

Mr. David Prasnicki  
President, VMI Alumni Agencies  
December 11, 2024

Dear David,

Although we are not sure why you sent it to us, we acknowledge receipt of the document dated November 26, 2024 printed on stationery of the Office of the Superintendent of VMI and included with your email of December 2, 2024. You characterized it as a “VMI statement on (Phillip) Crane.” However, the document is not signed by anyone nor is it directed to any person or group. It bears no resemblance to a press release or other document indicating it is intended for wide public dissemination. We have inquired of other VMI Alumni and none has received it. A statement is intended for an audience. There appears to be none for this statement. Is it just intended for a file to be taken out for show only if someone questions VMI’s action in hiring Crane?

There is also no indication of who authored or at least authorized release of the statement and nowhere within its bounds is it indicated to be an official statement by VMI. In that regard, we are also mindful that VMI’s Director of Communications and Marketing, Lt. Col. Sherry Wallace, in a public setting, insisted that a document not bearing a person’s signature or other indication of approval cannot be presumed to be its author or authorizing agent. We ask, therefore, is this document in fact an official statement by VMI concerning the hiring of Mr. Crane? Was it authored or at least approved by the Superintendent? If not endorsed by the Superintendent, who did?

If the document is an effort to respond to media criticisms by AIM of the hiring of Phillip Crane to join the VMI faculty, we offer the following critique of it. It does not refute any of the substantive allegations made against Crane and, in fact, contains material misrepresentations and is preposterously hypocritical. The principal allegations made by AIM are that Crane was a leader of a campus group at Columbia University during the period of unrest on that campus in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israeli civilians on the dawn of October 7, 2023. The VMI statement does not dispute, in fact it does not even mention, that over 1200 Israelis were killed, including children and women, thousands more were wounded, many survivors of the attack were mutilated and hundreds taken as hostages some of whom are being held by Hamas to this day and some of whom are American citizens.

The VMI statement acknowledges that, following the brutal attack, a coalition of Columbia student organizations issued an open letter about the attack.<sup>1</sup>Crane was secretary of one of the student groups, the Palestine Working Group, that signed on to that letter. It is beyond dispute that this letter voiced staunch support for the attack. When the details of the attack became better known, many of the subscribers to the open letter withdrew their support but not Crane’s club. However, the VMI statement attempts to whitewash the open letter with the claim that the open letter did not suggest a moral justification for the attack on civilians.

Frankly, the author of this shameful whitewash statement is either unable to comprehend the English language or simply blind to the truth. In the very first paragraph, the open letter attempts to justify the attack on the ground that the right of the Palestinians to resist the Israelis is “enshrined in international law.” We emphatically state that nowhere in international law is there enshrined a right to slaughter, mutilate or

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<sup>1</sup> The open letter and a contemporaneous statement by Columbia University supporters of Hamas are referenced with links in an article appearing in the Columbia Spectator, a student newspaper. See [Nearly two dozen Palestinian solidarity groups release open letter, joint statement \(columbiaspectator.com\)](#)

take hostage women, children, or any other noncombatant in the exercise of a claimed right to resist unlawful occupation.

Finally, with respect to hypocrisy, the VMI statement tries to bolster its own integrity by boasting that VMI fosters “spirited debate” on issues of contemporary importance. This boast is particularly shameful considering it comes from an administration that has tried to crush the independent student newspaper, The Cadet, since its resurrection in 2021.

The history of the Roman/Turkish domination of the province of Palestine and its post-World War I history is complex and there is plenty of blame to go around for the long, sad conflict that has attended the emergence of the state of Israel. When we wrote you on November 7, it was not our purpose to argue one way or the other for the Alumni Agencies to take a particular position on the attack by Hamas. We only asked that all alumni be informed about the media controversy surrounding the hiring of Mr. Crane. As of this date we do not see any progress toward that goal. Frankly, it appears that the VMI administration, abetted by the Alumni Agencies, intends to obfuscate, deny and where possible ignore the concerns of alumni. The statement you sent us, if that is in fact VMI’s last word on the matter, bears all the hallmarks of a classic response to organizational criticism it wishes would go away. Everyone involved in public relations knows those hallmarks. Deflect criticism by ignoring requests for a simple explanation of its position, claim that its critics are really the ones acting in bad faith and passionately rebut fictionalized criticism not actually leveled at it.

Nothing has happened since we made our request of you suggest that the Alumni Agencies will carry out its charter obligation to “inform” members. To do an at least adequate job would only require that the AIM statements be sent to all alumni accompanied by VMI’s statement and the open letter to which Crane’s organization subscribed. We are also puzzled why Crane has not publicly spoken. If he is the principled military veteran the VMI statement claims, he should have no difficulty simply stating for the benefit of all alumni that he either fully supports or disavows the open letter. Mr. Crane’s silence is deafening! But it is deafening only to those within earshot. The silence of the Alumni Agencies on this important issue is even more deafening, so deafening that it drowns out Crane’s silence and deprives the body of VMI alumni the opportunity to hear and weigh important issues affecting their alma mater.

The positions nations take on matters of common concern are critically important. In totalitarian states, official positions depend on the whims of autocrats. In democracies they are shaped by elected leaders to reflect the will of informed citizens. Members of the VMI alumni, the citizens of our alma mater, are not able to signal their views because the very organs created to “inform” them flagrantly disregard that duty. That’s a pity.

Salvatore Vitale, ‘61  
William “Larry” Respass, ‘61