

Why Nonintervention?
Guest: Daniel McAdams
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Daniel McAdams is executive director of the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity (RonPaullInstitute.org), and served for many years as foreign affairs, civil liberties, and defense policy adviser to Congressman Ron Paul.

WOODS: Isn't it amazing how quickly Syria went from being a front-burner crisis to now being yesterday's news? Like, ho-hum. People are already yawning about it.

McADAMS: It is.

WOODS: What do you think about this? This is very unusual in American foreign-policy history.

McADAMS: It's interesting, and I think it tells us a number of things, Tom. One is that the whole idea that the use of force should be a final option when everything else has failed is completely thrown out the window—because this, as you say, was such a crisis a couple of weeks ago where even force was being considered, and now all of a sudden nobody's talking about it. So obviously, it wasn't the last possible choice that could be made.

WOODS: Right. I'm not sure we necessarily bought that to begin with, but it's fun to see it completely exploded.

I wanted to have you on when I was hosting the Peter Schiff Show some time ago, and it turned out you were in Hawaii. By now it's slightly old news, but no fallacy is too old to be smashed. How do you answer the claim made by Obama's people that the progress in Syria, in terms of getting them to hand over their stockpile of chemical weapons, wouldn't have occurred if it hadn't been for the threats of military force on the part of the U.S.? In other words, it's not Russia that deserves the credit for the breakthrough. It's Obama himself. What's your answer to that?

McADAMS: It's a pretty good spin, and it's tempting to say, okay, we'll take what we can get. You guys can take the credit. Everyone looks good. I think the Russians probably knew that when they made this proposal—which, who knows, it may have been knocked around back and forth for months or longer than that. I think you have to give the Russians credit. They were looking for a diplomatic solution that would give the U.S. a face-saving measure and would defuse the situation, which they understood would be explosive for everyone. If that's what it took to make them feel better, I was tempted to let them have that, I guess.

WOODS: I would, too, but do you think there's something fake about it?

McADAMS: I think it's certainly an embellishment of the facts, but I think the Russians were literally astonished. If you think about it, Obama was almost apologizing for it before it happened. Don't worry. Just a shot across the bow. Just to send a message. No big deal. As if we're going to send a nasty letter from our lawyers. We're talking about thousand-pound payloads on these Tomahawk missiles, which anyone with a brain knows would have killed, I'm sure, orders of magnitude more people than these gas attacks or whatever they were that occurred on the outskirts of Damascus on the 21st.

WOODS: We have to be careful, of course, not to get too gleeful about this situation and to read into it more than is there, but as I've said on Peter Schiff Show, the career of John McCain has had some very interesting twists and turns over the past five years. You remember late 2007. He was doing so badly in the polls that there were rumors he might actually drop out. Then he wound up firing everybody. He winds up getting the nomination. He's riding high. He loses, but hey, he was the GOP nominee. You can't take that away from him.

Now in 2013, he is held in such low regard by everybody except the establishment whose respect he craves that his whole worldview, for this glorious moment anyway, lies in tatters and is totally repudiated. Am I reading too much into this? Maybe the neocons or some of the Christian Right people will still support the next war that comes along. It's not as if they've all become antiwar. But this is still an interesting watershed moment, don't you think?

McADAMS: Well, it's as you wrote to me the other day: "It's almost impossible to parody John McCain." But it is in a way the horrible fate of those of us who are interested in foreign affairs and foreign policy, because it's always the people like John McCain who want to be involved everywhere and do something no matter what the crisis is in the most remote part of the world. They're always the ones that are considered the quote "experts." They're always the ones everyone listens to.

I remember back when I was serving on Dr. Paul's staff. At the time it was Tom Lantos who was the Chairman of the House International Relations Committee that Dr. Paul was on. It was the same thing. Everyone deferred to him. He was the great expert, but their expertise is, first of all, as you point out, in being wrong—everything they recommend is wrong. Yet somehow they're always listened to, and people that argue for restraint and for really getting an understanding of as much as we can of extremely complex issues—we don't get the credibility that the McCains and the Lantoses of the world get.

WOODS: Then he hires this woman who lied about her credentials. The more you lie, the more interested they are in you. That's a separate issue. There's pathology there.

McADAMS: Sure.

WOODS: You made reference just now to working for Congressman Paul. I want to talk about that in a minute, but I want to wrap up the Syria thing. You had a post over at RonPaulInstitute.org—which I highly recommend, by the way. I know people feel they already visit a lot of sites, but it's called the Ron Paul Institute, for heaven's sake. How could it be bad? It's run by Daniel McAdams. He's a great guy. It's where you can get some excellent foreign policy analysis.

McADAMS: It's actually run by Ron Paul himself. He's the founder and CEO, so this is Ron Paul. We're the only organization that he was willing to put his name on, and he's extremely involved in what we do. I only carry on what I've been doing for Dr. Paul for all these years, which is helping him, but this is his Institute, just to clarify.

WOODS: That's wonderful. The Institute is Ron Paul's congressional career except without all the headaches and annoying jerks you have to deal with. Now you can just have speeches and articles and all this stuff reprinted and available on the site and get Ron Paul's commentary fresh. You don't hear him delivering it on the House floor, but you get it right there on your computer. Just as good.

McADAMS: Sure, and we don't have to be as nice to people like McCain, like we used to be. We can be nasty.

WOODS: It's probably some kind of professional courtesy before.

McADAMS: That's right.

WOODS: From Thursday, the headline is, "A New Agreement in Syria: Obama War Hawks Defeated on Every Count." Can you share that with us?

McADAMS: On the two major things, what was really fascinating for me to watch is John Kerry. What an incredibly amazing person. He's been so spectacularly wrong, wrong-footed, foot in mouth, you name it. Remember all along when this agreement was reached on the destruction of the Syrian chemical weapons? He was insisting all along that any resolution before the UN Security Council would be brought up under

Article Seven, which would have provided for the use of force. If you remember, this is a trick that the Obama Administration used on Libya. Let's bring up a resolution under Article Seven, but which doesn't explicitly call for war. After a lot of cajoling they got the Russians and Chinese to sign off on it and *boom!* Bombs away immediately. The Russians were understandably hesitant to support such a thing, but Kerry nevertheless kept promising that this is what would come up under Article Seven. When it finally came out, it was not brought up under Article Seven, which means that if there is to be a use of force it cannot occur under the resolution that the Security Council passed. We have to go back to it.

An enormous defeat but all the way up until the end, Kerry was claiming that, "Oh yes, this would happen. It would be under Article Seven." It is an amazing defeat for Kerry personally, and of course, no mention of regime change at all in the article, which is the other thing that the administration wanted to have. The third major thing that Obama was pushing for so much in this resolution was that it did not ascribe blame for the attack near Damascus on August 21st. Even in Obama's speech before the UN last week, he claimed unequivocally that it was the Syrian government that carried out this attack, but no one else believes it in the whole world. They weren't able to get this into the resolution, so everything they wanted, to lay the groundwork for a future attack, was left out of this resolution. I'm with you, Tom. I don't think we should be overly optimistic. This is at best a tactical victory, and the cynic inside of me wonders if this very much-welcomed rapprochement with Iran over the past week is not to lay the groundwork to pursue regime change in Syria. Maybe I'm just too pessimistic.

WOODS: It is interesting to me to see. Did you see that letter that came out a few weeks ago by the Iowa GOP, signed by many, many people? At least 30 people, a lot of them are very well known in the Christian Right in Iowa. I'm not saying this to make fun of anybody, because I like the people in the Iowa GOP. But some of these Christian Right people. All of a sudden they're concerned about the fate of Christians in the Middle East, which has not fazed them in ten years. You tell them all about the fate of Christians in the Middle East, and they couldn't care less. All of a sudden, they care deeply about that. All of a sudden they care about the possibility. that maybe we're helping al Qaeda, all these things that should have been obvious for ten years. This letter is at least some kind of admission from them that, well, maybe there is another way of looking at this. It's not just commie pinkos on the one side and us super patriots on the other.

McADAMS: Yeah, and I probably focused to a disproportionate degree on talking about Christians killed in Syria. Part of the reason, really, is that there are a lot of Christians who are misguided, I think, on the war issue here in the U.S. I've written a lot of things for the Institute's website and elsewhere underscoring the threat that they face. Of course, every innocent being killed is lamentable, and certainly many Muslims are being killed as well, but really for the American Christians I wanted to point this out. These are people who share your faith, and they're being killed by the people that we're supporting who happened to not share very many of our values, I don't think, the extremists. And you saw this siege and this historic Christian village in Syria where there were so many beautiful ancient icons and things of this nature and monasteries by these radical jihadists who were beheading priests and bishops, and maybe because it got a little bit of news it did give a bit of a wakeup call, which is to be welcomed. As you know, sadly, our intervention in Iraq sent all of the Iraqi Christians into Syria, because that was relatively a safe place for them under Assad. Not a great guy, but nevertheless that's where they went. So that's where they felt safe. They get there, and the next thing you know we're intervening in Syria and then they're all getting killed there. It's just terrible.

WOODS: You started working for Ron Paul in 2001. Had you been working there for some time by September 11th, or did you come on board after that?

McADAMS: Actually, it's funny, because I had a clandestine phone call from a staff member who was thinking of leaving but did not want to leave Dr. Paul in the lurch, so he wanted to make sure. I had been writing for Lew Rockwell for some time, so I was somewhat known in our circles. I had this clandestine call. I was looking for a job, and I had admired Dr. Paul's work for quite some time while I was living in Europe,

and all of a sudden, in the middle of this 9/11 happened. I thought, “No. It’s all going to be off now.” But thankfully, this gentleman departed, and I was able to come onto Dr. Paul’s staff in October, so I missed that exact day. However, I was in for all of the Patriot Act and all of these things that followed—the FISA courts and all these horrible attacks on our civil liberties that Dr. Paul, as you know, warned everyone about. This is what’s going to happen, and now we’re finding out that it’s even worse than we could have possibly imagined. We’ve become the targets, not the terrorists.

WOODS: What was it like being in his office at that time when there weren’t a whole lot of voices of reason? You guys must have been, even more than usual, the outliers.

McADAMS: It was very nerve-wracking, to be honest with you, Tom. As you know, Congressman Paul comes from a very conservative and patriotic district in Texas, and the way these issues were portrayed at the time—there was a lot of emotion in the U.S. on everyone. They took advantage of the people who would pass these laws. They took advantage of these emotional reactions and the patriotism, and it was wrapped in the flag. It wasn’t a great time.

Thank God for the courage of Dr. Paul, because people that were saying what he was saying were called traitors, and I can’t tell you how many thousands of calls we got in the office of people who were furious. We fully expected, or we thought certainly very, very possible that he could lose in 2004. That’s when it was really the worst, because Iraq had just been invaded. That was sort of the fever pitch I think of the whole thing, so it was very nerve-wracking. We felt we had to fight, rhetorically speaking, from all sides. The left, the right, the center, it was not an easy time.

WOODS: What was it like for Ron Paul, especially let’s say during the 2008 campaign and 2007, after he’d had that exchange with Giuliani? Was he encouraged? Was he discouraged? Was he exhausted? How did you see him?

McADAMS: The great thing about Ron Paul is that nothing fazes him. He would have just had some amazing performance like with Giuliani or something of that nature. An amazing whirlwind tour, and then he’d walk into the office as if nothing had happened. He is not fazed by these things. He really isn’t unless he’s just great at not showing it, but we never really noticed anything. We didn’t see him very much during the real heat of the campaigns, but when he came in it was the same old thing. You know, the same old exercise routine, the same old lunch, and it was amazing.

WOODS: What was it like working for him in general? Are there any anecdotes that you can share that illustrate the general sense of what it was like?

McADAMS: I think the thing about him was that he was someone unfazed and he never took it personally, and how much we all learned from him as much as we couldn’t stand this member or that. It could never be a personal attack. It could never be personal. Always keep to the issues, and even people who personally got under his craw, it was never personal with him. It was about the issues.

WOODS: I don’t know how he did that.

McADAMS: It was so great.

WOODS: Oh, yeah?

McADAMS: He has such a dry sense of humor. I won’t mention any names, but there was one member who had treated Dr. Paul very, very badly over the years, and I think he was probably jealous of Dr. Paul’s earned reputation as a constitutionalist. But you know how everyone is so artificially friendly on the Hill—“*Hello, my great friend, so and so, whom I just stabbed in the back.*” This gentleman, this member, who’s a pretty high-ranking member, wrote one of these phony baloney notes. “Thank you for voting on my amendment”

of such and such. Dr. Paul put it in my inbox with a little handwritten note, “He’s our friend.” That’s just his style.

WOODS: There’s a feature on the RonPaulInstitute.org website called Neocon Watch. That’s just beautiful, first of all. I love the idea of that. Tell our listeners: who exactly are the neocons? Where do they come from? Is this just a term of derision we throw at people we don’t like, or does it have a real meaning?

McADAMS: There’s a danger of being too general with that, and we take some liberties, because I think the humanitarian interventionists on the left exhibit a lot of the traits of the neocons. As we know, Dr. Paul delivered an historic speech on the neocons a few years back called “Neoconned,” and I think he spelled it out in great detail, their characteristics so accurately that one of them kept calling us and demanding that he retract his speech. He obviously hit a nerve. That’s what we wanted to do with this feature, is shine the light back on them, because they can’t stand it. They love to attack the rest of us who try to be sane, but they can’t stand it when anyone puts the words back to them.

My interest in the neocons actually came well before I went to work for Dr. Paul. I was working in Europe at the time with a human rights group, and the neocons, as you know, had infiltrated—or from the beginning, things like the National Endowment for Democracy, which was really kind of a Reagan sop to the neocons. Here, you guys can have this thing where you can do in the open what the CIA does in secret. But the neocons, with their Trotskyite worldview, believe in a permanent revolution, so the idea of democratization or the spreading worldwide of their version of democracy by force was so attractive to that sort of mentality. It’s the mentality of the person who wants to force everyone else to do what they think you should do. They were infiltrated into the NED, which is paid for by our tax dollars, and has been since its creation in 1985 or 1983 I believe. It has all these sister groups, the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, the labor unions get their cut of it.

What they do is they go overseas, and they give money to one particular party or another. They’ll give money to a newspaper, and they’ll call it an “independent newspaper.” That’s what they were doing in Albania during the period when I spent a lot of time there, during the coup in 1996. These people were the neocons. You can argue that what they did during the Cold War had a purpose, though I won’t grant them that. Certainly at the end of the Cold War, when this great evil of communism was defeated, things like the National Endowment for Democracy and indeed NATO should have all gone by the wayside. They should have done what the Warsaw Pact did. But in the case of NED and the neocons, they ramped it up and doubled down.

WOODS: It’s just as Milton Friedman said, speaking of the domestic sphere, “There’s nothing so permanent as a temporary government program.” That seems to be at least as true in foreign affairs.

McADAMS: Exactly, and some poor attorney somewhere in the middle of the country who wouldn’t want a junket to rewrite Albania’s constitution? So you get on board with one of these different law groups that get money from NED, and you fly over there and have an exotic couple of weeks. Maybe you’ll take a vacation in some storied place as you’re slaving away rewriting their constitution, and it gives you a sense that you are bigger than you really are. You’re larger and more important than you really are, and this is what they do.

WOODS: We’ve got about two minutes left. I want you to take that time to describe to people what exactly you’re doing at the Ron Paul Institute, what Dr. Paul’s doing, and what you hope ultimately will come out of it. In ten years, what do you want to see the Ron Paul Institute doing and what’s it doing now?

McADAMS: Philosophically what I would like to do is to establish the idea that noninterventionism is a legitimate foreign-policy perspective. We have the realists, and we have the neoconservatives and all these different schools, but I want to show it is a rational view of the world to leave people alone. Dr. Paul, in fact, recently described himself not with the word libertarian but as noninterventionist across the board, so

that's why we would like to raise that idea. We want to do it through education. We want to help train the next generation of people writing about foreign affairs and about politics. That's why next year we will have a summer school for young college students to meet like-minded people and to hear lectures from our very distinguished board of advisors and academic advisors. We have terrific people like Judge Napolitano on our board of advisors. We have Dennis Kucinich. It's a right-left board, and it's a grand coalition against war and in favor of civil liberties. We want to help the next generation. We want to encourage them. We want to also give the tools to people who don't believe the mainstream media. They believe there's something wrong with it. That's why I was so encouraged when the Syria crisis hit that our readership just skyrocketed, so that's a great feeling. People are looking for something different, and that's what we want to provide them.

WOODS: Daniel, it is very, very important work you're doing.