

# Will 'God' Save Kavanaugh?

That attitudes may not have changed from an older generation to Kavanaugh's – and may have gotten still worse, and not only at elitist Georgetown Prep, but in society at large – is sad beyond telling, says Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

*Special to Consortium News*



"Are boys really better than girls? I know you are one, but please try to be fair," asked eight year-old Helen in a letter to God.

From my own experience while a callow youth at a Jesuit boys-only high school, I believe it highly unlikely that Georgetown Jesuit Prepster Brent Kavanaugh ever thought of asking God the question Helen posed. For Kavanaugh, as for the rest of us, the answer was self-evident – much clearer than 13th century Thomas Aquinas's "proofs" for the existence of God.

At my Jesuit high school, as at Kavanaugh's, the concept of God-like male supremacy was deeply entrenched – from the priests and other all-male faculty to the *bonhomie* of the young "good-natured men" in the smoke-infested Senior Room.

The Jesuits encouraged us to think of ourselves – each one of us – as exceptional, down to the last man, so to speak. It was Lake Wobegone on steroids. We had been pre-selected to become the future leaders of the sole exceptional country in the world – an ethos that prevails, in spades, at Georgetown Prep.

Happily, we were spared Aquinas's "insights" on women, whom he described as defective, misbegotten males. It was not until college that I learned Thomas deemed women "the result of some debility ... or of some change effected by external influences, like the south wind, for example, which is damp, as we are told by Aristotle."

## Is God 'One of the Boys'

Even without Aquinas, though, the culture of the Prep spoke loudly, if less directly, of the subordinate status of women. It should come as no surprise, then, that this prep-school milieu left us precocious adolescents quite comfortable with an all-powerful God who was "one of the boys."

For me, though, high school was a half-century ago. The reality that attitudes

have not changed between my generation and Kavanaugh's – and may have gotten still worse, not only at Jesuit-run elitist Georgetown Prep, but in society at large – is sad beyond telling. Can we forget that the 2016 election went to a man who bragged about sexually assaulting women? “When you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything.” ... and that this same man is now defending Kavanaugh “all the way.”

### **To Be Fair**

Taking a cue from eight year-old Helen, let's try to be fair. Who among us is without blame? Most of us still refer to God as “he.” And how many of us still visualize the Last Supper, through the oils of Leonardo da Vinci, as a stag party rather than the traditional Passover meal it was – with women and children galore. (Psst! DaVinci wasn't even there.)

Perhaps worst of all, how many of Catholics join Kavanaugh in bowing submissively to the arbitrary ban on women priests, a prohibition based not on Scripture or the practice of the first-century Church, but rather on out-and-out misogyny.

In his kid-gloves interview on Fox Tuesday evening, Kavanaugh again denied having sexually assaulted anyone, pointedly adding, “I have faith in God.” But the tide has turned. This has become clearer with every new accusation against him, plus the unseemly rush by Judiciary Committee Chair Charles Grassley (R, Iowa) and his ten white male Republican apostles to ram through the confirmation. Like the protagonists of the Greek tragedies – Kavanaugh will need a *Deus ex Machina* to pluck him out of his distress. “Supportive” comments on Wednesday from the aforementioned “star,” who now happens to be president, are not going to help.

Those who know Washington are aware that the closest thing to an all-powerful God is a congressional committee chairman. But it does not help Kavanaugh's candidacy when Sen. Grassley seems to know nothing other than the power-over type of God – the same model that dominated what Kavanaugh calls his “formative years” at Georgetown Prep.

Throw in Grassley's obtuseness and insensitivity, and add a pinch of omniscience from the likes of Sen. Orin Hatch (R, Utah) and you have a recipe that could spell defeat. Asked why he branded “phony” the very recent allegation by Deborah Ramirez, a Yale classmate of Kavanaugh, Hatch snapped, “Because I know it is, that's why.”

If Kavanaugh's nomination does reach the Senate floor, what will be most interesting of all will be to observe the degree to which Senators Susan Collins

(R, Maine) and Lisa Murkowski (R, Alaska) have themselves internalized male supremacy – whether of God or of demigod Republican committee chairmen.

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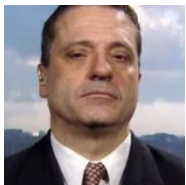
## Letter from Britain: The Real Reason for the ‘Anti-Semite’ Campaign Against Jeremy Corbyn

Panic drives the smear attack against Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn whose background as a radical socialist, not his criticism of Israel and support for the Palestine, threatens the British establishment’s hold on power, argues Alexander Mercouris.

**By Alexander Mercouris**

**in London**

*Special to Consortium News*



Any discussion of the current “anti-Semitism crisis” in the British Labour Party needs to start with an understanding that there is no “anti-semitism crisis” in the British Labour Party, or in Britain.

Anti-Semitism did once have a place in British society. By way of example, readers of Agatha Christie stories written before World War II will come across stock anti-Semitic representations of Jewish characters. As recently as the 1970s, I can remember what would today be considered Semitic stereotypes being commonly used to represent Jewish people in many of the unfunny comedy shows broadcast by British television in that period, including some the BBC broadcast.

Racist stereotyping of this sort was commonplace in Britain right up to the 1970s, and was certainly not exclusive to Jews, as Irish people, black people and people from the Indian subcontinent well recall. Some still persists today, but by and large racial stereotyping is socially unacceptable, except (worryingly) with respect to Russians.

By comparison with other European countries, anti-Semitism in Britain has,

however, not been a major phenomenon in modern British society and recent British history. There has been no official persecution of Jews in Britain since they were allowed to resettle in England by Oliver Cromwell in the 1650s, while the attempt by Oswald Moseley's British Union of Fascists to stir up political anti-Semitism in the 1930s provoked fierce resistance.

Jewish people now play a full and active role in British life, and this happens without notice or comment.

As for the formal institutions of Britain's Jewish community, these form an integral part of British life. The chief rabbi has enjoyed a measure of recognition as the nominal leader of the British Jewish community from the British state ever since the 1870s. Since the 1980s, by convention, the chief rabbi has been admitted to the British Parliament as a peer of the House of Lords, though the present chief rabbi, Ephraim Mirvis, has not yet been so admitted. The British Jewish community's major institution—the Board of Deputies of British Jews—has had a continuous existence since the 1760s.

Though there are anti-Semites in Britain as there are everywhere else, they are very much a minor and ugly fringe, and moreover a generally despised and disliked one, with no influence or traction in British politics or in British life.

Despite lurid claims to the contrary, actual cases of anti-Semitic violence and property damage in Britain are relatively few, and certainly appear to be less than other types of racial violence.

Indeed, Jewish people today are so much an integral part of British society and of British life that I for one question whether it is even accurate to speak of a distinct "Jewish establishment" among British Jews. Rather, it seems to me that it would be more accurate to say that there are some prominent British Jews and some prominent British Jewish institutions—such as the chief rabbi and the Board of Deputies of British Jews—which today form an integral part of the larger British establishment, whose general perspectives and interests they share.

Which brings me to the present "anti-Semitism" campaign against Jeremy Corbyn.

### **The Left-Wing, Anti-Imperialist Labour Tradition**

The British Labour Party was formed in 1900 before World War I, and if there has been one political movement in Britain that has stood rock solid against all manifestations of anti-Semitism in British life (perhaps more than any other group), it is the British Labour Party, and first and foremost its left wing.

This is consistent with the traditional stance of the left wing of the British Labour Party, which can be broadly defined as anti-racist, anti-fascist, and, above all, anti-imperialist. The latter has been important in a country like Britain—historically the preeminent imperialist power—where imperialism was justified in racist terms. British left-wing anti-imperialists, who are mostly drawn from the working class (a fact which gave British anti-imperialism a strong class-conflict character) strongly were predisposed to be anti-racist.

Not surprisingly, British Labour left-wing anti-racism extended to staunch opposition to anti-Semitism, which is, of course, the reason why so many British Jews were drawn to the Labour Party in the first place.

The key point to understand about Corbyn is that it is from within this left-wing, anti-imperialist Labour tradition that he comes. His parents after all first met each other in the 1930s attending a rally in support of the Spanish Republic at the time of the Spanish Civil War. He has been loyal to the traditions of the Labour Party's anti-imperialist left ever since he began his career in politics, as his long record of opposition to all the West's interventionist wars shows. Needless to say, that includes strong and consistent anti-racism and the opposition to anti-Semitism which goes with it. Strikingly, Corbyn's acceptance speech following his election as Labour leader included a declaration of support for refugees.

To insinuate that Corbyn is an anti-Semite—as is increasingly happening—and to insinuate that the left wing of the Labour Party to which he belongs is riddled with anti-Semitism and poses an “existential threat to British Jews” (as several of the British Jewish community's newspapers have alleged) is more than just absurd. It stands reality on its head. Corbyn is not an anti-Semite. Anti-Semitism, on the contrary, is what he always has defined himself against, and to claim otherwise is dishonest and even surreal.

Corbyn's well-known support for the Palestinian people's struggle does not contradict his opposition to anti-Semitism. Rather, it is the product of his consistent anti-imperialism, making Corbyn's support for the Palestinians and his opposition to anti-Semitism consistent.

All this is well understood by those who are conducting the anti-Semitism campaign against Corbyn within the Labour Party and outside it. Corbyn has been a fixture of British political life ever since he was first elected a member of Parliament in 1983. The British establishment—including those members of the British establishment who are Jewish—know him well, and they know well what his actual beliefs are. It is not credible that they believe him to be an anti-Semite, or that they think that the left wing of the British Labour Party, which supports him, is riddled with anti-Semitism.

## The Push to Stop Corbyn

The essential mendacity of the whole anti-Semitism campaign and the true motives behind it is shown by the exceptionally narrow frame of reference in which it is being conducted. It is universally acknowledged that the allegations of anti-Semitism being made against Corbyn and some of his supporters stem from Corbyn's longstanding support for the Palestinian people's struggle and his equally longstanding criticisms of Israel's response to that struggle. As'ad AbuKhalil has discussed this aspect of the affair for Consortium News with great thoroughness and detail.

It is worth pointing out, however, that the criticisms being made against Corbyn barely touch on the Palestinian question at all. Anyone looking at these criticisms for a discussion of the Palestinian issue, even one from a position sympathetic to Israel and hostile to the Palestinians, will fail to find it.

The Palestinian struggle, the plight of the Palestinian people, the whole history of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the current policies both of Israel and of the Western governments which support it, are barely mentioned. When Palestinians do get mentioned at all, it is purely as terrorists. The entire campaign is being conducted as if Corbyn and those who support him hate Zionism and Israel and therefore all Jews.

It is, of course, impossible that those who are conducting the campaign against Corbyn are any more ignorant of the basic facts of the Palestinian struggle and of the Arab-Israeli conflict than they are ignorant of Corbyn's actual beliefs. If they are not mentioning these facts, it is not because they are ignorant of them. It is because they choose not to mention them.

In other words, the campaign against Corbyn has very little to do with the situation in the Middle East. I say this, though I have no doubt that the Israeli embassy is playing an active role in the campaign, a fact which is apparently freely admitted within Israel itself, though not in Britain.

However, it is a mistake to see the campaign against Corbyn as principally Israeli inspired. If it were, I would expect those conducting it to say far more about the situation in the Middle East than they do. Nor, in my opinion, is the campaign exclusively or even primarily the work of British Jews. As it happens, the Jewish community in Britain is far from united behind the campaign, with many British Jews expressing doubts or even outright opposition to it.

Instead, the campaign should be seen for what it is: the latest in a long series of attacks by the British establishment against Corbyn, the one British politician who more than any other embodies the threat to the current status quo

and to the British establishment's hold on power.

These attacks have at various times sought to portray Corbyn as a Communist, a Russian agent, a terrorist sympathizer and a traitor. Adding a charge of anti-Semitism to this catalogue is an obvious further step, and given Corbyn's well-known advocacy of Palestinian rights an easy one. The only surprise is that it has not happened before.

That the anti-Semitism campaign is the latest in a long series of establishment attacks on Corbyn, which extend all the way back to his election as Labour's leader, is shown by the sheer breadth of the campaign. The parliamentary Labour Party, the entire Conservative Party and the media (including the BBC and the supposedly left-wing *Guardian* newspaper) have all embraced it. Certainly, it extends far beyond those members of Britain's Jewish community who form part of the greater British establishment and who initially spearheaded it. As it happens, the great majority of British politicians and commentators who have joined in the campaign are non-Jews.

### **A New Political Dynamic**

As for the campaign's greater vehemence by comparison with earlier campaigns, that is the product of the changed political dynamic in Britain since the June 2017 general election.

Before that election, the British establishment did not take Corbyn seriously, since it assumed that the British electorate would reject him in any election which he fought. The horrifying realization following the June 2017 election that the opposite is the case has—not surprisingly—caused panic and has led to the establishment pulling out all the stops. That explains not just the greater vehemence of this campaign but why it has persisted for so long.

In other words, what is driving the campaign is not some overarching loyalty on the part of British Jews to Israel or a belief that Corbyn is an anti-Semite. Rather, it is British establishment panic. As Britain's Conservative government disintegrates, Corbyn stands poised to become Britain's next prime minister. That terrifying prospect—of a radical socialist in 10, Downing Street—is one which must be averted at all costs. That is the reason for the anti-Semitism campaign we have been witnessing, and thus all the other campaigns against Corbyn we have witnessed, of which there are certainly more to come.

While the causes of the anti-Semitism campaign are mainly domestic, there is a wide consensus among Corbyn's supporters that he has not handled his response to the campaign well. The general opinion—that he has been far too accommodating to his critics—has been forcefully argued in Consortium News by [Jonathan Cook](#).

Corbyn himself has conceded too much ground on anti-semitism. As a lifelong anti-racism campaigner, the accusations of anti-semitism have clearly pained him. He has tried to placate rather than defy the smearers. He has tried to maintain unity with people who have no interest in finding common ground with him.

And as he has lost all sense of how to respond in good faith to allegations made in bad faith, he has begun committing the cardinal sin of sounding and looking evasive – just as those who deployed the anti-semitism charge hoped. It was his honesty, plain-speaking and compassion that won him the leadership and the love of ordinary members. Unless he can regain the political and spiritual confidence that underpinned those qualities, he risks haemorrhaging support.

This widespread view that Corbyn has been accommodating to people who seek only his destruction has even produced some curious examples of drafts of “speeches” written for him by some of his sympathizers setting out the sort of things which they think he should say.

While I have considerable sympathy for this view, I think it is only fair to add that Corbyn happens to be one of the most polite and diffident personalities in British politics. The contrast with, say, Donald Trump in the United States, could not be greater. It is not in Corbyn’s nature to respond to his critics with the same forcefulness that they extend to him. While this makes Corbyn an indifferent orator and blunts his impact in debates in the House of Commons, his politeness and diffidence is an integral part of his appeal. To call on him to act differently is to call for a different man, with no guarantee that that man would command anything remotely approaching the level of support that Corbyn has.

### **Is the Campaign Working?**

It is important to stress this point because as of the time of writing it is far from clear to me that—contrary to what Jonathan Cook fears—this latest campaign against Corbyn is succeeding.

The poll numbers barely have shifted, with Conservative and Labour both polling around 40 percent of the vote since the June 2017 general election, and most opinion polls put Labour ahead. Though the anti-Semitism campaign may have lost Labour some Jewish votes in places like the London district of Barnet, the generality of the British voters seem indifferent and unimpressed by the whole affair.

I suspect that the truth is that Corbyn has been around in British politics for



so long that the British electorate long ago formed its view of him. Knowing Corbyn as well as they do—as well as the left-wing tradition from which he comes—the vast majority of British center-left voters who make up Corbyn’s electoral base find the whole idea that he is an anti-Semite just too fantastic to take seriously. Besides the fact that the anti-Semitism campaign is merely the latest in a series of campaigns against Corbyn launched from the moment he became Labour’s leader makes the true motives of his critics in the end altogether too obvious.

Cook has expressed the fear that if the Labour Party adopts the four additional working examples of anti-Semitism drafted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)—which it has hitherto resisted doing because of the way they limit criticism of Israel—that will make future criticism of Israel by Corbyn and by other members of the Labour Party all but impossible, and will open the way to a purge of Palestinian sympathizers within the Labour Party. [Editor’s note: The Labour Party altered its anti-Semitism definition on Sept. 4 at its National Executive Committee meeting and adopted the four additional working examples of anti-Semitism drafted by the IHRA.]

Similar concerns have been expressed by Norman Finkelstein, who sees the whole attempt to impose any sort of definition of anti-Semitism on the Labour Party as an attack on the party’s traditions and on free speech.

These concerns are far from groundless. On the contrary, there is no doubt that silencing criticism of Israel is very much a part of the agenda of some of the people behind the campaign, with the British establishment (not just its Jewish part) united in support of Israel in the same way as are the political establishments of all the other Western countries. Consider, for example, this extraordinary article by Andrew Feldman in *The Evening Standard*, a newspaper edited by former Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron’s friend and former Chancellor George Osborne, which contains this passage:

Anti-Semitism and anti-Zionism are the same thing. They are two sides of the same coin. Anti-Zionism is the belief that the state of Israel should not exist. That it should be dismantled. This is not the same as saying, quite legitimately, that you disagree with the policies of the current or any other Israeli government; or calling for the reversal of the settlement programme in the West Bank; or demanding a return to earlier borders and the creation of a two-state solution.

Some historical context is important here. Two thousand years ago, at the end of a long and bloody revolt, the Temple was destroyed and the Jewish people were dispersed far and wide, across the Roman Empire and beyond. They settled

in many places. Some made them welcome for a time. Others less so. Jewish people lived in a constant state of trepidation. Periods of peace and prosperity punctuated by pogroms, inquisition and expulsion.

In Europe, the Holocaust was the crescendo of centuries of rumbling antipathy. Jews sought to escape the horror but the numbers who found refuge were pathetically small. Even the UK only accepted 70,000 Jewish refugees before the Second World War and 10,000 during it.

Quite simply, there was nowhere for them to go, so six million people perished out of a total global Jewish population of 17 million.

Finally, after this destruction, the world decided that enough was enough. The Jewish people needed their own place to go when things went wrong. And the ancient homeland was chosen. It was to be shared with the Palestinians on lines established by a United Nations resolution in 1948.

This was not the only work for the cartographers after the Second World War. The demise of empire, the calls for national determination and the need for pragmatic solutions brought about the creation of new states in Europe, Africa, the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere in the Middle East. Lines were drawn on maps. Sometimes they respected geographical, religious and tribal boundaries; sometimes they did not. Everyone was doing the best they could to make sense of the cataclysmic events of the previous decades.

The State of Israel served its purpose. A national homeland for the Jewish people existing alongside the Jewish communities that continued to live around the world. And when things did not go well for some of those communities – in Russia, Iraq, Morocco and elsewhere – it was a place of sanctuary. It accepted refugees in huge numbers without question.

Note that the Palestinians are barely mentioned in the whole article, which claims that anti-Zionism is anti-Semitism and does so by linking anti-Zionism to the whole history of anti-Semitism in the West, culminating in the Nazis and the Holocaust.

Needless to say, though Feldman appears to admit that it is legitimate to criticize Israel, he makes no criticisms of Israel anywhere in his article. In practice, on the basis of his article, it is difficult to imagine what criticism of Israeli policy toward the Palestinians Feldman would not define as anti-Semitic.

Having said this, it is important to retain perspective. Even though the Labour Party changed its anti-Semitism definition, that will not end criticism of

Israel within the Labour Party or in British society. Corbyn himself will not change his views, nor will other supporters of the Palestinian struggle within the Labour Party or in British society.

Ultimately, what is causing the growing criticism of Israel in Britain as elsewhere are Israeli policies, and attempts to silence criticism of those policies by conjuring up the specter of anti-Semitism or by resorting to purges and inquisitions that can only, in the end, threaten to provoke a backlash.

### **How the Anti-Corbyn Campaign Is Like Russia-gate**

The anti-Semitism campaign against Corbyn in Britain bears more than a passing resemblance to the Russia-gate scandal in the United States.

In both countries, the establishment has been shocked by popular insurgencies on the right and left and the rise of a seeming outsider: Corbyn in Britain, and Trump (with far less cause) in the U.S. In both countries, this has provoked a shrill establishment campaign against the outsider. In both countries, the allegations which form the basis of the campaign—of anti-Semitism in the case of Corbyn, of being an agent of the Russians in the case of Trump—are to anyone with even a basic grasp of reality utterly fantastic. In neither country does the sheer absurdity of the allegations seem to matter for those who have invested in the campaign. Instead, the political class in both countries pretends to believe them, while the media has embraced them. A media effort has been made to link Corbyn to Russia too.

In both countries, interested outside powers are involved in the campaigns—Israel in the case of the anti-Semitism campaign against Corbyn in Britain, Britain and some other U.S. European allies in the Russia-gate scandal against Trump in the U.S. But the origins of both campaigns are domestic.

In both Britain and the U.S., the core electoral base of both Corbyn and Trump remains unmoved by the hysteria and the swirl of allegations, but in the meantime, real damage to the political system is being done. Both countries are unable to formulate rational foreign policies, whether with respect to the situation in the Middle East in the case of Britain, or with respect to relations with Russia in the case of the U.S.

Corbyn and the movement he leads have far deeper roots within British society than Trump does in the U.S. There has been a continuous tradition of political radicalism in Britain going back to the period of the French Revolution. Corbyn stands squarely within that tradition, a fact which is perhaps better understood in Britain than it is outside it. That tradition for the moment is rising in the case of younger Britains.

That, of course, is why, against all expectations, Corbyn, was elected leader of the Labour Party, and why, again contrary to all expectations, he increased the Labour's share of the vote so dramatically in the June 2017 general election.

That is reason for the intensity of the campaign against him, but it also explains why he has been able to withstand it up to now. The shape of British politics in the future will be determined by whether or not he is able to continue to do so.

**Alexander Mercouris is a political commentator and editor of The Duran.**

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## The Unlikely Force Behind US Prison Reform

If a conservative is a liberal who gets mugged, then a prison reformer is a conservative who goes to prison, as John Kiriakou explains.

**By John Kiriakou**

*Special to Consortium News*



Prison and sentencing reform have long been an important issue for the political left. The United States has five percent of the world's population and 25 percent of the world's prison population. Congress creates 50 new crimes every year. That's 500 things that were legal a decade ago that are now felonies. It's no wonder the prisons are full.

Liberals are concerned because so many poor people and people of color are in prison. One out of every four black men in America is in prison, in jail, on probation, or on parole. The numbers are astounding. The rest of the world looks at us and shakes its collective head—especially our European allies.

The truth, though, is that prison reform and sentencing reform are not reserved for the left. In fact, evangelicals and conservatives have been leaders in the reform movement since the 1970s. Chuck Colson, who had been Richard Nixon's special counsel and hatchet man during the Watergate years and who served eight months in a minimum-security prison for Watergate-related crimes, found his Christian faith there and created Prison Fellowship, now the oldest and largest Christian-oriented prison ministry and reform organization in the country. Its

success has spawned countless similar organizations.

Prison Fellowship has become known especially for its program that sends Christmas presents to the children of indigent prisoners and for its provision of bibles and religious literature to prisoners at the federal, state, and local levels. The trend for Christian organizations involved in prison work, though, has changed over the past 20 years or so, ever since President Bill Clinton toughened the already harsh Reagan-era anti-drug laws that have filled American prisons. Now, many of those groups are advocating for legislation that would change sentences, guidelines, and in some cases, the entire system.

Most recently, Congress has twice come up with bipartisan bills that would reshape the entire federal sentencing regime. Supporters thought they had a real chance in 2014 when a bipartisan group of senators, led by Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) and John Cornyn (R-TX) introduced the Recidivism Reduction and Public Safety Act of 2014. The bill easily passed the Senate Judiciary Committee. A similar bill, the Smarter Sentencing Act of 2013, also passed the committee. Both bills also sailed through the House Judiciary Committee. They died on the Senate floor, though, when then-majority leader Harry Reid (D-NV) refused to call them up for a vote. A year later, the new majority leader, Mitch McConnell (R-KY) also refused to allow a vote.

Both bills, which would have eased sentencing guidelines, done away with mandatory minimum sentences for most drug crimes, and offered incentives for federal prisoners that would have allowed early release for good behavior and for taking GED or vocational classes, had the support of groups as diverse as the American Civil Liberties Union, the conservative Heritage Foundation, former prosecutors, police and prison guard organizations, victims' advocates, prominent conservatives, and faith groups. But nothing happened.

Four years later, with Donald Trump in the White House and Republicans controlling both houses of Congress, that could change. Certainly, evangelical and conservative interest in prison and sentencing reform has not diminished. Craig DeRoche, senior vice president for advocacy and public policy at Colson's Prison Fellowship, told Religion News Service in May, "There's never been greater interest in America for criminal justice reform. We have a lot of hope. This administration is genuinely interested in second chances." De Roche added that, while Prison Fellowship and other Christian organizations have worked on prison reform with every president since Jimmy Carter, the group's access to the Trump White House is "unprecedented." Part of the reason, he said, was that the prison population has so ballooned in the past 20 years that the issue has "touched many Christians personally."

I would add that the driving force behind the Administration's interest in

prison and sentencing reform is presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner, whose father Charles was convicted in 2004 of 18 counts of making illegal campaign contributions, tax evasion, and witness tampering. The elder Kushner was sentenced to 24 months in prison. He served 14 months and completed his sentence in a halfway house in Newark, New Jersey. The younger Kushner has been a reform advocate ever since. And that's where hope lies.

In May the House of Representatives passed a bipartisan prison reform bill by a vote of 360-59 that would immediately send home 4,000 prisoners, provide free sanitary napkins to all incarcerated women, outlaw shackling during childbirth, and make it easier for inmates to earn time under house arrest or in halfway houses. President Trump endorsed the bill just a few days after it passed the House.

The problem is, and has always been, in the Senate. In June, Kushner met with Cornyn and Whitehouse, as well as Reps. Doug Collins (R-GA) and Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), to strategize on how to move the bill forward in the Senate. Senate Judiciary Committee chairman Chuck Grassley (R-IA), has his own reform bill that is more comprehensive than Kushner's. But it runs the risk of alienating other key Republicans, including Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Trump himself. Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) already has said that he will seek to block it.

But now there's finally some good news. Trump has proven to be truly interested in reform. He met in early August with Republican senators and told them that he is supportive of a new reform proposal that would combine Kushner's "First Step Act," the Grassley proposals, and the original provisions of the 2013 and 2014 bipartisan bills. Trump told the assembled senators, "Do some work with your colleagues and let's see where the Senate is and then come back to me with it." That's as far as any reform bill has gotten in a generation.

Here are the provisions as things stand now:

- The bill would lower lifetime mandatory minimum sentences for people with prior nonviolent drug felony convictions to 25 years;
- It would reduce 20-year mandatory minimum sentences for similar offenders to 15 years. This would apply only to new sentences and would not be retroactive;
- It would apply the Fair Sentencing Act, which Congress passed in 2010 and which reduced the disparity between cocaine- and crack-related offenses,

retroactively;

- And it would expand exceptions to the application of mandatory-minimum sentences to more people with criminal histories.

The bill is popular and is moving forward because of that support from evangelicals and conservatives. Conservative icon Richard Vigeurie said in the New York Times in 2013 that, “Conservatives should recognize that the entire criminal justice system is another government spending program fraught with the issues that plague all government programs. Criminal justice should be subject to the same level of skepticism and scrutiny that we apply to any other government program.” He added that three principles—public safety, compassion, and controlled government spending—lie at the core of conservative philosophy. He’s right. And it’s evangelicals who are focused on the “compassion” aspect.

All of this is great, right? But it ignores the single most important reason that people are in prison in the first place—drug abuse. The federal Bureau of Prisons has a program that’s supposed to help people get off drugs and reintegrate into society. It’s called the Residential Drug Abuse Program, or RDAP. It’s a joke. There is precious little money dedicated to RDAP. And in most prisons it consists only of 11 weekly meetings where prisoners gather to watch taped reruns of the A&E Network program “Intervention.” Seriously. That’s it. There is no counseling, no therapy, no drug education, no vocational training. Nothing. That’s where conservatives should focus. If the government isn’t going to do anything about it, shouldn’t the churches? Wouldn’t it be practical for every church in America to help one single prisoner get off drugs and learn a trade or finish a high school diploma? It would certainly be cheaper and it probably would be more efficient than the system we now have.

Overall, a lot of Congress members want to do the right thing here. Reform is truly bipartisan. The political stars have aligned. It’s time to get it done. Conservatives should push reform forward and declare victory.

**John Kiriakou is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and a former senior investigator with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. John became the sixth whistleblower indicted by the Obama administration under the Espionage Act – a law designed to punish spies. He served 23 months in prison as a result of his attempts to oppose the Bush administration’s torture program.**

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# Religious Divisions Threaten to Further Inflammate Ukrainian Civil War

Not admitting the head of the Russian Orthodox Church to Kiev is like barring the Pope from Rome, but that is just what the U.S.-backed Ukrainian government has done, explains Dmitry Babich.

**By Dmitry Babich**

**in Moscow**

*Special to Consortium News*



During the American Civil War, in which 620,000 people were slaughtered on the battlefields alone and hundreds of thousands more injured, the organization of the Roman Catholic Church in the American north and south remained united throughout the war and after.

The same cannot be said for the four-year-old civil war in Ukraine, which has deepened existing divisions among Orthodox Christians in the country.

Tensions are rising to the point that the Ukrainian government has been accused of suppressing the celebration of the 1030th anniversary of the coming of Christianity to ancient Rus, the proto-state of Eastern Slavs, which included the territories of modern Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. The government is being blamed for involvement in an effort to eliminate the original historic church of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP), because of its affiliation with Russia and the word "Moscow" in its name.

The UOC-MP currently includes more than 12,000 of about 18,000 parishes in Ukraine, and is headed by Ukrainian Metropolitan Onuphrius, under the higher spiritual authority of Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Rus, seated in Moscow.

On July 27, a solemn march celebrating the 1030th anniversary of the baptism of Rus by Prince Vladimir the Great of Kiev in 988 AD drew 250,000 faithful of the UOC-MP in Kiev despite the attempt to sabotage it by the U.S.-backed Ukrainian government of President Petro Poroshenko. According to numerous testimonies by UOC-MP's priests, published in the Ukrainian press, transportation was cut off from outlying parishes and believers were intimidated.

But, if we believe the government, these actions weren't a suppression of religion, but rather "required by a specific situation." The Poroshenko regime, formed in the beginning of the civil war that followed the U.S.-backed 2014 bloody coup in the "Euromaidan" uprising, is favoring a split-off of the



traditional church by an anti-Moscow church known as the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kiev Patriarchate ( UOC-KP) headed by a self-proclaimed leader named Patriarch Filaret (born, Denisenko).

Denisenko, a former cleric of the Moscow Patriarchate, left the UOC-MP in 1992 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. He had lost an ecclesiastical election and tried to form his own church. Denisenko was then excommunicated. His church is not recognized by any of the other members of the international community of Orthodox churches.

There is no single authority in the Orthodox Churches similar to the Roman Catholic pope; rather there are independent or auto-cephalic regional Patriarchs considered equal in authority, with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), regarded as first among equals (*primus inter pares*) primarily for historic reasons because Constantinople, before its takeover by Turks in 1453, was the center of Orthodox Christianity.

None of these Orthodox Patriarchates recognize either the UOC-KP or "Patriarch" Filaret Denisenko. But now the Poroshenko government, together with Denisenko, is moving to reverse that situation. They have called on Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew in Istanbul to remove the authority of the Moscow Patriarchate and recognize a new, single independent Orthodox church in Ukraine, severing all ties to Moscow.

The single church in the Poroshenko-Denisenko plan would carry the UOC-KP name with the authority, according to Denisenko, to seize all churches, temples, chapels, monasteries and other properties belonging to the UOC-MP.

It would mean dispossessing the historic UOC-MP, which has direct "apostolic" continuity with the 1030-year-old original Kievan church and Christianity in the Eastern Roman empire, once brought there by Christ's own disciples. UOC-MP said they would not pray in church together with the excommunicated Denisenko.

### **A Warning from Kirill**

Russian Patriarch Kirill, speaking in Moscow at the celebrations of the 1030<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vladimir's baptism of Rus, warned against attempts by secular authorities in Ukraine to interfere with church affairs or to split the historic church.

Orthodox faithful inside Ukraine, both ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians, see the plans of Poroshenko's government and Denisenko as an illegal assault on their tradition and religious heritage. In addition, some deputies in the Ukrainian Rada (Parliament) have warned that there could be "bloody consequences" if the properties of the UOC-MP are confiscated and its members

forced to join a new church.

With a decision from Bartholomew expected next month, events took an important turn with the announcement of a planned Aug. 31 meeting between Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Ecumenical Patriarch in Istanbul. The announcement was made in early August through the ROC's press service, which called the upcoming meeting a "very important talk" between the two Patriarchs.

Though the Ecumenical Patriarch doesn't play the same role as the pope in the Roman Catholic Church, Bartholomew is nonetheless in a "make or break" position. All Russia and all of Ukraine will be anxiously watching that meeting, especially after the tensions that surrounded the UOC-MP's celebration in Kiev of the 1030th anniversary of Christianization.

The core issue is that Russian and Ukrainian Orthodox believers have belonged to the same church since Russia's conversion to Christianity in 988 AD. Against this powerful tradition, the government authorities in Kiev are spreading fear against the UOC-MP among some Ukrainian Orthodox believers that has been unheard of since Christianity was de facto "rehabilitated" in 1988 in the former Soviet Union during the celebrations of the 1000th anniversary of the Baptism.

The 1000th year anniversary celebration took place under Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who broke the 70 years long tradition of enforced state atheism in the Soviet Union. The USSR had one legal Russian Orthodox Church (persecuted by Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev)— the same that had existed in the Russian empire toppled by Bolsheviks in 1917. Church leaders say Ukraine's government cannot erase the united Church's history, which goes back to Prince Vladimir and to apostolic times.

According to the historical record, the Baptism of Kievan Rus by Vladimir had the support and participation of the Greek Church in Constantinople, then the official church of the Eastern Roman Empire, later known as Byzantium. The first Orthodox bishops and metropolitans (equivalent to Western archbishops) in Russia were Greeks from Constantinople who got their "apostolic succession" from Christ's disciples.

The petition to Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to approve the invention of a new "united" Ukrainian church that eliminates the UOC-MP would violate this sacred apostolic succession, says the Moscow Patriarchate. The UOC-MP has also protested that neither Poroshenko nor the Rada are empowered to ask Bartholomew to change the church's organization in Ukraine.

"The strength of the Russian Orthodox Church and its Ukrainian sister UOC-MP lies in the apostolic succession, which the current Ukrainian government can

neither provide nor imitate," the Russian Orthodox Church's spokesman said. "The state cannot 'create' a church, nor should it aspire to do it. But this is exactly what the Ukrainian authorities are trying to do, urging the Ukrainian Orthodox Church to merge with Denisenko's entity and asking from the ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople an autocephalous status for this new 'united' Ukrainian church of their own invention."

"This initiative is an abuse of power, an interference of state into church affairs," UOC-MP's the spokesman said.

The UOC-MP has remained the only public organization in Ukraine which still legally has the word "Moscow" in its name, and for millions of Ukrainian citizens, ethnic Russians or not, any kind of legal linkage to Russia is still valued.

### **Kiev's Moves Against Russia**

Almost immediately after seizing power in 2014, the new regime in Kiev terminated air flights between the two countries and banished Russian television and radio from Ukraine's cable networks. One of the new regime's first acts was to cancel the regional status of Russian language as "one of the official languages" even in those regions of Ukraine, where Russian speakers make up the majority of the population. The measure was reversed after some critical comments from Europe, but it was reinstated a few years later, when the European and American public became more tolerant towards the new Ukrainian regime's whims. Constant attempts are made by the Ukrainian government to shut down the Russian embassy, introduce a new visa regime between Russia and Ukraine or seal the borders, making it extremely difficult for millions of Russians and Ukrainians to see their family members.

The historic role of the Moscow Patriarchate has provided a spiritual and cultural link for tens of millions of people, who in the 1990s suddenly became divided by newly emerged borders. In the period of the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991 the Russian church proved wiser and more flexible than the Soviet state.

"Russian Orthodox Church then gave its 'periphery' so much autonomy, that this prevented the collapse of the whole structure," said Yevgeny Nikiforov, the head of the Orthodox-oriented radio station Radonezh, and a specialist in Russian church history. "The unified state might collapse in tears, but the church did not follow it. It remained alive and did not give up its right to cater to believers on all sides of the newly emerged borders."

Even in Soviet days the Moscow Patriarchate allowed sister churches in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova to have their own budgets, to appoint their own bishops and

to run all their “earthly” activities (education, manufacture of church items, etc.) without consulting Moscow. In return, the Russian Orthodox Church remained in “eucharistic union” with them, with representatives of these churches participating in the election of the Russian Patriarch of the ROC. Believers in all of these countries were treated as equals.

It seems clear why Poroshenko’s regime is opposed to the UOC-MP. The church openly condemns the ongoing civil war in Ukraine, refuses to call it “Russian aggression” and retains the word “Moscow” in its name. In addition, pro-government Ukrainian nationalist organizations often accuse the UOC-MP of being “a pro-Moscow group of separatists in priests’ attire.”

Patriarch Kirill denounced the attempts by Ukrainian authorities to divide and subdue the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-MP while speaking to a convention of the world’s Orthodox churches’ representatives in Moscow on July 27. He underscored what the attempt by the Poroshenko government’s religious takeover means and how it could further inflame the Ukrainian civil war.

“For our church,” Kirill said, “Kiev is the same ... holy place as Jerusalem is for Christians of all creeds.”

**Dmitry Babich is a multilingual Russian journalist and political commentator. Born in 1970 in Moscow, graduated from Moscow State University (department of journalism) in 1992. Dmitri worked for Russian newspapers, such as *Komsomolskaya Pravda* and *The Moscow News* (as the head of the foreign department). Dmitri covered the Chechen war as a television reporter for TV6 channel from 1995 to 1997. Since 2003 he has worked for *RIA Novosti*, RT, and *Russia Profile*. Dmitry is a frequent guest on the BBC, Al Jazeera, Sky News and Press TV.**

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## Israelis Continue to Open Fire on Gaza Protestors: An Eyewitness Account

An Interview with Gaza-based Palestinian Journalist, Wafa Al-Udaini

By Dennis J Bernstein



According to the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights (PCHR), the Palestinian death toll since March 30, 2018 “has risen to 33, including 4 children and 1 photojournalist, and the number of those wounded has risen to 2,436, including 410 children, 66 women, 22 journalists and 9 paramedics.”

There have been no Israeli casualties.

According to PCHR, on Friday, April 20th, Israeli snipers “killed 4 Palestinian civilians, including a child, and wounded 274 others, including 41 children, 6 women and 1 journalist, in addition to hundreds suffering tear gas inhalation, including PCHR’s fieldworkers who were documenting the Israeli forces’ suppression of the entirely peaceful demonstrations near the border fence with Israel, east of the Gaza Strip.”

PCHR maintains that “for the fourth week in a row and upon a decision by the Israeli highest military and political echelons, the Israeli forces used lethal force against the peaceful protesters, who did not pose any threat to the soldiers’ life.” There is a cell phone camera recording now being widely distributed that appears to show Israeli snipers and soldiers cheering as they gun down unarmed Palestinians fleeing in the distance.

On April 17th, I spoke with Gaza-based Palestinian Journalist Wafa Al-Udaini who has been an eyewitness to all the Gaza protests in the ongoing anti-occupation, Right to Return protests since late March. Al-Udaini’s friend and colleague, Yaser Murtaja, a photojournalist and camera person for a Gaza-based media production company was shot on April 6th by Israeli sharpshooters and died the next day of his wounds.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, “Pictures posted on social media by local journalists and witness testimony from local journalists show that Murtaja was wearing a bulletproof vest and helmet that were both clearly marked with the words “PRESS” when he was hit.”

Today I interview the little brave man. He said, he went to protest peacefully to get back occupied lands #GreatReturnMarch [pic.twitter.com/5RMUc9eGNg](https://pic.twitter.com/5RMUc9eGNg)

– Wafa A Al-Udaini (@wafa\_Gaza) April 18, 2018

In the following interview, Al-Udaini offers an eye-witness recounting of the initial protest in Gaza on March 30th, in which at least 18 protesters were killed by Israeli snipers and well over a thousand people were wounded.

**Dennis Bernstein:** We are going to hear now some eyewitness accounts, some very troubling testimony of the way in which Israeli snipers, from a long distance away, behind a fence and across a field, began to gun down hundreds of people, wounding over a thousand protesters and killing at least 18 Palestinians on the first day. It was truly horrifying.

Some people were protesting, some were praying, and others, like Wafa Al-Udaini, were sitting down for a meal during the long day of anti-occupation protests, when Israeli snipers opened fire and began to gun down unarmed Palestinians.

Wafa Al-Udaini, tell us a bit of your background and then tell us what you witnessed on March 30th and the other protest days that you were an eye-witness to.

**Wafa Al-Udaini:** I live here in the Gaza Strip. My grandparents were expelled from Beersheba by Israeli gangs in 1948. Now I live as a Palestinian refugee in the Gaza Strip. I work as a journalist for different websites and on radio. I am also an activist, the leader of a youth group here composed of students and journalists who work to present Palestinian issues to the world.

We were so excited about the Great March of Return protests, which began on the 13th of March. It was a peaceful and secular march, where all Palestinians, male and female, elderly and children, came to the border fence to resist peacefully. I took my family with me and we brought along something to eat and drink. We sat together and shared our food. We were asserting our right to demonstrate and reminding the world of our right to return to the land we occupied before we were driven from our homes. I brought my camera and intended to livestream the event. We were about 700 meters from the Israeli side.

**DB:** Could you talk about when you realized that the soldiers were opening fire on civilians? Were people around you being shot?

**WAU:** At the moment, I was interviewing people around me about what life was like before 1948, stories they had heard from their grandparents. Then suddenly I heard shots and I saw people running. I asked what was happening and they told me that the Israelis were opening fire. A man fleeing with his children told me some had been murdered. The Israelis began throwing teargas and they gunned down people who were fleeing.

**DB:** Let me explain to people that there is the border fence, which is electrified, and then there is a major piece of land between the fence and where the protest was happening. My understanding is that the soldiers were sharpshooters and they were picking people off from the other side of the fence.

**WAU:** Exactly. It had nothing to do with “defense,” because of the distance and because we were unarmed. They fired on women holding the Palestinian flag. This was their crime. Claims of self defense are just ludicrous.

**DB:** A friend of yours, a journalist, Yaser Murtaja, was gunned down on April 6th. I understand he was wearing his press vest, that clearly marked him as a journalist. He was gunned down and killed by Israeli snipers. Do you think he might have been shot *because* he was wearing his press vest, and the Israelis weren't crazy about there killing fields being broadcast around the world?

**WAU:** Yes. The Israelis are realizing that they can't continue to fool people indefinitely. This camera footage of all of this flies in the face of any claims that the Israeli army is acting in self defense. These on-the-ground images show Israeli propaganda for what it is.

**DB:** It appears they are willing to wipe out peaceful protesters while the rest of the world is watching, while the US government continues to provide them with arms, and while the Western corporate press works to bury the real story.

**Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of *Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom*. You can access the audio archives at [www.flashpoints.net](http://www.flashpoints.net). You can get in touch with the author at [dbernstein@igc.org](mailto:dbernstein@igc.org).**

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## Palm Sunday: History and Tradition

The time for the followers of Jesus to publicly protest injustices such as wealth inequality is at hand, argues retired Baptist minister Rev. Howard Bess.

By Howard Bess

In about 30 CE, Jesus traveled about 70 miles south of his native Galilee to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. This trip is mentioned in Matthew's, Mark's and Luke's Gospels, all of which describe Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as the first event of a tumultuous week that ended with Jesus' crucifixion as an insurrectionist and later with his resurrection from the dead. When scholars interested in studying the historical Jesus look for historical certainties in the gospel writings, they almost unanimously identify this trip to Jerusalem as a matter of history, not just tradition or fiction.

Scholars are not of one mind about the details of these three events. The three

gospel writers obviously embellished their stories with fiction. There are things we know with reasonable confidence. We know that Jesus being greeted by multitudes in Jerusalem is not remotely possible. This was probably Jesus' only trip to Jerusalem during the short years of his public ministry in Galilee. 70 miles is a long walk. He might have been known by Jerusalem's Pharisees, but the Pharisees would have ignored him. Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was more likely a very small political protest march, more like a form of street theatre.

The details of the story, i.e. children waving palm branches and Jesus riding a donkey in fulfillment of a non-existent Old Testament prediction, are more likely small parts of the process of turning the political nature of the Jesus movement into a new religion that glorifies the political leader. The reality is that Jesus was a religiously devout and practicing Jew, who was killed for his political activities. Those who want to look at the whole process should read Barrie Wilson's book "How Jesus Became Christian." The process of change has left followers of Jesus reciting the Apostles' Creed that deifies Jesus and leaves what he said, taught and lived unsaid. It left Jesus followers asking "what should I believe?" to the exclusion of "what should I be doing?"

On Palm Sunday, 2018, children will once again parade through church sanctuaries waving Palm branches or paper replicas in the celebration of the "triumphal" entry into the city of Jerusalem. It is a tradition that seemingly will not go away. Once again nothing will be said from Christian pulpits about the horror of Roman rule. The Roman rulers were ruthless thieves of land and wealth. They made hard-working laborers into economic slaves. The Roman tyrants in the hinterlands of the Empire shipped stolen wealth back to Rome, where wealthy people had sumptuous living.

The Romans were masters of the vision of greatness. They called it Pax Romana. In fact the Romans had a vast propaganda program that justified the gap between the wealthy and the poor. It was unimaginable no matter what they called it. Jesus saw through all the ugliness, seeing it as a wholesale denial of justice. His entry into Jerusalem was the beginning of a week of protest.

Today, pastors of churches, who are well trained in high quality seminaries, know the context of the ministry of Jesus from Nazareth. Ministers by the tens of thousands know about the ruthless greed that drove the Romans. They know of the compromises that were being made by the priests of the Jerusalem temple. They know about the rage of Jesus at the injustices of the system. They know about the fraud of a triumphal entry but will say nothing. Instead, tradition will triumph once more and children will wave Palm branches once more.

If there is any time in the year when followers of Jesus should massively protest against the evils in our society, it is during holy week beginning with



Palm Sunday.

Jim Wallace, editor of Sojourners magazine has chosen the April 2018 edition to call for a return to aggressive protest by followers of Jesus from Nazareth. He sees the disparities of the Roman Empire being repeated in America under the banner of Make America Great Again. For Wallace the time for the followers of Jesus to publicly protest is at hand. Protest marches against injustice are a part of our Jesus tradition.

In our America, protest marches have been used effectively to bring about change. The American master of the protest march was Martin Luther King Jr. When he led marches, he was using the tool of Jesus, the protest march. Many Christians kept advising King to back off from his protest marches. He kept on marching. His "Letter from Birmingham Jail" is one of the truly great literary pieces of our history. It was addressed to the clergy of Birmingham. Protest marches are unsettling to the majority. They produce consequences that are not comfortable for the protesters. King was in a jail in Birmingham because of his non-violent protest marching. Jesus was killed because he protested.

Jim Wallace has been arrested and jailed 23 times because of his protests against injustice.

The tradition of celebrating Palm Sunday as a triumphal entry should cease. It needs to be replaced with protest marches against the abuse of power and injustice in all its forms. It is the message of Palm Sunday.

**The Rev. Howard Bess is a retired American Baptist minister, who lives in Palmer, Alaska. His email address is [hdbss@mtaonline.net](mailto:hdbss@mtaonline.net).**

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## Senate Votes to Continue Yemen Devastation

On Tuesday, the Senate voted down a resolution that would have withdrawn US support for the Saudi-led war on Yemen, choosing instead to continue to illegally assist what the UN has called "the world's largest humanitarian crisis," reports Dennis J. Bernstein and Shireen Al-Adeimi in this interview.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

Shireen Al-Adeimi is a doctoral candidate at Harvard University. But she is having a hard time focusing on her studies, when friends and family back home in

Yemen are under violent attack by the heavily armed, US-backed Saudi forces, with many going hungry as a result of the Saudi blockade.

Al-Adeimi said on Tuesday, March 20, "This month marks the third anniversary of the U.S.-backed, Saudi-led war on Yemen. Despite the dire humanitarian crisis, however, the United States continues to sell arms to the Saudis and provide them with military support."

Senators Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.), Mike Lee (R-Ut.), and Chris Murphy (D-Ct.) had introduced a bill that aimed to force a withdrawal of the United States from the Saudi-led war, based on violations of the War Powers Act. But the Bill, Senate Joint Resolution 54, cosponsored by 10 senators, was voted down 55-44 on Tuesday.

Of course it was no surprise, given the amount of lobbying money spent by the Saudis to buy congressional silence and support. The bill also was met with fierce opposition by various Trump administration officials.

The American Conservative Magazine reported that "the media has been laying out the red carpet for Crown Prince bin Salman in Washington. What the establishment press won't tell you is that no less than 25 American lobbying firms worked for the Saudi Arabian government in 2017 to the tune of \$16 million, to burnish their image, manage the message, and get massive military contracts for the weapons of war that are now being used to kill, maim and slowly starve millions of civilians in Yemen today."

I spoke with Shireen Al-Adeimi on Tuesday, March 20, directly following the vote by Congress to continue aid for the US-supported, Saudi-led slaughter.

**Dennis Bernstein:** Shireen, what is your response to the Senate voting to continue aid to the Saudis?

**Shireen Al-Adeimi:** It is very disappointing because it ensures that millions more Yemenis will continue to suffer. On average, 130 children die every day in Yemen due to malnutrition and disease caused by the Saudi-led blockade. Many more will die because of US bombs which are dropped from Saudi jets. People continue to die for no reason at all.

**DB:** Could you give us a little background?

**SAA:** The Saudis began bombing Yemen in March, 2015. Right now, some 80% of a population of 24 million people are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

Yemen is experiencing the world's worst cholera outbreak in modern history, with over 1 million cases. There is a severe water crisis affecting 15 million people in Yemen.

Hundreds of thousands have died of malnutrition and disease because Saudi Arabia is not only bombing Yemen but is also blockading Yemen by land, sea and air, ensuring that no aid or medicine can come into the country. The Saudis have created what the UN calls "the worst humanitarian crisis on earth today."

**DB:** Could you describe the United States' role in all of this?

**SAA:** In January, the US Army published an article detailing their support for the Saudis, including training Saudi soldiers, advising military personnel, maintaining and upgrading vehicles and aircraft, providing courses on communication and navigation, and providing Saudi jets with mid-air refueling. This is in addition to the billions in weapon sales between the US and Saudi Arabia every year.

The bottom line is that the United States is benefiting from this relationship with the Saudis and it doesn't seem to matter that this has caused such a humanitarian toll in the process. Estimates are that over 75% of the targets in Yemen have been civilian targets.

**DB:** Is there a notable difference between the policies of the last administration and those of the Trump administration?

**SAA:** Absolutely not. This began under the Obama administration, which sold billions in weapons to the Saudis and provided them with the logistical services I just mentioned. The Trump policy in Yemen is basically on autopilot, following blindly what the Obama administration did. This is very much a bipartisan effort.

**DB:** Tell us more about how this is evolving on the ground.

**SAA:** People have lost their jobs. There is no future to look forward to. People who were once wealthy or middle-class are now resorting to begging on the streets and selling their possessions. Three million are displaced internally because there is nowhere to go with the blockade in place. People can't find water, they can't find food, they can't find medicine or fuel. They can't decide whether to take a sick child to the hospital or provide them with food. It is as bad as it can get.

**DB:** The Saudi prince was just in D.C. He said that he really feels for the people of Yemen and that he is working on easing the blockade because he understands how devastating it has been. What is your response to that?

**SAA:** It is a complete fabrication. They are the ones imposing the blockade, they are the ones bombing a sovereign country. They have no business in Yemen at all. And then to claim that it is the Houthis who are preventing food and

medicine from coming into the country is completely absurd. In fact, the Saudis have acknowledged that they are using starvation as a weapon.

They have already bombed most hospitals in Yemen. Four times they bombed Doctors without Borders hospitals. So far they have caused the death of at least 10,000 civilians through airstrikes and tens of thousands more through disease and malnutrition caused by the blockade.

**DB:** The US media has once again dropped the ball.

**SAA:** MSNBC reported on Yemen once in 2017 and not once since then. There is no reporting on the humanitarian crisis, on the resolutions before Congress. When it comes to the relationship between the US and Saudi Arabia, people just don't want to go there.

**DB:** What are human rights organizations saying about the potential for famine?

**SAA:** The UN has designated Yemen a level 3 for famine out of a range of 1 to 4, but when you have people already dying of starvation it doesn't matter much what level they establish. In 2015, 15,000 children died of hunger and disease in Yemen and a similar number in 2016. We are not at the brink of famine, we are already there. People are dying of starvation every day.

**DB:** Is it possible to get through to folks on the ground there? Is there outreach from the country for support?

**SAA:** Organizations such as Oxfam and Save the Children do have their ships there and they do bring in aid and food to the 7 million people who depend on it every day. But even that flow is obstructed by the Saudis. The cost of fuel has increased 200%. Family members like myself are sending cash, as are organizations like Doctors without Borders, to keep people employed and afloat. Kids are dying of diseases that are completely preventable. No one has to die from cholera.

**DB:** How do you explain these congress people who support this ongoing war and famine in Yemen? Are they owned by the weapons manufacturers?

**SAA:** Some claim that it protects Saudi interests and prevents Iran from spreading its tentacles in the region. But they undoubtedly have contact to the Saudis and to the weapons manufacturers who want to maintain their interests in Saudi Arabia.

**Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.**

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# Billy Graham: An Old Soldier Fades Away

Evangelist Billy Graham, who counseled presidents and stirred controversy with inflammatory statements on gay rights, opposition to Martin Luther King's tactics of civil disobedience, and support for U.S. wars, died Wednesday. Cecil Bothwell reflects here on his life and legacy.

By Cecil Bothwell

*"We are selling the greatest product on earth. Why shouldn't we promote it as effectively as we promote a bar of soap?" – Billy Graham, Saturday Evening Post, 1963*

Billy Graham was a preacher man equally intent on saving souls and soliciting financial support for his ministry. His success at the former is not subject to proof and his success at the latter is unrivaled. He preached to millions on every ice-free continent and led many to his chosen messiah.

When Graham succumbed to various ailments this week at the age of 99 he left behind an organization that is said to have touched more people than any other Christian ministry in history, with property, assets and a name-brand worth hundreds of millions. The address lists of contributors alone comprise a mother lode for the Billy Graham Evangelical Association, now headed by his son and namesake, William Franklin Graham, III.

Graham also left behind a United States government in which religion plays a far greater role than before he intruded into politics in the 1950s. The shift from secular governance to "In God We Trust" can be laid squarely at this minister's feet.

Graham's message was principally one of fear: fear of a wrathful god; fear of temptation; fear of communists and socialists; fear of unions; fear of Catholics; fear of homosexuals; fear of racial integration and above all, fear of death. But as a balm for such fears, he promised listeners eternal life, which he said was readily claimed through acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's savior.

Furthermore, he assured listeners that God loved us so much that He created governments, the most blessed form being Western capitalist democracy. To make this point, he frequently quoted Romans 13, particularly the first two verses. In the New American Standard Version of the Bible, they read, "Let every person

be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. Therefore he who resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.”

The question of whether this was actually the recorded word of God or a rider inserted into the bill by Roman senators with rather more worldly aims never dimmed Graham’s insistence that all governments are the work of the Almighty. Almost perversely, he even endorsed the arrest of a woman who lofted a Christian banner during his Reagan-era visit to Moscow, opting for the crack-down of “divine” authority over the civil disobedience of a believer.

Governments, he reminded his Moscow listeners, do God’s work.

Based on that Biblical mandate for all governments, Graham stood in solid opposition to the work of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In his Letter from Birmingham Jail, all but addressed to Graham, King noted, “We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was ‘legal’ and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was ‘illegal.’ ... If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country’s anti-religious laws.”

### **Finger on the Pulse of American Fear**

Fear is the stock in trade of most evangelists, of course, comprising the necessary setup before the pitch. As historian William Martin explained in his 1991 account of Graham’s early sermons, “even those whose personal lives seemed rich and fulfilling must live in a world filled with terror and threat. As a direct result of sinful humanity’s rebellion against God, our streets have become jungles of terror, mugging, rape, and death. Confusion reigns on campuses as never before. Political leaders live in constant fear of the assassin’s bullet. Racial tension seems certain to unleash titanic forces of hatred and violence. Communism threatens to eradicate freedom from the face of the earth. Small nations are getting the bomb, so that global war seems inevitable. High-speed objects, apparently guided by an unknown intelligence, are coming into our atmosphere for reasons no one understands. Clearly, all signs point to the end of the present world order. ...

“Graham’s basic mode of preaching in these early years was assault. ... Then, when he had his listeners mentally crouching in terror, aware that all the attractively labeled escape routes—alcohol, sexual indulgence, riches, psychiatry, education, social-welfare programs, increased military might, the United Nations—led ultimately to dead ends, he held out the only compass that

pointed reliably to the straight and narrow path that leads to personal happiness and lasting peace.”

Columnist and former priest James Carroll had much the same take, noting that “Graham had his finger on the pulse of American fear, and in subsequent years, anti communism occupied the nation’s soul as an avowedly religious obsession. The Red Scare at home, unabashed moves toward empire abroad, the phrase ‘under God’ inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance, the scapegoating of homosexuals as ‘security risks,’ an insane accumulation of nuclear weapons, suicidal wars against postcolonial insurgencies in Asia—a set of desperate choices indeed. Through it all, Billy Graham was the high priest of the American crusade, which is why U.S. presidents uniformly sought his blessing.”

While Carroll had most of that right, the record suggests that, over and over again, it was Graham who sought presidential blessing, rather than the other way around. Letters enshrined in the presidential and Graham libraries reveal a preacher endlessly seeking official audience. As Truman said, years after his presidency, “Well, I hadn’t ought to say this, but he’s one of those counterfeits I was telling you about. He claims he’s a friend of all the presidents, but he was never a friend of mine when I was president.”

Of course, politicians have often brandished fear as well, and the twin streams of fear-based politics and fear-based religion couldn’t have been more confluent. Communist infiltrators, missile gaps and the domino effect each took their turn, as did the Evil Empire and, more recently, Saddam, Osama bin Laden and an amorphous threat of global terrorism.

In light of the Biblical endorsement of rulers, Graham supported police repression of Vietnam war protesters and civil rights marchers, opposed Martin Luther King’s tactic of civil disobedience, supported South American despots, and publicly supported every war or intervention waged by the United States from Korea forward.

### **A Pro-War Christian**

Born on a prosperous dairy farm and educated at Wheaton College, Graham first gained national attention in 1949 when the publishing magnate William Randolph Hearst, searching for a spiritual icon to spread his anti-communist sentiments, discovered the young preacher holding forth at a Los Angeles tent meeting. Hearst wired his editors across the nation, “puff Graham,” and he was an instant sensation.

Hearst next contacted his friend and fellow publisher Henry Luce. Their Wall Street ally, Bernard Baruch, arranged a meeting between Luce and Graham while

the preacher was staying with the segregationist Governor Strom Thurmond in the official mansion in Columbia, South Carolina, Luce concurred with Hearst about Graham's marketability and Time and Life were enlisted in the job of selling the soap of salvation to the world. Time, alone, has run more than 600 stories about Graham.

The man who would become known as "the minister to presidents" offered his first military advice in 1950. On June 25, North Korean troops invaded South Korea and Graham sent Truman a telegram. "MILLIONS OF CHRISTIANS PRAYING GOD GIVE YOU WISDOM IN THIS CRISIS. STRONGLY URGE SHOWDOWN WITH COMMUNISM NOW. MORE CHRISTIANS IN SOUTHERN KOREA PER CAPITA THAN ANY PART OF WORLD. WE CANNOT LET THEM DOWN."

It was the first time Graham encouraged a president to go to war, and with characteristic hyperbole: Korea has never topped the list of Christian-leaning nations. Subsequently, Graham gave his blessing to every conflict under every president from Truman to the second Bush, and most of the presidents, pleased to enjoy public assurance of God's approval, made him welcome in the White House.

Graham excoriated Truman for firing General Douglas MacArthur and supported the general's plan to invade China. He went so far as to urge Nixon to bomb dikes in Vietnam – knowing that it would kill upward of a million civilians – and he claimed to have sat on the sofa next to G.H.W. Bush as the bombs began falling in the first Gulf War (though Bush's diary version of the evening somehow excludes Graham, as does a White House video of Bush during the attack).

According to Bush's account, in a phone call the preceding week, Graham quoted poetry that compared the President to a messiah destined to save the world, and in the next breath called Saddam the Antichrist. Bush wrote that Graham suggested it was his historical mission to destroy Saddam.

Through the years, Graham's politics earned him some strange bedfellows. He praised Senator Joseph McCarthy and supported his assault on Constitutional rights, then scolded the Senate for censuring McCarthy for his excesses. He befriended oil men and arms manufacturers. He defended Nixon after Watergate, right up to the disgraced president's resignation, and faced public scorn when tapes were aired that exposed the foul-mouthed President as a schemer and plotter.

Nixon's chief of staff, Bob Haldeman, reported on Graham's denigration of Jews in his posthumously published diary—a claim Graham vehemently denied until released tapes undid him in 2002. Caught with his prejudicial pants down, Graham claimed ignorance of the hour-and-a-half long conversation in which he led the anti-Semitic attack.



As reported by the Associated Press on March 2, 2002:

“Although I have no memory of the occasion, I deeply regret comments I apparently made in an Oval Office conversation with President Nixon . . . some 30 years ago,” Graham said in a statement released by his Texas public relations firm. “They do not reflect my views, and I sincerely apologize for any offense caused by the remarks.”

Whether or not the comments reflect Graham’s views at the time or thirty years later, it is his defense that bears much closer scrutiny. What were we to make of a preacher who insisted that his words didn’t reflect his beliefs? Were we to believe him then or later, on other matters?

Graham was a political operative, reporting to Kennedy on purported communist insurgencies in Latin America, turning over lists of activist Christians to the Republican party, conferring regularly with J. Edgar Hoover and networking with the CIA in South America and Vietnam. He was even assigned by Nixon’s operatives to talk George Wallace out of a second run for the White House.

To accomplish the latter, he phoned Wallace as he was coming out of an anesthetic stupor after one of his numerous post-assassination-attempt surgeries. While the long suffering gunshot victim asked the minister to pray for him, the minister asked him not to make a third-party bid for the presidency. “I won’t do anything to help McGovern,” Wallace replied.

There are many who would argue that the good that Graham did outweighs whatever political intrigue he embraced, and even the several wars he enthusiastically endorsed. To the extent that bringing people to Christ is of benefit to them, an untestable hypothesis, he was successful with his calls to come forward. He accrued hundreds of millions of dollars which were used to extend his ministry and thereby bring more people to “be saved,” which is self-justifying but fails as evidence of goodness.

### **Billy Graham Freeway**

If Christian beliefs about the hereafter prove correct, we will all presumably discover what good he accomplished, or what chance for salvation we missed, in the sweet by and by.

In talking to one of his biographers, Graham recalled his mood during his fire and brimstone declamations, “I would feel as though I had a sword, a rapier, in my hand, and I would be slashing deeper and deeper into the consciences of the people before me, cutting away straight to their very souls.”

In that regard, Graham’s largest and most lasting monument is a highway cut

through Beaucatcher Mountain, blasted through a majestic land form that once bisected Asheville, North Carolina. He helped convince recalcitrant landowners to permit the excavation and construction through the cut of the short stretch of Interstate highway subsequently named the Billy Graham Freeway.

Downwind residents report that the weather has permanently shifted due to the gaping mountain maw and the future of the highway that transects the city continues to be one of the most divisive issues in that southern metropolis.

“Straight to their very souls,” indeed.

In every way, Graham was the spiritual father of today’s right-wing religious leaders who so inhabit the national conversation. If he cloaked his suasion in public neutrality it was the hallmark of an era in which such intrusion was deemed unseemly. If today’s practitioners are less abashed, it is in many ways reflective of the secure foundation Graham built within Republican and conservative circles.

Graham endorsed and courted Eisenhower and compared a militaristic State of the Union speech to the Sermon on the Mount, fanned anti-Catholic flames in the Nixon-Kennedy contest, backed Johnson and then Nixon in Vietnam, lobbied for arms sales to Saudi Arabia during the Reagan years, conveyed foreign threats and entreaties for Clinton and lent his imprimatur to G.W. Bush as he declared war on terrorism from the pulpit of the National Cathedral.

Billy Graham approved of warriors and war, weapons of mass destruction (in white, Christian hands) and covert operations. He publicly declaimed the righteousness of battle with enemies of American capitalism, abetted genocide in oil-rich Ecuador and surrounds and endorsed castration as punishment for rapists. A terrible swift sword for certain, and effective no doubt, but not much there in the way of turning the other cheek.

Graham will be cordially remembered by those who found solace in his golden promises and happy homilies, but the worldly blowback from his ministry is playing out in Iraq and Afghanistan, Chechnya and Korea, the Philippines and Colombia – everywhere governments threaten human rights and pie in the sky is offered in lieu of daily bread.

In the words of Graham’s ministerial and secular adversary, Dr. King, “I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress.”

Farewell Reverend Graham. Let justice roll.

Prize-winning investigative reporter Cecil Bothwell is author of *The Prince of War: Billy Graham's Crusade for a Wholly Christian Empire*, (Brave Ulysses Books, 2007) and *Whale Falls: An exploration of belief and its consequences* (Brave Ulysses Books, 2010).

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## A Treacherous Crossing

Paul Ryan's recent trip to the Gulf reiterated the U.S. government's support of the Saudi-led assault on Yemen and a bellicose stance towards Iran, which has created a watershed of human suffering, writes Kathy Kelly.

By Kathy Kelly

On January 23rd an overcrowded smuggling boat capsized off the coast of Aden in Southern Yemen. Smugglers packed 152 passengers from Somalia and Ethiopia in the boat and then, while at sea, reportedly pulled guns on the migrants to extort additional money from them. The boat capsized, according to *The Guardian*, after the shooting prompted panic. The death toll, currently 30, is expected to rise. Dozens of children were on board.



The passengers had already risked the perilous journey from African shores to Yemen, a dangerous crossing that leaves people vulnerable to false promises, predatory captors, arbitrary detention and tortuous human rights violations. Sheer desperation for basic needs has driven hundreds of thousands of African migrants to Yemen. Many hope, upon arrival, they can eventually travel to prosperous Gulf countries further north where they might find work and some measure of security. But the desperation and fighting in southern Yemen were horrible enough to convince most migrants that boarded the smuggling boat on January 23rd to try and return to Africa.

Referring to those who drowned when the boat capsized, Amnesty International's Lynn Maalouf said: "This heart-breaking tragedy underscores, yet again, just how devastating Yemen's conflict continues to be for civilians. Amid ongoing hostilities and crushing restrictions imposed by the Saudi Arabia-led coalition, many people who came to Yemen to flee conflict and repression elsewhere are now being forced yet again to flee in search of safety. Some are dying in the process."

In 2017, more than 55,000 African migrants arrived in Yemen, many of them teenagers from Somalia and Ethiopia where there are few jobs and severe drought is pushing people to the verge of famine. It's difficult to arrange or afford transit beyond Yemen. Migrants become trapped in the poorest country in the Arab peninsula, which now, along with several drought-stricken North African countries, faces the worst humanitarian disaster since World War II.

In Yemen, eight million people are on the brink of starvation as conflict-driven near-famine conditions leave millions without food and safe drinking water. Over one million people have suffered from cholera over the past year and more recent reports add a diphtheria outbreak to the horror. Civil war has exacerbated and prolonged the misery while, since March of 2015, a Saudi-led coalition, joined and supported by the U.S., has regularly bombed civilians and infrastructure in Yemen while also maintaining a blockade that prevented transport of desperately needed food, fuel and medicines.

Maalouf called on the international community to "halt arms transfers that could be used in the conflict." To heed Maalouf's call, the international community must finally thwart the greed of transnational military contractors that profit from selling billions of dollars of weapons to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and other countries in the Saudi-led coalition. For instance, a November, 2017 Reuters report said that Saudi Arabia has agreed to buy about \$7 billion worth of precision guided munitions from U.S. defense contractors. The UAE also has purchased billions in American armaments.

Raytheon and Boeing are the companies that will primarily benefit from a deal that was part of a \$110 billion weapons agreement coinciding with President Donald Trump's visit to Saudi Arabia in May.

### **Paul Ryan's Remarks**

Another dangerous crossing happened in the region on January 24th. U.S. Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) arrived in Saudi Arabia, along with a congressional delegation, to meet with the monarchy's King Salman and subsequently with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman who has orchestrated the Saudi-led coalition's war in Yemen. Following that visit, Ryan and the

delegation met with royals from the UAE.

“So rest assured”, said Ryan, speaking to a gathering of young diplomats in the UAE, “we will not stop until ISIS, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates are defeated and no longer a threat to the United States and our allies.

“Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, we are focused on the Iranian threat to regional stability.”

Beyond the simple well-recorded fact of lavish Saudi financial support for Islamist terrorism, Ryan’s remarks overlook the Saudi-led coalition military assaults and “special operations” in Yemen, which the U.S. supports and joins. The war there is arguably undermining effort to combat jihadist groups, which have flourished in the chaos of the war, particularly in the south which is nominally under the control of the government allied to Saudi Arabia.

The Iranian government Ryan denounced does have allies in Yemen and may be smuggling weapons into Yemen, but no one has accused them of supplying the Houthi rebels with cluster bombs, laser-guided missiles and littoral (near-coastal) combat ships to blockade ports vital to famine relief. Iran does not provide in-air refueling for warplanes used in daily bombing runs over Yemen. The U.S. has sold all of these to countries in the Saudi-led coalition which have, in turn, used these weapons to destroy Yemen’s infrastructure as well as create chaos and exacerbate suffering among civilians in Yemen.

Ryan omitted any mention of the starvation, disease, and displacement afflicting people in Yemen. He neglected to mention documented human rights abuses in a network of clandestine prisons operated by the UAE in Yemen’s south. Ryan and the delegation essentially created a smokescreen of concern for human life that conceals the very real terror into which U.S. policies have thrust the people of Yemen and the surrounding region.

Potential starvation of their children terrifies people who can’t acquire food for their families. Those who can’t obtain safe drinking water face nightmarish prospects of dehydration or disease. Persons fleeing bombers, snipers, and armed militias who might arbitrarily detain them shudder in fear as they try to devise escape routes.

Paul Ryan, and the congressional delegation traveling with him, had an extraordinary opportunity to support humanitarian appeals made by UN officials and human rights organizers.

Instead, Ryan implied the only security concerns worth mentioning are those that threaten people in the U.S. He pledged cooperation with brutally repressive dictators known for egregious human rights violations in their own countries,

and in beleaguered Yemen. He blamed the government of Iran for meddling in the affairs of other countries and supplying militias with funds and weapons. U.S. foreign policy is foolishly reduced to “the good guys,” the U.S. and its allies, versus “the bad guy,” – Iran.

The “good guys” shaping and selling U.S. foreign policy and weapon sales exemplify the heartless indifference of the smugglers who gamble human life in exceedingly dangerous crossings.

**Kathy Kelly (kathy@vcnv.org) co-coordinates Voices for Creative Nonviolence ([www.vcnv.org](http://www.vcnv.org)).**

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## Former Ambassador Reflects on Current Events

Former British Ambassador Craig Murray discussed the current situation with Julian Assange, the alleged Russian election hack, Trump’s Israel embassy move and more in an interview with Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Craig Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He was British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010. Murray’s books include *Zionism is Bullshit*—censored on Facebook—and *Murder in Samarkand*. He is a self-proclaimed defender and strong supporter of the work of Julian Assange as one of the most significant “Publishers” of our time.

Murray was interviewed by Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein on January 25.

**Randy Credico:** The last time we spoke, Craig, you were involved in a libel suit which I believe had a positive outcome for you. Even as we spoke, you were in route to London to defend yourself from the suit brought against by a gentleman you called a liar, after he publicly called you an anti-Semite because of your criticism of Israel and the ongoing ethnic cleansing there against the Palestinians. I understand that the suit was dropped just as the case was getting underway. But it cost you a pretty penny before it was over.

**Craig Murray:** Unfortunately, while I didn’t lose the case, I still ended up having to pay my lawyers. Libel suits are incredibly expensive in the UK, which is why they are used by corporations and the wealthy to silence ordinary people.

My legal bills came to well over \$100,000. Lucky for me, there were over 5,000 individuals who subscribed to our defense fund and that paid the bill for me.

But it is frightening because ordinary people are terrified to write anything critical of the wealthy and powerful.

**RC:** I was there right after your suit ended. I was covering Stefania Maurizi's suit in the high court to get email transmissions from the Crown Prosecution Service to both Sweden and the US concerning Julian Assange. She made a great case but in the end they sided with the prosecution. Is the system totally rigged there, or is it libelous to say that?

**CM:** It is fair to say that the establishment stick together. In fact, I believe that the government and the judiciary are closer here than they are in the United States to some extent. There is quite a closed circle of the ruling class. They attend all the same schools and they are closely linked in various ways. So once you take on the establishment, you are taking on the entire establishment.

**RC:** So they are protecting the US government but they are protecting themselves as well. The UK was involved in a lot of the things that Assange exposed—the war logs and some of the cables. Is the motivation to keep him quiet so that the exposures don't continue?

**CM:** Yes, and the corporate press is part of the same nexus and control the public's access to judicial proceedings. Wikileaks very much threatens this control of government information. Wikileaks's motto is "we open governments" and that is very true.

**Dennis Bernstein:** I'd like to talk a little more about Julian Assange's situation. We know that the powers that be try to undermine the spirit as best they can. To date they have been unable to stop Julian from continuing this work for the people. We know he is facing health problems now. How do you assess his condition and what could happen at this point?

**CM:** I last met Julian in the embassy a little over two weeks ago. I am not a medical person but medical professionals now say he is in serious condition, both medical and psychological, from the effects of his confinement. He has a single room which is about twelve square feet and a smaller room where people from Wikileaks sometimes work with him. The entire Ecuadorian embassy in London is just an apartment.

Julian gets no daylight at all. He doesn't like to go near the windows because of the threats which have been made against him. He gets no outside exercise, which even the worse prison offenders are allowed for a short period every day

to get some fresh air and stretch their legs. This kind of confining existence is a real health danger. In addition, there is the indeterminate nature of the whole thing, which is bound to have a severe psychological effect, not having any idea when he is going to be let out.

But having said all that, I have not seen any diminution in his intellectual abilities. In fact, he seems to be even more honed in on the issues of the day. He is extremely well informed on political and social developments and an extremely shrewd analyst. I don't want people to worry about him in that way. But he looks pale and he is obviously not in a healthy state. The dangers of decline are definitely there.

**DB:** The current Ecuadorian government, which would really like to earn some good favor in the United States, could become a very dangerous entity to Julian Assange.

**CM:** In general, Ecuador has been fantastic in what they have done for him. Ecuador is a small country and like most countries in Latin America is vulnerable to pressure from the United States. The political situation there has changed and the left is not in the position it was five or six years ago. There is a heavy CIA presence there, both overt and covert. So I don't criticize the Ecuadorian government, they're in a very difficult position.

**DB:** Facebook has not taken kindly to your recent critique of Zionism. What did they say?

**CM:** An editor has very kindly taken on the task of collecting earlier articles of mine into a book. They include a speech I gave after one of the big Israeli attacks in Gaza. I actually gave the speech in front of a crowd of 350,000 people in Hyde Park. That's when I first used the phrase "Zionism is bullshit," which became the title of the book.

Facebook took down ads for the book, claiming that they objected to the profanity, which is kind of funny because it is a word that appears quite often on Facebook. Later they claimed that the book was banned because the title denigrated a religion. Of course, Zionism is not a religion but a political movement. Many religious Jews do not support Zionism. If I don't agree with a political position I should be able to say so as plainly as I wish.

**DB:** The current US administration plans to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Would that be in keeping with Zionist policy?

**CM:** Look, my own ancestors were primarily Celtic and we know that 3,000 years ago the Celtic people resided in places like present-day Switzerland. Just because 3,000 years ago some people believed that God gave Jerusalem



specifically to the Jewish people, that doesn't mean that you ignore the next 3,000 years and the place should become the capital of Israel based on biblical references. The idea that the rights of the Palestinian people can be ignored because of religious text written down thousands of years ago is absolutely ludicrous.

The Palestinians have had a dreadful time over the last ten years. Not only have they periodically suffered completely disproportionate military attacks but they continue to suffer the appropriation of their land and the destruction of their buildings and farms, with more and more Israeli settlements being built on Palestinian land, to the extent that a two-state solution is no longer viable because so much of what would be the Palestinian state is now Israeli settlements, containing hundreds of thousands of people.

To declare Jerusalem the capital of the Israeli state is going to be a major handicap to any future peace settlement. It is something that the entire international community has resisted doing. It really does set back progress on the Israel/Palestine issue, doing nothing for the cause of peace or for Israeli security. This is being done to gain domestic political advantage in the United States with the Christian Evangelical lobby.

**RC:** Julian Assange has now been granted citizenship as well as diplomatic status by the Ecuadorian government. But the British government refuses to recognize this diplomatic status.

**CM:** Now it gets a little technical. Under the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, if you appoint an ambassador, that ambassador has to be approved in advance by the host country. If you appoint a diplomat to the embassy below the level of ambassador, you don't have to seek agreement in advance. All you have to do is notify. And Ecuador notified the British government of its decision to grant Assange diplomatic status.

Again, the Vienna Convention is absolutely clear that from the moment of notification that person enjoys diplomatic immunity. The host state doesn't have to accept the person, they can declare him or her persona non grata and the person then has to leave the country within a reasonable period of time. But they have diplomatic immunity from the moment of notification until they leave.

The whole point of diplomatic immunity is to prevent foreign states from effectively kidnapping your diplomats in order to extort from them your country's secrets. So the British government should have to allow Assange to leave the country and he should have immunity while he leaves, but they have stated that they would arrest him if he leaves the embassy.

The remedy would be for Ecuador to take the United Kingdom to the International Court of Justice to oblige the UK to follow international law in this regard.

Whether Ecuador is prepared to do that, I don't know. It would require significant legal resources and time and cost a certain amount of diplomatic capital.

Another option would be, were he to be arrested, his lawyers could take his case to the courts in the UK. But we have spoken already of the close ties between the British courts and the government and whether he could succeed is an open question. The fear is that immediately an extradition request would come in from the United States.

**DB:** The fact is, Julian Assange is a political prisoner who has made an extraordinary practice of monitoring centers of power. They are going to do whatever they can to bring him down. The only real way to save Assange is for the people to be made aware and for them to rise up and prevent the UK government from doing this because this person has performed a great public service on many fronts in many countries.

**CM:** You are absolutely right. He is being persecuted by governments because of the tremendous journalism he has published. It is ironic that at the moment Hollywood is bringing out a film called *The Post* about the Pentagon Papers and that is being celebrated at the same time that the entire establishment is out to get Julian Assange for publishing in exactly the way The Washington Post did.

Of course, The Washington Post has now given up on that and we no longer have a liberal media. The New York Times and The Washington Post are leading the calls for attacks on whistleblowers. Julian Assange exemplifies the only remaining form of free media outlet.

**DB:** You write in your recent piece "The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming", "The complete and unmitigated irrationality of the current epidemic of Russia-phobia does nothing to reduce its incredible virulence as it continues to infect the entire political and media class." That would include The Washington Post, wouldn't it?

**CM:** In fact, the articles that The Washington Post has been spewing out for a year now on Russiagate and the alleged collusion between WikiLeaks and Russia have been quite remarkable to behold. They appear to have given up any journalistic standards in terms of truthful reporting, in terms of allowing people a chance to reply to their allegations, and in terms of doing any real investigation of the facts. The New York Times is probably just as bad on this story. They have both been astonishing in their inaccuracy.

It is difficult to explain what is happening. The political and intelligence communities have seen WikiLeaks as an enemy ever since the Chelsea Manning revelations. And then the political establishment was very alarmed by the challenges to Hillary Clinton, the first of which was the challenge posed by Bernie Sanders. Then WikiLeaks got a hold of emails from the DNC and Podesta which indicated that the entire playing field was being quite deliberately tilted against Sanders to make sure that he didn't win. This, of course, added to Clinton's unpopularity. All through the campaign opinion polls showed that Clinton was the only person who could possibly lose to Donald Trump. But the establishment made sure that she got the nomination. Already during the campaign she and her people identified Russia as the scapegoat.

So we have had the coming together of these factors: the hatred of WikiLeaks by the intelligence community, the military's need for Russia as an enemy to justify the billions and billions in military spending, and the need of the so-called liberal left for a scapegoat for Hillary's defeat. So you have this kind of perfect storm that has led people to concoct this imaginary scenario where Russia installed the president of the United States in collusion with Julian Assange.

**DB:** So again, was this a hack or a leak?

**CM:** It was definitely not a hack, not by Russia or anybody else. It was a leak of information legally downloaded from their servers. I know this because I am quite closely associated with WikiLeaks. But WikiLeaks never reveal their sources because they are totally focused on source protection.

**RC:** Is there an economic motivation here? Is there a Russiagate industry that has developed?

**CM:** We shouldn't underestimate the NSA and their fantastic capabilities. People from inside the agency, such as William Binney and Edward Snowden, all say that if it were a hack the NSA would have the technical ability to trace that data as it passed through the Internet. They would be able to tell you the exact second the hack occurred and where it went. There is no such data, because it wasn't a hack.

People tend to rationalize doing what makes their employers happy or what they consider to be to their advantage in terms of their career. That is a kind of economic motive, but I think it is largely subconscious. People do what they do to get ahead.

Of course, people at the top have a very definite economic motive. They are trying to maintain corporate control and the control of the political class

through a process described by Noam Chomsky [and the late Edward Herman] as “manufacturing consent.” But I believe the foot soldiers subconsciously fall in with what they are supposed to do in order to keep their jobs.

**RC:** You just wrote a piece on Margaret Thatcher and her support for Apartheid in South Africa.

**CM:** It is interesting how the media airbrush history. One of the things which has been airbrushed out of Margaret Thatcher’s history is that she was a strong supporter of the Apartheid system. I have no doubt about this whatsoever because my first job as a foreign officer was at the South Africa desk as a political officer.

The entire two years I was there, we were trying to bring her to understand that Apartheid was evil and had to end. But this went against her strong personal instincts, which were to support Whites-only rule. She successfully opposed any sanctions against Apartheid South Africa. She refused to allow any of her government officials to talk to the ANC or to anybody representing Black people in South Africa.

I have been explaining this to people for many years but people have tended to doubt me because I was going against the accepted narrative. I was very gratified last week that Sir Patrick Wright, the head of the foreign service at that time, published his diaries from that time, where he makes absolutely plain that Thatcher supported Apartheid and that he considered her a racist. I am happy indeed that the truth is starting to get out there.

But the other point is that there are many people in senior positions in the conservative party now—including our minister of defense who just resigned—who at the time were also strong supporters of Apartheid.

**DB:** Meanwhile, as we all know, Apartheid is alive and well in Israel/Palestine. Let us pray that the kind of forces that rose up to end Apartheid in South Africa will also bring pressure to end the situation in Palestine.

**Dennis J. Bernstein is a host of “Flashpoints” on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.**

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