

The Illegal Constitutional Amendment

By David Gordon

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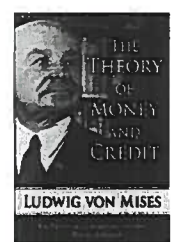
The 14th Amendment has been used extensively to decide on the constitutionality of many issues, among others segregation in schools, "civil rights," immigration, and abortion. Debates over the meaning of the Amendment have produced an enormous literature. But there is a more fundamental issue that is generally ignored. Was the 14th Amendment legally ratified? If it wasn't, the framework for much of subsequent constitutional law collapses. In a notable article that first appeared in the *Georgia Journal of Southern Legal History* in 1991, the historian Forrest McDonald argued that it was not legally ratified, and I'll discuss his arguments in this week's column.

McDonald was one of the most distinguished American historians, who first attracted attention with his book *We the People*, published in 1958, and he remained at the forefront of the historical profession until his death in 2016. (I gave a book report on *We the People* when I was in high school in 1963.)

He summarizes the main issues at stake in the debate over the legality of the Amendment in this way:

Whatever else the Radicals had in mind in pushing through the Reconstruction Amendments—their motives were diverse and conflicting—it is clear that some of them, at least, intended that the Fourteenth should greatly increase the powers of Congress at the expense of the states. It is also clear that the process of adopting the Fourteenth Amendment was marred by repeated irregularities. President Andrew Johnson questioned the legitimacy of an amendment proposed by a Congress that represented only twenty-five of the thirty-six states. Three northern states that ratified the proposal later rescinded their votes. All the southern states except Tennessee at first voted against the amendment, despite an implied threat that they would not be readmitted to the Union; they changed their stands only after the threat was made explicit. And throughout the debates on the amendment, friends and foes alike disagreed as to whether approval of three-quarters of twenty-five states or of thirty-six would be necessary.

This does not exhaust the legal problems of the Amendment. A constitutional amendment requires approval by two-thirds of both the House and Senate, but the Fourteenth Amendment fell short of the required vote in the Senate. (McDonald notes that it isn't a good argument that because the Southern states that had seceded weren't represented in Congress, and would undoubtedly have opposed the Amendment if they had been, the required majorities weren't obtained. The argument fails because the Constitution requires only approval by two-thirds of the members present.) McDonald presents the problem with the Senate's approval in this way:



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But another aspect of the matter clouds the issue. The numbers cited concerning the vote in the Senate mask some chicanery. One of the fifty non-southern senators was the newly elected John P. Stockton of New Jersey, an outspoken opponent of the Fourteenth Amendment, who took the oath of office and was formally seated when the Thirty-ninth Congress convened on December 5, 1865. Later, after informal polls revealed that only thirty-three senators favored it (one short of the necessary two-thirds) a motion was made not to seat Stockton. The motion not to seat was resorted to, even though he had already been seated, because Article I, Section 5, of the Constitution requires a two-thirds vote to expel a member, and that majority could not be mustered. Following a great deal of debate, a vote was taken and the motion not to seat failed twenty-two to twenty-one. Overnight, however, one member of the Senate was persuaded to change his vote. The next day the same motion passed. Stockton was thus unconstitutionally expelled, and only in that way did the thirty-three votes for the Fourteenth Amendment become a two thirds majority.

The main problems with the Amendment, though, occurred in the process of ratification. The Southern states voted against it, so the Radical Republicans responded by putting the states that had done so under military occupation and they refused to readmit them into the Union until their legislatures ratified it:

The congressional majority used the Reconstruction Act of March 2, 1867, passed over President Johnson's veto just before the expiration of the Thirty-ninth Congress and slightly amended by the Fortieth Congress later the same month, to force the southern states to approve the amendment. The act, as amended, began with a declaration that "no legal state governments" existed in the ten "rebel" states that had refused to ratify. It divided the South into five military districts and replaced the existing governmental structures with martial law. The act required the "rebel" states to call elections, in which black males could vote, but whites who had participated in the rebellion or given aid and comfort to rebels could not. Thus the states would elect delegates to conventions that were to establish constitutions that included provisions for black suffrage. When the constitutions were ratified by a majority of the eligible voters and approved by Congress, when governments were organized under them, and when those governments ratified the Fourteenth Amendment, then—and only then—would Congress consider ending military rule, recognizing the state governments as legally existent and readmitting the states to representation in Congress.

There is yet another problem, and this one is the most severe. A state can ratify an amendment only if it is part of the Union, but Congress would not admit a state until ratification had taken place. The Radicals dealt with this problem in their customary highhanded and illegal way:

We now come to the pivotal point upon which the constitutionality of the adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment turns. Let us assume that the amendment had been constitutionally proposed; assume that the ratifications in Tennessee, Oregon, and West Virginia were proper and should have been counted; and assume that the rescissions by New Jersey and Ohio were illegal and that their ratifications should be counted. Even so, as of April 1, 1868, the approval of six more states was necessary to validate the amendment. Let us further assume that the Reconstruction Act of March 2, 1867, was constitutional, and that ratification by the governments of the reconstituted southern states would count toward the necessary total. Even if we make all these assumptions, it remains a fact that the southern state governments could have a voice in ratifying the amendment only if they were duly recognized as governments at the time they acted on the amendment. Congress had taken it upon itself—properly or improperly, it does not matter for present purposes—to be the arbiter of whether the governments were legitimate. At that point Congress changed the rules somewhat. Heretofore, ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment had been a necessary qualification for readmission to statehood, but not a sufficient one, which is to say that after the non-government of a state ratified, Congress would consider readmission. An act passed June 25, 1868, altered the procedure. The preamble of the act declared that several southern states had “framed constitutions of State government which are republican”; article one enacted that each of them “shall be entitled and admitted to representation in Congress as a State of the Union” automatically when they ratified the amendment. Obviously, however, they were not states at the time they ratified, for if they were, they would already have been “entitled” to representation.



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Some people may say that regardless of these problems, it is too late to do anything about it. The Fourteenth Amendment is part of the Constitution and that is that. But this is an un-Rothbardian attitude. Rothbard always favored getting to the root of the matter and that should be our view of the illegally-ratified Fourteenth Amendment.

There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from other nations.

– George Washington, *Farewell Address* [September 7, 1796]

adapting ourselves to changing resources...it embodies a networked approach to mission that enhances both effectiveness and shared commitment...

Is this not a “tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” (*Macbeth* Act V, Scene V). One fears that what is afoot here is worse than mere idiocy.

The Church’s most prestigious educational institutions have been peddling Marxist and woke prattle for decades. No surprise at seeing graduates of Catholic universities excitedly joining the campaigns for Marxist candidates. They have received ample preparation, having been spoon-fed this ideology for their entire time of university matriculation. Pity that not even one bishop raised his voice against this wholesale abduction of one of the most venerable institutions of Western civilization.

Paul Johnson wrote with chilling prescience of this crisis in his magnum opus, *Modern Times*:

The greatest event of recent times—that God is dead, that the belief in the Christian God is no longer tenable, is beginning to cast its first shadows over Europe. Among the advanced races, the decline and ultimately the collapse of the religious impulse leave a huge vacuum. The history of modern times is in great part the history of how that vacuum had been filled. Nietzsche rightly perceived that the most likely candidate would be what he would call the Will to Power, which offered a more comprehensive and in the end a more plausible explanation of human behavior than either Marx or Freud. In place of religious belief, there would be secular ideology. Those who had once filled the ranks of the totalitarian clergy would become totalitarian politicians. And, above all, the Will to Power would produce a new kind of Messiah, uninhibited by any religious sanctions whatever, and with an unappeasable appetite for controlling mankind. The end of the Old Order, with an unguided world adrift in a relativistic universe, was a summons to such a gangster-statesmen to emerge.

To Americans in general and Catholics in particular, there must be an awakening to the multi-tentacled hydra that has been growing beneath our very feet. Thinking this overwrought or to persist in leaving it to someone else to address this enormity is an invitation to demise.

Belloc’s premonitory words are still bracing. Though this author has frequently cited them, they do not cease being terribly pertinent:

We sit by and watch the barbarian, we tolerate him. In the longest stretches of peace, we are not afraid. We are tickled by his irreverence. His cosmic inversion of our old certitudes and fixed creeds refreshes us: we laugh. But as we laugh we are watched by large unlawful faces from beyond, and on these faces, there is no smile.

Sitting idly will certainly guarantee that the hammer and sickle will indeed be coming to a town near you.

Author

Fr. John A. Perricone

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Hammers and Sickles Coming Soon to a Town Near You

By Fr. John A. Perricone

August 3, 2026

We have sat idly by while the barbarians have rushed through the gates of Western Civilization. If we continue as such, we will soon be marching under a new flag of global tyranny.

Hammer and Sickle? Who under the age of 60 would even remember that barbaric symbol of Communism? Or the tens of millions it executed under its totalitarian death grip? Or the fact that several nations still smart beneath its jackboot?

Given the degraded state of contemporary education, such ignorance is to be expected. To call this a mere problem is too benign a word, like calling the bombing of Dresden an incident. No, tragedy more befits this development.

Educated Americans sincerely query how such amnesia could have settled upon our nation. The statistics take us aback. Nearly 38 percent of Americans under the age of 30 believe socialism is better than capitalism. Take no consolation that we are speaking about socialism not communism. Hardly a hair's difference lies between them. Communism is being garroted with a piano wire; socialism is being garroted with a silk scarf. Both are fatal.

This disturbing landscape is being dramatically brought to the forefront of American attention by the election of politicians boasting their socialism *bona fides*. Socialist politicians staff their campaigns, and then their administrations, with a youth brigade torn right out of Mao's Cultural Revolution. Very little difference lies between a Mamdani cabinet and a Red Guard Struggle Session.

Take a glance at the political platform of the Democratic Socialists of America:

- abolition of police and jails
- abolition of the War Department
- abolition of the Constitution
- abolition of Congress and the presidency

It would be incautious to dismiss this as the rantings of a lunatic fringe. Doing so would be as foolhardy as the Romanovs dismissing Lenin. More disturbing is its currency with the young.

This predicament did not rise up suddenly as Athena rising fully armored out of the head of Zeus. No, the gestation period extends back over a century. Faint echoes are present in John Dewey's 1938 *Experience and Education* as well as in his entire oeuvre. Having seeded his educational antinomianism for some twenty years at Columbia's Teachers College, the die was cast. His radical program to replace, with careful cultivation of the intellect, perennial truth with social activism was at a gallop.

Out went the millennial anthropology of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas which guided the nurturing of the human intellect. Forgotten were classics such as Fr. Edward Leen's *What is Education?* or Fr. Sertillanges' *The Intellectual Life*. Here was the triumph of *praxis* over *intellectus* which portended dire consequences.

This frontal attack upon the metaphysical structure and thrust of the intellect cast its roots deeply among America's intelligentsia. Soon, "progressivism" in education was setting its roots far and wide, from grammar schools to universities. Like termites chewing at a foundation, its progress was furtive, lest it alarm a naïve American public still informed by a robust Judeo-Christian ethos.

A somnolent American public had shivers down its spine when Alger Hiss, a high official in the State Department, was convicted in 1950 of treason.

This alarming turn of events was capped by the stunning revelation of Whittaker Chambers in his absorbing account *Witness*, where he traces his ardent affiliation in the Communist party to his conversion to Christianity. In testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee sealing Hiss' fate, Chambers remarked with melancholy, "I know that I am leaving the winning side for the losing side but it is better to die on the losing side than to live under communism."

He wrote sometime later to his friend William F. Buckley Jr. with a note of apocalyptic doom:

It is idle to talk about preventing the wreck of Western civilization. It is already a wreck from within. That is why we can hope to do little more than snatch a fingernail of a saint from the rack or a handful of ashes from the faggots, and bury them secretly in a flowerpot...

The Long March (to borrow a term of Chairman Mao) proceeded through American education with nary a whisper of alarm from the American people. The Marxist paradigm was settling in upon the academy in carefully timed increments: lessening of discipline, abolition of prayer in public schools, the introduction of new systems of mathematics and reading. History textbooks that undermined American exceptionalism and applauded non-Western thinking began to appear. Upon entering the university classroom, students were already primed for advanced indoctrination.

It would take the thunderbolt of Buckley's 1951 *God and Man at Yale* to unmask the extent this perilous revolution had taken. It was nothing less than revolution infiltrating the commanding heights of American culture.

With this inversion firmly established, a prominent academic struggled to sound a final, desperate warning bell. In 1987, Dr. Allan Bloom, distinguished professor of European Literature at both the University of Chicago and Cornell University, published his brilliant monitum *The Closing of the American Mind*. With a careful dissection of the roots of the decline of American education, he registered his panic that this presaged nothing less than civilizational chaos.

Yet, slowly, the demise widened. Certain flashpoints alerted the American public to the jarring crisis right at their footsteps. Such a flashpoint occurred only a few days ago.

Scores of Americans had their jaws drop at the Congressional hearings on July 21. The Smithsonian Institution's director, Anthea Hartig, smugly defended this venerable institution's descent into wholesale Marxist ideology. To many an American's astonishment, the long-hidden policy agenda of this once venerable institution was unmasked, leaving many a citizen stunned.

Their policy list was jolting:

- Politeness, objectivity, and hard work are symptoms of white supremacy.
- Celebration of transgenderism, bondage, and sadomasochism were routinely on display in their public exhibits.
- "The Smithsonian's woke Secretary Lonni Bunch sent curators into the streets to collect trash left behind by arsonists, vandals, and looters as 'historical artifacts that need to be saved and collected for posterity.'"
- Anthea Hartig, who describes herself as "propped up by the cushions of whiteness and the pillows of the bourgeois" had the Institution speak of history as a "prime tool of social justice."
- One exhibit listed the evils of whiteness as rugged individualism, self-reliance, hard work, objectivity, the nuclear family, progress, respect for authority, and delayed gratification.

In a better time, the Roman Catholic Church, with her mighty doctrinal voice, daunting religious orders, and sprawling constellation of impressive educational institutions would have acted as a battering ram against this Marxist stampede.

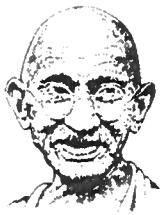
Today, they augment it. Official pronouncements seem only to act as an echo chamber of woke ideology. In lockstep with the decaying culture, many in the Church today add to the quicksand enveloping the West. Try to find a single bishop censuring his Catholic university for propping up this Marxist drumbeat. Rather, these educational Catholic institutions of higher learning are on the cutting edge of leftist ideology, especially the erstwhile gold standard Jesuit colleges and universities.

A sliver of evidence to this alliance of woke ideology and Catholic leadership was on full display only recently. In a cringeworthy letter recently promulgated by the provincial of a major religious order, he announced the redesign of one of their parishes:

I am excited by a new approach to structuring parish ministry because it reflects well the contemporary way of proceeding...discernment, collaboration and networking. By fostering collaboration amongst our priests and lay colleagues, this is a response to the signs of the times...

COVENANT & *civilization*

GANDHI, HITLER & CHURCHILL in Limbo: A TRIALOGUE



January 30 is a strange combination of historical anniversaries. It is the anniversary of Mohandas Gandhi's assassination, when the Indian proponent of nonviolence fell to a bullet fired at point-blank range. It is the anniversary of Adolf Hitler's inauguration into power, when German political office became a kind of altar, and a nation offered up its religious conscience for the promise of national-socialist rebirth. It is also the anniversary of Winston Churchill's funeral, when Great Britain buried a man whose words had stiffened a civilization's spine in its darkest hour. These events sit together on the calendar as warnings on top of warnings, and history waits to see whether men will learn.

The following trialogue between the three men takes place in a fictional locale that resembles the shadowy threshold C.S. Lewis describes at the beginning of *The Great Divorce*, a realm between death and the particular judgment before the throne of Christ, a fictional limbo of sorts.

Gandhi, Hitler, and Churchill find themselves in a shadowy, lifeless place — no sun, no stars, no comforting scenery. There is only a dark, neutral expanse, as if the world had been drained of ornament so that nothing remained except what each man had become. They stand three paces apart, and they all know the same thing without saying it: Death had ended the era of their speeches and begun their time of reckoning.

Churchill is the first to speak. His voice carries the old steadiness, though it lacks the swagger of his wartime broadcasts. He had never been a man of easy devotion, yet he had lived close enough to Christian truth to know what it kept from collapsing.

"So," he says, looking from one to the other, "this is where celebrated men are reduced to the size of their souls."

Gandhi's eyes are calm, observant. "It is also where the noise ends. In life, the noise confuses. Here, all that noise is finally gone."

Hitler's posture remains rigid, as if he were still standing before an audience whose applause he desired to stoke. "Don't pretend this makes us equals. This is weakness, that's all. Just weakness after death. And I reject this weakness."

Churchill holds his gaze. "Weakness after death is an odd complaint from a man who demanded so much worship in life."

Hitler's jaw clenches. "I demanded discipline. I demanded unity. I demanded destiny. You don't build a people by letting them drift and rot. You forge them. You lift them out of humiliation."

"And in your furnace," Churchill says, "you burned the very idea that a man answers to anything higher than the state."

Gandhi interjects gently. "You see, accountability is the heart of politics. If you remove it, then politics becomes nothing more than a contest of force."

Hitler laughs once, harshly. "Politics is force. It always has been. All your sermons are mere decoration. A nation survives by sheer power of the will."

Churchill answers with a dry steadiness. "Yes, and a wolf pack survives by sheer power of the will, too."

Gandhi tilts his head toward Churchill quizzically. "And yet, you speak as if you never used force."

Churchill doesn't flinch. "Of course I used force. Evil doesn't surrender because you ask it politely. I used force with grief, not with delight. And anyway, the question is never whether force exists. The question is whether that force answers to justice."

Hitler's eyes flash. "Justice is whatever the victors say it is."

Churchill's voice tightens. "That's the slogan men repeat when they're afraid of judgment. Yes, history may be written by victors, but history itself is not the Judge."

Gandhi nods faintly. "So, you believe there is a Judge beyond history."

"I've never been able to dismiss it," Churchill answers. "Call it God. Call it moral law. Call it the court above the court. I didn't always live as a man mastered by the Lordship of Christ, but I never doubted this: Once you remove God, you eventually make the human person disposable. You make him a thing you can spend or, worse, destroy."

Hitler's lip curls. "Christianity nearly destroyed Germany with its decadence. It teaches compassion for the weak. It dilutes resolve. Its priests use guilt as a chain to control men. My movement freed Germans from religious shackles."

Churchill steps forward. "No. You claimed to free men, but you did it by silencing their consciences, and then you called it liberation. That's the oldest tyranny in the book, and you know it."

Hitler's voice rises. "I gave my people meaning! A nation must have a sense of myth, sacrifice, and blood; otherwise, it dissolves into nothing."

Gandhi's face tightens at the word *blood*. "Meaning that demands blood is a cruel meaning."

Hitler spins toward him. "And you? You stirred masses with the language of sacrifice!"

"Sacrifice, yes; blood, no," Gandhi answers. "A man may offer himself. He may refuse to offer his neighbor. That is the line."

Churchill glances toward Gandhi. "And that line is one which should be crossed only in extreme need. What's more, history shows that once God is removed from a nation's center, that line gets crossed quickly, and men pretend they had no choice."

Hitler laughs again. "God is removed because God is a myth. Nations are real. Race is real. Power is real."

Churchill replies slowly, with that familiar understatement that carried so much weight. "Yes, and if God is a myth, then man becomes a myth, too. He becomes a tool. A number. Material. And once you treat men like material, the strong can justify anything and call it progress."

Gandhi lowers his eyes, as if turning inward. "I believed in God, though I spoke of God as truth. I believed that truth is the highest law."



Churchill nods. "I understand that instinct. But you know as well as I that truth, when it becomes only a principle, can be bent by the man who speaks most beautifully and knows how to charm and sway the crowd."

Hitler smirks. "Truth is whatever builds the nation."

Gandhi lifts his gaze. "Then truth becomes propaganda, and you start believing your own slogans."

Hitler steps forward, speaking with a rousing cadence. "A people needs one story. They need one banner. They need a leader who embodies it. They need unity of blood, unity of purpose, unity of destiny. Christianity tears apart that unity because it demands loyalty beyond the nation!"

Churchill looks at him without anger, and somehow that makes his words heavier. "Yes, the Christian claim puts a boundary on the nation because the nation isn't God. Even I could see that that boundary is a necessary guardrail. Once the state becomes ultimate, it demands offerings that only God may demand, and its altar fills with the shed blood of human lives, which you then call necessary."

Hitler's eyes narrow. "You were no different. You wielded words like weapons."

Churchill draws a short, almost weary breath. "I used words to defend the West. I never pretended I was a saint, though I did strive for civic virtue."

Gandhi again seems to turn inward. "I admired Jesus. I read the Gospels with reverence. I saw in Him purity, moral clarity, and unrelenting courage in suffering. Yet I could not accept the Church as the vessel of that vision. I saw its hypocrisy. I saw its empire. I saw missionaries speaking of love while serving corrupted power."

Churchill's expression softens. "You saw accurately. Christians have often been poor witnesses. This has been true throughout history. But even I understood this: The rot in Christians doesn't refute the truth of Christ. It just means they'll answer for it, and, if they are ministers of His Gospel, they'll answer for it with compound interest."



Gandhi hesitates. "Still, you speak as though Christ must be the anchor. Why must it be Christ? Why not simply God or truth or the natural law

or conscience?"

Churchill's voice lowers, becoming somber. "Because man's conscience can be trained to lie. Because *truth* can become a principle that a clever and eloquent man bends and sells. Because *God* can become a word men can mold into their own image until it flatters them. Christ — the historical, biblical Christ — stands outside our manipulation. I didn't cling to Him as a disciple should, but I recognized that if He's real, then He's the one measure you can't bribe. Real mercy can't be purchased."

Hitler cuts in sharply. "Mercy is weakness!"

Churchill doesn't raise his voice. "You say that because you confused mercy with indulgence. Mercy is a strength that refuses to become cruelty. You had strength, and you chose cruelty. You chose it again and again."

Hitler's face hardens. "I chose necessity."

Gandhi's voice grows firmer. "You see, necessity is evil's favorite mask. It's the mask evil wears when it wants to look respectable."

The dark expanse around them seems to thicken and press closer, as if the place itself leans in to listen.

Hitler stares at Gandhi. "You talk about evil, and yet your nonviolence didn't stop violence."

Gandhi answers steadily. "Nonviolence is not a technique. It is a discipline of the soul. It does not guarantee outcomes. It guarantees fidelity to a way of life that, I hoped, would inspire a social transformation."

Churchill looks at them. "I must ask, fidelity to what? Because if you're faithful only to a principle, it may remain noble, but it stays incomplete. It leaves the wound of man's fallenness untouched."

Gandhi turns to him. "Incomplete?"

"Yes, because the heart doesn't only need direction. It needs to transcend itself. Man's crisis is never only social or political. It is moral and, for want of a better expression, spiritual. Call it revolt. Call it amnesia. Call it pride. I watched it happen on a continental scale, and I watched men call it enlightenment."

Hitler sneers. "*Spiritual*. You're talking like a priest."

"I'm talking like a man who watched what happens when the old Christian grammar is ripped away and replaced by slogans. When priests are replaced by commissars, politics becomes a counterfeit religion. It offers salvation through the state. It demands faith in a leader. It punishes freedom as treason. It baptizes violence as progress. It uses the language of Heaven to justify Hell."

Hitler's voice drops. "And it works."

"For a season," Churchill says. "Then the bill arrives, and it arrives in blood, even the blood of its originators."

Gandhi's gaze falls again, and when he speaks, it is with a tremor of interior struggle. "If Christ is the measure, then I fear I kept Him at a distance. I

solves the nation."

"Yes," Churchill said, "and in doing so it saves the human person. The nation exists for man, not man for the nation. Reverse that and you end up with camps, pits, and smoke."

Hitler's eyes burn. "That belief destroyed Germany."

"That belief," Churchill replies, "exposed what Germany had allowed itself to become."

Gandhi interjects. "Both of you speak of nations as if they were moral beings."

"In a strict sense, they aren't," Churchill says. "But they amplify the collective moral conscience of their citizens. We have all seen this firsthand. Nations magnify either virtue or vice depending on what governs them, and depending on who gets to speak."

"And what has to govern them?" Gandhi asks.

"Truth," Churchill answers. "And truth requires a transcendent Judge beyond power. Otherwise, truth becomes whatever the strong can enforce."

Hitler shakes his head. "Your Christ offers weakness where strength is required."

"He offers strength," Churchill replies, "that refuses to become evil. And that refusal is exactly what you hated."

The word *evil* seems to echo, though there are no walls around them.

Gandhi's voice softens again, now plainly interior. "If Christ is truth incarnate, then my hesitation was not intellectual. It was personal. He wanted my whole allegiance. I feared losing myself."

"And instead," Churchill says, "you carried yourself right to the edge of surrender, and then you stopped."

Gandhi closes his eyes. "Yes."

Hitler glares at them with contempt. "This is confession talk. I answered to Germany. I fought for Germany. I lived for Germany. I died for Germany."

Churchill challenges him. "You lived for power. You fought for domination. You died in despair. And Germany paid the price. Your people paid it, and so did the world."

Hitler stiffens. "And you? You talk like you're innocent."

"No, I'm saying I suspect that there's an accounting beyond the applause of men. I defended Christian civilization more faithfully than I lived its demands, and I know that difference will be weighed. I know it will be measured."

A silence follows, heavier than before. Then something changes. The darkness ahead does not retreat but thins, as if depth were being replaced by distance. Something luminous presses through it, still without form, yet unmistakable as presence.

Gandhi senses it first. He inhales sharply. "There is something."

Hitler turns, unsettled. "Light."

Churchill straightens, voice restrained rather than triumphant. "Yes."

The light does not blaze. It does not assault. It simply *is*, growing steadily, irresistibly. Then the light slowly begins to affect them interiorly. It compels the very moral fiber of their inner beings. Each reacts differently.

Gandhi's voice trembles. "This is judgment."

"Yes," Churchill says. "And if mercy exists, then we can only hope it's mercy that greets us with the truth, not mercy that denies the truth of our actions."

Hitler takes an involuntary step back, and firmly declares, "I DO NOT BOW!"

"You will eventually," Churchill replies quietly, "if the Christian claim is true."

Gandhi steps forward, his face lit with both fear and longing. "If this is Christ, then He is more than a moral teacher."

Churchill's throat tightens. "Then all reality has a face. And the Church, for all her wounded messengers, has been guarding something I stood near, argued for in public, but never fully obeyed."

The light intensifies. It is no longer abstract, no longer distant. It carries weight, intelligence, and unmatched authority.

Hitler clenches his fists. "I will not be judged by a crucified Jew!"

The light grows brighter still, and the darkness before them recedes as if it had never possessed substance at all.

Gandhi whispers, "I sought truth."

"And now," Churchill says, and he sounds startled by how simple it is, "the truth you pursued as an idea has become a Presence that pursues you. And it won't be talked down."

Hitler stands rigid, caught between defiance and terror.

Churchill takes one step forward, his cane forgotten. "All our systems end here," he says, tears welling in his eyes. "Empires, ideologies, philosophies, even our best intentions. It all ends here. What remains is the question we spent our lives avoiding."

The light presses closer.

"And the question," Churchill concludes, "is not whether God will answer to man, but whether man will finally answer to God made flesh, Jesus Christ, in whom all truth finds its fullness. Whatever words we used in life, we must now answer His question: *Who do you say that I am?* I never fully answered that question, yet I now must."

By MARCUS PETER

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The Cushion Ran Out: Bessent's Oil "Mystery" Isn't One

LARRY C. JOHNSON • AUGUST 21, 2026 •

Scott Bessent says he doesn't understand why oil is going up. On Thursday, hours after announcing that Washington would keep its naval blockade and hit Iran with the toughest sanctions in history, the Treasury Secretary watched crude climb and told CNBC, "*I'm not sure why oil has popped up on this.*" He called it a spike he doesn't understand, and waved it off as noise. Buried in the bafflement is a remarkable assumption: that slapping draconian sanctions on a major oil producer should make oil *cheaper*. By Friday Brent was near \$94, a second straight weekly gain above 5 percent, with Trump promising an "*economic D-Day*" on Monday.

There is no mystery. This is a Treasury Secretary watching the wrong gauge. Oil is not priced off sanctions announcements; it is priced off barrels reaching refineries. And the barrels stopped arriving in the quantities the world needs — not this week, but as the inevitable result of a strait that has been shut since February. The only puzzle is why it took until August to bite. The answer is that for five months, the shortage was hidden. Break the supply picture since the February 28 attack into three phases and the "mystery" dissolves.

Phase 1 — the oil already at sea (February 28 to early April)

When Hormuz seized up, the oil that fed the world for the next five weeks was already floating toward it. Tankers loaded before the attack kept discharging on schedule, and the in-transit pipeline — millions of barrels between the Gulf and its buyers — emptied onto docks as if nothing had happened. Futures traders saw what was coming and panicked early: WTI leapt from about \$67 on February 27 to nearly \$99 by March 13, a 47 percent spike in two weeks. But the barrels on the water kept landing, the feared scarcity didn't show up at the refinery gate, and by early April the last pre-war cargoes had delivered. Then a second cushion arrived.

Phase 2 — the great drawdown (April to late July)

This is the phase that lulled Bessent, and evidently still governs his instincts. Staring at a Hormuz closure that removed an estimated 11 to 16 million barrels a day of Gulf supply, governments did exactly what strategic reserves exist for: they opened the tanks.

The scale was unprecedented. The IEA launched the largest coordinated emergency release in its history — more than 400 million barrels across 32 countries — with the United States alone committing 172 million barrels over a 120-day period out of the Strategic Petroleum Reserve. Together the releases fed roughly 2.5 million barrels a day into the market for about four months. It worked, exactly as long as it could. Prices sagged from the March highs back into the high \$70s and low \$80s, and the crisis took on the appearance of something survivable. To a casual eye at the Treasury, the war had been absorbed.

It hadn't. It had been financed out of a tank with a bottom. The entire 400-million-barrel release amounted to roughly four days of global consumption thrown against a disruption running for months, and the American drawdown ran on a 120-day clock that started in mid-March — set to expire, by arithmetic, right at the end of July. The cushion was never a fix. It was a sedative with a printed expiration date.

Phase 3 — the bill arrives (August)

In early August the sedative wore off, and the market felt the shortage for the first time.

The reserve gauge tells it plainly. The US SPR held about 415 million barrels before the war; it fell to 305 million by the end of July and then under 300 million in August — 298.7 million barrels, the lowest since 1983 — bound for roughly 243 million once the ordered release finishes. And the paper figure flatters it: the GAO found more than a quarter of the reserve can't even be drawn on account of decayed infrastructure, and what's gone won't be replaced until around 2028. The largest tool the world had for hiding the Hormuz hole is spent, with no comparable barrel behind it. Strip away the cushion and price does the only thing left to do — converge on what a shut strait actually implies. That is why crude is surging *now*, in August, and not in March. Bessent's sanctions didn't cause it. They merely arrived at the same moment the reserves stopped covering for them.

The surprise is the tell

Set against that timeline, the expectation that sanctions would push oil down is wrong three ways at once.

Wrong on direction: sanctions on Iran *remove* barrels — Iranian crude, most of it going to China, is supply — so threatening to choke it off on top of the Hormuz cutoff tightens the balance further. Maximum pressure is a bullish input for oil, full stop. Wrong on variable: no Treasury designation manufactures a barrel of crude. Sanctions can bankrupt a seller; they cannot feed a refinery, and it is refineries that set the price. Wrong on timing: Bessent read the Phase 2 lull as stability, when it was borrowed calm funded out of emergency stocks. Mistaking that for normal is precisely how you end up “surprised” the moment the cushion empties.

A market that jumps when you sanction an oil producer, during a supply crunch, after the reserves suppressing prices have run dry, is not being mysterious. It is being obvious. The mystery exists only for a man reading the wrong instrument — the same man who, a war earlier, professed not to understand why threatening Iran moves the price of oil.

What this isn't

One qualifier is worth stating plainly — and even it cuts toward the shortage, not away from it. Yes, US commercial crude *built* in August. But that build is the wrong barrel. What America produces is light sweet shale; what its refineries were built to run is heavy sour. Nearly 70 percent of U.S. refining capacity is optimized for heavier grades — which is why roughly 90 percent of the crude the country imports is heavier than its own shale, and why the Gulf Coast's cokers and hydrocrackers were built in the first place. Light sweet crude underproduces the middle distillates the economy actually moves on — diesel and jet fuel — and refiners cannot blend their way around the gap. So a shale inventory build is cold comfort: the United States still has to import sour crude to make diesel and jet, and it drained its Strategic Petroleum Reserve at record rates precisely to bridge that mismatch once the war choked off sour barrels. The only clean sense in which the U.S. is better off is the Brent–WTI spread — Brent near \$94, WTI near \$86 — which shows the sharpest raw-crude scarcity concentrated in Hormuz-dependent Asia and Europe. On the fuels that matter, America is far less insulated than a crude-inventory number makes it look.

The remainder is risk premium — traders bidding up ahead of Monday, sharpened by Ukrainian strikes on Russian refineries. And Washington's claim that large volumes still move through the strait is self-reported by an interested party, uncorroborated by independent tracking that shows transit at a fraction of pre-war levels, and discounted here. Every one of these forces pushes the price the same way: up. The caveats change the mechanism. None of them reverses the direction.

Bottom line

Bessent's sanctions did not fail to lower the oil price. They were never going to. For five months the world buried a Hormuz-sized hole in supply under the largest emergency reserve release the IEA has ever run, and for five months Washington could threaten to strangle Iran without paying a visible price for it. That grace period ended in August, when the tanks hit forty-year lows and the shortage finally reached the refineries. The Secretary is “surprised” only because he mistook a borrowed calm for a durable one and keeps looking to his sanctions machinery to explain a number set out on the water. The market isn't confused. It's presenting the bill — and the reserve that was quietly paying it is empty.

Sources: CNBC and the Mediaite/Raw Story/Fox cluster (Bessent's August 20 oil remarks); Trading Economics, Fortune, and OilPrice.com (Brent near \$94 and WTI near \$86 on August 21, the second consecutive weekly gain, “economic D-Day,” the Brent–WTI spread); US Congressional Research Service, the Bipartisan Policy Center, Brookings, and RBN Energy (the March–April IEA 400-million-barrel coordinated release, the U.S. 172-million-barrel contribution, the ~2.5 mb/d four-month buffer, the ~4-days-of-consumption scale, the 11–16

How Finland Destroyed Itself for NATO

NATE BEAR • AUGUST 19, 2026 •

Finland, often known as the happiest country in the world, now has the highest unemployment rate in Europe, demand for food aid has exploded by more than 70%, and homelessness, which had been declining for more than ten years, has increased 34% in just two years. Conditions in the country are so bad that almost 20% of Finland's population is now considered at risk of poverty,

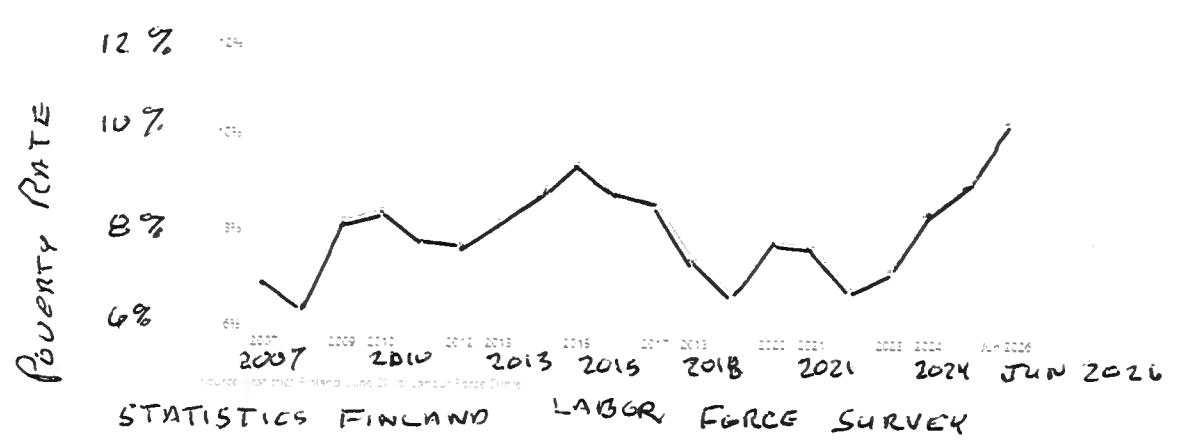
Once considered the standard bearer for the good life, for competent governance and a strong social state, Finland is unravelling at warp speed. What has gone wrong so quickly?

In three words, NATO, austerity and Russophobia.

All are linked. Finland is slashing its social state to the bone to meet NATO's 5% GDP military spending target, a target which became necessary after the country abandoned neutrality and swapped the welfare state for the warfare state after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The speed of the collapse has been stunning.

In 2019, the at-risk of poverty rate was 11% and by 2022 the country was on course to hit record low unemployment.



Everything changed after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the country's hysterical over-reaction to an imagined threat. This is not just my judgement. A number of Finnish academics, including Heikki Patomäki, professor of world politics at the University of Helsinki, have said that the conditions simply did not warrant Finland joining NATO, cutting off its economically valuable links to Russia and militarising its border.

The facts support this.

At the time of its invasion of Ukraine, Russia had just a couple of thousand troops spread out across various bases on its 1,340 km border with Finland. The bases were home to handful of missile defence batteries and a few dozen tanks. Many of the troops and much of the equipment was subsequently deployed to Ukraine, leaving the bases empty. There was obviously no invasion threat, and Putin in May 2022 emphasised this in a phone call to Finland's then-president Sauli Niinistö.

But by this point, the Russophobia and hysteria for NATO membership had begun to take on a life of its own. Sanna Marin, Finland's young female prime minister at the time, and a liberal media darling, was a particularly effective saleswoman. Despite claiming in the days following Russia's invasion that there was no threat, her tone became decidedly more hawkish in the months that followed. She said Russia "poses a threat to all of us" and began talking like a war-time leader, saying in September 2022 that "Russia may challenge Finland, blackmail us and threaten us, but we will not give in." Bear in mind, Russia at this point had practically zero troops and equipment on its western border with Finland. The Russian threat she was invoking was entirely imagined, an hallucination.

Nevertheless, in April 2023, Finland joined NATO, just days after Marin was defeated by the right and far-right in an election where the policy choice on Russia was one of uniformity, with

the conservatives, the ethno-nationalists and Marin's social democrats all singing the same tune.

After her defeat, Marin scuttled off to work for Tony Blair, while the new conservative-nationalist government set about decimating Finland's welfare state to pay for the privilege of NATO membership.

The Finnish government is now a substantial way through its programme to cut €9 billion of public spending by 2027, including large reductions to social security (including housing, child, and unemployment benefits) healthcare, education, and municipal funding budgets, while it also increasing taxes on average earners. Cuts to healthcare provision have been particularly brutal, including a large reduction in hospital staff numbers, elderly care and disability services while redefining "minimum service obligations" to justify providing patients with lower quality care. The government has also slashed funding for organisations working on peace and initiatives which would address the new cold war-style relations with Russia.

In addition, the new government fully closed all the border crossings with Russia that Marin's Social Democrats had partially closed, and began building large sections of a border fence, securitised with troops, night vision cameras and motion detectors.

And while the entire country is now suffering as a result of the pro-war paranoia that has gripped Finland's leaders, its border towns have taken a particular beating.

Before the war, Russians routinely crossed to shop, eat, stay in hotels and visit holiday properties they owned in the towns and villages along the border. That has all gone away. One estimate cited in a recent Finnish study puts the loss of Russian tourism in the border region of South Karelia at as much as €1 million per day. Unemployment in some border regions is now approaching 20%.

The border also used to be an important commercial gateway between the EU and Russia, but its closure eliminated much of the road freight and transit business. The OECD says eastern Finland has gone from being an "economic gateway" to a "security barrier," a transformation which of course it praises rather than mourns, claiming that confronting Russia is important not only for Finland but for Europe as a whole.

Then there are the commodities like gas and timber.

In 2021 Russia accounted for about 92% of Finland's gas imports. Finland has replaced all of that with a mix of sources, including far more expensive LNG from the US, meaning that Finland, after having some of the lowest gas prices in Europe, now has the highest gas prices in Europe.

As for timber, in 2021, 70% of Finland's wood imports came from Russia, and this wood supplied approximately 10% of all the raw wood used by Finnish industry. Pulp mills in Finland subsequently went bust and the industry faced shortages which persist to this day after the EU, with Finland's support, banned countries from buying wood from Russia.

Finland's decisions, both independently and collectively through the EU, have immiserated many millions of Finnish citizens. Yet at the same time as the country is slashing the social state, it is spending more money than ever, around \$8.1 billion in 2025, on weapons of war to fight a threat that previously didn't exist. A threat that Finland has *made* real by its new-found anti-Russia NATO militancy, with Putin promising to respond to Finland's border build-up.

And among the beneficiaries of a new tooled-up and aggressive Finland are the arms dealers of the Israeli apartheid-genocide complex, which in 2024 sold Finland its questionably functional "David's Sling" air defence system for €316 million. Finland **has also bought** tank and ship missiles from the Israeli company Rafael which supplied most of the weapons and equipment used to commit the genocide of Gaza. The Finnish government said Israel's genocide of Gaza would not stop it buying weapons from the country, a position which is par for the course among the morally bankrupt leaders of Europe.

Defence minister: Situation in Gaza won't affect Finland's arms trade with Israel

According to the defence minister, Finland's substantial arms purchases from Israel are extremely important, of top quality, and very well suited to the Defence Forces.

Finland is also spending €10 billion on US fighter jets, and a few billion euros on missiles and glide bombs to fire from those jets, as well as giving Ukraine €2.3 billion in direct military aid over three years.

It's all utterly deranged, but completely unsurprising given the Russophobia which pervades all European halls of power and has become embedded on the continent.

Finland has effectively taken a scythe to all the things that made it, in the eyes of many, the envy of the world. The country has trashed the model which delivered such a high standard of living, a model which included neutrality and good relations with Russia.

Instead the country has enacted a self-imposed structural adjustment programme to pay for membership of a military alliance it didn't need, with that membership creating an enemy that didn't exist, an enemy which happens to be a nuclear superpower with which it shares a huge border.

The price has been, and will continue to be a steep one, and it is a price ordinary Finns will be paying for a long time.

But it is not just in Finland.

We are watching, across Europe, the shameful replacement of the welfare state with the warfare state while the merchants of genocide and death laugh all the way to the bank.

(All my work is free to read but takes time and effort to put together, so if you appreciate it please consider upgrading or making a donation [here](#).)

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Hind Rajab's kindergarten graduation photo released by her family

After More Than Two Years, Israel Admits to Firing on Car Carrying Five-Year-Old Hind Rajab and the Ambulance Sent To Rescue Her

by Dave DeCamp | August 19, 2026 at 3:12 pm ET | Gaza, Israel

Israel has admitted that its forces fired on a car that was carrying five-year-old Hind Rajab, who was killed by the IDF along with six members of her family as they were attempting to flee Gaza City on January 29, 2024.

Hind was the only survivor of an initial attack on the vehicle and was surrounded by six dead family members as she spent hours on the phone with the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PCRS) pleading for help. The PCRS waited until it had authorization from the Israeli military to dispatch an ambulance to the area and send it along a route provided by the IDF's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT).

Despite the coordination with the IDF, once the two Palestinian paramedics arrived, they were fired on by Israeli tanks and killed. Hind was still alive after the blast that killed the paramedics and was speaking on the phone with her mother, but the PCRS lost contact with her shortly after. Nearly two weeks later, after the IDF withdrew from the area, the body of Hind, her six family members, and the paramedics, Yousef Zeino and Ahmed al-Madhoun, were recovered.

Israel admitted that its forces fired on the car, which, according to Forensic Architecture, was riddled with 335 bullet holes, and the ambulance, when announcing it was launching a criminal probe into the killings. The admission is significant since the IDF previously claimed its forces weren't in the area during the attacks. It also initially denied coordinating with the PCRS to dispatch the ambulance.

"Following review of the findings and due to alleged failures in the coordination of the movement of the Palestine Red Crescent ambulance, it has been decided to initiate a criminal investigation of the incident by military police criminal investigation division," the IDF said, according to *The Guardian*, which noted IDF investigations into the killing of Palestinians typically don't lead to convictions.

The IDF also said it was launching a probe into the March 23, 2025, massacre of 15 medics and rescue workers near Rafah, southern Gaza. The IDF initially claimed its forces fired on a vehicle that was "advancing suspiciously" and that it didn't have emergency lights, but that was contradicted by a video that emerged and showed the rescue workers arriving in a vehicle with emergency lights on before Israeli soldiers began firing on them.

The Israeli military said that it would not launch a probe into the April 1, 2024, massacre of seven World Central Kitchen workers, which included one Palestinian, one American-Canadian dual citizen, three citizens of Britain, one Australian, and a Polish citizen. The aid workers were bombed as they were traveling in three cars, also along an IDF-approved route. One by one, an Israeli drone struck all three cars as survivors of the initial strikes switched vehicles, until they were all dead.

"The IDF decision is wrong and is painful for all of us," Jose Andres, a celebrity chef who founded the World Central Kitchen, wrote on X in response to the news.

"There was no excuse for their attacks on our team. There is no excuse for any attacks on any humanitarians. We will never ever forget our friends, our heroes, who were killed in Gaza. They lost their lives trying to feed hungry people. We will never stop fighting for truth and justice for them, for their families, for all humanitarians," Andres added.

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