

British Lord boosts Afghansi terrorists

On Jan. 13, Washington Independent Writers journalist Scott Thompson interviewed Lord Eric Avebury, who has been a leading patron of the “Afghansi” terrorist apparatus. The interview was made available to EIR.

Q: You were one of the Hereditary Peers who was elected to the House of Lords?

Avebury: Yes, I survived, yes.

Q: I was calling you once again to ask where things stood with the terrorism laws in Britain. I understand that Jack Straw, under pressure from Clinton, had changed the law.

Avebury: Yeah. He introduced new legislation to make it a criminal offense to conspire to commit acts of terrorism abroad.

Q: And, that passed?

Avebury: Yes.

Q: So where do things stand for the people from repressive regimes?

Avebury: Well, that’s a good question. And, that’s precisely the objection to the legislation. If they’re not doing anything unlawful in the United Kingdom, and, in fact, in a sense, they’re aiding U.K. policy, because they’re working against tyrannical regimes, that takes it down.

For instance, everybody hates the NIF [National Islamic Front] regime in Sudan, but, if you were an exiled Sudanese, and you were working for the SPLA [Sudanese People’s Liberation Army] in Britain, then you might be committing a criminal offense. Now, when examples of this kind were given, what they said was: “Oh well, the Attorney General has to give his consent to any prosecution. And, so, the sort of cases you have in mind can easily be taken care of.” But, what we say is that it’s not reasonable to rely on the discretion of future Attorneys General, even if you think that the present one would be perfectly reasonable in making such a decision. . . .

It’s bad practice to have a law on the statutes, that allows that kind of discretion to people whom you can’t even dream of now.

Q: Have there been any cases since that ruling?

Avebury: Not as far as I’m aware. I don’t think there’s been any prosecutions at all.

Q: So, this Attorney General is exercising his discretion, as you put it?

Avebury: He seems to be. I mean, there haven’t been any cases, where (what I think) proposals have been submitted to him by the Crown Prosecution Service, as they would have to.

Q: What about complaints from other countries, how are they being dealt with?

Avebury: Well, interestingly enough, we happened to have a debate on foreign affairs yesterday. And, one of the speakers, who was an old Sri Lanka hand, was talking about the Tamil Tigers [Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)].

And he said, and everybody knows, that the LTT do have an office in London. It’s not called the LTT. They happen to have it under a cover name. But, everybody knows who they are. And, he was complaining that the government doesn’t take any action against these people. And, every so often, I get letters from Sri Lanka diplomats here, saying that the Tigers are operating openly; they’re collecting money in Britain to finance their terrorist activities in Sri Lanka: “Why doesn’t the government do something about it?”

Q: As far as I know, there are about a dozen countries that have complained about Britain harboring terrorism. I assume that using this discretion, none of these cases has ever been brought before the court?

Avebury: Egyptians are you talking about?

Q: Well, you have the Egyptians, the Saudis—

Avebury: I mean, there are restrictions. There’s a man who lives here called al-Sirri, who is accused of either murdering or attempting to murder an Egyptian Prime Minister—I can’t remember which it was. But, he’s living here as an exile. And, in fact, I believe he’s even gotten refugee status.

Q: What about Ahmad Omar Sheikh? Didn’t your government back off on that? . . . The one who was released recently—

Avebury: Oh right, okay, yes, I know who you mean. The one who was released from the Indian prison as a result of the hijacking.

Q: Exactly.

Avebury: I wasn’t aware that he was living in the U.K. There are people like that.

Q: I was told that he was a British citizen. As I was told, originally the British government welcomed him back—the Blair government—but then they started backpedaling. Do you know anything about his current status? Is that what you would expect under these new laws?

Avebury: I wouldn’t actually expect that they would refuse to grant him residence. . . .

Q: Dealing with this problem of “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”: So, there has been a change in the law on the books, but so far, to date, the law has not been put into effect?

Avebury: Well, it has, but then, maybe they haven’t quite been able to get the evidence, I think. In the past, I had taken up with Westminster, the question of the Tamil Tigers. And, while they don’t do anything about the collection of money, which is used for the purchase of weapons, and they say it’s an organization that’s ostensibly engaged in welfare—you know, humanitarian operations—but, in fact, the money is diverted and sent over to some overseas country, into the purchase of weapons. It’s quite difficult to police that. You know, I could go around and collect money and say that this is for the relief of suffering in Sri Lanka, and no one is to know, once the money has left the country, if it’s being used for some entirely different purpose. . . .

Q: And, it’s thought that the Taliban, or others of their ilk, may be active in Chechnya—

Avebury: I know, I’ve seen that allegation. I’m not sure of it. And, in fact, somebody also mentioned that in the debate we had on foreign affairs. [Deputy Speaker of the House of Lords, Baroness] Caroline Cox says that that is the case—

Q: That they are spilling over?

Avebury: That there are Taliban involved in the struggle of the Chechens against Russia.

Q: That surprises me; what do you think her motive in saying that was?

Avebury: Well, I mean, she’s very anti-fundamentalism. I mean, she claims to be pro-normal Islam, but she works closely with an organization called Christian Solidarity Worldwide. And so, they have a sort of Christian slant on everything they do. Although in some ways I admire her, because I think she does a very splendid [job] in places where there are difficult problems, like southern Sudan, Burma. But always, the victims are the Christians. Those are the ones whom she focusses on.

Q: Yes, that I’ve noticed that with her. So, what else did she have to say at the debate?

Avebury: She talked entirely on Chechnya, and she said that you should understand what the Russians are up against. This is a phenomenon which is triggered off by Islamic fundamentalism—

Q: Did she have the line that Osama bin Laden is loose in Chechnya?

Avebury: I’m not sure. I think she did mention bin Laden, yes. And, that’s her angle. You know there are all fundamentalists involved in that struggle. But, of course, most of them are native Chechen fundamentalists. I mean, according to her,

they don’t need much help from the foreigners, because there are plenty of fundamentalists in Chechnya. . . .

I think the North Caucasus, that is to say, particularly Chechnya and Dagestan, will end up being independent. But, I think also that other parts of the Russian Federation, like Tatarstan, for example, may well split off. You know, there’s no particular logic—

Q: And, then there’s the whole question of Siberia.

Avebury: Yes, absolutely. I mean, Siberia might as well be a foreign country anyway.

Q: Yes, it’s so far from Moscow—some six time zones. And, there’s very little that Moscow seems to be putting into it at the present time.

Avebury: Yes. I mean the writ of Moscow doesn’t run there, and they’ve already got quite a separate identity in all of these regions. And, things like differences in their attitude to religions, for example. I mean that in some places, they’re very hard on minority religions, and in others, they observe what is in the Russian Constitution about freedom of religion.

Q: Do any of these groups have offices in London at the present time?

Avebury: Islamic groups? Let me think. Not as such, I would say. I mean, there are people, for example—

Q: I had heard that there was recruiting going on in London for mercenaries and Muslim youth to be trained to fight in Chechnya against the Russians.

Avebury: It’s possible. I haven’t heard of it. I mean, there are groups, like, for example, the Yemenis, who were carried to prominence when some British citizens were charged with terrorist offenses in Yemen. And, it turned out that they had some close connections with a cleric in London, who has a reputation of being fairly extreme—

Q: What was that about?

Avebury: Well, the terrorists were accused of kidnapping some Western tourists. And, in the end, the Yemeni authorities sent troops to deal with it. And, there was a shoot-out, and some of the tourists were killed. The terrorists were arrested, and brought before the court. And, there was quite a lot of interest in the fact that these people were British citizens. These British citizens were tried in Yemen, and they had, as I say, this association with a fundamentalist cleric who operates in London. Now, it’s not clear to me whether there’s an organization there, or whether these are initiatives that are taken by a few individuals in a sort of random way. I mean, it’s quite possible that the cleric would have incited them to go there and commit these terrorist acts. But, without having brought into existence some formal organization that, you know, undertook these operations,

you could do it just as an ad hoc thing, couldn't you?

Q: Was there a *fatwa* issued?

Avebury: Well, there may have been, but it didn't appear. And, he's not been charged, this cleric. And, I suppose there wouldn't be enough evidence, for instance, to bring him to court under these conspiracy laws. And, that's one of the defects of the laws, they're very difficult to prove in court. Conspiracy is notoriously difficult to nail on somebody, because you've got to actually show that that person did meet with others.

Q: We have a somewhat different justice system. It seems fairly easy to prove conspiracy charges here.

Avebury: Well, you have to show under our legislation of conspiracy, that two or more people made decisions, which involved the commission of these acts. That's the basis of conspiracy. And, of course, if the meetings are clandestine and they don't keep records, then you'll never know, unless one of them gives it away. . . .

Q: So, I gather from what you've been saying that with the new laws, the conspiracy laws and so forth, there's been no effective change, but there is a Sword of Damocles—

Avebury: Yes, that's correct. That's the right way of putting

it, I think. I mean, it certainly caused some alarm amongst people that I know, who are engaged in very peaceful activities, because they weren't quite sure what the boundaries were.

Q: So, it's a law on the books, but it's just held there in abeyance for action when someone—

Avebury: When they get the evidence.

Q: My sense is that it was President Bill Clinton who forced Britain to adopt that law?

Avebury: I don't think Jack Straw needed much encouragement to pass this kind of law.

Q: Well, heretofore, as far as I know, Labour had voted against that kind of law.

Avebury: Oh, yes, but Jack Straw has moved a long way to the right since he became Home Secretary.

Q: Do you mean matters like Operation Surety, and so forth?

Avebury: I mean, he's a changed man.

Q: So, he's triangulated successfully along the Third Way?

Avebury: He certainly has.

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