

Why We Didn't Bomb Auschwitz: BBC/PBS Whitewash

An Interview with Dr. Rafael Medoff

by [Jerry Gordon](#) and Rod Reuven Dovid Bryant (March 2020)



Birkenau Train Tracks

The recent commemoration of the 75th anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp by Russian Forces on January 20, 1945 and the gathering of 50 world leaders at the World Holocaust Forum at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem brought new focus on the question of why didn't the allies Bomb Auschwitz? A BBC documentary, [1944: Should We Bomb Auschwitz?](#), that aired

originally in September 2019 and in the US as [Bombing Auschwitz](#), on January 21, 2020 on the PBS program *Secrets of the Dead*—was accused of being a “whitewash” of FDR’s betrayal of the six million European Jewish men, woman and children murdered in unspeakable ways during the Holocaust. Those accusations and more were the comments of a frequent guest on *Israel News Talk Radio—Beyond the Matrix*, Dr. Rafael Medoff, executive director of the David S. Wyman, Institute of Holocaust Studies. Rod Bryant and Jerry Gordon discussed these issues with Dr. Medoff.

Dr. Medoff is the author of more than 20 books on this and related topics; his most recent work, [The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust](#). The title stems from conversations between President Roosevelt and Rabbi Wise, a leading American Jewish Leader of both the World and American Jewish Congresses to pressure American Jews not to pursue rescue of European Jews as a ‘diversion’ of the war against Nazi Germany. A major chapter in Medoff’s latest book deals with the bombing Auschwitz controversy.

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Medoff had been approached by the BBC production team for a possible interview. He balked at the opportunity after reviewing the re-enactments portrayed in the documentary which did not reflect the realities. Among these were the facts that American Jewish leaders had approached both FDR’s Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Secretary of War Edwin Stimson with

requests to bomb the rail network and bridges on the approaches to the Auschwitz–Birkenau killing center. The *BBC* production portray a false moral quandary confronting FDR and leading figures in his Administration that bombing the death complex would have killed innocent prisoners. Instead FDR adopted the theme rescue could only be achieved through victory against Hitler’s Nazi regime on the battlefield. His Administration refused opportunities to rescue Jews when it would not have constituted a “diversion” of the war effort as senior FDR cabinet officials alleged.

In this *Israel New Talk Radio–Beyond the Matrix* interview, Medoff reveals [a filmed interview](#) was made by the David S. Wyman Institute in 2005 with 1972 Democrat Presidential candidate, the late US South Dakota Senator George McGovern. McGovern during WWII piloted B-24 Liberator missions with the USAAF 740th Bombardment Squadron over the IG Farben artificial rubber and synthetic oil complex, less than 5 miles from the killing center at Birkenau. The chimneys of the crematoria at Birkenau were used as waypoints on the final approaches to the targets at the Auschwitz industrial complex where later Nobel Laureates Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel worked as slave laborers.

McGovern confirmed the feasibility of conducting missions against the rail net and bridges, a common target for US Army Air Force missions to disrupt German troop and equipment transportation. Medoff cites the Institute’s 2005 filmed [interview](#) with McGovern saying that while FDR was his political hero, he faulted him for two failures; the incarceration in concentration camps in the American West of 120,000 Japanese Americans under Executive Order 9066 and the failure to undertake bombing of the Auschwitz–Birkenau complex that might have rescued Jews. Especially, tens of thousands of the more than 437,000 Hungarian Jews murdered in the gas

chambers whose remains burned to ashes in the four crematoria at Birkenau from May to July 1944.

Medoff and a colleague, Thane Rosenbaum, wrote a 2018 article for *The New York Jewish Week*, "[Every Generation Needs to Bomb Auschwitz.](#)" a reference to facing the moral question of using military force to prevent genocide. They cite among examples: the Clinton air campaign in the Balkans; the Obama Administration bombing of ISIS to rescue the Yazidis in Iraq, and the Trump Administration missile strikes against Syrian chemical sites. To make those decisions, Medoff says we must first learn the facts from history about why Auschwitz–Birkenau could have been bombed to disrupt the deaths of over 1.1 million at the death complex; 90 percent of whom were Jews.

Medoff noted that the official newspaper of the Palestinian Authority had published an article during the recent World Holocaust Forum urging violent attacks at the gathering of World leaders at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. He authored a letter co-signed by more than 150 holocaust historians calling for the PA leaders to fire the author of the article. Among those who didn't sign the letter were the historians of the staff of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum who created the controversial exhibit *America and the Holocaust*, seeking to absolve FDR and his Administration of failure to rescue Jews during the Shoah.

Medoff noted that it was Jewish activists who aroused Congress in late 1943 to pass a Resolution requesting the Roosevelt Administration to rescue European Jews. That pressure led to Roosevelt creating the War Refugee Board (WRB) with minimal staff and funding to accomplish this task. Nevertheless, with

largely private Jewish organization funding, the WRB wrought “miracles”. Foremost among these was the magnificent effort by the valiant Swedish Diplomat Raoul Wallenberg who spared the lives of over a hundred thousand Hungarian Jews in Budapest with the aid of Foreign neutral government consuls. Medoff estimates the WRB initiatives saved more than 200,000 Jewish lives.

What follows is the *Israel News Talk Radio–Beyond the Matrix* interview with Dr. Rafael Medoff of the David S. Wyman Institute on Holocaust Studies.

Rod Bryant: I’m Rod Bryant host of *Beyond the Matrix* with my co-host and producer, Jerry Gordon. We have a special guest who has been on before, Dr. Rafael Medoff who is one of the experts in the area of the Holocaust and has worked with integrity to make sure that we have the facts straight. We all know that there are revisionist histories all through our time of trying to refocus or shift the focus off FDR’s failure to rescue European Jews during the Holocaust. Can you explain it to our listeners?

Jerry Gordon: Dr. Medoff’s book *The Jews Should Keep Quiet*, has a large chapter on the failure of the Allies and particularly FDR to consider bombing Auschwitz, which was the subject of a recent BBC/PBS documentary. Medoff’s conclusion is that it was feasible to hit the rail network and the bridges leading to Auschwitz. Medoff discusses the stunning discovery that the Democratic presidential candidate in 1972, South Dakota Senator George McGovern, was a B-24 Liberator pilot flying over Auschwitz-Birkenau on missions attacking the IG Farben plant less than five miles away. Moreover, McGovern testified that they certainly could have hit the bridges, the

rail lines as well as the crematoria at the killing center of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Rod Bryant: Right. The BBC film used a moralistic argument against bombing that we didn't want to kill any inmates who were imprisoned in the camps. That is why we didn't bomb them. But you and I know the facts point out that they bombed the IG Farben plant, part of the Auschwitz complex, on a regular basis. They used the chimneys of the crematoria as waypoints to bomb the IG Farben artificial rubber and synthetic oil plant. The Holocaust has been prominent in the news given the 75th Anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps. Dr. Medoff is a noted Holocaust scholar, the author of more than 20 books on the subject and director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies in Washington DC. Rafael, thank you for joining us today, we really appreciate you taking time out of your busy schedule.

Rafael Medoff: Thank you for having me.

Jerry Gordon: Dr Medoff, let's start with the ceremonies in Europe and Israel, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz death camp by Soviet forces. Many people describe the American, British, and Soviet armies as heroes for liberating the camps. Do you agree with that characterization?

Rafael Medoff: They certainly were heroes for risking their lives, and often giving their lives, in World War II, in the fight against Nazi Germany and the Axis. However, it would be a mistake to refer to the liberation of the camps as an act of

heroism in the sense that we normally use that word, because the Allies did not battle with the Germans to liberate the camps. In almost every case, the Nazis had fled from the camps before the arrival of the Allied armies. The "liberation of Auschwitz," as we call it, consisted of the Russian forces, the Red Army, marching into an Auschwitz that was unprotected because the German guards and administrators had all fled, knowing that the Russians were approaching.

The Allies could have liberated the death camps while those camps were still in operation; they were certainly in the vicinity and had the military ability to do so. The military leadership—and this refers to the Americans, the British and the Soviets—were aware of the presence of these death camps and what was happening in them. However, it was the decision of President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill, and Stalin to refrain from taking any particular action to try to interrupt the mass murder in the camps or to liberate them. When we refer to the "liberation of the camps," it's more like the accidental overrunning of the camps. None of the Allied armies went out of their way to try to do anything to rescue the Jews or put the camps out of operation. Rather, they were liberated because the Allied armies were marching through Europe, defeating the Germans, and they came across the camps, essentially by accident. The soldiers, the rank-and-file soldiers, who were part of the units that entered the camps were completely shocked. Nobody had prepared them for what they were to encounter. This was what we might call an accidental liberation. Of course, we are all grateful for the tremendous sacrifices made by the Allied forces and for the care that the Allied armies gave to the few Jewish survivors who they found alive in the camps. However, to call it "liberation" implies that the Allies went in there to save the Jews, which unfortunately they did not.

Rod Bryant: Rafael, obviously it does make sense what you said that the rank and file soldier did not know that this was even going on. Further, that military leadership in the Pentagon and the staff knew about these concentration camps. Why weren't they prepared to do something about the situation?

Rafael Medoff: Because the overall policy of the Roosevelt administration was to disregard the persecution of the Jews. The military did not make its own policy; it followed the wishes and the instructions of the president. President Roosevelt's attitude toward the persecution of the Jews in Europe was essentially, "That is really none of America's business. It's not our problem. We have no obligation, moral or otherwise, to do anything about it." Therefore, the policy of the military, the War Department—as it was called in those days—was to proceed with the war effort and ignore opportunities to assist the Jews, even when those actions to help the Jews would not have detracted from the war effort in any meaningful way.

Jerry Gordon: Dr. Medoff, one of the surprising things that the Russians uncovered when they entered the precinct of Auschwitz were several hundred children. Why were they there?

Rafael Medoff: In the chaos of the final days of the operations of the Auschwitz camp, there were people left behind, either by accident by the Germans or because they were too much trouble to take along on the death marches. These were miles-long marches of tens of thousands of surviving prisoners. They were not marching towards any destination; they were essentially being marched to death. Many who had survived long months or even years in Auschwitz then sadly perished as they marched along in the freezing cold, starving,

beaten and in many cases just falling by the roadside. Some of the Jewish survivors of Auschwitz and other camps [in these marches] were liberated when they were stumbled upon, in effect, by Allied armies that were coming in the opposite direction. The Germans fled and left the Jews there standing in the road in their ragged clothes in the sub-zero temperatures. In the chaos, as the thousands of survivors of Auschwitz were being herded out of the camp to begin those death marches, there were some survivors who were too sick to march. That included a small number of children who were not noticed that remained in Auschwitz when the Red Army arrived.

Rod Bryant: Why is it important for us to bring these kinds of details to light now that may have been suppressed for the last 75 years?

Rafael Medoff: Learning as much as we can about what happened during the Holocaust is always important. The most fundamental reason of all [is] because we don't want to see such horrors repeated in our own time. The Holocaust, of course, was not the last genocide that humanity has witnessed in recent decades. We saw mass murder and other atrocities in Cambodia, in Darfur, in the Balkans and elsewhere. Every generation has faced something new and horrific. Even if not quite on the scale of Auschwitz, nonetheless each generation faces a moral dilemma of whether to intervene, take any action, to do what President Roosevelt refused to do during the Holocaust. Learning about what happened in the 1930s and the 1940s is the first step towards possible action. Knowledge is always necessary before people can be persuaded that intervention is justified.

Jerry Gordon: Dr. Medoff, one of the surprise attendees at the

World Holocaust Forum in Jerusalem was the Foreign Minister of the United Arab Emirates. At the same time, the Secretary General of the World Muslim League, from Saudi Arabia visited the Auschwitz museum in Poland. Do you think these steps by prominent Arab figures signal any kind of change in their mindset and their world?

Rafael Medoff: I would not assume that those two small gestures represent any kind of trend in the Arab or Muslim world. A small number of Arab leaders, especially those from the Gulf, have come to understand that a part of the price they need to pay for friendly relations with the United States and the West, is to at least pay lip service to the fact that there was a Holocaust. However, despite the visits that you mentioned of those two Arab Gulf leaders, the fact is that Holocaust denial is more prevalent in the Arab and Muslim countries than anywhere else in the world. I don't see any sign in recent surveys or anecdotal reports of what appears in Arab newspapers and in school textbooks, of any meaningful change in that attitude. It remains a fact that throughout the Arab world, denial of the Holocaust—and anti-Israel vitriol laced with and intertwined with Holocaust denial—is still a feature of the media and culture.

Jerry Gordon: Who was the person in the Muslim world who basically recruited Muslims to be part of the Nazi Waffen SS who later became the enemy of the new Jewish state?

Rafael Medoff: You are referring to Haj Amin Al-Husseini, better known as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. He was the pre-eminent Palestinian-Arab leader of the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. He was also a Nazi collaborator. He was indicted as a Nazi war criminal at the end of World War II in Yugoslavia for

his efforts to recruit Muslims for the Bosnian Muslim division of the Waffen SS, which engaged in numerous atrocities in 1943 and 1944.

Jerry Gordon: Dr. Medoff, there was a very different reaction to the commemoration events [in Jerusalem] from the Palestinian Authority. The official PA newspaper published an article encouraging Palestinians to launch violent attacks on the World Holocaust Forum, which was held at Yad Vashem, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. You organized an open letter calling on the Palestinian leadership to disown the article and fire the author. More than 150 Holocaust scholars from around the world signed your statement. What kind of responses did the statement receive?

Rafael Medoff: It did not receive the kind of attention in the news media that one might have assumed it would warrant. Certainly, it was an extraordinary development that an article would appear in the official newspaper of the Palestinian Authority, making such threats against Yad Vashem. Obviously, every society has its fringe elements, and there are people who make threats. However, for the Palestinian Authority leadership to publish these explicit violent threats in its newspaper, *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, is really an endorsement by the Palestinian leadership of extreme hostility towards Yad Vashem. It was nothing less than an incitement of violence against Yad Vashem. One would think that the international news media would have taken the issue seriously. I'm sorry to report that it did not. The response from the community of Holocaust scholars was very substantial—150 Holocaust scholars from numerous countries around the world signed the open statement and that was very encouraging. I think most Holocaust scholars recognized that we, as academics, should not just hide in our ivory towers, but we need to pay

attention to what is happening in the world around us. Sometimes we need to speak out. This was certainly such a case, when our colleagues at a revered Holocaust institution in Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, were being directly threatened. Thankfully, the Israeli security establishment did whatever it had to do to ensure that the threats were not carried out. There were no such attacks. It would have been much more encouraging if the Palestinian leadership had responded to this appeal from Holocaust scholars. Now if we were dealing with a normal, rational, reasonable type of regime there would have been a response. In our statement. we called on the Palestinian Authority leadership to publicly dissociate itself from the threat and to fire the writer who made the threat. Instead, unfortunately, the PA leadership made no such disavowal and did not fire him. He still writes for the newspaper just as he did previously. That is, unfortunately, a confirmation of the worst fears that many of us have that the Palestinian Authority leadership remains as profoundly hostile to Jews in Israel as it always was.

Jerry Gordon: We noticed that absent among the 150 signatories, were the historians from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Any idea why?

Rafael Medoff: That was a disappointing aspect of the response to the statement. I do not know why the staff historians at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum did not participate in this statement. Frankly, a threat against the lives of our colleagues at Yad Vashem should be something that strikes home. You would think would inspire every Holocaust scholar around the world to cry out in protest. The folks at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum turned a blind eye to this protest. I hope in the future they will take it a little more seriously.

Jerry Gordon: The other controversy was about the Allies' refusal to bomb Auschwitz, which was back in the news with a release of a BBC production and PBS program on the subject. You wrote in an article for *The History News Network*, calling the film a "whitewash." Why?

Rafael Medoff: The film produced by the BBC and aired by PBS in the US is titled *Bombing Auschwitz*. Instead of exploring the entire issue of why Auschwitz was not bombed, the film proceeded according to a false premise. The premise was that the reason the Allies did not bomb Auschwitz, the reason the Roosevelt administration rejected the many requests to bomb Auschwitz or the railway lines leading to it, was that President Roosevelt and his aides were concerned that bombing the gas chambers might accidentally injure or kill some of the Jews who were imprisoned in Auschwitz. That was the premise of the film. However, the premise itself is false. The Roosevelt administration rejected the requests for bombing for a completely different reason.

There was no debate at the time about whether the prisoners at Auschwitz would be harmed [in a bombing]. The film argues that this was the great moral dilemma and debate of 1944 regarding the question of bombing Auschwitz. It was not a debate at all. In fact, the BBC invented this debate in the film through so-called reenactments where actors claimed to be portraying different meetings and other developments. In the case of the BBC film, they're not re-enacting things that happened. They were re-enacting an imaginary version in which the BBC pretended that the Allies had, in effect, a perfectly understandable reason for not bombing Auschwitz.

Many of the requests for bombing Auschwitz had nothing to do with bombing the camp, where the prisoners were situated—they were for bombing the railway tracks and the bridges leading to the camp over which Hungarian Jews were being deported at that time, in 1944, to their deaths in Auschwitz. The requests for bombing railway tracks and bridges would not have involved any risk of civilian casualties. When the Roosevelt administration rejected the request to bomb the railways and the bridges it didn't say anything about civilian casualties. Of course, it wouldn't have made sense because there were no civilians [living] on the railroad tracks. The entire idea that concerns about harming the prisoners were at the heart of the rejection is a complete fabrication, a whitewash. The word "whitewash," frankly, is perhaps even too gentle to describe the travesty of this film. And yet, sadly, the BBC has lent the prestige of its name to this production and PBS unfortunately, chose to air it even though from a historical and scholarly point of view, the film is simply a sham.

Jerry Gordon: The BBC film gives the impression that the decision to reject the request to bomb Auschwitz was made by low-level officials in the War Department, not by the White House or other senior officials of the Roosevelt administration. Is that true?

Rafael Medoff: It is manifestly untrue. In fact, the decision to reject the request for bombing Auschwitz or the railway tracks reached some of the highest-level members of President Roosevelt's own cabinet. The documents from the time reveal that Jewish officials met with—among others—Secretary of State Cordell Hull and Secretary of War Henry Stimson and pleaded directly with them to bomb the railway tracks and the bridges. The idea that this was something handled by low-level officials and that the top brass didn't know, is simply false.

It is really part of a broader effort to try to exonerate President Roosevelt and the leadership of his administration from these decisions. When we know that the Secretary of State and Secretary of War were directly approached, then we understand that the decision to refrain from hitting the railways, the bridges or the gas chambers ultimately came from the very top.

A very important aspect of this whole discussion about the rejections of the bombing requests revolves around the fact that American planes did bomb the industrial zone of Auschwitz at the time. This is significant because when the requests by Jewish organizations were made to bomb the gas chambers or bomb the railway tracks, the War Department replied that it had conducted what we would call a feasibility study. It decided that it was impractical to bomb those targets because it would require "diverting" American bombers from other parts of Europe where they were engaged in battle operations. In fact, there were American bombers flying over the industrial zone of Auschwitz where Jewish slave laborers toiled in factories producing synthetic oil and rubber—slave laborers who included teenage Ellie Wiesel. That area was just a couple of miles from the gas chambers. Auschwitz was a huge, sprawling complex. It had an industrial area, as well as the killing area known as Birkenau. The planes that were bombing the oil factories could easily have hit the railway tracks or the gas chambers. They didn't have to be diverted from elsewhere in Europe. So, the entire basis for the American rejection was based on a lie. Furthermore, the bombers were available. They didn't have to be diverted. And as it turns out, young George McGovern was one of the pilots who flew those missions bombing the synthetic oil and artificial rubber factories at Auschwitz.

Jerry Gordon: You and your colleagues uncovered that fascinating connection between Senator McGovern, the 1972 Presidential candidate, and America's failure to bomb Auschwitz. Could you tell us about that and why was it not included in the BBC film?

Rafael Medoff: McGovern was one of the pilots in the American air force who bombed those oil factories. When, my colleagues and I at the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies learned that McGovern had played that role, we sent a camera crew, led by two noted filmmakers, out to South Dakota some years back to interview him about his experiences. The filmmakers who conducted the interview were Haim Hecht, a noted Israeli media figure, and Stuart Erdheim, who was the producer and director of an important documentary about the failure to bomb Auschwitz, called *They Looked Away*.

They interviewed McGovern and asked him about his recollections of flying over that area, and whether he thought it would have been feasible for pilots like himself to have attacked either the railways, bridges or the gas chambers themselves. McGovern said there was no doubt at all that from a military point of view, they could have attacked those targets that they were certainly within range of his and the other American bombers flying over that area. He said that although railways and bridges were not easy to hit, they are smaller targets. Nonetheless, he said, he and his fellow pilots were constantly being sent to bomb railways and bridges throughout Europe because that was an important part of the war effort. German troops and military supplies were using railway routes, so the allies were constantly hitting them even though the Germans tried to repair them. Bridges, however, took much longer to repair.

McGovern made one very important point at the conclusion of the interview that bears repeating. He said that Franklin Roosevelt was his idol, that he adored Roosevelt, he was his political hero. However, he said that it was important to recognize Franklin Roosevelt's two great failings. One, McGovern said, was the mass internment of over 120,000 Japanese Americans without any evidence that any of them had been involved in espionage on behalf of Japan. The second great failing, McGovern said, was Roosevelt's abandonment of Europe's Jews and the failure to order the bombing of the railways or the death camp.

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Jerry Gordon: Dr. Medoff, you and another scholar, Thane Rosenbaum, recently wrote an op-ed in *The New York Jewish Week* titled, "Every Generation Needs to Bomb Auschwitz." What did you mean by that title?

Rafael Medoff: One more thought before I answer your specific question. I was contacted by the BBC when they were working on this film and they asked me whether I would be willing to be interviewed for it. After I learned details of the film's premise, I realized that it was profoundly biased, and I didn't want to have anything to do with it. But in my conversations and emails with the producer, Sue Jones, I told her about the McGovern interview. I was very surprised to learn that she knew nothing about it, even though it was

extremely well-publicized at the time. In fact, we screened it on Capitol Hill before a Congressional task force, and it was a subject of many articles easily found through Google. Nonetheless, she was unaware of it. I shared with her the footage of the interview. In an email [to me], she said it was very interesting.

But apparently it wasn't interesting enough, because it was completely omitted from the BBC's film on bombing Auschwitz, which is extraordinary. Here you have one of the most prominent figures in American political culture in the last half century, who was directly involved in this question of America's refusal to bomb Auschwitz. Yet the BBC decided it wasn't even worth a few seconds in an hour-long documentary to mention McGovern or his perspective.

My conclusion is that the problem for the BBC is that McGovern would have contradicted the basic, false premise of their film and so they simply left him out. If that is not a whitewash, I don't know what is.

Now the question of every generation encountering the problem of Auschwitz, so to speak, is an important one to consider because the fundamental question that Americans always face is to what extent should the United States interfere in the affairs of other countries around the world. There is, of course, an extreme view that America should never get involved in overseas affairs unless it is directly threatened, and that human rights abuses around the world are not America's business. I reject that concept. I do not say that America has a responsibility to intervene in every country and to rescue every beleaguered people. However, in situations of extraordinary persecution—genocide, ethnic cleansing, where

America could make a difference, could use its military power, to interrupt mass murder or to rescue people without great involvement of American troops—for example, through the use of air power—then it seems to me that the United States should take such actions. I'm pleased that several recent presidents have begun to see it that way. For example, the Clinton Administration's use of air power to intervene against ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, President Obama's use of military force to rescue the Yazidis who were threatened with massacre by ISIS, and more recently President Trump's order of missile strikes against Syrian chemical weapons factories. These kinds of limited, but effective, interventions give me and other Holocaust scholars some hope that perhaps there is a growing recognition in the United States that we should use our power for good when such situations arise. However, it has not become the consistent policy of the United States to take such actions. Thus, every generation needs to think seriously about these issues. Every generation has to ask itself, should we repeat the actions of the 1940s, when President Roosevelt decided that the Jews being murdered in Europe was none of our business, or should we take action and use our military power for moral good in some situations?

Rod Bryant: Dr. Medoff, before we get further in our questions, why don't you remind our listeners of the title of your most recent book that has received positive reactions?

Rafael Medoff: My new book is called *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust*. It was published by The Jewish Publication Society of America with the University of Nebraska Press. There is a large section in the book about this controversy over the US rejection of requests to bomb Auschwitz. The title *The Jews Should Keep Quiet* derives from several private conversations

that President Roosevelt held with Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, who was the most prominent American Jewish leader of that era. Roosevelt was anxious that American Jewish organizations keep quiet, that they should refrain from complaining or protesting his policy towards Jewish refugees. Roosevelt also pressured Wise, leaned on him, to try to silence others in the Jewish community and make sure they did not cry out against FDR's abandonment of the Jews.

Jerry Gordon: In your book, you also discuss the establishment of the War Refugee Board, over the objections of FDR. What recourse did the War Refugee Board have to rescue Jews in Europe?

Rafael Medoff: The overriding theme of the Roosevelt Administration's response to the Holocaust was a sound bite that FDR and his aides came up with. It was a phrase, "rescue through victory," meaning that there was no way to rescue the Jews except to fight the war and achieve victory over the Axis on the battlefield. This attitude, that rescue was impossible or undesirable, guided President Roosevelt's policy during the war until Jewish organizations decided they would no longer accept that excuse. They began efforts through Congress and through the news media. Jewish activists in late 1943 began pressuring President Roosevelt to take rescue action. The administration fought tooth and nail against a resolution that was introduced in Congress in late 1943, that called for the creation of the War Refugee Board. Despite the Roosevelt administration's opposition, the resolution gained significant backing both within Congress and the general public. Finally, in early 1944, FDR decided that fighting against the creation of such a refugee agency was more trouble than it was worth. He threw a bone to the rescue advocates and agreed to establish this government agency, the War Refugee Board.

However, astonishingly, he gave it almost no funding—90% of the board's budget was supplied by private Jewish organizations, because Roosevelt never intended it to be a meaningful rescue agency. He was still opposed, in principle, to the US making any meaningful rescue attempts. The board had to function with a small staff and a small budget, but it worked miracles. In the last months of the war, it bribed Nazis to look away so Jews could escape. Most significantly, it sponsored the life-saving work of Raoul Wallenberg in Nazi-occupied Budapest in 1944. We calculate that all together, about 200,000 Jews were saved in large part due to the work of the War Refugee Board.

Rod Bryant: Rafael, where can our listeners find your book?

Rafael Medoff: *The Jews Should Keep Quiet* is available on Amazon. I look forward to your listeners' comments after reading the book. I would be very interested to hear their feedback.

Rod Bryant: Thank you for this important interview. You have been listening to *Beyond the Matrix* here on *Israel News Talk Radio*. We'll see you this time next week.

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