June 3. (CNS/Reuters/Carlos Barria)



by Michael Sean Winters

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June 10, 2019
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Donald J. Trump was born into a family with an embarrassment of riches. Now, as our president went to Europe to commemorate the 75th anniversary of D-Day, he makes America rich in embarrassments.

First up were his attacks on the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle. Markle had previously criticized the president, and so the man who never knows there are times when it is best to not hit back, when asked about her criticism, said in an interview with The Sun, "What can I say? I didn't know that she was nasty?" The president later denied making the comment, but the interview had been recorded. He later admitted that he had said it and added "she's very nice." The whole episode was both bizarre and unnecessary. The president also sent out a lot of tweets about how nice the royals were in welcoming him and how much he enjoyed his time with them. I could not help thinking of the scene in "Game Change" in which Sarah Palin (Julianne Moore) did not know that the queen is head of state but not the head of government.

Trump's problems with London Mayor Sadiq Khan started even before Air Force One had landed, when the president tweeted that Khan is a "stone cold loser." Khan, the son of Pakistani immigrants and a Labour Member of Parliament before he was elected the first Muslim mayor of London, was never likely to become one of the Donald's favorites. But so far from being a "loser," Khan won his election handily with 1,148,716 votes to 909,755 for Conservative candidate Zac Goldsmith. True, that is not a lot of voters compared to the U.S. For example, Hillary Clinton's margin of victory in the popular vote, 2,868,518, was more than the total number of people who voted in the 2016 London mayoralty contest.

Things were no less embarrassing when the president got to Ireland. In a press avail after his meeting with the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Trump explained that he

understood the Irish border issue, but it was quite clear he had no idea what he was talking about, no sense of the complicated history of the border, and no sense of the very real danger a hard-Brexit poses to the hard-won peace along the border between Eire and Ulster. He knew he wanted to get to play some golf.

The most ugly of his tactless interventions came on the bluff overlooking Omaha Beach in the French village of Colleville-sur-Mer. There, sitting in front of the crosses and Stars of David that mark the 9,388 graves of American service members killed in the Battle of Normandy, he used the occasion of an interview on Fox News with Laura Ingraham to denigrate special counsel Robert Mueller and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi. It is customary that U.S. presidents do not engage in partisan politics when abroad. For starters, it puts the president's hosts in an awkward position. They need to work with whomever the American people choose to lead the nation, not just with this political party or that. More importantly, and especially on an occasion such as the commemoration of D-Day, it is wildly inappropriate. The president was there, with the leaders of France, the United Kingdom and Canada, to honor the sacrifices made by our soldiers. The Nazi machine guns did not distinguish between Democrats and Republicans on that day, and so it is wrong to introduce rank partisanship at such a place on such an occasion.

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U.S President Donald Trump smiles alongside first lady Melania Trump as they sit next to World War II veterans during a ceremony to mark the 75th anniversary of D-

Day at the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial in Colleville-sur-Mer, France, June 6. (CNS/Reuters/Christian Hartmann)

It is also grotesque to see the draft-dodging president attack a decorated war hero like Mueller. The now-former special counsel volunteered for the Marines and served in Vietnam. He received the Bronze Star and was wounded in combat. Incidentally, Mueller had a bum knee and failed his first medical exam before enlistment. Once it had healed, he went back and was successfully enlisted. The comparison with the president's cowardly behavior is not very flattering to the president, which might actually entice Trump to attack Mueller instead of respecting his service. It is the kind of thing narcissists do.

All this would be merely petty weirdness if it were not for the fact that the president fails, and fails utterly, to grasp the historic and on-going significance of NATO and the European Union as guarantors of peace and stability. Consider this tweet in which he promised a trade deal "once the U.K. gets rid of the shackles." Shackles?

When Trump became president, he made a great fuss about the fact he was returning a bust of Winston Churchill to the Oval Office. I wonder if he even knows that Churchill was a great advocate of a united Europe? Actually, no need to wonder. It is safe to assume that Trump knows almost nothing about Churchill. As I wrote last week, Trump's brash embrace of nationalistic populism is completely at odds with the lessons of history, lessons this crude and careless president managed to ignore during his trip to Europe.

[Michael Sean Winters covers the nexus of religion and politics for NCR.]

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