

The So-called War on Terror Is A Criminal Fraud

Interview with Michael Keefer

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Canadian scholar Prof. Michael Keefer believes that the US-engineered project of War on Terror is a “criminal fraud” that has virtually extinguished American democracy and the civil liberties of the American people.

“The so-called War on Terror is a criminal fraud, designed to frighten Americans and the citizens of its allies into supporting systematic violations of international law. It was from the outset Islamophobic both in intention and in the wars of aggression it has been used to justify,” said Prof. Michael Keefer in an exclusive interview with Fars News Agency.

On the US special relationship with Israel and Washington’s unconditional support for the Tel Aviv regime, Prof. Keefer says, “The US policy of seeking to dominate Eurasia through control of Middle Eastern and central-Asian hydrocarbon resources aligns with Israel’s concern to ensure that no Middle Eastern state has the power to interfere with its policies of continued colonization of Palestinian land.”

“The powerful and well-funded Israel lobby supports these policies—though there is evidence of a growing alienation among young Jews both from this lobby and from the state of Israel,” he added.

Michael Keefer is a professor emeritus at the University of Guelph’s School of English and Theater Studies. He is a former president of the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English. He studied at the Royal Military College of Canada, the University of Toronto, and Sussex University, and has held research fellowships at Sussex University in the UK and at the Ernst-Moritz-Arndt Universität, Greifswald, Germany.

He has published widely on English Renaissance literature and early modern philosophy, and has also written widely on issues of contemporary politics and cultural politics. His books include an edition of Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (2008), *Antisemitism Real and Imagined* (2010), and *Sabotaging Democracy*, a forthcoming study of electoral fraud in Canada’s 2011 federal election. He has written numerous articles about the US foreign policy, the War on Terror, Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the plight of the Palestinian nation since 1948.

FNA had the opportunity to conduct an extensive interview with Prof. Keefer and ask him questions on the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions movement against Israel, the influence of the Israeli lobby on the US government, the excuse of anti-Semitism and how it is used to vilify the critics of Israel and the US foreign policy in the Middle East. What follows is the text of the interview

Q: One of your recent articles has touched upon the Boycott/Divestment/Sanctions movement against Israel, which is apparently gaining momentum across the world. However, it seems that the Western governments will resist the movement and won't allow their firms and companies to implement economic sanctions against Israel. What's your view on that? Do you think that the Western companies and firms have the readiness and freedom to impose sanctions against Israel over its policies in the Occupied Territories and the Gaza Strip?

A: Corporations are not moral agents; they act according to calculations of profit and loss. But they can be persuaded by public pressure to withdraw from economic activity and investment in the Occupied West Bank and in Israel. Boycott campaigners have been able to prevent companies implicated in the infrastructure of the occupation from winning contracts for similar work in Europe; other companies are becoming increasingly concerned about damage to their reputation, and hence their sales, in North America, Europe, and elsewhere. And in Norway, the Netherlands, and the US, large pension funds have begun to respond to demands that they withdraw investments from Israel. This is the same process that led to the collapse of apartheid in South Africa.

Most Western governments, meanwhile, are providing ever more flagrant displays of the same hypocrisy they showed decades ago in dealing with South African apartheid. Israel is in open violation of many instruments of international law, among them the Fourth Geneva Convention, whose first article requires signatories "to respect and ensure respect for" that convention "in all circumstances." Western governments can't stop corporations from withdrawing from Israel, but some of them (France, followed in this by the US, Australia and Canada) have been attempting to criminalize the human rights activism of BDS supporters as an "incitement of hatred."

Q: Would you please share with us your perspective on the unofficial ban on the criticism of Israel in the mass media and academia in the West? The critics of the actions and policies of Israel are being branded anti-Semite and Jew-hater and those journalists, university professors and government officials who direct the most insignificant criticism against Israel are vilified and demonized. Is there any way to combat this criminalization of the criticism of Israel?

A: The campaigns conducted by supporters of Israel—which go beyond slander and vilification into demands that critics of Israel be fired—can best be resisted by calm, rational, persistent, and evidence-based argument. Jewish scholars and public intellectuals have played a very important role in this struggle: people like Jacqueline Rose, Brian Klug, and the late Tony Judt in the UK; Judith Butler, Norman Finkelstein, and William I. Robinson in the US; Naomi Klein and Yakov Rabkin in Canada; and Eva Illouz, Neve Gordon, and David Shulman in Israel. It helps that these are all scholars and writers of high distinction and international reputation; the fact that they are also Jewish makes it idiotic to insinuate that their solidarity with the Palestinians and their ethical and far-reaching critiques of Israel's actions and policies could be motivated by anti-Semitism.

Organizations like Independent Jewish Voices in the UK and Canada, and Jewish Voice for Peace in the US, have also been important in helping to persuade their compatriots that firm and principled criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitic.

The fall-back position of the slanderers is to insinuate that Jewish critics of Israel must be "self-hating Jews," animated by a perverse hatred of their own people. The historian Tony

Judt offered a characteristically witty response when a hostile journalist asked if he was indeed, as supporters of Israel had claimed, a “self-hating Jew.” After a meditative pause, Judt conceded that he did in fact hate himself—but not for being Jewish.

It is of course a large further step to criminalize criticism of Israel through revisions to the penal code of a country. Canadian supporters of Israel’s actions and policies have made repeated attempts in this direction—to which human rights activists have reacted with rational, evidence-based arguments. The book I edited and co-authored in 2010, “Antisemitism Real and Imagined”, brought together responses to one such attempt; my recent essay “Criminalizing Criticism of Israel in Canada” analyzes a current attempt by the Canadian government to make pro-Palestinian human rights discourse vulnerable to prosecution as hate speech.

Q: Do you agree with the comparison drawn by some scholars and intellectuals between the Israeli regime and the apartheid South Africa? Is it true that the measures adopted by Israel in the Occupied Territories, the West Bank and Gaza Strip resemble the characteristics of an apartheid, racist regime?

A: The comparison is correct and accurate. In making it, one is of course not claiming that the apartheid regime in South Africa and the apartheid regime imposed by Israel on the Palestinians resemble one another in all respects. I’m content to be guided in this matter by the South African scholars and jurists who wrote the report “Occupation, Colonialism, Apartheid?” A reassessment of Israel’s policies in the occupied Palestinian territories under international law, published by the Human Sciences Research Council of South Africa in May, 2009. According to this report, what the Israeli government is doing puts it in breach of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid.

Insofar as the two systems of apartheid differ, Israel’s is more violent and more oppressive. According to Ronnie Kasrils, one of the many South African Jews who struggled honorably against apartheid, and who subsequently served as a minister in Nelson Mandela’s government, “Israel’s methods of repression and collective punishment” are “far, far worse than anything we saw during our long and difficult liberation struggle.”

One of Israel’s leading sociologists, Eva Illouz of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has argued in “47 years a slave,” a long and compelling essay published in the Israeli newspaper Haaretz on February 7, 2014, that the Israeli occupation in fact subjects Palestinians to what she defines as “a condition of slavery.”

Q: Some critics of the US government believe that Washington has attached its interests and foreign policy priorities to Israel and many of its differences with the Muslim world emanate from its unconditional support for Tel Aviv even at the time when it is applying discriminatory measures against the Palestinian people and suppressing them. Why has the United States engaged in such an unusual relationship with Israel to the extent of deteriorating its ties with many Muslim nations which disfavor the Israeli policies?

A: The United States and other Western countries had mixed motives in supporting the founding of the state of Israel in the years immediately following World War Two. One motive was anti-Semitism—a desire to ensure that Jewish survivors of the Nazi genocide in Europe settled in Palestine rather than in their countries.

Canada’s behavior in this regard was especially shameful: restrictions against the

admission of Jewish refugees were in place throughout the years in which the Nazis held power in Germany, and were not relaxed until 1948.

Another motive was a desire to see a garrison culture that would be geopolitically dependent on the West implanted in the Muslim Middle East—with the explicit calculation that this settler colony would serve Western interests in a region whose hydrocarbon reserves are of immense strategic importance.

During George W. Bush's first term, the US enunciated a policy of attacking and fragmenting every Middle Eastern state that is not completely subordinate to US economic and geopolitical plans. The attacks on Libya and Syria show that that policy is still in place—and US actions in organizing the coup in Ukraine are part of the same geopolitical strategy.

The US policy of seeking to dominate Eurasia through control of Middle Eastern and central-Asian hydrocarbon resources aligns with Israel's concern to ensure that no Middle Eastern state has the power to interfere with its policies of continued colonization of Palestinian land. The powerful and well-funded Israel lobby supports these policies—though there is evidence of a growing alienation among young Jews both from this lobby and from the state of Israel.

Q: What's your viewpoint regarding the dominant US policy on the Middle East in the recent years? Our region has been witness to numerous wars and military expeditions waged by the United States and its allies; wars which many prudent people have termed as wars for oil and other energy resources available in the region. What's your idea on that? Does the United States really intend to bring democracy to the countries it invades and attacks, or are there other reasons at work?

A: I've begun to answer this question in my response to the previous one. US wars of aggression have had a number of goals: gaining control over oil and gas reserves (Iraq, Libya); denying or controlling access by competing powers such as China, or Western European nations to these reserves; gaining control over important pipeline routes (Afghanistan, Ukraine); preventing nations that possess important oil and gas deposits from using the revenues from them to fund social infrastructure or a "civil commons" (Iraq, Libya); preventing oil and gas-exporting countries from escaping from the petrodollar exchange system; and attempting to weaken and intimidate opposing powers like Iran and Russia (Syria).

The notion that the US has any interest in 'exporting democracy' is absurd, and amply refuted by its behavior.

Q: In February 2006, you wrote an article about the Bush administration's preparations for launching a military strike against Iran over the nuclear standoff. Israel had also repeatedly threatened Iran with aerial attacks on its nuclear facilities. But there were commentators and analysts who believed that the war threats were nothing more than a sort of media hype and propaganda campaign aimed at bullying Iran and leading it into making concessions. The attacks never happened, while people like John Bolton had categorically announced the dates of the possible attacks. What do you think about the veracity of their claims? Weren't they simply trying to intimidate the Iranians?

A: My view at the time was that a principal motive for US war plans against Iran was a desire to prevent Iran from opening an oil bourse in which currencies other than the US

dollar would be the medium of exchange. The position of the US dollar as a global fiat currency used in the vast majority of commercial transactions involving oil and gas is to a large degree what sustains an otherwise radically unstable imperial power. A significant shift away from reliance on the dollar in this capacity, which could result, for example, from Russia deciding at some point that its future gas sales will be conducted in currencies other than the US dollar, would have a major impact on the US economy, and on the US's ability to finance and sustain its military aggressions. The US was indeed seeking to bully and intimidate Iran—and has continued to do so. But threats of aggression, coming from a country with the US's record in such matters, should be taken very seriously.

American elites have long since forgotten that their invasion of Canada in 1812-14 was a failure, and resulted in the burning of Washington, DC, in return for their sack of what is now the city of Toronto. They don't need to remember it, since they have long since had something close to complete control of Canadian foreign policy. They have also forgotten that they overthrew the government of Mossadegh in 1953, and subjected Iran to a quarter-century of brutal dictatorship. But they have not forgotten their humiliation at the time of the Iranian revolution in 1979.

Q: As you note in your articles, there's no evidence showing that Iran has ever intended or is trying to produce nuclear weapons; however, it has been under intensive, severe economic sanctions for some 10 years, and these sanctions, except for troubling the lives of Iranian citizens and complicating the process of talks between Iran and the six world powers, have produced no useful results. What do you think about the sanctions regime? Do you agree that it's now up to West to lift the sanctions as a confidence-building measure?

A: I regard the sanctions against Iran as a very serious violation of international law. Although I am opposed to nuclear power generation, on the grounds that the technology is irreducibly dangerous, and that the risk calculations offered by the nuclear industry are systematically misleading, Iran has every right under international law to develop a civil nuclear power program. The behavior of the US and the European nations in their negotiations with Iran has been dishonest at every stage. The sanctions should be lifted immediately and unconditionally.

Q: What's your viewpoint on the official accounts of 9/11 terrorist attacks presented by the mainstream media and propagated by the Bush administration officials? Is it really the case that they were the Muslims who masterminded and perpetrated the attacks? If so, then how can we find appropriate answers for such questions as the five dancing Israelis arrested at the moment of the collapsing of the Twin Towers or the absence of 4,000 Israeli workers of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001?

A: The official account of the 9/11 terrorist attacks is systematically false. The narrative of the planning and organization of the terror attacks of 9/11 that is provided by the 9/11 Commission Report is almost entirely based upon 'evidence' acquired by torture. But the epistemic and evidential value of statements elicited under torture is zero. The Report is an impudent fiction, and should be catalogued in the same section of libraries as the equally foolish and tendentious fictions of Tom Clancy.

The key facts about the events of 9/11, in my opinion, are the following. First, the US air defense system in the northeastern US was effectively disabled on September 11, 2001 by overlapping exercises which transferred many of the available interceptor aircraft out of the region and confused the military control systems, whose operators were for an extended

period of time uncertain as to which dots on their radar screens were electronic simulations and which represented actual aircraft, and which of those real aircraft were part of an exercise and which were the victims of actual hijackings. Secondly, the planes that hit the Twin Towers and the Pentagon could not have been flown by the supposed hijackers; the hijacking was carried out electronically, and not by suicidal fanatics wielding box-cutters. Thirdly, there is conclusive scientific evidence that the Twin Towers and World Trade Center Building 7 were destroyed by controlled demolitions.

None of these things was within the power of Osama bin Laden and his agents. The official story that Muslims carried out these terror attacks is therefore false.

Israeli operatives appear to have been involved in some peripheral aspects of the plot. But to the best of my knowledge, the story that thousands of Israelis working in the Twin Towers were warned to stay away is quite simply false. Significant numbers of Israelis and people with dual Israeli-American citizenship were victims of the attacks.

Q: The War on Terror project that began immediately following the 9/11 attacks has so far claimed the lives of thousands of innocent civilians in different Muslim countries and nobody has been held responsible for the excessive, brutal killings. Do you agree that the War on Terror is in practice a war on Islam and the Muslims?

A: The so-called War on Terror is a criminal fraud, designed to frighten Americans and the citizens of its allies into supporting systematic violations of international law. It was from the outset Islamophobic both in intention and in the wars of aggression it has been used to justify. But a lack of concern for the lives of Muslims was already apparent in US policy: former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright calmly took responsibility for the deaths of half a million Iraqi children caused by the sanctions regime imposed during the 1990s; she thought this was an acceptable consequence of a valid policy.

Q: Do you agree with the premise that the 9/11 attacks laid the groundwork for the US government to impose restrictions and limitations on the civil liberties and social freedoms of the American people, silent the dissents and prevent the mass media from giving coverage to the controversial and sensitive matters of the US domestic and foreign policy?

A: The events of 9/11 are defined by some American social scientists, notably Lance DeHaven Smith and Matthew Witt, as a “state crime against democracy.” American democracy has for decades been under threat by corporate power—in particular the power of what President Dwight Eisenhower in 1960 called “the military-industrial complex,” and the power of state agencies operating outside of any control by democratic institutions, and effectively constituting an overtly anti-democratic shadow state.

The unsolved assassinations of the 1960s—of John F. Kennedy, Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Robert Kennedy—marked an important stage in the growing ascendancy of these agencies. In the opinion of many political analysts in the US, 9/11, and the policies pursued since 9/11 by Presidents Bush and Obama, have marked the effective end of constitutional democracy in the US. Many of the forms and much of the rhetoric of democratic governance still persist, in much the same way as the forms and rhetoric of a senatorial republic persisted in ancient Rome long after the state’s devolution into a military-autocratic empire under Augustus and his successors. But the US Constitution and Bill of Rights have been displaced by War-on-Terror legislation.

The consequences of the stifling of civil liberty, dissent, and, more generally, of the capacity for innovative, generous, and public-spirited critical thinking in the US and its allies may have tragic consequences on a global scale. Human civilization currently faces a wide array of crises related to planetary resource limits and processes of change triggered by human interventions. These include, in no particular order, peak oil; desertification and soil loss; increasing problems of access to clean drinking water; rising ocean acidity and the imminent extinction of fish stocks; and ecosystem and genetic damage caused both by nuclear weaponry including, very importantly, depleted uranium munitions, and by nuclear accidents like Fukushima. Overarching all of these are the processes of chaotic climate change and global warming that have been set in motion by greenhouse gas emissions: unchecked, these processes will accelerate a global mass-extinction event that is already underway. Over the past decade and more, the predictions of climate scientists have repeatedly been overtaken by climate change events that are moving much more rapidly than anticipated.

At this moment in history, more than any other, we are in desperate need of creativity, open-mindedness, cross-cultural and inter-faith generosity, and a commitment to justice and human solidarity, based on a firm assertion of the dignity and equality of our brothers and sisters everywhere.

Interview by Kourosh Ziabari

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