

# Trump's Lethal Decision on Jerusalem

President Trump has won praise from Christian Zionists and many staunch supporters of Israel for declaring Jerusalem Israel's capital, but critics say it only makes peace a more distant goal, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Protests have broken out across the Middle East against President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital – and Western critics complain that the move adds one more brick in the wall against the prospects for peace.

Professor Francis Boyle, who teaches international law at the University of Illinois College of Law and served as a long-time legal adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), calls Trump's announcement a "symbolic but still critical step in Israeli designs to control not just Jerusalem, but all of historic Palestine." I spoke with Boyle on Dec. 6.

Dennis Bernstein: What was your initial response to the announcement by President Trump that the United States will be moving its embassy to Jerusalem?

Francis Boyle: It is always a sad day when you know that people are going to die. It is a defeat for the human spirit. In the last intifada [September 2000-February 2005], about 3,000 Palestinians died and 1,000 Israelis. I don't know what will happen this time. The Palestinians have called for "three days of rage." Trump could very well set off a third intifada here.

Dennis Bernstein: Trump says this doesn't get in the way of the US being an honest broker, that the vision is for peace. From the legal perspective, how do you see this?

Francis Boyle: First of all, the United States has never been an honest broker here. I was legal advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the Middle East Peace Negotiations from 1991, when they began, to the signing of Oslo. It was very clear that the United States was always serving as Israel's lawyer. You had Miller, Ross, and Kurtzer, all three American Jews, two of them orthodox.

The Palestinians had to go hat-in-hand to present their case to American Jews. Nothing has changed: We now have Kushner, Greenblatt and Friedman, all three of whom are orthodox Jews. The whole thing has been preposterous from the beginning. We have always been in favor of Israel, using lies, threats and intimidation to force the Palestinians to accept whatever the Israelis are

giving them. That is international diplomacy for you, conducted by the United States, not only in the Middle East but all over the world.

Dennis Bernstein: Would you say that what is going on here is not just Israel trying to control Jerusalem but all of Palestine?

Francis Boyle: That has always been Israel's policy. I had a conversation with the chair of the Palestinian Delegation to the Middle East peace negotiations. He told me that the Zionists have not changed their position since the Basel Convention of 1897. They want all of Palestine. What is happening now in Jerusalem is a step in that direction.

If you look at the recently leaked so-called peace plan that was presented to [Palestinian President Mahmoud] Abbas in Saudi Arabia, he was basically given an ultimatum to either accept some tiny bantustan or forget it. It is very clear that they want all of Palestine, all of the West Bank, all of Jerusalem. They want the Golan Heights and maybe even some more of Syria.

Dennis Bernstein: We have revelations now that Jared Kushner, our chief peace negotiator in the Middle East, failed to disclose in ethics filings his role as director of a family foundation that funded Israeli settlements. Do you think that is a problem?

Francis Boyle: Of course, because basically he is aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity in Palestine.

Dennis Bernstein: Is the United States participating in illegal actions in Israel, or doesn't it matter anymore?

Francis Boyle: For most of the Arab and Muslim world, it matters. Here in the United States, apart from the BDS movement, we have basically thrown in our lot with the Israeli government. Congress has been bought and paid for by the Israel lobby. During his campaign, Trump made explicit promises in order to secure Jewish funding and votes.

We arm, equip, supply and train Israel. What is going on in Gaza right now is a form of genocide. They are being strangled to death. The 1948 Genocide Convention, to which both Israel and the United States are parties, says that "deliberately inflicting on a people conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction in whole or in part" is genocide. That is exactly what is going on in Gaza today.

Dennis Bernstein: How would you assess the situation now? Is a two-state solution at all viable?

Francis Boyle: That is for the Palestinians to decide. Their right of self determination is at stake here. As of today, their official position is two states with their capital in East Jerusalem. There have been hints that they might go back to the one-state solution, which was their position before the Palestinian Declaration of Independence of December 15, 1988, when they officially accepted a two-state solution. Since then they have gotten nothing. Every day Israel just steals more land and drives out more Palestinians.

Dennis Bernstein: Are there any options for the Palestinians in the international arena, for example, at the United Nations?

Francis Boyle: I have advised them to invoke the "Uniting for Peace" resolution adopted by the general assembly in 1950, so that they can be admitted to the UN General Assembly as a full-fledged UN member state, recognizing their capital as East Jerusalem. And, as you know, after Palestine became a UN observer state, you and I discussed the concept of a "legal intifada" that the Palestinians could pursue.

My advice to the Palestinians is a full-court press in all specialized United Nations agencies and affiliated organizations, using all available legal mechanisms. This would include suing Israel at the International Court of Justice, which I have offered to do for them. And of course they have filed a complaint against Israel for war crimes and crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court. According to press reports, they are meeting right now to decide what to do and President Abbas will soon be addressing the Palestinian people.

Dennis Bernstein: I suppose it is important to emphasize the fact that this could turn very violent.

Francis Boyle: I am afraid so. This could turn into the third intifada. The First Intifada, which took place in 1987, was spontaneous. The Second Intifada [September 2000-February 2005] was provoked when Ariel Sharon went to the Al-Aqsa mosque with a couple hundred soldiers. Eventually, about 3,000 Palestinians lost their lives as a result.

Now we have Trump provoking the situation. His people, including Bannon and Flynn, know exactly what they are doing. They believe in Sam Huntington's concept of "the clash of civilizations." They truly believe that they are leading a crusade against the Muslim world. This is being done very deliberately.

**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**

## Missing the Significance of Israel-gate

Amid the U.S. mainstream media's hyping of Russia-gate, there has been much less attention given to what some call "Israel-gate," evidence that Israel was wielding much more behind-the-scenes influence, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

President Trump's decision to begin moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to the disputed city of Jerusalem – and disclosure that first-son-in-law Jared Kushner failed to disclose his role in a foundation funding Israeli settlements and lobbied against a United Nations' resolution critical of those settlements during the transition – are reminders that the foreign government with truly broad influence over U.S. politics is Israel.

Trump's Jerusalem announcement also threatened to touch off more disorder in the Middle East, which Ali Abunimah, co-founder of the Electronic Intifada, says reflected the Trump administration's determination to demand a full capitulation by the Palestinians. I spoke with Abunimah on Dec. 5.

Dennis Bernstein: We turn our attention back to occupied Palestine. We have now seen the kind of policy we are going to get from the Trump administration.

Jared Kushner has described bringing peace to the region as his dream. We are going to talk about that in the context of his investment in settlements there. I suppose the central issue in Palestine this week is whether the embassy is going to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and what will the timing be, as in, will it happen some time soon?

Ali Abunimah: Actually, it will not be moved any time soon. Trump will announce tomorrow [Dec. 6] that the US is recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital but he will also sign a waiver delaying the move for another six months and the whole process will likely take years.

Dennis Bernstein: How bad is the situation now? We know that settlements are being built apace, that the repression continues in the Gaza Strip, where life is barely livable.

Ali Abunimah: It is interesting that no one is actually talking about what is happening on the ground in Jerusalem, where hundreds of thousands of

Palestinians there are facing systematic ethnic cleansing by Israel. This includes home demolitions, revocation of residency rights, land confiscations.

In the words of B'Tselem, the Israeli human rights group, since the occupation of East Jerusalem began in 1967, Israel has treated Palestinians in the city as "unwanted immigrants" and worked systematically to drive them out of the area.

Whatever Trump announces tomorrow will not change the situation. The so-called international community is doing nothing about it and is letting Israel get away with it.

Dennis Bernstein: Jared Kushner is a broker for illegal settlements.

Ali Abunimah: He is a donor to illegal settlements, a philanthropist for illegal settlements. How many headlines have been devoted to Kushner failing to disclose important information in his government ethics filings? The latest is that he failed to disclose the fact that he was a director of his family's foundation, which has donated to building settlements in the occupied West Bank, particularly the settlement of Beit El, the same settlement that receives philanthropic donations from David Friedman, Trump's ambassador in Tel Aviv.

Kushner, who is supposedly charged with coming up with a peace plan, is actually busy funding settlements. Kushner's family are close friends of Benjamin Netanyahu. It is just farcical to pretend that anyone like Jared Kushner could ever be an honest broker.

Dennis Bernstein: Is all of this legal?

Ali Abunimah: That's questionable. Actually, in the past year there were lawsuits filed challenging this massive multi-billion dollar flow of tax-deductible, so-called charitable funds for illegal purposes, including the construction of settlements and massive donations to groups like Friends of the IDF.

Another issue is this whole business of what Jared Kushner was doing during the transition, when he was trying to undermine the policy of the sitting Obama administration and stop the UN Security Council resolution passed last December condemning Israeli settlements. This all came out in the context of the Mueller investigation and Michael Flynn's guilty plea, which revealed not so much a collusion with Russia as a very close collusion between the Trump transition and Israel.

Dennis Bernstein: You would think then that MSNBC, which makes a living on pumping up Russiagate, would want to jump into this case of collusion.

Ali Abunimah: The Michael Flynn revelation did not show collusion with Russia

and certainly did not show any interference in the US election. What Flynn pled guilty to was lying about two meetings. Flynn is a serial liar, he lied about his work for the Turkish government.

The facts that were filed in the documents with his plea show that a “very senior member” of the Trump transition team, who has since been identified as Jared Kushner, had ordered Flynn to contact every member of the UN Security Council to try to defeat this resolution criticizing Israel. It was also reported in The New York Times that Kushner had acted at the urging of Netanyahu.

None of this has anything to do with Russian interference in the elections.

What it does show is clear collusion at the highest level with a foreign government [Israel] to undermine and sabotage the policy of the sitting administration.

Dennis Bernstein: It doesn't appear that Arab outrage is going to have much influence over what happens with this plan to move the capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

Ali Abunimah: On the contrary, I think that it has actually been facilitated by the fact that Saudi Arabia, which markets itself as the guardian of Islam, has been engaging in this major rapprochement with Israel, pressuring the Palestinians to accept what amounts to surrender, in order to get them out of the way so that Saudi Arabia and Israel can embrace each other and go to war together against Iran.

The New York Times reported details of the so-called Trump peace plan that Jared Kushner has been putting together, which basically creates a Palestinian state in name only. The Palestinians would have very limited autonomy in very small non-contiguous areas of the West Bank. They would have no control, no sovereignty, no capital in East Jerusalem, no right of return for refugees, and so on. But they would be free to call this a Palestinian state if they want to.

All of this sounds familiar to people who have followed this issue because this is a rehashing of the kind of schemes that have been put forward since the 1990's. What is different this time is that Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Authority leader, was called to Riyadh last month and told by Mohammad bin Salman that he was going to accept this or else. The thinking behind it is that the Palestinian issue is a thorn in the side of the Saudi/Israeli alliance that wants to escalate the catastrophic confrontation with Iran.

Dennis Bernstein: How does the crisis with the prime minister in Lebanon play into all of this?

Ali Abunimah: The Saudis have been behind so many of the regional disasters, including escalating the situation in Syria by funding a proxy war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people. For two years they have been bombing the poorest Arab country, Yemen, with millions suffering famine and tens of thousands killed and injured. Saudi Arabia has been unable to defeat the people resisting them in Yemen. They were trying to destabilize Lebanon and that failed because [Prime Minister] Hariri went home and rescinded his forced resignation under pressure from the Saudis.

Dennis Bernstein: I guess maybe the one silver lining in all of this is the boycott/divestment movement. There is not much else going on in terms of global resistance to the brutality in occupied Palestine.

Ali Abunimah: I suppose it is possible to look at all of this and just feel immobilized and hopeless. But I think it is important to feel hope as well. Even in Jerusalem, Palestinians have been standing up to Israel and winning victories, as they did this summer when they forced Israel to back down from its efforts to impose stricter control on entrance to the al-Aqsa mosque compound. That was a real victory for people power in Jerusalem against one of the strongest armies in the world.

Despite a twenty-fold increase in lobbying, Israel has not been able to stop the “impressive growth” of the Palestine solidarity movement, particularly the boycott/divestment/sanctions movement. So it’s not time to be hopeless, it’s time to get on with the work, because there is lots to do and people power is still winning victories.

Dennis Bernstein: I guess you could say that proof of those victories is the amount of repression and clamp-down of Palestinian students and their supporters all over the country.

Ali Abunimah: And it is across the board now, including the effort of the big Silicon Valley companies who are helping the establishment to censor and limit the reach of independent media like us. They know that people are listening and we are powerful, even though we may sometimes feel small in the face of the forces that are trying to reshape the world.

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# Saudi Arabia's Mysterious Upheaval

Stung by an apparent defeat in Syria, Saudi Arabia's aggressive Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman has arrested rivals within the kingdom's elite and provoked a political crisis in Lebanon, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Change is clearly afoot in Saudi Arabia – with Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MbS) engineering the dubious resignation of Lebanon's Prime Minister and arresting some of the kingdom's richest businessmen and rivals within the royal family on charges of corruption – but exactly what it foretells is hard to read.

The Saudis also are reeling from the apparent defeat of Saudi-backed Sunni jihadists in Syria, including Al Qaeda and Islamic State militants. So what are the consequences for Saudi Arabia and its regional allies?

On Nov. 20, after Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri left Saudi Arabia and resurfaced in France, I spoke with Vijay Prashad, professor of International Studies at Trinity College in Connecticut. (Hariri has since returned to Lebanon where he remains prime minister at least for the time being.)

Prashad is the Chief Editor of LeftWord Books and the Director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research. He is the author of 20 books including *The Death of a Nation* and *The Future of the Arab Revolution*.

Dennis Bernstein: Where do you think the Prime Minister of Lebanon is now, and why is he there?

Vijay Prashad: Saad Hariri is currently in Paris. Emmanuel Macron went to Saudi Arabia and essentially rescued Saad Hariri from house arrest there. Hariri resigned on Saudi television. He was probably instructed to resign in order to create a political crisis in Lebanon. Hariri has indicated he may return to Beirut this week but there is no certainty that this is going to happen.

Dennis Bernstein: Do you think this is driven by the same forces behind the Crown Prince's arrest of key businessmen and political figures?

Vijay Prashad: It is important to point out that the crisis in Lebanon is both internally and externally generated. It is internally generated because Lebanon has a curious sectarian constitution where the various sects in the country—the Sunnis, the Shia, the Christians—have divided power.

One of the very important players in the divided government is Hezbollah.

Hezbollah is, of course, very close to the Iranian government and has been an



adversary of Saad Hariri's and his father's Future Movement.

But the external pressure from Saudi Arabia is much more important. Since the defeat of Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq, Saudi Arabia has seen Iran stretch its wings in the region. It has tried various strategies to essentially put Iran back into its borders. The war in Syria was one such episode, as is the fight in Yemen and the attempt to strangle Qatar. Now, having failed in each of these attempts, Saudi Arabia is going after what is perhaps the most sensitive country in the region, which is Lebanon.

By forcing Mr. Hariri to resign and creating a political crisis inside Lebanon, the Saudis want to see a block form inside Lebanon that will try to push Hezbollah out of the political consensus. This is not going to happen, but it is raising tension in the region.

Dennis Bernstein: This is not a moderation in Saudi policy, as it is being portrayed in the Western press.

Vijay Prashad: It is important to recognize that the descendants of the founder of Saudi Arabia have basically shared power over the past ninety years. They have parceled out the institutions among the different lines and made sure that no single line dominated the entire kingdom. They have all exploited the oil and have been provided with a nuclear umbrella by the United States. That has been the basic order in Saudi Arabia. Because they were very helpful to the Americans in the anti-Communist crusade, they were allowed to export their brand of Islam across the Islamic world.

So this was the basic order until Mohammed bin Salman , the current Crown Prince, decided to consolidate power. He has arrested sections of his own family and tried to bring all power under this own control. It is a centralization of power that is taking place. His reason for doing this is actually very interesting.

For the past decade, Saudi Arabia has been running its oil wells at enormous capacity. It has been flooding international oil markets with oil, keeping prices down. Of course, this has not been good for Saudi Arabia, which has never diversified its economy. It has been facing a serious balance of payments shortfall.

Mohammad bin Salman has pushed a so-called "reform" agenda to liberalize the Saudi economy. He wants to have the Saudi oil company, Aramco, go on the public market. He has taken a stand against corruption, which he claims has cost the country hundreds of billions of dollars. He is going after the very rich in an attempt to recover some of these billions to help close the budget deficit

inside Saudi Arabia.

At the same time, he has talked about the need to rein in extremism. But while he is saying all these things, he is prosecuting a decidedly anti-Iranian agenda, which is of course red meat to the extremists. It is not clear how he could, on the one hand, put the extremists in their place, while at the same time basically parroting the rhetoric of the extremists.

He might not only consolidate power from the rest of his family, he might consolidate power from some of the clerics and become the most extremist player in Saudi Arabia with his rhetoric against Iran. It is not a very comforting sight.

If this Saudi monarchy precipitately collapses, there will be serious chaos in Saudi Arabia. The entire institutional framework has been set up around the monarchy and there is no easily identifiable separate power base.

Dennis Bernstein: By the way, who is under arrest at the fancy hotel there in Riyadh?

Vijay Prashad: One of the people under arrest was a former employer of mine. He is the richest man in Saudi Arabia and part-owner of Twitter. Another person under arrest is also one of the richest men in Saudi Arabia, who is heavily involved in Ethiopia. He is brokering the vast buy-up of Ethiopian land and gold mines by Saudi Arabia. These are the wealthiest people in the country. There are also about 200 businessmen of various means who are being held on charges of corruption.

It is interesting because, on the one hand, this is going to earn the Crown Prince some goodwill among the population, who are fed up with the crony corruption of the royal family. But this is not an entire shake-up of the system. After all, the Crown Prince and his circle will continue to feed at the trough of the oil profits of the kingdom.

Dennis Bernstein: As you point out, the timing is interesting.

Vijay Prashad: I was a little surprised that the corporate media didn't pick up on this. About a week before the arrests were made, there was a major investors' conference in Saudi Arabia. The Crown Prince had asked a consultancy firm to write an important report titled "Saudi Vision 2020," where he laid out the plans to diversify the Saudi economy away from reliance on oil to make Saudi Arabia a kind of "Singapore in the Sand." To use the country's wealth to help it track into the future.

He has plans to build a vast new high-tech city in northern Saudi Arabia

bordering Jordan and Egypt. At this conference, many banks and hedge funds appeared to be very excited to get involved in this project. Now, if you want to raise investor confidence, the last thing you should be doing is arresting some of the richest people in your country.

But I think this was a message the Crown Prince wanted to send to these investors, saying that he was not going to tolerate internal corruption. This is a kind of neoliberal message to the banks, that you won't have to worry about paying bribes, etc., this is going to be run in a modern way.

Dennis Bernstein: How do you see the US and Trump fitting into all of this?

Vijay Prashad: The US position is a little curious. Some have taken Jared Kushner's visit to Saudi Arabia as a green light given to conduct this kind of internal coup and perhaps also to push against Lebanon and Hezbollah. I'm sure there is some truth to that but, as I've said, this is a long-term policy of the Crown Prince to centralize power and put pressure on Iran.

This policy predates the Trump administration. Obama was quite happy with the idea of centralization of power in Saudi Arabia. Only recently has Congress begun speaking out against the war in Yemen. There is a long-term trend of the United States backing this Crown Prince, especially to push back against Iranian influence in the region.

Trump is far more aggressive in his anti-Iran position than Obama ever was and I think he has emboldened the Israelis. When the Crown Prince called Saad Hariri to Saudi Arabia he also summoned Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority. We don't know what was said in that meeting but since then the Saudi and the Israelis have been leaking stories saying that the two of them are meeting. At the same time, the United Arab Emirates has been making friendly gestures toward Israel.

Perhaps the Saudis are hallucinating that they will be able to use Israel and the Trump administration to do their dirty work vis-a-vis Iran. Perhaps it will begin with a war against Hezbollah in Lebanon. But Hezbollah, which was able to withstand the Israeli attack in 2006, is now much more battle-hardened as a result of its participation in Syria.

It is not likely that Hezbollah is going to crumble under Israeli fire. In fact, it might inflict considerable damage on Israel. Sensible politics at this point would lead one to say that there needs to be a serious conversation between these countries about dialing down the tension, but no one is really calling for that.

Dennis Bernstein: The situation with the Lebanese Prime Minister could become

fairly explosive, couldn't it?

Vijay Prashad: Hezbollah is integrated fully into the Lebanese security apparatus. It is inconceivable that the Future Movement would actually like to set aside Hezbollah. And it is inconceivable that the Future Movement would welcome an Israeli attack on Hezbollah.

Lebanon is a very small country with 4 million to 5 million people. In 2006, when Israel bombed what was considered to be Hezbollah areas in Beirut, that bombing affected the whole city. I don't think the Future Movement are stupid enough to welcome an Israeli assault on their own society. They must realize that the entire Lebanese security structure is intertwined with Hezbollah's battlefield experience and its ability to defend the south of Lebanon.

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## The Right Returns to the Religion Well

Over the centuries, religion has cloaked hypocrisy – and it's getting a test again as President Trump and Senate candidate Roy Moore hide behind the Religious Right's self-interested sanctimony, write Bill Moyers and Michael Winship.

By Bill Moyers and Michael Winship

In Babylon-on-the-Potomac recently, the brand new, \$500 million Museum of the Bible had its grand opening. Donald Trump did not attend, perhaps fearing a fate like the end of *Raiders of the Lost Ark* when the remnants of the Ten Commandments are unsealed, holy mayhem ensues and miscreants melt like candles.

Just a couple of blocks from Capitol Hill, the museum sprawls across eight floors and 430,000 square feet, giving visitors a chance to meet New Testament re-enactors, see a burning bush and Bibles that belonged to Babe Ruth and Elvis, walk through a replica of a village from the time of Christ, experience a motion ride called Washington Revelations and grab a snack at the Milk and Honey café (There's also a cafeteria-style restaurant called, you guessed it: Manna).

At the gift shop, you can buy key chains, hats and T-shirts, frankincense and myrrh body wash, a \$1,250 leather foot stool shaped like a rhinoceros (because

rhinos were on Noah's Ark, of course) or a \$125,000 bejeweled pomegranate made of Jerusalem stone (the Song of Solomon: "I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranates").

As the old joke goes, this is what God would do if He had money.

To be fair, by most accounts, the museum is well designed and executed, high-tech and state-of-the-art. Philip Kennicott, art and architecture critic for *The Washington Post*, wrote, "What it does well, it does as well or better than any museum in the country," but added:

"There... is a lot of slippage between [the museum's] claims that the Bible is enormously influential (which is indisputable) and that the stories it tells are fundamentally true (a claim disputed not just by atheists, agnostics, secular scholars and scientists, but also by billions of adherents of the world's other religions). Every resource of museum design and careful argumentation has been mustered to sweep up these unrelated ideas in one, big, overwhelming package."

### **Right-Wing Money**

What has many observers far more concerned are connections among the new attraction's principal funders and the right wing. Here its mission becomes suspect, more political than religious, although with the right wing, it is always difficult to separate the two, each possessing a will to dominate.

The Post describes a tangled relationship between the nonprofit museum, its corporate backer Hobby Lobby – the very rich, closely held craft store chain controlled by the Christian conservative Green family – and another principal backer the National Christian Foundation, a donor-advised fund "that supports key soldiers in the national battle for conservative Christian values."

The foundation, self-mandated to "advance God's kingdom," has given millions to churches and others, counting among its grantees opponents of abortion and same-sex marriage. As for the billionaire Green family, their craft-store empire gained notoriety when it won a Supreme Court ruling allowing it to deny on religious grounds Obamacare coverage of contraception for its employees. Oh, and just in case you haven't heard, they recently were fined \$3 million in fines and forced to turn over thousands of antiquities smuggled out of Iraq. (Down goes one of the commandments – see Deuteronomy 5:19.)

Those involved claim that the museum's purpose simply is to expose visitors to the story of the Good Book and that its motives are nonsectarian and apolitical. Sure. But the opening gala was held at the Trump International Hotel on Pennsylvania Avenue. The cheapest ticket was \$2,500 and apparently no collection plate was passed for the hungry and homeless, on the grounds, we presume, that

it would be an unfair tax on the rich. Organizers claim that the choice of a venue had all to do with finding an available space large enough and nothing to do with currying favor with the owners of the inn.

Hobby Lobby CEO David Green backed Sen. Marco Rubio's 2016 presidential candidacy but endorsed Trump in the general election, and his son, museum chair and Hobby Lobby president Steve Green, recently told the Christian Broadcasting Network, "We are seeing that the current administration with President Trump is a friend of religious freedom and has taken steps to strengthen and confirm that we are a nation that values the freedoms our founders gave us."

Really? Trump? A friend of religious freedom? Why, according to televangelist and Trump buddy Paula White, he's a man whose election kept us from being "on the verge of losing what we call religious liberties." Without him and the prayers of believers, she said, "I believe the church in America would have been an underground church in five years."

### **Trump as Savior?**

Whoa! Donald Trump, the savior of oppressed Christians whom Democrats otherwise would have banished to caves and dungeons, or fed to lions in the Coliseum? Apparently for Paula White and the like-minded, the first commandment – forbidding the worship of false gods – must be provisional. And to them, what Jesus told his followers – "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" – presents no hard choice, because Trump is one and the same.

The ninth commandment – forbidding false witness – they simply ignore. Donald Trump rode to power on the Birther Lie, and they cheered him on. During the 2016 campaign he couldn't open his mouth without lying, and they cheered him on.

Yes, they cheered the man who said he had never needed to seek forgiveness, who reportedly cheated his contractors and vendors, who wants to slash programs for the poor and cut taxes for the rich, who plans to kick thousands of disaster and political refugees out of the country, who ignores famine in foreign lands, who wants to eradicate rules and regulations protecting the water and air of God's green earth and who has surrounded himself with crony capitalists, grifters and predators. The man who scorns and dismisses allegations of his own sexual misconduct (See Deuteronomy 5:18) while calling for the election to the U.S. Senate of Roy Moore, the pistol-packing, homophobic, God-fearing demagogue who by many accounts lusted after teenagers and asked them out on dates. This to the applause of some of Alabama's loudest Bible thumpers.

Speaking on an Alabama radio station, here's how right-wing, anti-gay pastor

Flip Benham justified Moore's alleged predilection for teens: "He did that because there is something about a purity of a young woman, there is something that is good, that's true, that's straight and he looked for that." A sentiment like that may be what prompted Walt Whitman to write: "'O Bible!' Say I, 'What follies and monstrous barbarities are defended in *thy* name!'"

And here's pastor Earl Wise from Millbrook Alabama, a Moore supporter who told the *Boston Globe*, "How these gals came up with this, I don't know. They must have had some sweet dreams somewhere down the line. Plus, there are some 14-year-olds, who, the way they look, could pass for 20."

"Not versions, but perversions," said St. Jerome of the Bibles in his day.

### **Religion and Politics**

One trembles at the numbers of right-wing Christians who resort to the Bible as if it were the Republican Party platform, who in their pursuit of reactionary and bigoted rectitude embrace Trump and his GOP allies no matter how reprehensible their behavior; who, like Trump mouthpiece Kellyanne Conway, seem to find it preferable to have a purported molester like Moore elected to the Senate than a Democrat, and who quote scripture to overlook – even justify – Moore's sins, going so far as to cite biblical references to the age difference of Joseph and Mary to give their candidate the all-clear.

All of this skin-crawling rationalization just to hold onto a single Republican seat in the Senate? Yes, because they can count on Moore to continue demonizing their gay brothers and sisters, to invoke the police powers of the state to force women to carry unwanted pregnancies, to cut taxes for rich donors and give churches the right to collect money from secret sources to carry on political activities without losing their tax-exempt status (it's in the tax bill now before Congress; check it out).

In the words of historian of religion Randall Ballmer, "You have a movement that has so totally embraced a particular political party that it's willing to go along with any outrage as long as it's within the tent of party."

Fortunately, there are Christians who say no. In Alabama itself, dozens of pastors signed a letter condemning Moore. It reads, in part:

"Even before the recent allegations of sexual abuse, Roy Moore demonstrated that his extremist values and actions are not consistent with traditional Christian values or good Christian character. He and politicians like him have cynically used Christianity for their own goals. But Roy Moore does not speak for Christianity, and he acts in ways that are contrary to our faith."

To which North Carolina's Rev. Dr. William Barber II, president of Repairers of the Breach, says amen. He deplors the fact that religious values "have been hijacked by extremists" who no more represent Jesus "than did the church authorities who backed slavery."

Rev. Barber likes to quote Isaiah 10:1-4:

"Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless. What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?"

Go to the Museum of the Bible in Washington. You can look it up.

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## The Dark Inevitability of Zionism

Among the growing assaults on freedom of speech is an Israeli-driven campaign to criminalize a campaign to boycott Israel over its racist persecution of Palestinians, writes Lawrence Davidson.

By Lawrence Davidson

We know where Zionism has taken Israel. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 led the way. In that imperial and colonial document, the British promised the World Zionist Organization a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine. They did so, as Edward Said put it, in "flat disregard of both the presence and wishes of the native majority residents in that territory."

Right from the start the Zionists understood "national home" to mean an eventual Jewish state. Actualizing that assumption has had enormous implications not only for the Palestinians but also for the Jews. And, as it turns out, for the rest of us as well.

You cannot introduce one people, in this case a large number of Europeans who happen to be Jewish, into a territory populated by hundreds of thousands of non-Europeans, without negative consequences. And, if the incoming Europeans have



the goal of creating a state exclusively for their group alone, those consequences are going to be dire indeed. Surrounded by “the other,” the only way you can achieve your exclusive state is through discriminatory practices and laws ultimately producing an apartheid nation. And that is what happened.

While this has meant, and continues to mean, segregation, ethnic cleansing and Bantustans for the Palestinians, for the Jews it means that their religion is tied to a racist political ideology. There is no instance of Israeli prejudice exercised against the Palestinians, no act of violence committed against them, that does not simultaneously dishonor and debase the Jewish religion and people.

### **Worldwide Consequences**

How about the rest of world? The consequences of Zionism are threatening both security and equality everywhere. Here is how this is happening:

–As the Balfour Declaration indicates, Israel and its society are products of a colonial era. That is an era when the people of both Europe and the U.S. openly practiced racist policies and behavior toward non-Europeans. They regularly trampled of the rights of alleged inferiors. Israel continues to operate in this fashion into the present.

–Following World War II, it became understood that these behaviors and attitudes are morally indefensible and their consequences should be remedied. And so, the United Nations was established, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights issued, and a number of treaties embodying international laws designating crimes against humanity were signed. With this process the world entered a potentially more civilized, post-colonial age.

–When this happened the Zionist project instantly became an anachronism. In fact, Israel became a state that defied the modern norm the moment it was proclaimed.

–However, Israel does not want to be outside the norm. It wants to be accepted as a “normal” nation, particularly within the Western state system. There are only two ways this can happen: either (1) Israel must either give up the racist ideology of Zionism and embrace a form of democracy accessible to all its people regardless of religion or ethnicity, or (2) the world must revert back to an acceptance of at least some of the colonial practices of the Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries.

You would think that choosing the anti-racist option, and therefore seriously pressuring Israel – as the world had done with white-ruled South Africa – to fundamentally change, would be the obvious choice for today’s statesmen. But it seems not. Why is that?

There is now an ongoing effort, we might call it the updated Zionist project, to move the world backward so as to accept racist past practices as “normal.” It consists of (a) an attack on international law protecting human rights (despite the fact that much of this law was created as a reaction to the anti-Semitic crimes of World War II), (b) an attempt to undermine the International Criminal Court, and (c) an attack on the United Nations and its efforts to protect the human and political rights of Palestinians.

## **Enter BDS**

It is clear that very few of the world’s governments are willing to confront Israel, even though it is an apartheid state existing in an era that claims to detest such racist regimes. This has a lot to do with the financial and special interest strength of Zionist supporters both Jewish and Christian, and the strategic use of such power to corrupt policymaking. This can be seen most plainly in the United States.

There are also Israel’s extensive high-tech and weapons-trading networks in Europe, Africa and South America that lead important political and economic institutions and individuals to support, or at least turn a blind eye to, the Zionist state. And then, of course, there are a growing number of states that themselves have plans to marginalize their own minorities.

Does this mean that there is no defense against the insidious effects of this reactionary regime – one which, according to its own past Prime Minister Ehud Barak, is “infected with fascism”? No, there are options to oppose Israel. However, at present they are to be found outside of the realm of government action and, at least for the moment, outside occupied Palestine as well.

The latter is so because inside Palestine, 70 years of Israeli colonial savagery has worn down much of the indigenous population. This does not mean that resistance from within the Occupied Territories does not continue. It does, but at relatively low levels and at a high cost.

Since the death of Yasser Arafat in 2004, too many of the Palestinian leaders have been co-opted into playing the role of modern-day Quislings. The Palestinians within Israeli-controlled territory are now fragmented into Bantustan-style enclaves, and their own “security forces” often work hand-in-hand with the Israeli oppressors.

As a consequence of these circumstances, right now the greatest pressure can be put on apartheid Israel through the activities of organized civil society. This pressure by itself may or may not be able to force fundamental change on Israel, but it can certainly raise the cost of its racist behavior and impact public

opinion.

Here we are talking about the BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement that urges both individuals and organizations (be they economic, cultural or intellectual) to avoid interacting with Israel and its state-sponsored institutions and projects. To date this has proved to be an effective weapon against Israeli racism and colonialism. For instance, if you go to the website of the U.S. Campaign for Palestinian Rights, you can find [a list of 200 recent victories](#) falling within the Boycott and Divestment categories. State-based sanctions are still in the future.

### **Israeli Pressure**

Success in this regard has, of course, generated a fierce reaction from the Zionists. According to a [Huffington Post article](#), “The Israeli government has reportedly committed [tens of millions of dollars, one government ministry and its military and security intelligence assets](#) to the fight.

Israeli Minister of Transport, Intelligence and Atomic Energy, Yisrael Katz, recently called for “targeted civil eliminations” of BDS leaders. Actually, such a reaction reflects not only the fact that the cost of Israeli racism is on the rise, but also that the Zionists have lost the public (if not the governmental) debate when it comes to their behavior toward the Palestinians.

Put broadly, BDS is an effort to help save the positive potential inherent in modern post-colonial society: the civilizing potential to be found in international law, in human and civil rights, in a benevolent and egalitarian rule of law for all of us.

So successful has BDS been to date, and so much potential does it have to help force Israel down the same road as white-ruled South Africa, that Israel and its surrogates in the U.S. and Europe are willing to undermine the very laws and rights that help uphold what freedoms there are within the public realm. For instance, in the U.S., the very right to engage in such a boycott is under Zionist attack, and by extension, so is the constitutional protection to free speech. American Zionists seem willing to subvert their own constitutional protections in order to support a racist foreign state.

Zionism can be seen as a strange twist on the Spanish philosopher George Santayana’s warning that “those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” The Zionists certainly remember the persecutions suffered by European Jews. But they forget that this mistreatment was most often organized by racist states that sought to ethnically cleanse the Jews.

Having forgotten about this state-based aspect of their own past, the Zionist

state now commits this same offense against the Palestinians. It also needs the rest of us to forget the sins of past racism if it is to carry on its effort to ethnically cleanse the Palestinians. Our response should be to embrace the motto, "Never Again!" It is time to direct this demand to the shameful behavior of Israel and the Zionists.

**Lawrence Davidson is a history professor at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. He is the author of *Foreign Policy Inc.: Privatizing America's National Interest*; *America's Palestine: Popular and Official Perceptions from Balfour to Israeli Statehood*; and *Islamic Fundamentalism*. He blogs at [www.tothepointanalyses.com](http://www.tothepointanalyses.com).**

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## Strange Twists in the Hariri Mystery

French President Macron has invited Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri to Paris, a possible opportunity to determine whether Hariri's sudden resignation, announced in Saudi Arabia, was coerced, as Dennis J Bernstein reports.

By Dennis J Bernstein

The strange case of Lebanon's Prime Minister Saad Hariri and his surprise resignation, delivered in Saudi Arabia, has developed international overtones with rumors about his possible kidnapping by the Saudis and France extending an invitation for him to come to Paris before possibly returning to Lebanon.

Because of concerns that his resignation may have been extracted by the Saudis under duress, the Lebanese government has refused to accept it unless he tenders it in person. In an interview last Sunday, Hariri looked harried and nervous. At one point the camera caught a man holding up some kind of sign behind the interviewer, as if he was trying to direct Hariri's comments.

I spoke again to Beirut-based political activist and environmentalist Rania Masri on Nov. 13 about the Hariri case. Masri is an Arab-American academic, an expert in the workings of the Lebanese government, and has been doing regular translations of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah on Facebook.

Dennis Bernstein: Let's start with your response to the latest developments. The prime minister says he would like to return to Lebanon.

Rania Masri: Yesterday there was an interview conducted in Saudi Arabia. Saudi individuals were present during the interview. When you look at what Hariri

actually said at this interview, it appears that the Saudi plan so far has not been successful. We have Hariri saying he wants to return to Lebanon, he is not sure when that will be, and that he will proceed with the resignation when he is here unless things change. So he left the door open for possibly not resigning.

As to why this is happening, you have to look at the events of the last two weeks. Saturday, [November 4], Saad Hariri read a statement that many of us believe was written by the Saudis. The Lebanese president and speaker of the house reject that statement of resignation because it was given while he was abroad. There is an almost total consensus that Hariri has been held captive since Friday.

During this time, it has become very apparent that Saudi Arabia has been in discussions with the US and Israeli governments and has been encouraging the Israeli government to attack Lebanon. The Lebanese president believes that he has gotten word that the Saudis and the Israelis are actually discussing something akin to the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. We are not talking about a war such as what occurred in 2006 but the possibility of an invasion like the one that took place in 1982.

So the political rhetoric has been escalated by the Saudis. They have basically declared war on Lebanon. The Saudi plan was to threaten Lebanon with military destruction and hope that the Lebanese would rise up against Hezbollah, leading to a civil war. That plan has completely failed.

Dennis Bernstein: What has been Hezbollah's response to these extraordinary developments?

Rania Masri: [Secretary General of Hezbollah] Hassan Nasrallah gave two talks this week concerning the resignation and the need for national unity. In the second talk he spoke to the contents of the resignation letter and responded to these Saudi threats. Nasrallah believes that Saudi Arabia has asked Israel to attack Lebanon and is willing to support this effort with millions of dollars. We know from statements from the Saudi ministries that the Saudi government has declared war on all of Lebanon, not just Hezbollah.

Hezbollah condemns Saudi intervention in Lebanon. They consider it an insult that the Lebanese prime minister is being held against his will and they call for his return to Lebanon. If he wants to resign, he should do so from the presidential palace. Hezbollah considers the declared resignation to be unconstitutional, illegal and illegitimate, because it was not voluntary.

Nasrallah has continued to call for de-escalation. He points out that Saudi Arabia has seen all of its actions in the region fail—whether it be in Yemen, in

Bahrain, in Syria, or in Iraq. Nasrallah believes that, as a result of this, Saudi Arabia is now venting its anger against Lebanon. He also points out that if Saudi Arabia really wants to, it can find ways to punish Hezbollah directly instead of attacking the entire country.

Dennis Bernstein: What role do you see the United States playing here?

Rania Masri: I have to say that I don't know what the US position is. The Saudis recognize that they have not achieved the level of support they would like. It is not really clear what the next step will be by the United States. What is clear is that the Israeli press is not enthusiastic about launching a war against Lebanon to fulfill Saudi aims.

Dennis Bernstein: Is all of this driven by what appears to be the profound failure of the Saudis in Syria?

Rania Masri: There are several issues at play. Historically, the Saudi government has always sought to create enemies, very much in the way the US government has. The de facto ruler in the country, Mohammed bin Salman, has proven himself to be a strategic failure. In Syria all they have managed to do is cause massive death and destruction through their support of ISIS and through their support for the destruction of Damascus and for regime change there.

We also know that there has been strong collaboration of Israel during the process. When we look at the military record of Saudi Arabia in Yemen, in Iraq, in Syria, we know that they are capable of great destruction. But they are not capable of transformation and change. I believe that this is an attempt on the part of the Saudis to vent their frustration and anger at numerous political failures and to achieve what has long been both a Saudi and Israeli goal, which is the destruction of the resistance movement in Lebanon.

Dennis Bernstein: I understand that the Saudi government has asked all of its citizens to leave Lebanon. What are your worst fears at this point?

Rania Masri: Yes, the Saudi and the Bahraini and the Kuwaiti governments have asked their citizens to leave the country. We know that they have directly intervened to force our prime minister to resign and to impose a new prime minister on Lebanon. This they have failed to do. They are also working to pressure the Gulf states and other countries to sanction Lebanon.

And there is open talk of a Saudi/Israeli attack on Lebanon. Personally, I don't think that is likely. There are other options. They could instigate terrorist acts in the country, as they did in Syria. But the stronger and more unified the country and the leadership is, the harder it will be for the Saudi government to cause disunity and civil tension.

Dennis Bernstein: Are people following all of this closely in Lebanon?

Rania Masri: We have gone through so many wars and attacks over the past twenty years that we suffer from a kind of fatigue. However, we have regular conversations among friends as to whether there will be another war and, if so, what it will look like. At the same time, many people in the country feel strengthened by the military prowess and the resolve of Hezbollah. Many feel that, if we did not have Hezbollah, the likelihood of an Israeli attack would be much higher.

It is really critical for people in the United States to understand that the Trump administration and the American Congress has continued to support this apartheid regime in Israel which has consistently issued threats against Lebanon. The US government has continued to strengthen its relationship with the Saudi Arabian government despite the ongoing war crimes the Saudis have been committing in Yemen. Regardless of what happens in Lebanon, it is necessary for the US government to reevaluate its ties with the Saudi Arabian government or, at the very least, to stop the massive arm sales.

**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).**

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## The Balfour Declaration's Century of Turmoil

As Israel continues to occupy Palestinian lands and threatens a new war against Lebanon, much of this turmoil traces back to Great Britain's Balfour Declaration during World I, a century ago, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Great Britain's Balfour Declaration – a century ago – laid the groundwork for a Zionist state in the Middle East and led to the purging of millions of Palestinians from what became Israel, a human rights crisis that continues to roil the Middle East to this day.

I caught up with noted Palestinian human rights campaigner Mustafa Barghouti in San Francisco where he was lecturing on the Balfour Declaration, a letter from British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour published on Nov. 9, 1917, and promising a Jewish homeland. The letter came during World War I while Great

Britain was at war with Turkey's Ottoman Empire.

In June 2002, Dr. Barghouti co-founded the Palestinian National Initiative, and currently serves as its Secretary-General.

Dennis Bernstein: What was the significance of the Balfour Declaration and what does it mean to the Palestinian people?

Mustafa Barghouti: The Balfour Declaration was a major historical crime committed against the Palestinian people. It was a crime that led to a series of other crimes, including the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people in 1948, when 70% of the population were displaced and forced to leave their country. There are still 6 million refugees spread all over the world. It led to the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and Jerusalem in 1967.

But most importantly, the Balfour Declaration was a racist act that discriminated against 90% of the population of Palestine. It gave 10% of the population the right to a homeland and deprived the Palestinians of that right. The result is what we see today, which is a system of apartheid that is much worse than what existed in South Africa.

I believe the Balfour Declaration was also a crime against the Jewish people. It used the Jewish population to serve the colonial interests of the colonial powers of Europe at the time. It pushed the Jewish population toward Zionism. It put the Jewish people in contradiction with the Palestinians and with the Arabs and created a situation of instability which has existed now for a hundred years.

Britain should apologize for its crime in Palestine and compensate the Palestinian people for the harm caused to them. At the very least, they should recognize the state of Palestine. Theresa May, the prime minister of Britain, added insult to injury by celebrating the anniversary of this declaration in the company of Benjamin Netanyahu. We responded with a fantastic rally in which 50,000 people gathered in the streets of London, occupying key locations for more than five hours.

I spoke in front of these people, as did Jeremy Corbyn, the leader of the Labor Party, who could very soon become the next prime minister of Britain. I think we can clearly say that we control public opinion in Britain.

Dennis Bernstein: What the Balfour Declaration essentially did was take a land where people had been living for generations, centuries, and gave it to another people.

Mustafa Barghouti: Exactly. Britain had no ownership of Palestine and did not



even govern Palestine at the time. They took the land of the Palestinian people and gave it to the Jewish people, who were a very small minority in Palestine.

At that time, Palestine was under Ottoman Turkish rule. Ninety percent of the population were Palestinians, whether Muslim or Christians, and ten percent were Jewish.

Balfour was not for the sake of the Jewish people as human beings, it was a case of using the Jewish people for colonial purposes. And it was in the interests of the colonial powers to push the Jewish to become Zionist, although at that time most of the Jewish people did not want Zionism.

The Balfour Declaration was a part of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, which divided the Middle East between the French and British colonial powers. Proof that the Jewish people were used for colonial purposes came in 1956 when the British responded to the Egyptian decision to nationalize the Suez Canal by attacking Egypt through Israel. All of this led to the terrible crisis we see today. It was totally unjust, it was absolutely colonial and it created the system of apartheid we have to struggle against today.

Dennis Bernstein: Why do you suppose some of the key leaders in the anti-apartheid movement have said that the situation in Palestine is worse than it was in South Africa?

Mustafa Barghouti: In South Africa, there was never the segregation of roads that you see in the occupied West Bank, there were never the walls you have here. In South Africa, settlements were not used to ethnically cleanse the population.

Israel takes away 87% of our water resources in the West Bank. A Palestinian in the West Bank is allowed to use no more than fifty cubic meters of water, while an illegal Israeli settler is allowed to use 2,400 cubic meters, 48 times more than a Palestinian.

The Israeli GDP per capita is about \$38,000 while ours does not exceed \$2,000.

But Israel obliges us to buy products at the Israeli market price. So we make much less money but have to buy products at their cost. In addition, they force us to pay for water and electricity at double the amount Israelis pay. If we happen to have to send a child to an Israeli hospital, we would be obliged to pay four times what an Israeli would pay.

If you look it up in the dictionary, "apartheid" is defined as "two systems of laws for two peoples living in the same place." That is exactly what Israel has created. Israeli citizens, even if they are illegal settlers violating international law, are treated with respect by the Israeli government, they have

rights, they are ruled by civil law. While Palestinians are ruled by military law. They still use against us the Ottoman Turkish Law of 1911, the British Mandatory Law, the British Emergency Law, Jordanian law, Israeli law and 2,400 Israeli military orders. That is why you have things like administrative detention, which means they can arrest any Palestinian without even bringing charges. 56 members of our elected parliament were jailed by Israel, many under administrative detention. Imagine if the Mexican government came to the United States and arrested congress people and put them in jail without even charges!

Dennis Bernstein: People in custody are being subjected to torture, young people are being subjected to torture. This is an ongoing program. I am always stunned by the brutality and the acceptance of that brutality by the United States. If what is going on in Palestine is a form of ethnic cleansing, then we would have to indict the United States.

Mustafa Barghouti: It is unfortunate that US institutions are completely biased toward Israel. Without American support, Israel could not do what it does. The problem is that there are double standards. They speak about freedom, about democracy, about human rights...except when it comes to Palestine. It is as if we are not human beings. We speak about countries having to abide by international law—not having nuclear weapons, for instance—but Israel is above international law. That can only be described as a double standard.

In the long run, this is bad, not only for the Palestinians, but also for the Jewish people. The system of apartheid and racial discrimination run by the Israeli government is absolutely incompatible with the history of the Jewish people, the people who suffered from the Holocaust, from anti-Semitism and the pogroms in Russia. They should not be oppressors, they should not be discriminating against other people. That is why it does not surprise me to see many wonderful Jewish activists supporting Palestine and the BDS movement. I don't think the Israelis can be free until the Palestinians are free.

Dennis Bernstein: Do you see the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement as an effective movement? It certainly contributed to ending apartheid in South Africa.

Mustafa Barghouti: Of course, it is very effective. It translates international solidarity with the Palestinian people into a material effect. But it must be stated that the BDS movement is not against the Jewish people and it is not anti-Semitic. It is a nonviolent form of action and freedom of expression. It is about individual rights. Those who have come out against BDS are positioning themselves against freedom of choice. If you don't want to boycott Israel, at least boycott settlement activities, which, according to United Nations Security Council resolution 2334, are a violation of international law.

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).

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## The Saudi Hand in Lebanon’s Crisis

Facing defeat in its proxy war for “regime change” in Syria, Saudi Arabia undertook some startling moves, including staging the resignation of Lebanon’s prime minister, reports Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Last weekend during a visit to Saudi Arabia, Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri suddenly and dramatically resigned, raising questions about whether the Saudi leadership was engineering a political crisis in Lebanon as a way to counter the defeat of its jihadist proxies in Syria.

Given the timing and the unusual circumstances – from a fancy hotel in Riyadh – questions also were raised about whether Hariri’s resignation amounted to the kidnapping of the Lebanese leader (who has dual Saudi citizenship) or whether it presaged a new front in the regional wars.

I spoke with Beirut-based Professor, Activist and Environmental Scientist Rania Masri last Monday, while Hariri’s whereabouts and safety were still in question.

Dennis Bernstein: The prime minister of Lebanon has stepped down. Could you talk a little bit about what provoked that and the significance of that action?

Rania Masri: The prime minister, Saad al-Hariri, was called very suddenly to Saudi Arabia. He cancelled all his appointments and went on Thursday. [On] Saturday there was a taped broadcast in which he stated that he was resigning as prime minister. This has never happened in the history of Lebanon. This is a resignation submitted from outside the country!

Secondly, the statement that he read was clearly not a statement that he wrote.

We know this because of linguistic assessments of the statement and we know this because his brother writes his statements and his brother has been in Lebanon. It is very clear that this was a resignation forced upon him by the Saudi government. He has not been answering his phone for the past few days.

Most likely he is locked up in the Ritz Carlton Hotel along with dozens of other influential Saudi princes and businessmen who are under arrest there. The

president has asked him to return to Lebanon before the resignation becomes finalized.

Saad al-Hariri read the letter of resignation on Saturday. He said that he is forced to resign because of Iranian intervention in Lebanon. Imagine, to leave the country and go to Saudi Arabia to resign because of another country's intervention in your home country! He also claims in the statement that Hezbollah is an Iranian tool and that Iranian hands must be cut off by all means necessary. It was basically very threatening language against Lebanon.

Since then, Saudi minister Sabhan—who many believe wrote the statement for Hariri—has stated that Lebanon must decide between peace and keeping Hezbollah in the government. He continues to say that as long as Hezbollah is present in the Lebanese government, he will consider that the Lebanese government is at war with Saudi Arabia. So here we have a minister from Saudi Arabia openly declaring war on the entire country of Lebanon!

Dennis Bernstein: The simple explanation in the Western corporate press is that Hariri was afraid he would face the same fate as his father, who was assassinated.

Rania Masri: That has no basis in fact. There are three types of intelligence services in Lebanon, each of which is aligned to a different political party.

All have agreed that there is no evidence of any assassination plot against Hariri or anyone else in Lebanon. At the same time, no one has been able to reach him on the phone since Friday. He can't really believe that anyone is going to kill him if he answers the phone!

Dennis Bernstein: Should we be thinking about this in the context of this extraordinary shake-up in Saudi Arabia?

Rania Masri: One hundred percent. The day before Saad Hariri was called to Saudi Arabia, he was speaking positively of the Lebanese government. There was no discord within the government. Then he gets called to Saudi Arabia, disappears for a day and issues this resignation on a taped broadcast. At the same time, we have the capture and arrest of these very influential multi-millionaires in Saudi Arabia, all thrown into this same hotel.

We have to remember that Saad Hariri also has Saudi Arabian citizenship, that he and his family have had investments in Saudi Arabia since the early 1970's. He may be held liable to Saudi law, particularly if he loses his diplomatic immunity with his resignation. So at the very least we know that he did not issue his resignation because of an internal Lebanese problem. It is no coincidence that we now have this shake-up in Saudi Arabia to cement financial

and military and political power all in one man.

Dennis Bernstein: This would be an extremely bold action on the part of the Saudis, one which almost certainly was not taken without the knowledge of the United States government. You have the US flooding Saudi Arabia with weapons so that they can tighten their grip in Yemen.

Rania Masri: Trump has been saluting the Saudi regime. After what has been happening the past few days, he actually tweeted that he would like Aramco to move its headquarters to New York and be part of the New York Stock Exchange, that this would serve US interests.

No, I don't think the Saudi regime began this shake-up without the US administration's blessing. Some have even taken it a step further and say that this is not a Saudi-imposed resignation but an Israeli-imposed resignation presented via the Saudis. There are several different analyses you can make, but what is clear is that our prime minister issued his resignation while out of the country and has not been available for communication ever since.

The Saudi regime has been escalating its war in Yemen without any political victory in sight, it was the main financier behind the ISIS terrorists in Syria with the specific purpose of destroying Damascus, and now has set its sights on Lebanon.

Dennis Bernstein: How do we find out at this point what is really going on?

Rania Masri: Given its record in the region, I don't think we should be calling in the United Nations. Remember that the United Nations Security Council imposed genocidal sanctions on Iraq for twelve years. In no way, as a person from this region, would I be reaching out to the UN.

What is needed is for Hariri to return to Lebanon and, if he wants to resign, he can do it from the safety of his home here. What is also needed is for the media, particularly in the West, to clearly recognize what is happening. These are not changes for democracy and against corruption in Saudi Arabia, as has been promoted by The Guardian, among others.

It's important to recognize that when Hezbollah is threatened, all Lebanon is threatened. Hezbollah is not a terrorist organization within the country, Hezbollah is a legitimate political party, a legitimate resistance movement, it is part and parcel of the fabric of this country. What the Saudis are calling for is that the Lebanese relinquish what is left of our sovereignty and to sacrifice our main means of protecting ourselves against Israeli aggression.

Remember that it was Hezbollah that fought to liberate the south of Lebanon from

the 22-year occupation of the Israelis. It was Hezbollah who defeated Israeli in the 2006 war. And because of that, since 2006, Israel has not launched another military aggression against this country, even though they typically do so every three years.

And for Saudi Arabia to threaten Lebanon that either we disarm and remove Hezbollah as a legitimate political party or we will face Saudi repercussions is basically having us choose between a war with Saudi Arabia or being defenseless and broken. Saudi Arabia has the means to cause assassinations, to launch terrorist campaigns, to wage economic warfare against the country, but they do not have the means to break the back of the Lebanese people.

Dennis Bernstein: You alluded to the invisible hand of Israel.

Rania Masri: Benjamin Netanyahu has been gleeful ever since the Saudi statements and he has been promoting it as a further reason for the international community to attack and isolate Iran and to dismantle Hezbollah. We already know that this Saudi regime and the Israeli regime are in cahoots. So it comes as no surprise for the Israeli government to be the first to welcome these Saudi statements.

The Saudis seem to have forgotten who the real enemy is in the region and to have accepted a false sectarian discourse that the enemy is Iran and the Shias. Well, we all know that the enemy of the region is Zionism, a philosophy built on apartheid that continues to seek expansionist means, that continues to promote ethnic cleansing and genocide against Palestinians.

Dennis Bernstein: What are you watching now, what are your concerns?

Rania Masri: People from various political spectrums in the country have been re-tweeting the statement of the Saudi Arabian Minister of State for Gulf Affairs and basically consider this a declaration of war. We are watching the news, we are following the situation very closely. We are making a lot of jokes about what is happening because that is how we deal with it. But we are also following the advice of Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary-General of Hezbollah, who has advised us to be calm and to wait a few days until we understand what has been happening. Nasrallah will speak again on Friday [Nov. 10] and respond to the specific content of the letter presented to us on Saturday.

Dennis Bernstein: How does Syria play into all of this?

Rania Masri: The way the Saudi government is behaving is like a cat in a corner. It is important to stress that the Saudi Arabian plan in Syria failed miserably. They were not able to destroy Damascus, they were not able to break the country apart, they were not able to dismantle the Syrian regime. They were

able to contribute to the destruction and to the many massacres at the hands of ISIS.

We are dealing with a country with a great deal of financial and military power but whose plans in the region have failed. Now it is looking to completely destroy the resistance movement in Lebanon, particularly because Hezbollah also played a part in standing against ISIS in Syria.

**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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## In Case You Missed...

Some of our special stories in August focused on Official Washington’s growing hostility toward dissent, the Trump administration’s drift toward more endless warfare, and the worsening crises in Korea and Mideast.

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## Violence Around the Al-Aqsa Mosque

Tensions around the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem eased late this week after Israel removed security infrastructure around the entrance, but earlier violence left four Palestinians and three Israelis dead, as Dennis J Bernstein reported.

By Dennis J Bernstein

**Update:** By the early hours of Thursday – after this interview – Israel had removed the metal detectors from Al-Aqsa Mosque.

Violence flared in East Jerusalem starting on July 21, as a result of Israel’s decision to put metal detectors at the entrance to the Palestinians most holy site, the Al-Aqsa Mosque, along with the stationing of hundreds of Israeli security forces and police.

Palestinians protested all over occupied Palestine against the decision and at least four Palestinians and three Israelis have died as a result. The situation triggered international alarm and caused the United Nations Security Council to convene a meeting to explore ways to calm the tension.

I spoke to Ramzy Baroud, editor of the PalestineChronicle.com, about the situation on the ground last weekend and the continuing moves by Israeli occupation forces to seize more and more Palestinian land in East Jerusalem and on the West Bank.

Dennis Bernstein: What are your thoughts on the tense situation and the standoff in East Jerusalem?

Ramzy Baroud: Well, the situation on the ground is quite difficult right now. As you know, there was this gun battle a few days ago, which resulted in the closure of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Haram Sharif compound, one of the holiest sites for Muslims everywhere. This is the first time we have seen such a closure since the time of the Crusades. So this is a huge deal for the Palestinians and many fear this is an indication of a much more extensive political plan to normalize the annexation of East Jerusalem.

We have seen tens of thousands of Palestinian worshippers, mainly Muslim but also joined by their Christian brethren, prevented from entering the compound to

pray. On July 21, Israeli [forces] installed metal detectors and, of course, the Palestinians are protesting this. The Al-Aqsa compound has been under the management of the Islamic Trust since an agreement was reached by the Israeli and Jordanian governments in 1967. Installing metal detectors is Israel's way of rejecting this agreement, which has been in force for five decades now.

Palestinians are feeling a great deal of outrage and insecurity now in East Jerusalem. They fear this is part of a larger Israeli plan that brings right-wing politicians such as Benjamin Netanyahu into the same camp with extremist Zionists who believe that the mosque is built on the site of an ancient Jewish temple and want to destroy it. They have attempted to do so in the past but this recent violence has inspired many of them to believe that the moment is now.

DB: Maybe you could put this latest violence into the context of the ongoing seizure of Jerusalem.

RB: American politicians such as Trump tend to neglect the complexity of history. They assume that all it takes to be an effective politician is the ability to attract campaign contributions and win the support of powerful segments of the population. Truly wise politicians try to understand the repercussions of every decision they make.

With the Trump administration, there has been a kind of euphoria in Israel, particularly among the ultra-nationalists, the most extreme camps in the Israeli government and society. They feel that Trump is their messiah, not in a religious sense but in the sense that he is going to be the one to fulfill biblical prophecy. Trump has promised that he is going to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in defiance of international law, making the US the only country in the world to do so.

Whether he actually carries through on the promise is not the issue. The message is loud and clear: The US is no longer following any kind of international consensus, on Jerusalem or the status of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. That changes the rules of the game entirely.

Nikki Haley, the new US ambassador to the UN, has repeatedly insisted on Israel's sovereignty in Jerusalem, on Israel's ownership of the Muslim and Christian holy shrines. I don't think we have seen anything like this since the George W. Bush administration and the Negroponte doctrine, which stated that the United States would not accept any UN resolution inconsistent with Israeli interests.

But what is happening now is even worse than that. We are not just seeing attempts at preventing United Nations institutions from speaking out against

Israel's violations of international law. We are seeing a new level of very right-wing, indoctrinated outlook emanating from Washington. As a result, Israel has been extremely empowered.

For the Zionists, Nikki Haley is a godsend. She is the person who is going to change the status of Israel at the United Nations. Palestinians understand that something has been fundamentally altered in the nature of the relationship between Israel and the United States.

So there is an attempt to really push the limit. For example, last March the Knesset passed another reading of a law that prohibits the Muslim call for morning prayer. Again, this is something that hasn't happened for a thousand years. It is not possible to say this new position is just the work of a few extremists on the margin. We are talking about mainstream politics in Israel.

If this continues and there are no international repercussions, Palestinians will be forced to fight. What is happening in Jerusalem now are not clashes, it is about people wanting to go to their mosques to pray and thousands of Israeli soldiers blocking entry. If this continues, we are going to see a lot more violence in the coming days and weeks.

DB: In April, the Israeli government announced that they are going to build 15,000 new housing units in occupied Jerusalem. That has got to be wreaking havoc already.

RB: We hear these astonishing numbers, as if the occupied territories have this unlimited space that can be constantly carved out and destroyed and rebuilt! These housing units are going to be built on Palestinian land, whether privately owned or not. People will find themselves homeless, entire villages will be wiped out. The Bedouins, in particular, are often the first to suffer.

Unfortunately, when this happened, our media told us only part of the story: Three Palestinian brothers opened fire, killing two Israeli police officers. Anyone hearing a story like this is going to think, well, this is really quite violent and completely unacceptable. These officers are doing their jobs. But they don't understand the very violent context to this story: people being killed, being ethnically cleansed, being brutalized on a daily basis.

People are being pushed to the breaking point. This doesn't mean that we are condoning violence but it must be understood that these types of violent actions don't happen out of context. Until we hold to account those who are illegally wielding power, the violence is going to continue and more people are going to suffer as a result.

DB: It is my understanding that a lot of organizing is going on within the

Palestinian community all over occupied Palestine and Israel. What is now happening at the holy sites is really getting attention not only in the region but all over the world. How do you see this in the context of the larger wars underway, the Syria connection, the way in which the Saudis are being even more empowered by the Trump administration? It seems that the Israelis are seizing the opportunity to do what they have been meaning to do in Jerusalem for so long.

RB: Indeed, we see for the first time in many years the absence of an Arab consensus on Jerusalem. Not because Arabs don't care about Jerusalem, but because greater political urgencies are motivating the various actors. Saudi Arabia, at this point, is an embattled country, a country which is undergoing shifts in its political structure from within. The heir apparent has been replaced in a so-called "palace coup."

The Saudi's main concern right now is not Israel but Iran. The more they try to limit Iran's influence in the region, the greater this influence becomes. At this point we are seeing an almost open pact between Saudi Arabia and Israel. Those who dare operate outside the Saudi consensus, such as Qatar, find themselves immediately under siege.

So right now the political equation in the Middle East is changing. Israel is no longer at the center. Rather, you have Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Israel on one side, and Syria, Iran and a few others facing off against them.

This creates the perfect opportunity for Israel, if you think about it from a shrewd political standpoint, to do whatever they deem necessary for their political interests. In Washington, you have an administration that is completely blind to Israeli crimes and you have Saudi Arabia and its allies looking the other way. This is the perfect opportunity for the Israelis to open the floodgates to new settlements and to do what they please with the Palestinian population.

**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).**

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