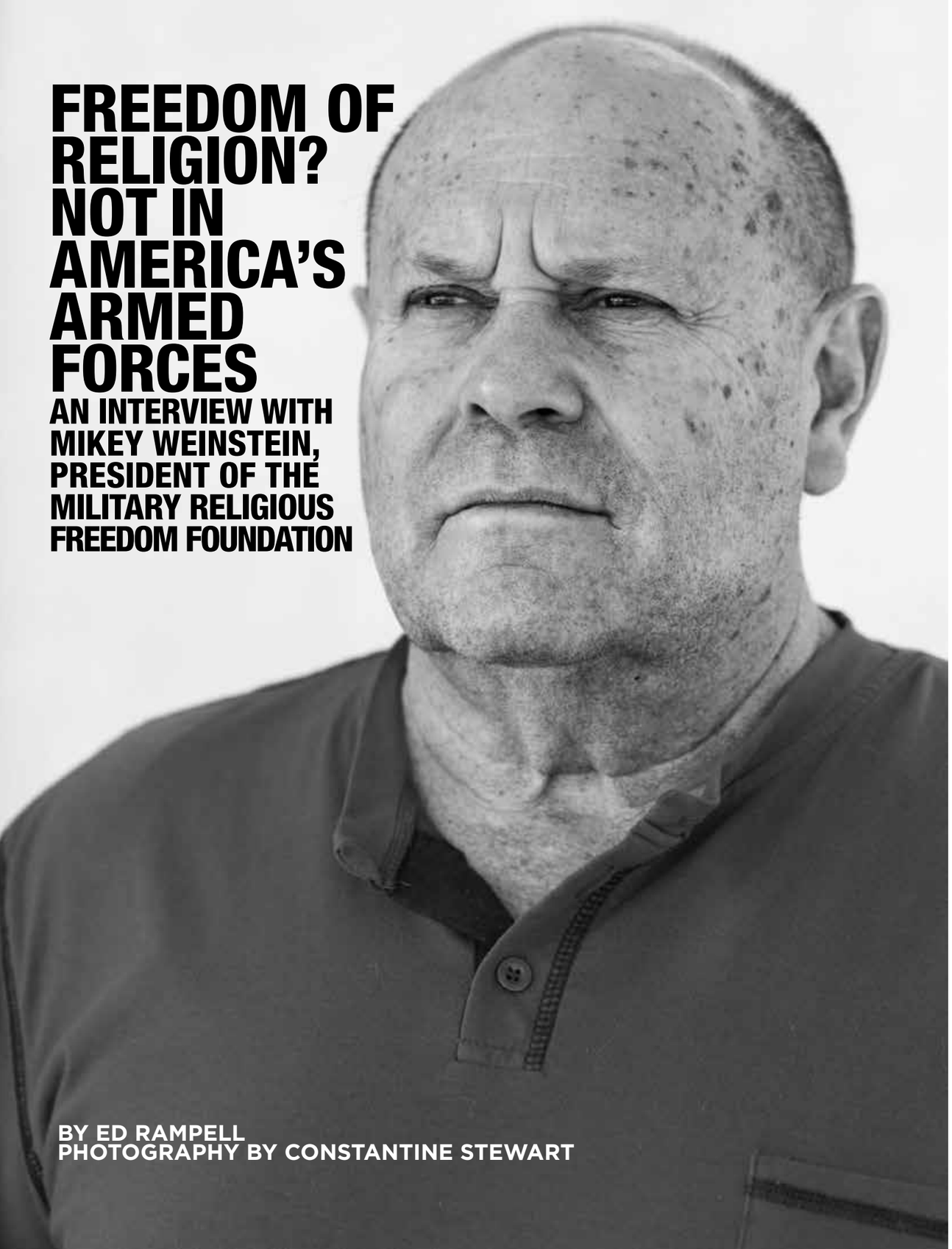
# FREEDOM OF RELIGION? NOT IN AMERICA'S ARMED FORCES

## AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKEY WEINSTEIN, PRESIDENT OF THE MILITARY RELIGIOUS FREEDOM FOUNDATION



BY ED RAMPELL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CONSTANTINE STEWART

In his 2025 inauguration speech, Donald Trump claimed, "I was saved by God to make America great again." At a 2026 White House Easter event, Trump's spiritual adviser Paula White compared the Commander in Chief to Jesus. Embroiled in a feud with Pope Leo XIV about the Iran War, the President posted a Christ-like image of himself on his social media site. And as part of the "America Reads the Bible" event, cosponsored by the far-right Family Research Council, Trump read a passage from the Old Testament in the Oval Office. Under the Trump regime, the lines separating church and state are being erased, and the infiltration, invasion and infection of Christian Nationalism is virulently spreading through the U.S. government—and through the Defense Department in particular.

Michael L. Weinstein is the Armed Forces' point man resisting the Pentagon's proselytization of its personnel. "Mikey," as he prefers to be called, is an Air Force veteran who served with the Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps, and he is the founder and president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation (MRFF). As far as Mikey is concerned, no one in the "Department of War" should push their theocratic beliefs on enlisted men and women. And right now Christian Nationalists are pushing hard.

"Christian nationalism is a perverse, twisted and tortured version of mainstream Christianity," Mikey explains. Mainstream Christianity preaches that Jesus is the Prince of Peace who said in Luke 4:18 that God "has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free..." Christ's teachings include blessed are the peacemakers; love your neighbor as yourself; forgive others who have wronged you; love your enemies; and the meek shall inherit the Earth.

In stark contrast, Weinstein argues that Christian Nationalism, "is based on only the most wretchedly radical interpretation of the New Testament. It lusts to utterly destroy the American, democratic, Constitutional republic and replace it with an austere, ruthless, dystopian version of a Christian fanatical nation. A hellscape of merciless, religious, extremist bigotry, hatred and prejudice, which is founded upon the inhuman concepts of virulent white supremacy, violent antisemitism, hideous misogyny, rampant Islamophobia, homophobia and transphobia. Think Gilead right out of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*."

M*A*S*H actor Mike Farrell and Colonel Larry Wilkerson, former chief of staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell, are long-serving advisory board members of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, nongovernmental organization established in 2005 and headquartered in Albuquerque, New Mexico. According to its mission statement, MRFF "is dedicated to ensuring that all members of the United States Armed Forces fully receive the Constitutional guarantees of religious freedom to which they and all Americans are entitled by virtue of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment."

In this no-holds-barred, candid conversation, the former White House legal counsel lays out a compelling case against "Secretary of War Crimes" Pete Hegseth and the Trump regime's efforts to evangelize and convert the Armed Forces—whether our service members like it or not.

**HUSTLER: Tell us about your personal background.**

MIKEY WEINSTEIN: I'm an Air Force brat. I was born in Albuquerque, at Kirtland Air Force Base. Our family has over 160 years of combined active-duty military service, in pretty much every major military engagement, [from] the Civil War to the Global War on Terror. My wife is the daughter of a retired Air Force pilot who flew 250 combat missions in Korea, and we are about to have our 49th wedding anniversary. We have four kids and three grandkids. We have three consecutive generations of military graduates.

My father was a distinguished graduate at the Naval Academy, class of '53—his best friend and classmate was H. Ross Perot, who ran for President. I was Perot's first general counsel. I was an honor graduate in the class of 1977 at the Air Force Academy, where my two sons graduated, in '04 and '07. One of my kids is a Democratic state senator in Ohio. He and his wife were classmates at the Air Force Academy in 2004.

I was four years as a cadet at the Air Force Academy, and I served another seven years on active duty—I was a Judge Advocate General (JAG). The last three years I was at the Reagan White House as an attorney… and was selected to be the Committee Management Officer for the Iran-Contra investigation.

**According to your MRFF bio, you're a registered Republican who worked for the West Wing of the Reagan Administration. Are you still a registered Republican?**

I'm still a registered Republican. I just haven't been able to find any of them to vote for the last three decades or so. Ronald Reagan was a nice man, not the most intellectual person in the world, but he'd be rolling in his grave seeing what's happened to the Republican Party. He and Ross Perot, founder of the Reform Party, would both be shocked by what has happened to the GOP.

**You were born Jewish. Are you an observant Jew today?**

I chant the Shema [a Jewish prayer] three times a day. I love my ethnicity and culture, but I don't really buy into the theology of that anymore.

**What is the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, and why did you create it?**

Our kids at the Air Force Academy were the victims of someone in Hollywood—Mel Gibson came out with a 2004 movie called *The Passion of the Christ*. We refer to it as *The Jesus Chainsaw Massacre*—it's an unbelievably bloody film. The pressure put on my kids at the Academy by their chain of command to see that movie was out of control. It was like a thread on a sweater, and I pulled that thread and realized that there was a systemic, pervasive, pernicious pattern of pushing fundamental Christian extremism. Completely unconstitutional, bigoted, hateful and prejudiced. My wife and I saw what was happening to our kids, and for 22 months we fought this.

The Military Religious Freedom Foundation is a militant, aggressive civil rights nonprofit organization in support of the U.S. Constitution, which mandates separation of the spiritual and temporal, church and state, in the most lethal organization ever created by our species, the U.S. military. MRFF is an NGO and now represents over 100,000 active duty, reserve and guard members of the military, and veterans.

Interestingly, about 95% of our clients are Christians themselves. The remaining 5% we have are Jews, Muslims and Buddhists—we represent 18% of all Muslims in the U.S. military, plus atheists, agnostics, secularists and humanists. We even have 12 members of the Church of the Jedi—right out of *Star Wars*. We don't care what they believe. >>

We only care about the time, place and manner in which a military superior believes he or she has the right to deploy their faith on an otherwise helpless subordinate. The military is a peculiarly tribal, adversarial, communal and ritualistic environment, and you cannot fight back. The military has its own rules. Fucking somebody other than your spouse is a crime; adultery is a felony.... The U.S. Supreme Court has determined that the compelling governmental interest for First Amendment freedoms, if you wear the uniform, is to maximize the lethality of our military. How do you do that? Good order, morale, discipline, unit cohesion, the health and safety of the troops, mission accomplishment. The military is a peculiar environment where you cannot fight back. If you're being proselytized to by your military superior, "Get the fuck out of my face," is not an option for you.

So they come to MRFF, and we do it for them, and we're real good at that. We provide our clients with AARP—anonymity, action, results and protection. We're extremely careful about protecting our clients' identities. We had a 19-year-old Navajo on an aircraft carrier in the South Pacific who was being mercilessly proselytized by his chief petty officer. He couldn't fight back. We were able to get that chief petty officer severely disciplined and moved to the far side of the ship, which are like cities. His parents sent me a message from Window Rock, Arizona, the capital of the Navajo Nation, saying, "Thank you for being the voices we're not allowed to speak with." I think about that every day.

**THE MILITARY IS A PECULIARLY TRIBAL, ADVERSARIAL, COMMUNAL AND RITUALISTIC ENVIRONMENT, AND YOU CANNOT FIGHT BACK.**

**Mikey, what are some highlights of battles you and MRFF have fought with the Pentagon?**

We sued the Air Force Academy years ago because they were essentially "volun-telling": If you're even being suggested to by your superior, you're being told. They were being "volun-told" to attend the National Prayer Luncheon at the Academy, a fundamentalist Christian event. We represented 255 Academy cadets, faculty and staff. We sued them in federal court in Denver. When I took the stand, the Justice Department representing the Air Force demanded to know the names of our clients, and I refused. The judge asked "Why?" and I said, "Because I'm an attorney, and I'm asserting attorney-client privilege." The judge said, "For all of them?" and I said, "Yes. I'd go to jail before ever revealing anything about our clients." And it stopped right there. We're extremely careful and focused on protecting anonymity.

Some of our biggest stories were the "Jesus nukes" and "Jesus rifles." We had 138 marines and soldiers fighting in one of the worst parts of Afghanistan, Helmand Province. Believe it or not, every rifle in the U.S. military had engraved on the metal part that held the scope Biblical citations from Matthew, Mark and Luke, John, including the Book of Revelation. Imagine the optics of American soldiers shooting Muslims with weapons that had those Biblical citations.

We broke that story. A company called Trijicon, a defense contractor in Michigan, had a contract to make beautiful rifle scopes. The "Tri" apparently stands for "Trinity." Think of Chick-fil-A or Hobby Lobby as a defense contractor. It wasn't just the rifles in the American military that had that on it; so did the rifles in NATO. Even the Israeli Defense Forces' rifles had that [Biblical citations]. General Petraeus was forced to start rotating the rifles back and get those off. This shows you just how pervasive, systemic and wrong this was.

We had another big success with "Jesus nukes" [in 2011]. There were U.S. Air Force missile launchers at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. That's where the Air Force has its nuclear missile launch school. They were being inundated with a power point called "Jesus Loves Nukes." We got the power point through the Freedom of Information Act. The slides were filled with Biblical references about how much Jesus wants you to launch nuclear weapons. The Air Force was horribly embarrassed. They admitted to having used this power point filled with references from the New Testament for 25 years. We got that removed.

America's celebrating our 250th anniversary. We're a constitutional democratic republic. When our Founders looked at European history, they saw most of the bloodbaths that had occurred there were when men of the cloth had been men of political power. They looked at Cromwell in England. They were also moved by the Salem witch trials and said, "We're not going to do that here." They built a Grand Canyon between those things, because in this country we don't mix church and state because it leads to one thing: not little babbling brooks or streams or creeks, but to oceans and oceans of blood. [Like] the Crusades, the Inquisition, the pogroms, the Holocaust and the Japanese Imperial Army run by out-of-control Shintoism—whenever an extremist version of any religious faith is joined with that part of the state that makes war, it's oceans of blood.

**MRFF began during the administration of George W. Bush, who described himself as a born-again Christian. How have matters regarding religious liberty and the military changed since Trump's return to office?**

We thought things were bad under Bush [Jr.], but they didn't get much better, even under Obama. You start talking about confining their weaponized Jesus, that's some kind of different war. On a scale of 1 to 10, under Bush it was probably 4.5. Under Obama, it was whittled >>

