

"I'm Congressman Ritchie Torres, and I'm praying for all the Israelis who are experiencing a level of trauma and terror that most of us, including myself, cannot begin to even imagine. Israel is under siege not only from the rocket fire — relentless rocket fire — at the hands of Hamas, but also from the endless propaganda war that has taken on a new intensity, especially here in the United States. And so I'm here to affirm that as a member of Congress, one who intends to be here for a long time, I have an unwavering commitment to both the sovereignty and security of Israel as a Jewish state.

"With sovereignty and security comes the inherent right of self-defense, a right that every state including our own takes for granted. Why should Israel be an exception to the rule? Why should Israel be held to a deadly double standard in a moment of terror? It is unreasonable to expect a nation-state to be the passive target of hundreds of rockets, and then forfeit the right to defend itself amid a constant stream of terror. No right-minded person would impose that kind of self-destructive burden on any other country.

"What is under siege is not only Israel, what is under siege is the truth itself. Circulating on social media in particular is a vicious lie, a lie that's deceptively reframes the terrorism of Hamas as self-defense and deceptively reframes the self-defense of Israel as terrorism. Increasingly, we seem to live in an Orwellian universe where the truth no longer matters. Now is not the time to be silent. All of us, especially those holding elected office, have to be visible and vocal, fearless and forceful, in standing up for our greatest friend in the Middle East. Support for Israel, especially in moments like these, is not for the faint-hearted.

"The moment I sent out a statement denouncing the rocket fire from Hamas, I was swiftly denounced by BDS extremists as a white supremacist, as a supporter of apartheid and ethnic cleansing and genocide - terms that have been stripped of their original and proper meaning. And although these comments caused great pain to my loved ones, the complicity of silence would cause me even greater pain. I remain as determined as ever to speak out. And if I can speak out, then anyone can. And everyone must.

"We cannot allow ourselves to be silenced by an overbearing Twitter mob, dominated by the extremes of American politics. If we in elected office are not willing to say and do what is right, then we are unworthy of the office we hold. And so I'm here to state in the clearest possible terms that I stand with Israel, because doing so quite simply is the right thing to do. Thank you for having me."