

INTRODUCING: Consortium News on Flashpoints, Our Second Radio Show

This month Consortium News launched [Consortium News Radio](#). Today we begin a second radio show in collaboration with Pacifica Radio's Flashpoints, a biweekly interview program with Consortium News writers.

In collaboration with Dennis Bernstein, host of Pacifica Radio's syndicated show Flashpoints, Consortium News is today launching its second radio program, **Consortium News on Flashpoints**. Recorded and produced in the Berkeley, California studios of KPFA radio, Bernstein will interview three Consortium News writers about their recent articles published on this site. Each program will open with Consortium News Editor-in-Chief Joe Lauria discussing with Bernstein his picks of the three CN articles to be featured. The show will air twice a month on every other Friday. (We are about to launch a podcast of all our radio programming).

On the first show, Bernstein interviews Sam Hussein on his piece [The Limits of Elizabeth Warren](#); Patrick Lawrence about his article, ['Too Big to Fail': Russia-gate One Year After VIPS Showed a Leak, Not a Hack](#); and Joe Lauria, on his [retrospective](#) of Kofi Annan, who died last Saturday.

Now the first episode of **Consortium News on Flashpoints**.

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. You can get in touch with the author at dennisjbernstein@gmail.com .

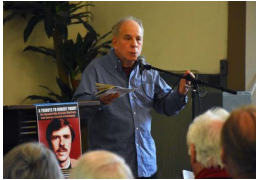
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'Journey for Justice' Caravan Launches Cross-Country Trek

The Trump administration is dismantling Temporary Protected Status, a program that protects people from deportations to countries destabilized by war, civil conflict, or natural catastrophe. One group is fighting back.

By Dennis J Bernstein



The Trump Administration, with Attorney General Jefferson Beauregard Sessions as its willing lightning rod, is in the process of dismantling key aspects of the United States political asylum program. To that end, the administration has begun to zero in on what is known as Temporary Protected Status (TPS). **TPS** was established by Congress in the Immigration Act of 1990. It's a humanitarian program that mandates that the U.S. should suspend deportations to countries that have been destabilized by war, civil conflict, or natural catastrophe.

According to the National TPS Alliance, if the Trump administration manages to crush the program, over 450,000 people would face possible deportation, putting them in harm's way, facing extreme violence and possible death.

In response, a national grassroots coalition of refugee and immigrants rights activists will caravan from Los Angeles to Washington, D.C. Those who are directly affected by Trump's extreme anti-immigrant policy—the TPS recipients themselves—will lead the Journey for Justice Caravan.

The Caravan will travel across the country to visit over 50 cities in a span of 12-weeks, kicking off the campaign from Los Angeles on Friday, Aug. 17. The movement to save TPS has greatly expanded in recent days and weeks in response to the Trump administration's hard-line decision to terminate the life-saving program as part of his ongoing and unrelenting attacks against immigrant communities from coast to coast.

The caravan will consist of over 50 TPS holders, from various countries that are currently designated TPS. "The goal of the caravan is to lift the collective voices against the termination of TPS," according to a recent press release. "The cruel dehumanization of families at the southern border and against the criminalization of immigrants throughout the United States. For 12 weeks, TPS families will ride a bus across the country, and throughout the way, the justice riders will participate in vigils, community assemblies, know-your-rights sessions, forums, roundtable discussions, concerts, demonstrations, leadership-

development activities and meetings with political candidates and elected officials.”

The National Day Laborer Organizing Network or NDLO is a key co-sponsor of the national action. NDLO is a coalition of worker-centered organizations across the country that defend day laborers from exploitation and extreme immigration enforcement, help people find jobs and recover wages, and train workers in health and safety.

I spoke with NDLO Executive Director Pablo Alvarado on Aug. 9 in Los Angeles about the reasons for the cross-country action to save TPS. Alvarado knows firsthand and up-close what violence looks like in El Salvador. Alvarado witnessed the death squad murder of his fifth grade teacher, before he fled the violence and the U.S.-funded military death squads that ruled El Salvador with a bloody iron fist. His own relatives in El Salvador continue to face death threats.

Dennis Bernstein: How would you assess the current administration’s policy toward immigrants and undocumented people from Central America?

Pablo Alvarado: This action on the part of the Trump administration is not just an act of cruelty but also of hatred, of bigotry. This president decided to terminate an incredible program that has facilitated the immigration of thousands and thousands of migrants. Today, 30 percent of these people own homes, over 90 percent have jobs. And yet, in an act of cruel racism, this administration has decided to get rid of this program. Their motivation is very clear: to reduce the number of non-white immigrants. They are scared of the changing demographics in our country. This is their way of slowing down the emergence of a new majority. They are no longer just going after undocumented people. They are taking away the papers of people with documents.

DB: You are from El Salvador yourself. Could you talk a little bit about the kinds of violence that people fled during this period of U.S.-supported death squads?

PA: It is important to note how many times the U.S. has intervened in Central America. The latest case is our recognition of a president in Honduras that 80 percent of the Honduran people don’t want. Honduras will continue to be in flames for months to come. Already, death squads are emerging, and activists have been disappeared and tortured. Children are being gassed while protesting. All of this will lead to even greater poverty and feed the cycle of migration. This is the same thing that the United States has done in El Salvador, in Nicaragua, and throughout the region. The widespread gang violence in El Salvador is something that was imported from Los Angeles.

I can tell you that my two brothers, who are teachers and make \$450 a month, are being extorted by gang members. Temporary Protected Status was introduced following the great earthquake, but the reality is that El Salvador has not yet recovered from that natural disaster. The country is still in dire circumstances. There are many villages that subsist on the remittances of family members who are here in the United States. This action by the Trump administration is going to lead to an even larger humanitarian crisis.

DB: Do you see this as a form of ethnic cleansing?



PA: It is clearly an effort, as I said, to slow down the emergence of a new majority. This has always been the strategy of the people around Trump. They refer to it as attrition through enforcement. This involves making the lives of immigrants so miserable that they will want to pack their bags and leave on their own. Ending TPS is essentially a step in that direction. It is interesting, right-wing pundits say, that it is the Democrats who want to allow these immigrants to come because they want to turn them into Democratic voters. This is so ridiculous. These people are leaving their countries not to be able to vote here. They are fleeing violence and extreme poverty and persecution. Any country that respects human rights is going to want to provide safe haven to people fleeing such conditions.

DB: What kinds of actions are you planning to take now?

PA: We recently put together the National TPS Alliance, a coalition of about 50 committees of TPS recipients across the country who have come to Washington several times and are coming again in the first week of February. Prior to this recent decision, they were already doing lobbying work, trying to persuade politicians from both sides of the aisle of the seriousness of their plight. Out of those conversations, four legislative proposals have been introduced to provide a permanent solution for TPS holders. The administration may want to see TPS fade away in 18 months, but we are determined to make these proposals a reality.

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. You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

Laughing While Pulling the Trigger

Donald Trump has shown “sadism” against Palestinians who’ve turned to Gandhian protests but are still being slaughtered by Israel, says Max Blumenthal in this interview with Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein



Max Blumenthal is an award-winning journalist and best-selling author. His reporting on the brutalities of illegal Israeli occupation has set the standard for real reporting on the issue. Blumenthal has also reported on every aspect of the Israeli/US propaganda machine that works 24/7 to sustain the Israeli occupation.

Blumenthal’s articles have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Daily Beast*, and *The Nation Magazine*. He also co-hosts the podcast *Moderate Rebels*.

Dennis Bernstein spoke with Max Blumenthal on April 19th.

Dennis Bernstein: I understand you were in the Gaza Strip recently. You were there just before the latest slaughter along the border fence [on March 30]?

Max Blumenthal: I was there just weeks before the Great March of Return, when Israeli snipers began shooting regular people in Gaza who marched to the border wall to protest their open-air imprisonment. Preparations were just starting for that march.

I got the chance to interview the wife of a man who had been refused an exit permit to get treatment for cancer. He was forced to basically sit on his deathbed when he had a condition that could have been treated in the West Bank. He was one of scores of people documented by the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights in the Gaza Strip who were refused exit permits and were forced to die.

Some are wondering why people would rush the border and risk their own lives by walking into the teeth of Israeli snipers. You have to understand that every family in Gaza has a story like this.

DB: You tweeted a very disturbing video of Israeli soldiers shooting from behind this electric fence. One of the shots shows them shooting and laughing.

MB: The video was released by Breaking the Silence, a group of former and current Israeli soldiers who have confessed to crimes they have committed in the

field. They obtained this video, which was taken through a sniper's scope, showing a sniper shooting an unarmed man and then laughing and cheering about how much they enjoyed doing that.

It really speaks to the perspective of average Israelis regarding people in the Gaza Strip. They just don't see them as human, especially younger Israelis who haven't interacted with Palestinians since the Gaza Strip was sealed off in 2006. Israelis interact with them simply as snipers or drone operators and only a small minority of the Jewish Israeli public sees them as human.

There were some protests in Tel Aviv against the massacres that just occurred and one of the leaders of that protest, Tamar Sandberg, who is from a left-wing nationalist party called Meretz, was brutally demonized in mainstream Israeli media. A lot of Israelis who do have questions about what is happening tend to self-censor because the consequences are so high.

DB: What is happening there between the protesters and the sharpshooters demonstrates what current Israeli policy is. How would you characterize the policy now? Is the situation worse than it was five years ago?

MB: The situation has been the same from 1948 to today. We can refer to it as "demographic engineering." Imagine if the United States officially declared itself a white Christian state. And there were perhaps millions of people in the United States who were not white and Christian. They would have to be warehoused and their population would have to be limited somehow so that they would not compromise the ethnic integrity of the white Christian state.

That is Israel, the Jewish state, where most people in historic Palestine were not Jewish and were forced out of Israel in 1948, 750,000 of them. Thirty to forty percent were forced into the Gaza Strip. Seventy to eighty percent of the people in the Gaza Strip are refugees or descended from refugees. They cannot return to Israel, simply because they are not Jewish. Israel won't be a Jewish state if they return there and have families. So Israel must contain them by any means.

In 2006 Israel imposed a siege on the Gaza Strip, which meant that food and goods would be allowed in but only enough to keep people alive, not enough that they could thrive. This was to put pressure on the population to submit. The population has refused to submit. They have tried various means, including military means, to resist. Now they are using Gandhian unarmed protest, which American liberals have called for for years. It has been very effective from a public relations standpoint, but it hasn't changed Israel's policy at all. Israel is still maintaining its demographic borders through force. The logic behind that is not security, it is demographic maintenance.

DB: So the strategy is to make it impossible to survive and so the only thing you want to do is either hide or leave.

MB: Or simply stay in your hole. In East Jerusalem, where Israel actually seeks to take over, the policy is to force people to leave. They have a law called the "Center of Life Policy," where people who are Palestinian have to continually prove that they live there. And if, for example, Palestinians spend too much time in the West Bank, they lose their residency.

There is another law to keep people from Gaza and the West Bank out of Jerusalem and out of Israel, where 20% of the population are Palestinians. That's called the Citizenship and Entry Law. It blocks people who have residency in Gaza or the West Bank from marrying people who are citizens of Israel. The point is to prevent a growth of the Palestinian population within Israel.

There are a whole set of laws aimed at demographic engineering which people don't really know about in the West, but which represent the foundation of apartheid. They are absolutely undemocratic.

DB: Some of the people who fought against apartheid in South Africa say that the situation is worse now for Palestinians. I have to think of that stage in the movement when Gandhi went to South Africa during the resistance to the pass laws. People had decided that they were going to put their bodies on the line.

MB: This has been going on for years and years in the West Bank against the separation wall. But you have to understand that across the Palestinian population there is a deep desire to engage in this kind of resistance. In the Gaza Strip people have been trying to do these protests every Friday against the wall and the siege. Now, for the first time, Hamas simply let them.

In the past, Hamas had actually been breaking up some of these protests to keep the border stable and to show that it was a good governor. This is an expression of the authentic desire of the Palestinian people to resist, to show its face for the first time. The Israeli military apparatus is deeply worried. They have actually advocated assassinating leaders of the protest.

DB: How about assassinating people who are marked clearly as journalists?

MB: We lost Yaser Murtaja, a founder of one of Gaza's most important press agencies, iMedia. These are some of the bravest journalists in the world, who get the shots that Western journalists can't get. Murtaja was widely respected outside Gaza though he had never been able to leave.

After he was shot on site by an Israeli sniper, in the stomach below his vest that was marked "press," Israel came out and labeled him a Hamas spy with

absolutely zero evidence. And *The Washington Post* reprinted that allegation in a headline. Why would *The Washington Post* give any credence to that, even as just an allegation?

DB: You have written that “US policy on Israel/Palestine is almost entirely controlled by two elements in Washington, the pro-Israeli lobby and the arms industry.”

MB: The pro-Israel lobby is the second most powerful lobby in Washington, after the NRA. It is responsible for funding campaigns on both sides of the aisle down to the state level. A lot of the politicians without a strong donor base can easily make a few pro-Israel statements and pledge to sign on to whatever AIPAC wants them to do, and money will start flowing in through various family foundations and donors. Kamala Harris is a perfect example. She shows up at AIPAC and makes a series of ridiculously pandering statements about how she used to raise money for Israel as a little kid.

Then you have the arms industry, who Trump holds up as job creators, especially in the swing states. A lot of those jobs come from US loans to Israel, which now total \$4 billion a year. Those loans go straight back into Texas, Colorado, Ohio to pay for the weapons that are shipped to Israel.

Israel actually has a tacit agreement with the United States not to produce any major weapons platforms of its own. The US will punish Israel if they attempt to produce their own jets. Israel must buy US F-15's and F-16's. They must buy from US companies to receive US loans. So basically the arms industry and its lobbying apparatus are pushing for these multi-billion dollar loan packages to Israel along with the Israel lobby. And where do the weapons fall? They fall on apartment blocks in the Gaza Strip, and could be falling on Lebanon pretty soon.

DB: You were just in the Gaza Strip. Could you describe what daily life is like now for the people there?

MB: The issue isn't that there isn't enough food. I was there on Valentine's day and there were all these huge teddy bears there for sale with balloons, the same as here. But no one can afford to buy them. There is food in the restaurants but no one can afford to eat there, apart from the fortunate few. But even the upper class is suffering. The middle class has been winnowed out. Every young person with an education wants to leave.

I was able to visit a few friends who were stuck there. I met a guy there when we were watching a soccer match and he told me that his family is all in Dubai and he came into the Gaza Strip to visit other family. The gates shut behind him and he has been stuck in Gaza for two years and doesn't know how to get out

to reunite with his family. This is a situation which is really unique in the world. People are trapped inside and the walls are not lifting.

What impressed me very much was the stoicism of people there, the willingness to cope with the situation and not to cower before one of the world's most powerful militaries, backed by the world's lone superpower.

DB: Is the Trump administration noticeably worse, for example, with its movement of the embassy to Jerusalem? Or is it just business as usual?

MB: No, I am actually impressed with how much worse Trump has been able to make things on the ground. He has very clearly demonstrated a level of sadism toward Palestinians that no other president has. It has a lot to do with his son-in-law, Jared Kushner.

The administration has substantially reduced funding for the UN Relief Works Agency, which is in charge of Palestinian refugees, about 70% of the population in Gaza. UNRWA runs first-class schools which give students a first-class secular education. People in Gaza rely substantially on food aid from UNRWA and that is not coming at the same level. So suffering has increased under Trump and Kushner, whose family is deeply connected to the pro-Israel lobby.

I spoke to an UNRWA source who has been in meetings with Trump and Kushner and he told me that the generals are even afraid of Jared Kushner. They understand that destabilizing the situation for Palestinian refugees will destabilize the Middle East as a whole and mean trouble for US national security. But there is nothing they can do because they can't get access to Trump without going through Kushner. You have this guy whose only qualification is marrying Ivanka, who doesn't even have a security clearance, and he is dictating policy on Israel/Palestine. It is a terrifying scenario.

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Weapons Inspector Refutes U.S. Syria Chemical Claims

Scott Ritter is arguably the most experienced American weapons inspector and in this interview with Dennis J. Bernstein he levels a frank assessment of U.S.

government assertions about chemical weapons use.

By Dennis J Bernstein



In the 1980's, Scott Ritter was a commissioned officer in the United States Marine Corps, specializing in intelligence. In 1987, Ritter was assigned to the On-Site Inspection Agency, which was put together to go into the Soviet Union and oversee the implementation of the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty. This was the first time that on-site inspection had been used as part of a disarmament verification process.

Ritter was one of the groundbreakers in developing on-site inspection techniques and methodologies. With this unique experience behind him, Ritter was asked in 1991, at the end of the Gulf War, to join the United Nations Special Commission, which was tasked by the Security Council to oversee the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. From 1991 to 1998, Ritter served as a chief weapons inspector and led a number of teams into Iraq.

According to Ritter, in the following Flashpoints Radio interview with Dennis Bernstein conducted on April 23rd, US, British and French claims that the Syrian Government used chemical weapons against civilians last month appear to be totally bogus.

Dennis Bernstein: You have been speaking out recently about the use of chemical weapons in Syria. Could you outline your case?

Scott Ritter: There are a lot of similarities between the Syrian case and the Iraqi case. Both countries possess weapons of mass destruction. Syria had a very large chemical weapons program.

In 2013 there was an incident in a suburb of Damascus called Ghouta, the same suburb where the current controversy is taking place. The allegations were that the Syrian government used sarin nerve agent against the civilian population. The Syrian government denied that, but as a result of that incident the international community got together and compelled Syria into signing the Chemical Weapons Convention, declaring the totality of its chemical weapons holdings, and opening itself to be disarmed by inspections of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. Russia was chosen to be the guarantor of Syria's compliance. The bottom line is that Syria had the weapons but was verified by 2016 as being in 100% compliance. The totality of Syria's chemical weapons program was eliminated.

At the same time that this disarmament process was taking place, Syria was being

engulfed in a civil war which has resulted in a humanitarian crisis. Over a half million people have died. It is a war that pits the Syrian government against a variety of anti-regime forces, many of which are Islamic in nature: the Islamic State, Al Nusra, Al Qaeda. Some of these Islamic factions have been in the vicinity of Ghouta since 2012.

Earlier this year, the Syrian government initiated an offensive to liberate that area of these factions. It was very heavy fighting, thousands of civilians were killed, with massive aerial bombardment. Government forces were prevailing and by April 6 it looked as if the militants were preparing to surrender.

Suddenly the allegations come out that there was this chemical weapons attack.

It wasn't a *massive* chemical weapons attack, it was dropping one or two so-called "barrel bombs," improvised devices that contained chlorine gas canisters.

According to the militants, between 40 and 70 people were killed and up to 500 people were made ill. The United States and other nations picked up on this, saying that this was proof positive that Syria has been lying about its chemical weapons program and that Russia has been behind Syria's retention of chemical weapons. This is the case the US made to launch its missile strike [on April 14].

There are a lot of problems with this scenario. Again, why would the Syrian government, at the moment of victory, use a pinprick chemical attack with zero military value? It added nothing to the military campaign and invited the wrath of the West at a critical time, when the rebels were begging for Western intervention.

Many, including the Russian government, believe that this was a staged event.

There has been no hard evidence put forward by anyone that an attack took place. Shortly after allegations of the attack came out, the entire town of Douma was taken over by the Syrian Army while the rebels were evacuated.

The places that were alleged to have been attacked were inspected by Russian chemical weapons specialists, who found zero trace of any chemicals weapons activity. The same inspectors who oversaw the disarmament of Syria were mobilized to return to Syria and do an investigation. They were supposed to start their work this past weekend [April 21-22]. They arrived in Damascus the day after the missile strikes occurred but they still haven't been out to the sites. The United States, France and Great Britain have all admitted that the only evidence they have used to justify this attack were the photographs and videotapes sent to them by the rebel forces.

I have great concern about the United States carrying out an attack on a sovereign nation based on no hard evidence. The longer we wait, the longer it

takes to get inspectors onto the site, the more claims we are going to get that the Russians have sanitized it. I believe that the last thing the United States wanted was inspectors to get on-site and carry out a forensic investigation that would have found that a chemical attack did not in fact take place.

DB: It is sort of like cleaning up a police crime scene before you check for evidence.

SR: The United States didn't actually bomb the site that was attacked. They bombed three other facilities. One was in the suburbs of Damascus, a major metropolitan area. The generals said that they believed there were quantities of nerve agent there. So, in a building in a densely populated area where we believe nerve agent is stored, what do we do? We blow it up! If there had in fact been nerve agent there, it would have resulted in hundreds or even thousands of deaths. That fact that nobody died is the clearest evidence yet that there was no nerve agent there. The United States is just winging it, making it up.

One of the tragedies is that we can no longer trust our military, our intelligence services, our politicians. They will manufacture whatever narrative they need to justify an action that they deem to be politically expedient.

DB: Isn't it also the case that there were problems with the allegations concerning Syria using chemical weapons in 2013 and then again in 2015? I believe *The New York Times* had to retract their 2013 story.

SR: They put out a story about thousands of people dying, claiming that it was definitely done by the Syrian government. It turned out later that the number of deaths was far lower and that the weapons systems used were probably in the possession of the rebels. It was a case of the rebels staging a chemical attack in order to get the world to intervene on their behalf.

A similar scenario unfolded last year when the Syrian government dropped two or three bombs on a village and suddenly there were reports that there was sarin nerve agent and chlorine gas wafting through the village, killing scores of people. Videotapes were taken of dead and dying and suffering people which prompted Trump to intervene. Inspectors never went to the site. Instead they relied upon evidence collected by the rebels.

As a weapons inspector, I can tell you that chain of custody of any samples that are to be used in the investigation is an absolute. You have to be at the site when it is collected, it has to be certified to be in your possession until the laboratory. Any break in the chain of custody makes that evidence useless for a

legitimate investigation. So we have evidence collected by the rebels. They videotaped themselves carrying out the inspection, wearing training suits that would not have protected them at all from chemical weapons! Like almost everything having to do with these rebels, this was a staged event, an act of theater.

DB: Who has been supporting this particular group of rebels?

SR: On the one hand, we have the actual fighters, the Army of Islam, a Saudi-backed fundamentalist group who are extraordinarily brutal. Embedded within the fighters are a variety of Western-trained and Western-funded NGOs such as the White Helmets and the Syrian-American Medical Society. But their primary focus isn't rescue, in the case of the White Helmets, or medical care in the case of the Syrian-American Medical Society, but rather anti-regime propaganda. Many of the reports that came out of Douma originated with these two NGO's.

DB: You mentioned "chain of custody." That's what was most ridiculous about sending in inspectors. The first thing you would want to do is establish chain of custody and nail down the crime scene.

SR: I was a participant in the Gulf War and we spent the bulk of that war conducting a massive aerial campaign against Iraq. I was one of the people who helped come up with the target list that was used to attack. Each target had to have a purpose.

Let's look what happened in Syria [on April 14]. We bombed three targets, a research facility in Damascus and two bunker facilities in western Syria. It was claimed that all three targets were involved with a Syrian chemical weapons program. But the Syria weapons program was verified to be disarmed. So what chemical weapons program are we talking about? Then US officials said that one of these sites stored sarin nerve agent and chemical production equipment. That is a very specific statement. Now, if Syria was verified to be disarmed last year, with all this material eliminated, what are they talking about? What evidence do they have that any of this material exists? *They just make it up.*

If I had been a member of that inspections team, I would have been able to tell you with 100% certainty what took place at that site. It wasn't that long ago that the allegations took place, there are very good forensic techniques that can be applied. We would be able to reverse engineer that site and tell you exactly what happened when. Let's say an inspection team had gone in and we found that there was sarin nerve agent. Now, the US government can say, there is not supposed to be any sarin nerve agent in Syria, therefore we can state that the Syrians have a covert sarin nerve agent capability. But still you don't know *where* it is, so now you have to say we assess that it *could* be in this

bunker.

We bombed empty buildings. We didn't degrade Syria's chemical weapons capability. They got rid of it. We were among the nations that certified that they had been disarmed. We just created this phantom threat out of nothing so that we could attack Syria and our president could be seen as being presidential, as being the commander in chief at a time when his credibility was being attacked on the home front.

DB: Amazing. That helps clarify the situation. Of course, it also leaves us terrified because we are so far away from the truth.

SR: As an American citizen who happens to be empowered with knowledge about how weapons inspections work, how decisions are made regarding war, I am disillusioned beyond belief.

This isn't the first time we have been lied to by the president. But we have been lied to by military officers who are supposed to be above that. Three top Marine Corps officers stood before the American people and told bald-faced lies about what was going on. We have been lied to by Congress, who are supposed to be the people's representatives who provide a check against executive overreach. And we have been lied to by the corporate media, a bunch of paid mouthpieces who repeat what the government tells them without question.

So Donald Trump can say there are chemical weapons in Syria, the generals parrot his words, the Congress nods its head dumbly, and the mass media repeats it over and over again to the American public.

DB: Are you worried that we might end up in a shooting war with Russia at this point?

SR: A week ago I was very worried. If I am going to give kudos to Jim Mattis it will be because he took the desire of Trump and Bolton to create a major crisis with Russia over the allegations of Syrian chemical weapons use and was able to water that down into putting on a show for the American people. We warned the Russians in advance, there were no casualties, we blew up three empty buildings. We spent a quarter of a billion dollars of taxpayer money and we got to pat ourselves on the back and tell everybody how great we are. But we avoided a needless confrontation with the Russians and I am a lot calmer today about the potential of a shooting war with Russia than I was a week ago.

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 of this interview and the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.

Embattled Palestinian Knesset Member Fights for Her People's Rights

In this interview with Haneen Zoabi, a Palestinian member of the Israeli Knesset, Dennis J. Bernstein discusses Zoabi's feminism, the struggle in Gaza and life in the Israeli parliament.

By Dennis J Bernstein



Haneen Zoabi is a member of the Israeli Knesset and the first woman elected to the Israeli Knesset on an Arab party list. She's an unrelenting advocate for equal citizenship rights for the Palestinian citizens of Israel, and despite repeated attacks of all kinds, she remains unrelenting in her call for an end to Israel's occupation of Palestinian Lands.

Zoabi considers herself a straight up feminist. She says "real feminism must acknowledge the discrimination against Arab women in Israel, and real feminism must know to identify with and struggle alongside them, at the national, civil and social levels."

Zoabi joined forces with the Balad Party a year after it was founded in 1997. A key guiding principle of the Party is to maintain a one-third quota for women candidates. The party advocates for the rights of Palestinians, legally designated as 'Arab Israelis'. Zoabi has been banned from the Knesset five times for taking strong stands in support of Palestinian rights.

Bernstein spoke to Haneen Zoabi on April 17th in Berkeley California at the Flashpoints studios of Pacifica Radio/KPFA

Dennis Bernstein: We are honored to have in the studio a member of the Israeli Knesset, Haneen Zoabi. She tells me she has been suspended from that body five times but she is back again, trying to make lives more livable for Palestinians in the state of Israel. What went through your mind, Haneen Zoabi, when you got first-hand reports of the killings along the border fence?

Haneen Zoabi: Palestinians have long been suffering from the siege. Almost daily, bombers fly over Gaza. Israel wants to break the will of the Palestinians, to prevent Palestinians from fighting for their freedom. I would describe the Palestinian struggle as an heroic one. After eleven years of siege, 75% of children in Gaza suffer from anemia. Fisherman are shot on a weekly basis. Farmers coming to work on their land are shot. Employment rates and poverty rates are extremely high. 95% of the water is unsafe to drink. The

United Nations has determined that the living situation in Gaza is not suitable for human life. But the Palestinian people do not want to die a silent, slow-motion death under the siege. If Israel is determined to kill them and continues to evade accountability for this crime, the Palestinians will die struggling for their liberation. This terrible, indiscriminate killing we are seeing now at the border is meant to deter others from struggling. This is the plan for Gaza: either to let it die slowly or to inflict more and more suffering, without breaking the silence concerning the siege. 70% of the inhabitants in Gaza are refugees Israeli expelled from their homes and villages in 1948. They want freedom and they want to return home.

DB: Some people have compared the lives of Arabs inside Israel with the lives of Blacks living under Jim Crow.

HZ: First of all, most people don't understand the meaning of being a Palestinian and being a citizen of Israel. First of all, we didn't choose to be Israelis. It was Israelis who immigrated to our homeland and established here a Jewish state. It was in order to be recognized in the UN that Israeli granted citizenship to those Palestinians who remained in their homeland. We who remained in historical Palestine continue to struggle for our people's rights—the right to return and an end to the occupation. Israel doesn't perceive us as citizens, they perceive us as obstacles to the Jewish state. The purpose of having a Jewish state is to give privileges to Jews at the expense of Palestinians. There are 95 racist laws on the books in Israel today. As a Knesset member, I have been suspended five times because of my political views and for speaking out against these racist laws.

DB: What sort of things got you suspended?

HZ: I participated in the Freedom Flotilla to break the siege of Gaza in 2010, when Israel killed nine Turkish activists in an act of piracy on international waters. For daring to be a part of this flotilla I was labeled a traitor. Since last year, Israel has now passed a new law which gives the Knesset the ability to permanently suspend any Knesset member. Our struggle for freedom and democracy clashes directly with the concept of a Jewish state. We cannot struggle for our equality within this construct.

DB: To be clear, you are calling for a one-state solution. For one person one vote.

HZ: I am calling for a state which represents all of its citizens. For Israel, this struggle for democracy is a strategic threat. Equality and justice are strategic threats. As a member of the Knesset, I am asked to be loyal to racism, loyal to apartheid laws, loyal to my oppressor. In Arab schools, we cannot study

our own history, our own literature. We cannot control our own textbooks. We learn that we don't have any special relation to our homeland. We pay taxes so that our children can learn how inferior we are in our homeland. We must thank Israel every day for not expelling us in 1948. Citizenship in Israel is not something that is meant to empower us. In a poll conducted three or four years ago, 65% of Israelis said they would like to be perceived as part of the West and not as part of the Middle East. If you don't want to be seen as part of the Middle East, if you don't want to respect the history and the culture, why did you come here? You hate my language, you destroy over 500 villages and cities, develop over 700 cities and villages for the exclusive use of Jewish citizens. You came here without any respect for my identity or my history. You came not to live beside me but to replace me. Our response to this position is so democratic, so simple, so humanitarian: to decolonize the regime and to decolonize the people of Israel. It is not only a battle for equality, it is also a vision that frees the Israelis from their colonialist perceptions.

DB: Could you describe the relationship between Palestinians inside the state of Israel and those in the occupied West Bank and Gaza?

HZ: I am forbidden to travel to Gaza. Gaza is now the biggest ghetto in the world. They restrict the movement even of patients, even of students. In Gaza there are hundreds of women with cancer who cannot be treated in the West Bank. It is not so uncommon that people with illnesses die waiting at checkpoints. As a politician, I don't see myself as just struggling for the rights of Palestinians within the borders of 1948. I am struggling for the rights of the Palestinian people.

DB: So your constituency includes all Palestinians.

HZ: One strategy of control at play here, apart from occupation and the siege, is citizenship as a way to tame and control Palestinians within Israel. I don't have the right to even identify myself as Palestinian in Israel. I must identify myself as Arab-Israeli. I must accept my dual marginalization: I am not 100% Palestinian and I am not 100% Israeli because I am not Jewish. It is not that we have a normal state occupying another state. We have a colonialist state which perceives me as an invader. Still today Israeli is confiscating our land. Already they have confiscated 85% of our land. Is it really the case that you need more? When I pose this question in the Knesset, the answer I get is: "We are a Jewish state and you are invaders." We must fight against the whole system, of which occupation is one part. Occupation is part of the Zionist ideology.

DB: What is your primary purpose in coming to the US at this time?

HZ: It is so important to speak directly to the American community. Israel could not continue its criminal policies against the Palestinians without the full support of the US government. We do not ask the Americans to like the Palestinians, nor do we ask them to love the Palestinians. We ask them to examine their sense of justice, equality and freedom. You cannot be a liberal without embracing the Palestinian cause. I meet US politicians who sympathize with our cause but explain that they may lose their positions if they support us openly. Washington politicians need to be liberated from the Zionist lobby if we are ever going to succeed at liberating ourselves.

DB: It is interesting that some of the strongest support for the Palestinian cause has come from those who fought against the apartheid regime in South Africa. They are saying that it is worse now in the occupied territories than it was in South Africa.

HZ: The Palestinian struggle is a struggle for justice. You cannot support justice in the world without supporting the Palestinian cause. And again, American citizens cannot see themselves as being neutral in this struggle, because of the total blind support of Israel by the United States. Israel is not held accountable for its crimes and this is why it is able to continue with this murderous oppression. It is time to send a clear message to Israel that it is not above 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. You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

The Rush to a New Cold War

From the Archive: The U.S. and Russia are expelling dozens of each other's diplomats, bringing bilateral relations to a new low. In this 2015 interview with Dennis Bernstein, the late Robert Parry explained the origins of the New Cold War.

By Dennis J. Bernstein (first published June 29, 2015)

A new Cold War has taken shape between nuclear-armed Russia and the United States with very little public debate, just a return to hostile rhetoric and military moves and counter-moves over Ukraine, an issue that journalist Robert Parry has followed over the past year and a half.

Parry, a longtime Washington-based investigative reporter and editor of Consortiumnews.com, was interviewed about the crisis by Dennis J. Bernstein for Pacifica Radio's Flashpoint program.

DB: It looks like the U.S., with Barack Obama leading the charge, has entered what you call "the second cold war." What do you mean by the second cold war?

RP: There has been a sharp increase in tension, obviously, between the United States and Russia. We've seen a very divergent way of looking at the problem. The United States and mainstream media have taken a very propagandist view of what occurred in Ukraine. The Russians have taken a very different view, which, perhaps to our amazement, is more accurate than what the United States is saying.

Because of these two divergent narratives, the countries have essentially plunged back into a cold war, where there's a lot of hostility, threats of military escalations, with the U.S. sending military teams to essentially parade along the western border of Russia. Some of those countries are NATO allies, and others, like Ukraine, may want to become a NATO ally.

So these tensions are building up, that oddly don't have much direct connection to U.S. national interests, but have become a kind of *cause celebre* in Official Washington where everyone just wants to stand tough against the Russians and bash Putin. It's become almost a self-perpetuating dynamic.

The Russians have taken a very different perspective, which is that the United States is encroaching on its borders and threatening them in a strategic manner. They also look at what happened in Ukraine very differently. They see a U.S.-backed *coup d'etat* in February 2014 that ousted an elected president and put in a regime that is very supportive of free market, neoliberal policies, but also includes very strong right-wing elements, including neo-Nazis and far-right nationalists. A crisis was created and tensions continue to spiral out of control.

DB: Let's talk about the origins of this cold war rhetoric. First, we have Barack Obama leading the charge. He has become a real cold warrior, hasn't he?

RP: He's certainly allowed some of his underlings to use very aggressive rhetoric against the Russians, particularly Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, who led the charge in supporting the *coup* in Ukraine in early 2014.

DB: When you say *coup*, most people don't know that occurred. Was there a *coup*?

RP: Of course there was. There was an armed uprising that involved some very

far right neo-Nazi militias that had been organizing and penetrating into what became the Maidan protests against the decision by the elected President Yanukovich not to go ahead quickly with an association with the European Union. That became increasingly violent; including some mysterious sniper attacks killing police and demonstrators, and getting the two sides to go at each other.

There was a political effort on Feb. 21, 2014, where Yanukovich agreed to reduce his powers and have early elections so he could be elected out of office. It was signed by three European countries to guarantee it. The next day there was a *coup*. These right-wing groups surged forward, seizing buildings, and Yanukovich barely escaped with his life.

Very quickly, despite the very unconstitutional nature of this change of power, the United States and European Union recognized this as legitimate. But it was obviously something the ethnic Russians, especially those in the eastern and southern Ukraine, found objectionable. They were the bases of support for Yanukovich, so they began to rise up, and this *coup d'état* then merged into a civil war.

DB: You have previously said the U.S. played an active role in this *coup*.

RP: There's no question. The U.S. was supporting, through the National Endowment for Democracy, scores of political organizations that were working to overthrow the elected government. There were other U.S. entities, like USAID, as well as members of the U.S. government. Sen. John McCain went to Kiev, spoke to this very right-wing group, and said the U.S. supports you and what you are doing.

Then there was the famous phone conversation that was intercepted between Assistant Secretary of State Nuland and Ambassador Jeffrey Pyatt where they discussed who was going to take over after the change of power. Nuland put forward that Yatsenyuk "is the guy," who after the *coup* became the prime minister. There were all the markings of a *coup d'état*. More neutral observers, who have looked at this, including the head of the Stratfor think tank (George Friedman), have called it the most obvious *coup* he's ever seen.

That was the reality, but the U.S. news media and U.S. government chose to present it in a very different way. The Yanukovich government just left the scene, or something, is how the New York Times presented it. That wasn't real, but that's how they sold it to the American people.

We have two very distinct ways of looking at this. One is the ethnic Russians of Ukraine who saw their president violently overthrown, and the other is the western Ukrainians, backed by the U.S., and in some degree the European Union,

saying they got rid of a corrupt leader, through a revolution, if you will. That became the core problem between the U.S. and Russians. Instead of finding common factual points to agree on, there are these two distinctly different narratives about what went on there.

DB: In Germany, recently, Obama himself carried this forward.

RP: Obama has been all over the map on this. In May, he sent Secretary of State Kerry to meet with President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov in Sochi, Russia. Those meetings, by all accounts, went very well in that Kerry was looking for Russian help on a variety of international problems, including Syria, Libya, the Iranian nuclear talks, and so forth. These are areas where Putin has been very helpful in the past in terms of U.S. policy. There was a general meeting of the minds, it seemed.

But after Kerry returned, Obama seemed to swing back, to go more with his hardliners. That was followed by the recent G7 Summit in Bavaria, at which Obama pushed for a continuation of economic sanctions against Russia. He continued to blame Russia for all the problems of Ukraine. He pretended that the Russians were the problem for why the Minsk 2 Peace Accord had not been going forward, even though the accord was essentially Putin's idea that he sold to the Germans and the French. It's really the Kiev regime that has tried to derail the Minsk 2 agreement from the very time it was signed.

Yet Obama took aggressive positions in Bavaria, including personal insults directed at Putin. Now we are back into this idea that we must have a confrontation with Russia. We're seeing this play out not just at the government level, but now also at the media level. At the more popular level, the *New York Times* and other major news organizations essentially are acting as propaganda agents for the U.S. government, by simply conveying whatever the government says as fact, and not something to be checked out.

DB: You are saying this as somebody who is based outside the Beltway, correct?

RP: No, I'm actually inside the Beltway.

DB: Good, I feel better now that you're in there. Where could this kind of policy lead? You've expressed concerns that we are dealing with two major nuclear powers. We have a man in Russia who will not be fooled with public relations, given that he was a master of it as head of the KGB. So where is this going?

RP: It has very dangerous possibilities. One hopes, of course, that cooler heads will prevail. But we see that when people paint themselves into corners, they sometimes don't want to get into the embarrassment of getting themselves

out. The more rhetoric and propaganda you throw into this, the harder it is for people to come to some common ground, reach an agreement and work things out.

There's been this idea among the neoconservatives in Washington, for some time now, that the real goal here is to oust Putin. As Carl Gershman, president of the National Endowment for Democracy, said back in 2013, Ukraine is "the biggest prize." But he made clear that it was simply a stepping-stone to removing Putin as the President of Russia, doing some sort of regime change in Moscow.

What the neocons often fail to understand, as we've seen very painfully in places like Iraq, is they think things are going to be easy, they can simply put in somebody like Chalabi in Baghdad and everything will work out fine. But that often isn't the way it goes. In the case of Russia, the great danger is that if the U.S. could destabilize Russia, somehow create a political crisis there, it's very possible that instead of an easily manipulated person like Yeltsin, there would be a super hard-line nationalist taking over, taking a harder line than Putin. Then you can get into a situation where a nuclear confrontation would become a very real possibility.

To deal with that kind of dangerous reality and be reasonable, the U.S. needs to realize that the ethnic Russians in Ukraine have a legitimate beef, and they are not simply part of a Russian invasion or aggression. Both sides have some argument here. All the truth does not rest in Washington DC and I would argue that less of it rests in Washington DC. If you don't deal with people honestly and straightforwardly, and try to understand their concern, a manageable crisis can turn into one that spins out of control.

DB: I have always thought that to some degree that the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, on foreign policy issues, particularly East and West, have often acted as a wing, an arm, a public relations division of the State Department. Is that getting worse?

RP: Yes, it's been a problem. In 2002 and 2003, the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* essentially led the drive for believing that Saddam Hussein had WMDs and the only answer was to invade Iraq. We've seen what that led to. The great irony here is that as much as the Washington press corps pretends it stands for truth and all these good things, there was virtually no accountability assessed upon people who misreported that story.

It's true that there's safety in numbers. All the important journalists got the story wrong and almost none of them were punished. They were allowed to go on, many in the same positions that they held then. Michael Gordon is still the Pentagon correspondent for the *New York Times*. He was one of the co-authors of the famous aluminum tube story, that these tubes being used for nuclear

centrifuges, when they weren't fit for that at all. Fred Hiatt, the editorial page editor of the *Washington Post*, said as flat fact that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction back in 2002 and 2003. He's still in the same job.

There's a problem of no accountability, so many of these news organizations go from one catastrophic inability to report honestly about what is going on in the world, to the next. Now they've upped the ante to a possible confrontation between nuclear-armed Russia and nuclear-armed United States. We are now back into the cold war mentality. The *New York Times* had a piece this week essentially suggesting that anybody who doesn't go along with the U.S. version of events must be working for Moscow.

We are starting to see McCarthyism rear its ugly head as well. Once you get into these kinds of propaganda wars, anyone who challenges or questions them has their patriotism questioned. We saw that somewhat in Iraq when people who questioned the WMD story early were called Saddam apologists. Now we're seeing something similar happening. If you point out some of these inconvenient facts that don't make the Kiev regime look too good, you're accused of being a stooge of Moscow.

DB: I am concerned that this kind of policy is going to continue. And it's not Saddam Hussein now, but Vladimir Putin, who has extreme experience, about how to play public relations games. And he has a nuclear arsenal, so it's a whole different game here.

RP: The American propaganda barrage has not at all swayed the Russian people and government. Of course, the U.S. says they are all being propagandized by *Russia Today* and other Russian networks. Frankly, one can argue with some ways some things have been reported by *RT* or other Russian sources, but they have been doing a more accurate, on-the-ground job than the U.S. press corps has been.

You can point to a number of egregious major mistakes made by the major U.S. news organizations. The *New York Times* went along with a bogus photograph from spring 2014 supposedly showing Russian troops in Ukraine. It turned out that some of the photographs were misrepresented and did not show what they were supposed to show. They [the Times writers] were forced to retract that.

You can point to factual errors on both sides, but it's not something where the U.S., as the *New York Times* tries to present it, is perfect and hasn't presented anything improperly, while the Russian media are all lies and propaganda. It's not true. But it's getting to the point where you cannot be a reasonable person, or look at things objectively, because you are pushed into taking sides.

That's where journalism is a very dangerous thing – especially here. There was a

lot of dangerous reporting during the cold war that in some cases pushed the two sides into dangerous confrontations. That can happen again. We were lucky to escape the '60s without a nuclear war. Now we are rushing ourselves back into something that William Polk, a writer and former diplomat of the Kennedy administration, has called a possible Cuban missile crisis in reverse.

This time we're the ones pushing our military forces onto the Russian border, rather than the Russians putting missiles onto a place like Cuba. We know how Americans reacted to that. Now the Russians are facing something very similar.

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.

Korean Olympic Diplomacy Moves Forward Despite U.S. Intransigence

An interview by Dennis J. Bernstein with writer, activist and regional expert, Kay Jay Noh, about the big-power politics swirling around the Olympic Games now being held in South Korea.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

By many accounts, the Koreans – North and South – have prevailed over the disruptive desires of the United States, coming together in a series of very public actions, clearly meant to turn down the political heat generated by President Donald Trump and the U.S. pressure for military action. This pressure can be seen as a continuation of President Barack Obama's "Asia Pivot," a policy that called for full U.S. dominance in the region, including by containing China and the new emerging regional powers through a set of expansive, coordinated, and aggressive military alliances with Japan and other Pacific Rim countries.

The high-profile actions taken by the North and the South – both acting independently of Washington – left U.S. Vice President Mike Pence pouting and twiddling his thumbs on the sidelines during some very effective international diplomacy. In this regard, there does indeed seem to be a new and genuine desire on the part of the president of South Korea to forge a more peaceful and cooperative relationship with the North, even though U.S. officials and commentators seem to be dead set against it, portraying the warming relations between North and South as an attempt by the North to subvert the long

and close relationship with the South.

In congressional hearings this week, the moves toward North-South de-escalation were dismissed by a leading Republican, Sen. James Risch of Idaho, as a “smile campaign.”

“The South Korean people seem to have been charmed to some degree, some of them seem to have been captivated by it,” Risch fretted.

Meanwhile, on the media front, CBS reported that its rival network NBC “was forced to fire one of its Olympic analysts after he inexplicably said Koreans are grateful for Japan’s role in their economic development – while ignoring the one-time imperial power’s brutalization of the peninsula.”

I spoke to writer and regional expert, Kay Jay Noh, about the Olympics and the big-power politics swirling around the Olympic Games in Seoul. Noh is a special correspondent for Flashpoints show on Pacifica Radio.

Dennis Bernstein: Welcome back Kay Jay Noh. We want to get to some of the bigger political issues but let’s start with a media story. We’ve heard that NBC fired one of its analysts because it turned out he didn’t have a clue about Korean history and ended up insulting Koreans while trying to somehow curry favor with Japan.

Kay Jay Noh: This commentator, Joshua Cooper Ramo, is the Co-CEO of Kissinger Associates and a supposed expert on the geopolitics and culture of Asia. The history is that Korea was brutally colonized and subjugated by Japan for three and a half decades. As the Japanese athletes were coming in, Ramo said “Now representing Japan, a country which occupied Korea from 1910 to 1945. But every Korean will tell you,” he went on to say, “that as a technical, cultural and economic example, Japan has been so important to the transformation of Korea.”

This didn’t go over well with Koreans. As one Korean put it, “After decades of human rights violations, exploiting our resources and attempting to destroy our heritage, Japan is not in a position to expect our gratitude.” This is just one example of the extraordinary ignorance surrounding Korea, by so-called “experts.”

DB: What do you think was the significance in terms of diplomacy between the North and the South? You have the United States swearing up and down that this is a ploy by the North to get in the way of our tight relationship with the South Koreans.

KJN: As you know, the Winter Olympics are usually not as well attended as the summer games and not as much a source of interest for the general global

audience. But these Olympics, held in the South Korean county of PyeongChang, have reached out to the North Koreans. And the North Koreans have responded.

In fact, they responded very rapidly, sending over 500 of their citizens, including a cheerleading squad, an orchestra, a Taekwondo demo team, the head of the North Korean assembly, 22 athletes, and most surprisingly, Kim Yo Jong. Kim Yo Jong is a high-ranking politburo member, and Kim Jong Un's younger sister. Just the fact of the North Koreans defying expectations and showing up was a propaganda coup.

The allegation was that the North Koreans were going to use the Olympics as a propaganda offensive. Actually, that battle was lost before it even started, because so much of the Western media has gone overboard to portray the North Koreans as brainwashed zombies or belligerent monsters. So when these representatives of North Korea show up and they are not cowed zombies or desperate monsters, but rather vivacious, congenial, and self-possessed women, that shattered a lot of received stereotypes.

DB: It does seem that there is a strong spiritual push by the new leadership in the south to bring the two countries together. There have been some pretty warm words, haven't there?

KJN: Absolutely. To give some more background, although technically North Korea and the US are still at war, North Korea and South Korea signed a Treaty of Reconciliation, Cooperation, and Non-aggression in 1992. The letter of that agreement has not always been observed and, especially during conservative administrations, the hostilities have escalated. But the current president of South Korea, Moon Jae In, was the chief of staff of Roh Moo Hyun, who headed a progressive administration and worked very actively toward reconciliation with the North in a program known as the "Sunshine Policy."

To a certain extent, this small break in the clouds is an attempt to return to that policy of reconciliation. What is notable is the congeniality with which the hand was extended toward North Korea. For example, when the North Korean and South Korean athletes entered the stadium as one team, under a single flag, a standing ovation erupted as 35,000 people rose to their feet in a celebration of this very powerful coming together.

DB: Just watching on my TV, I was totally moved.

KJN: The other thing that was notable was that Vice President Pence was the only person who did not stand up. Here's a man who criticized African American football players for "taking the knee" and has said that sports should not be politicized. An American writer in the centrist Korean Times described Pence's

gesture as “mean-spirited and stupid arrogance, making America look bad in the eyes of the world.” Professor Alexis Dudden at the University of Connecticut, called it “a new low in American bullying.”

DB: These Olympics come in the context of some pretty crazy policy on the part of the United States government. The permanent war government wants this kind of policy because it helps the weapons industry. Can these meetings at the Olympics mean anything in this context?

KJN: It’s hard to say right now. There seems to have been a bit of an about-face on the part of Pence, some have said because the enormous criticism he has received. He has now said that he is willing meet and talk with the North Koreans without preconditions. At the same time, he has said that he intends to maintain maximal pressure and that there are even more extreme sanctions in the pipeline. Meanwhile, South Korean President Moon met with the sister of Kim Jong Un on four occasions over three days, including a performance by the North Korean Orchestra. During a state luncheon, Kim Yo Jong extended an invitation to President Moon from Kim Jong Un to visit North Korea for a summit meeting “at the earliest date possible.”

In the visitor’s book, she wrote: “I hope Pyongyang and Seoul get closer in people’s hearts and move forward for the future of a mutually prosperous unification.”

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. You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

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Silencing Donahue and Anti-War Voices

Amid the war fever over Iraq in 2002, legendary talk show host Phil Donahue returned to television with an MSNBC program that allowed antiwar voices to speak but his corporate chieftains soon pulled the plug, a shameful moment in U.S. journalism explored in this interview with Dennis J. Bernstein.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

From the early 1970s to 1985, *The Phil Donahue Show* was broadcast nationally from Chicago. Donahue also co-hosted a compelling political talk show – with

Vladimir Pozner of the former Soviet Union – called *This Week with Pozner and Donahue* from 1991-1994.

In July 2002, MSNBC hired him to host a free-wheeling TV talk show, which hyped the return of *Donahue*. However, eight months later during the run-up to war with Iraq, behind-the-scenes pressure from the Bush White House – and a groundswell of conservative outrage – led MSNBC to give the anti-war TV talk-show host the boot.

It mattered little that Donahue had won nine Daytime Emmys and a Lifetime Achievement Emmy in 1996. MSNBC claimed Donahue's ratings were too low to justify keeping the show on the air, even though *Donahue* was the highest rated show on MSNBC at the time it was canceled and beat out Chris Matthews's *Hardball*, which was then on CNBC.

After *Donahue* was cancelled, AllYourTV.com reported it had obtained a copy of an internal NBC memo that stated Donahue should be fired because he would be a "difficult public face for NBC in a time of war."

We caught up with Donahue at the campaign headquarters of Norman Solomon for Congress, in San Rafael, California, about 20 miles north of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge. He had come into town to show his moving film "Body of War" and to campaign for Solomon

DB: Phil Donahue has come into town to show a very compelling film that he produced called "Body of War" in 2007. It's a very thoughtful film about a young vet, named Thomas Young, who was paralyzed in Iraq, and went through a transformation. It wasn't meant to be a dogmatic attack at policy but it turned into something that made you really think about war and peace, and why we send young people off to war.

So, in that context, we've been at many wars for a long time here. We're thinking that there's some end to the U.S. involvement in the war in Iraq. But now, everything looks like, and it's getting worse that there might be some kind of tangle, and a very terrible tangle, with Iran. Your response to current policy, war policy, and your thoughts on that.

PD: Well, Rick Santorum is scaring me. He's got both guns out. The Straits of Hormuz, if they [the Iranians] block that, you can see how we get into war. That's one of the reasons why I admire Norman so much, he is making the point that it's much too easy for a president to go to war.

And I discovered Thomas Young at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Here was this kid, 24-years old, pale as the sheet, whacked out on morphine. And as I stood and looked down at him and his mother told me how paralyzed he was; he's a T4

which anatomists knows is paralyzed from the nipples down. Thomas can't cough. Thomas has bowel and bladder every morning, nausea.

He is a warrior turned anti-warrior. He came home from the war absolutely stunned at its horror, that it wasn't necessary. He went to Fort Hood and immediately said, "Why am I going to Iraq, I thought I was going to Afghanistan?" Too late now, he goes there, he goes to Iraq and he's there five days, no top on the truck, main street in Sadr City, and he takes a bullet through the collar bone and exited T4 in his spine. He will never walk again.

I couldn't believe what I was seeing. And then it occurred to me how sanitized this war was. I mean you couldn't. ... The president [George W. Bush] said, "don't take pictures" [of the carnage] and the whole mainstream press said "Okay." There was never any push back.

The American public did not see the pain that was inflicted on thousands and thousands of families. These were especially heinous injuries; I mean women had their faces blown off, I mean IEDs, blind kids, twenty something blind. And we don't know anything about that.

Bush successfully threw a blanket over the painful coverage, and media cooperated. I just couldn't believe that the land of the free would allow this to happen. And so I said I'm gonna, I nominated myself to show as many people as I could the pain of this one family, and tried to make the point that this is just one. There are thousands of other homes out there; the lives of the entire family are turned upside down. We've never been this close to a catastrophic injury.

This young man, it's awful. And he recently had pulmonary embolism, so now his speech is affected and he has to be fed. He cannot hold the silverware. You know, what's the sacrifice? Twenty something male, impotent? I mean, we'll never be the same, the people who worked on this film. We saw some PTSD, we saw him struggling, with you know, he can't, he's a smoker, he can't walk, he can't get out of bed and get his cigarettes.

I picked him up once on an airplane, I had to go and help him off the airplane. That's when you. ... this is a spiritual experience. That's when you realize how powerless, helpless he is, from the chest down he is a rag doll, and unless somebody comes up with a genome answer to this, which by the way, the man he fought for, George Bush, would not approve stem-cell research.

So all these things came colliding down on us and we went ahead with no script and we, I said "Thomas, I want to show the pain here. I don't want to sanitize this at all. But I can't do it unless you agree." He said, "I want to do that

too." So I had his agreement, and off we went. And here I am.

DB: And it was indeed hard to look at, it was transformational in nature. And it was only one example of millions of young people and that's why I bring this in the context of perhaps of one more, still, one more war. Imagine, can we take another ten or fifteen years, another war, with Iran? What does that mean? How do you respond to that kind of policy? What does that say about where we're going?

PD: It says that we live in a nation of law, unless we're scared. George Bush with great fanfare talked about democracy, went around the world "Democracy! Democracy!" and turned his back on the Bill of Rights. We have people in cages, around the world, no Red Cross. What is American to us? And while the bedrock of this nation, no habeas.

You know, you can't be a proud American and water board somebody. You can't be a proud American and deny access to a prisoner. And that's what they were doing, because they had to protect us. And the framers, you know, the Bill of Rights is kind of a quaint, good, interesting idea but it's not practical at [this] time. Especially now when you never know when somebody is going to drop a bomb on us.

This is how they are arguing. And I think it's how we bombed Grenada, Grenada! Panama. We bomb people. We drop bombs on crowded cities at night where old people and children are sleeping. And the American population watches this on CNN and remain, largely, mute. That's how we got here, I think.

DB: And of course, it was a New York Times' reporter, named Judith Miller, that helped lie us into that war with Iraq, so that was the paper of record. And I guess I want to focus with you a little bit on the problems with media. Norm Solomon, of course, is no stranger. He cut his teeth becoming a very biting, moving, media critic, holding the corporate media accountable.

Now, you've had your own encounters with the corporate media. And it's a problem because if people don't, if we don't have that Fourth Estate free and, if you will, questioning the centers of power, then we're in trouble. Would you remind people, just very briefly, what happened to you. We were all very excited, you were starting a new show on MSNBC, I think it was 2003, a wonderful...

PD: 2002.

DB: 2002. A wonderful producer named Jeff Cohen, who was a founder of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, was your producer. What happened there? It didn't last long. It was a wonderful show, but it didn't last long.

PD: Well, I think we signed on in August [2002] and I was gone in February of the following year which is a month before the invasion. MSNBC and its corporate parent, General Electric, were not at all pleased with my anti-war position. And I was outspoken about it.

And a memo was released, and printed by the New York Times from a consultant hired by NBC News. "Donahue appears to take delight in his anti-war stance." See how we're marginalized there, "delight." So I not only opposed the war, I was, I delighted in. ... I mean what kind of crass person am I?

They're so clever. The propaganda campaign that's been leveled against the so-called liberal voice. By the way, we're not liberal anymore, we're progressive. We're actually ashamed of our own name, liberal. The political idea that dare not speak its name.

So, I just, I noticed that the more I got into this the more I realized what I had learned from Norman. How easy it is to go to war, especially if you have corporate media on your side. And you can bet, that if there is another war, corporate media will be on the side of the establishment. It's not good for business to oppose a war.

People who oppose wars are scolds, nobody likes a scold. They are crabby, they don't love America. And how can you oppose a war when a president is ramping up for one? You embarrass the president in front of the world, and the people that we're trying to overcome here, and you're disrespectful to the troops.

So we've sent how many thousands and thousands of Americans to fight for our freedom, including free speech, and when we need it the most, at a time when a president [is starting a war], we have millions of people in this country who believe it's unpatriotic to not support the president. That's why, that's how war is made easy. It's amazing.

And then if you, if you scare the people you can move an entire population. George Bush took this nation by the ear and led it into the sword, and we let it happen. It's amazing what you can do if you scare the people. And corporate media will always be on the side of whatever the White House wants to do. They don't want anybody mad.

I mean imagine the money that General Electric makes out of just these defense contracts. And Donahue is on the air making fun of [Defense Secretary] Donald Rumsfeld. It's counterintuitive for them to want to have me on their television program. When the board of directors went to their country clubs I am sure their golf buddies said "What the hell are you doing with Donahue on the...?"

And this is, this is 2002. The Iraq War resolution was October 2002, this was

less than a year from the [9/11] towers. And Bush called for the Iraq resolution two weeks before an election. Only 23 senators voted "No." Twenty-three. [One-hundred-and-thirty-three] House members voted "No." This resolution passed overwhelmingly on lies. It wasn't true. Saddam had nothing to do with 9/11, and there are, I'm betting you, I can't prove this, there are millions and millions of Americans who today, believe he did.

DB: I'm sure to this day, and of course, we're concerned because the same kind of media machine is cranking us up for another war. It is interesting to me what happened in journalism, and I do want to get your feedback on this.

The great Israeli journalist, Amira Hass, who actually reports for an Israeli newspaper in the West Bank, talks, when you ask her "What's the job of a journalist?" She says, "To monitor the centers of power, whether they be in the government, in the corporation, in the local politicians. It's our job as the Fourth Estate, to monitor the centers of power." But now it seems that the media has become its own center of power. How would you define what happened here?

PD: With the war?

DB: And the role that the journalists seem to play in fanning the flames as opposed to reporting about what exactly is the situation.

PD: Well, there's almost a worship of people in power. You never see a peace worker or leader on *Meet the Press*. The established journalists cover established power. You know, I thought journalists could take all kinds of criticism because they dish so much of it out and I was wrong. They bleat and they pout. And they never forget you if you say something, so I don't mean to be swinging round-house bar room generalities here. But how else can we explain the surrender of the reporters [at a] Rumsfeld briefing.

So did the so-called expert generals, defense people on CNN and the other channels... I mean this was so managed and the press made it happen. One of the few journalists that I admire who doesn't care if the White House calls them back is Sy Hersh. And I'm sure you've interviewed and you know you won't see him on *Meet the Press*. ...

DB: And it's not because he wouldn't accept the invitation. He's not going to get the invitation.

PD: That's what I mean. That's exactly true. And we gotta somehow fix this. mainstream media, like the American public, as I say, if you criticize a president ramping up for war you're unpatriotic, you don't believe in God. They have got it, and you don't. That's the coup de grace.

And as long as that kind of drum beat against this "tax and spend, tax and spend!" I mean they have blistered us. We've changed our name, we're no longer liberal. That's how brilliant it has been this strategy of marginalization. You don't understand it, you liberals! You never saw a problem you don't want to spend my money to fix. You don't understand the geopolitical rah, rah, rah. They've got all kinds of things they're going to nail you with.

You go to war [and] if you criticize it, they're mad. If you criticize it after we go to war, you don't respect the troops. If you criticize it after we lose troops, you're defiling the memory of these troops and you are spitting in the face of their loved ones and their parents. I mean from everywhere, and by the way, you can't say "Why did they crash into the towers?" Because then you're blaming the victim.

At every turn they are ready for you, and you better shut up and sing or they're going to make life miserable for you and if you're thirty something, with two and a half kids and a mortgage, and reporting to a Republican boss, you know, how much of an outspoken dissenter are you going to be? Everything conspires to open the door wide for a president to march through it with his cruise missiles, his aircraft carriers. ...

I think the greatest thing that Obama could do now is call a press conference and say "We are here, now and hereafter not going to use drones for military assault. We may want to reserve the right to keep them for surveillance but we are promising the world now that we won't..."

Where is the valor? A guy sits in a cage or a control room somewhere in Maryland or maybe Nevada and he sees in the nose cone camera of the unmanned aerial vehicle, there's the insurgents, how they know, I'm not sure, and they fire an incendiary device, and we kill children, children! And this is on Obama's watch.

You know, I don't see how anybody who engages in this kind of killing can claim to be brave. You know, Grenada. We bombed a mental hospital. We don't have ground troops to go in and take care of Morris Bishop, the communist? And the endangered lives of those medical students? We don't have to bomb people. It's just easier. I'm convinced of this. And I also have this totally unassailable position that bombing should be a war crime.

You know, if a Marine goes into a Fallujah home and blows away the family with an AK47 that's a war crime. If we drop a bomb on that house and incinerate the family, it's collateral damage. We are in denial. And we are creating language to help us continue to be in denial. This is awful.

We are endangering the lives of our young adult children or the future

military. My grandchildren, what kind of a world are they going to live in? Are they going to keep looking over their shoulder in downtown New York City or Fargo, North Dakota? Are they going to be saying, "Did I just get on the wrong bus?" Do we really expect that we can drop bombs like this and not have to pay a price for this?

We have executed an American citizen in a foreign land and we assassinated him with a drone. We are endangering our political, and military and mostly our political leadership. You can't keep doing this. For them to stand there and let this happen forever is counterintuitive.

DB: Before we get to Norman, I, in this context of war and peace and courage, about telling the truth, I have to ask you about a private by the name of Bradley Manning. Who the government, the military wants to put in jail forever, who spent a great deal of time in jail. Just had his first hearing and some people think he should be executed for revealing some of the things that you were talking about including a film that showed a U.S. helicopter crew gunning down civilians, including children. Your thoughts on Bradley Manning? Is he a hero or a traitor?

PD: In a time in the history of this nation, when there is so much happening under the table, when administrations feel they have to protect us, and in order to do that efficiently they have to keep it secret, I celebrate the courage of Bradley Manning. I've yet to see anybody prove to anybody else that somebody was killed because of whatever it is that Bradley Manning has made public.

You know, the information is the life blood of a democracy. I believe there are more victims caused by secrecy than there are by sunshine. So let's have the disinfectant there. Let's have Julian Assange [WikiLeaks founder]. What has been revealed is helpful. It's gonna help. ... It raises the possibility that it won't happen again. And that's a good thing.

And we can argue all night, you know, the next thing they're going to bring in the family of the CIA agent who was killed, and how can you do. ... They are ready for any kind of dissent, they will slap you down. They will hit you hard. You can't even get your sentence out. One of the, the writers, a female writer, shortly after 9/11 wrote a column that said "The chickens have come home to roost." And Charles Krauthammer took her head off. She was blaming the victim.

So you can't even inquire "Why did they do this?" Another attempt to sort of say "Hold it. Hold it." is shut off. And they have succeeded. They have succeeded. They have scared us enough where they have made us believe, not everybody to be sure, but they've made enough people believe that they need this secrecy otherwise they can't protect us and that is a very difficult thing for an

American citizen to oppose.

DB: I know that you're in town to support the candidacy of Norman Solomon. He's running for Congress on the Democratic Party which in a district that was reprogrammed, if you will. That covers the Golden Gate Bridge all the way to the border, up north with Oregon. And it's a very important district. Some significant people have come out for him, Dan Ellsberg, Delores Huerta, and Elliott Gould was just in town. You are here now. Tell us why you've come here, why you would support somebody like Norman Solomon. What do you know about him? You know enough about him to believe in him?

PD: Well, I think so. First of all, we both made documentaries, with the same point of view. And when we each saw, when we saw each others documentaries, it was like a brotherhood, you know? And I admired also what he had to say in his book. His analysis of how we go to war and what collectively pushes [us] into these horrible "Don't mess with Texas" foreign policy decisions. It's much more detailed.

Norman does something that I haven't seen anybody else do, and that is get behind this. We have a national press corps that wants to know who's winning and who's losing, and where we have the bases and how much equipment ... without ever asking "Why the hell are we doing this in the first place?" Norman does that. And he does it in a very professional way.

His scholarship is impeccable. He's the son my mother wanted to have. And I admire him so much because, you know, I'm out there high wire, you know, trying to make my contribution to the peace movement and when I am out there, I think of Norman and I steal from him, I do. But I always quote his book. Norman, he makes the point, a president of the United States can have a war if he wants one. That is terrifying. That is so frightening.

You know look at Ron Paul, now here's a guy I'm not able to vote for. There is a history that is very distracting for me, but he's going around the campaign saying "Why are we always doing these wars? Why are we invading other people?" No other candidate on either side of the aisle can speak those words.

DB: And he's getting support for it.

PD: Yes, he is. He's getting a lot of young people. Can you imagine Mitt Romney saying "What are we doing in all these wars?" Can't be done, because if they turn out to be wrong or unpopular, whatever it is, it's politically fatal. They're finished in the public service business. They will not be re-elected to Congress.

Imagine the most important issue right in front of us, some would argue it's the

economy, and it may be. But right now when you think of all this military action going on and all the bombs we've dropped and all the countries we've invaded, what is more important to you as an issue in a presidential race? And it's off the table. That's how we go to war. There is no robust debate about this.

Rick Santorum can't wait to invade Iran. He's ready to send another 4,000 Americans to die. And he's doing it because he knows that the way you get elected is you gotta be tough. And a president, if you give a president a cruise missile, he'll fire. You know, it just, it blows me away when I see how easily we are seduced into a war and all of a sudden, we have widows getting the folded flag, people are crying around the coffin, young men and women are coming home. They'll never see a child graduate, they'll never go to a bar mitzvah, or first communion. They are irreplaceable human beings, and they are dead forever, because George Bush wanted to "Bring it on!" And now we've got Rick Santorum.

Boy, you can see a president doesn't get a statue for fixing health care. The only way you get a statue in a park is winning a war. That's why we've got horses and swords; we have military airplanes in parks that kids play on. We've cannons in parks, in parks! We celebrate war. There's no other way to say this.

And how the American people can stand there and allow this to happen, there is a connection. If we create a culture surrounded by things that go "Boom" we can't be surprised if we build our foreign policy on that kind of activity.

DB: In conclusion, and Norman and I have gone back and forth one this, I asked him for an article that I did about him for the Progressive, "Why would you give up this role, this very important role as a biting media critic to go into a swamp land called Congress, where nobody, very few people, say what they mean, there are a few of them. But won't we lose this important media critic if he ends up in the swamp of Congress?"

PD: Here's what I think about that. We're very close to cynicism with that observation. What good does it do? By the way, everybody hates Congress. And it doesn't take a lot of courage to hate Congress. It's easy to hate 535 people. And I've never found that criticism to have much weight. You know, what do you mean? What is it you don't like about Congress? They won't answer you. Congress is politicians, we hate politicians.

I think Norman's decision is exemplary. I'd like to see more people like Norman. It's an act of courage today to jump into this thing, I agree with you. I don't know how you have any fun with all the whacko business that's going on in Washington. Don't you miss Donald Trump? I mean seriously this is, this was the greatest reality show.

What we want is sunshine, as long as it's out there. As long as your listeners have an opportunity to hear them, don't let anybody be so protective and paternalistic where they get themselves in a position where "Well, we know what's good for you." Now we've become the thing we hate. Which by the way, has what's happened in foreign policy. We are killing innocent people.

When I was on MSNBC I had people on from Peaceful Tomorrows. These were citizens who lost family, loved ones in the towers. And they call us and their message was, "don't go and kill other innocent people to avenge the death of my innocent father, or grandfather," whatever it was. I could see the pain in their faces across, and this was another example of moral courage. Imagine these people got up in the middle of the war fever, and made this point.

Of course, they were ignored. But what's most interesting to me is that these people are not alone. You know, right now most people agree with us. You know, we're going to have to get used to this. We're popular. But I guess we weren't popular enough in 2003 when we invaded, but even then there were millions of Americans who opposed the war but they were never heard, they were never heard. Mainstream media, went along, to go along.

DB: Well, finally so to be clear here Phil Donahue, in your heart of hearts, you really believe that somebody like Norman Solomon can make a difference? Is that what you believe?

PD: You know if I don't believe that, then I'm a cynic, and my voice has ended, I no longer, if I think, how many times have you heard, "Oh, what does it matter, they're going to go to war anyway." I mean I've heard that so many times, you know, wars just happen. ... I mean that's a surrender. ...

I mean we've got to start somewhere, Dennis. I mean, if Norman doesn't, whose going to do it? ... I think he'd be a great example for other progressives to follow him into the public arena of Washington, D.C. and be a break on this rootin' tootin' shootin' foreign policy that presidents and others in power seem to believe will make them heroes. [Vice President Dick] Cheney looked at Bush at a cabinet meeting [and asked] "You gonna take him out, or not?" Imagine that. This is cowboy talk.

And it may involve your son, or daughter, who will come home in a pine box, when the two officers walk up the front walk and the mother looks out the window, they often faint, before these men get to the front door. This is the pain that the American people are not seeing, and I made this one little attempt with the movie titled "Body of War" to at least expose the sacrifice of one family.

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. You can get in touch with the author at dbernstein@igc.org.

Police Close Berkeley's Occupy Camp

Police cleared out the last major Occupy encampment in the San Francisco Bay area on Thursday with the removal of tents at a park in Berkeley and the roughing-up of some protesters. Dennis J. Bernstein interviewed a U.S. Army veteran who provided security at the camp.

By Dennis J. Bernstein

Berkeley Police gave Occupy Berkeley a troubling Christmas present in the form of a violent attack on and destruction of their encampment, located in Downtown Berkeley, across from City Hall, between the Berkeley High School and the Veterans Hall, in Martin Luther King Park.

I spoke with an member of the camp's informal security detail, an Iraq vet, Corporal Nick Anthony Shaw, who had just been roughed up by the Berkeley Police, as they destroyed, and violently trashed Occupy Berkeley on Thursday. The cops threatened to arrest me and him, trying to disrupt the interview, and then turned the city sprinklers on us.

At least half the Berkeley encampment is homeless. A nice Merry Christmas for them!

DB: We just got back from Martin Luther King Park in downtown Berkeley, right across from the High School, the Veterans Administration, Veterans Hall, City Hall and the police were there shredding and destroying; they were putting the sprinklers on even as we began this interview. We did catch up with one of the defenders of the camp who also happens to be a veteran.

NAS: I'm former Corporal Nick Anthony Shaw, United States Army, I served from '99 to 2003. I'm now a peacekeeper with Occupy S.F. and Berkeley, I suppose, now that S.F. is closed. Well, the encampment is just temporarily moved other than what the police threw away and ran over. They gave us a ten o'clock time to be out, the protesters stayed. So they proceeded to enter the back of the park here with two squad cars and a white truck where they ran over three tents, pulling in and didn't even bother to check if anybody was in there. Thank God, nobody got injured.

They threw three tents and a bunch of peoples' personal belongings in the back of a truck and then when the protesters tried to stop them they sped off about eighty miles an hour down the road, hitting one protester with the truck and hitting another protester with the car door. Then they proceeded to drive the truck over to the police station where, God only knows why, they started throwing peoples' things in a dumpster right in front of them.

The protesters went over, climbed over the side of the truck and started pulling their things out. That's when the police came out and began, well the first one was a woman. When the police came running out of the station everybody backed up. They came over and the one foreign-looking police officer which I can identify by face but not name proceeds to knock over a woman and hit her with his billy club.

And then they formed a line where several officers ran up into the crowd knocking people over, two women were seriously injured. About seven people were hit with billy clubs. I was personally hit in the elbow with a billy club and all I was doing was talking on a megaphone. So it was extremely violent. I know at least three officers who need to lose their job. And then they...

DB: Do you have their badge numbers?

NAS: We have them on live video. And then what they did was they came in today, and a lot of the people ran in fear, and a lot of peoples' stuff was here, but if anybody wasn't here to claim it they threw it in the garbage truck, and threw everything away. So we got a bunch of people still over here about thirty-five to forty on the sidewalk with all of their things who are afraid the police are going to take them.

Well, as you can see about seven or eight of us have already started putting our tents back up. We're not going anywhere; we are not illegally lodging, this is a protest. We have a right to occupy the Earth and no government has a right to put a time limit on a public place. And I just think it's ludicrous.

DB: You were in the military?

DAS: Yeah, four years, I made corporal.

DB: Four years. Are you...do you get the sense that the same forces, the same kind of weaponry, the same kind of attitude, shock and awe, that was being used against say in Iraq and Afghanistan is now being turned against the people here?

DAS: They have definitely militarized the police. I've read paperwork that the Department of Homeland Security actually beefed up eighteen cities and trained them how to squash the Occupy movement. As far as I know that's against the

Constitution, to militarize the police, but they have done it. And they are out here, in full riot gear beating unarmed non-violent protesters.

DB: And, of course, we've already seen them shoot and critically wound Scott Olsen, a veteran of the Iraq war. You said you got a warning at ten o'clock last night, is that correct?

DAS: Yes.

DB: And why, any sense of why you were cleared out? Did they say it was a danger to public safety? Anything like that?

DAS: They gave no reason whatsoever. I've actually got the eviction notice; the only thing that it says is that the park will be closed from 10 p.m. until 6 a.m. Anyone left will be considered as an illegal lodger and their belongings will be seized and they will be arrested.

DB: So these tents up here are in jeopardy starting at ten o'clock given what you have already learned from the police.

DAS: Yes, as far as what the police say, as of ten p.m. tonight they're going to seize all of our personal property and arrest us for illegal lodging.

DB: Say a little bit more about the people who were wounded. You mentioned that a number of people were hurt, can you give us a little bit more information about that?

DAS: Yes, we had one gentleman who had his elbow dislocated. One woman who badly tore up both of her knees and her hands being knocked to the ground, and there's at least four others who have abrasions and bruises from being hit with billy clubs.

DB: And for you, former serviceman, what's at the core of this? Why are you out here defending, in San Francisco, standing here, obviously ready to take it on again. What's pushing this?

DAS: Well, for me personally, my fiance died September 4th last year. I lost my home because we were a two-income family. All the money that they gave to the banks could have paid off every mortgage in America. And now instead of that they foreclosed on millions of Americans. And there are more empty homes than homeless people.

We have an inherent right to be here. If they don't want to give us somewhere to stay then we're going to take back what's ours. I mean, squirrels don't pay rent in a tree and a bear doesn't have to pay rent in the woods. Why do we have to pay to live somewhere that will never belong to us? And if we have to do that,

why do you need to have a penny in your pocket to have somewhere to stay? And since when is it illegal to be homeless? I don't understand that.

DB: In the bigger picture, you see this as a class war?

DAS: Oh, yes. They are definitely trying to segregate the classes. I mean a perfect example, the city of San Francisco the minimum wage is \$9.96. For \$9.96 you can't afford the smallest studio apartment in that city. So that means even if you work a forty-hour week job you can't afford to live in that city. That's class segregation and that's forced public transportation. You have to move to Oakland or share a no bedroom house with renters. I mean, how do you do that? If minimum wage doesn't afford you minimal housing in the city you live in, there's gotta be a problem, and I didn't fight for that.

DB: There seems to be a fear, particularly on the part of the authorities, when there is a unity between those people who are already homeless and perhaps those people who are afraid that soon they will be joining them. That the unity between those who may still have jobs but are afraid they won't soon. Do you see that as something that really sends shivers, gives problems to the powers that be?

DAS: Yes, of course. They are scared. They know that if we all unite we're stronger than them. There's nothing they can do about it. And there's nothing that can stop the 99 percent. I mean the power of the people can change the world. I personally quit a \$15 per hour job to be a full-time peacekeeper for Occupy S.F. Not everybody out here is homeless just because of a reason. I mean I could easily go and share with three roommates a place in San Francisco, but why?

I have a right to occupy this earth, we all do. So if they don't want to help us, then give us somewhere where all the people can go, the common people, the poor people. Then we're going to take back city park, if they don't want to give us that, we'll take the state park, we'll take the federal park. We'll take every street in the country, in the world. Egypt's already winning, there's no reason why we can't, too.

DB: Finally, it's ironic I'm looking right across at the Veterans Building, we're across the street from City Hall, we've got Berkeley High School right behind us, we've got the police pushing us back, we're not even in the park and the police are pushing us back because, obviously, they are afraid of a microphone too. But as I was saying, Berkeley High School, the Veterans Administration, City Hall, the court over there, it's pretty ironic. You want to tell us as a vet what that sorta means to you, that image.

DAS: Well, I look around me at all these buildings designed to help people, and I don't know who they are protecting anymore. To be honest with you, I am surrounded by police on a daily basis and I live in fear of them, not anyone here. I don't understand why the politicians are wanting to force us out of a park that clearly belong to the public. I mean, what are we doing so bad? We are sitting here protesting, no one is lodging. I mean, there might be some people who are homeless but they are joining the cause. There's nothing wrong with being a protester. I mean, heck, all these people here are the Time magazine Person of The Year.

DB: The protester is Time magazines' Person of The Year. Let me ask you, you're in that community, you are a defender of these camps. You went to war, you risked your life, your thoughts on these cops using military weaponry to shoot down a veteran.

DAS: I think it's tactics like that are exactly why we are going to win. And this is a war we're going to win non-violently, without us firing a single shot. And the more they abuse us, the more people are going to come to our aid. The more people are going to see how wrong they are. It's not the way it should be. It's not the way it was intended and I don't think that the only freedom in America should be the freedom to spend money if you make some.

DB: If you wouldn't mind I'd like you to sign off, do you perhaps remember your dog tag number, or if you have information, please sign off from the military side?

DAS: Corporal Nick Anthony Shaw 0-274768460, no religious preference.

Dennis Bernstein is host and executive producer of "Flashpoints," an award-winning radio show heard over Pacifica radio and originating from KPFA, 94.1, in Berkeley California.
