

What's Up With Iran?
Guest: Daniel McAdams
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Daniel McAdams is executive director of the Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity, and served for many years as foreign affairs, civil liberties, and defense policy adviser to Congressman Ron Paul.

WOODS: Let's first talk about Iran, because there we've seen what seems to be a favorable development. There seems to be some progress being made in terms of talks, yet no progress is ever enough to get US congressmen and senators to stop pushing for sanctions all the same. Can you fill us in on what went on last week in Geneva?

McADAMS: Sure. Last Thursday the P5+1 talks took place, the next round of them took place in Geneva and according to Iran's chief negotiator, they made some serious progress. Iran came initially to the first round with a pretty comprehensive package proposal as to what it would take to improve relations. It included the possibility of ratifying the additional protocols, that's what they call them, which is an additional set of protocols to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty that would allow for much more invasive inspections and those sorts of things, much deeper inspections of the Iranian nuclear sites. Also, they offered to make sure to not enrich over 20 percent purity and to have much more transparency and that sort of thing. In return for this they were requesting some relief from sanctions. The reports last week were that the talks were successful thus far and it's a good first step. But as you pointed out, Tom, the very same day, last Thursday, that this was announced, the Senate announced that it was going ahead and going to mark out a brand new sanctions bill against Iraq anyway—

WOODS: Against Iran.

McADAMS: —I'm sorry. Iran. Out of deference to the President's negotiating they said they would wait until the talks were over, but this is through the Senate Banking Committee and Senator Ken Johnson, and just to show you that this is a bipartisan thing—he's a Democrat obviously, the Senate is controlled by the Democrats—he and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid agreed to go ahead with the new sanctions. This really will tie the President's hand if the President's truly sincere about this, and I think there is no reason to doubt that he is sincere, to move ahead and try to find a peaceful solution to this 30-odd-year crisis with Iran. I think the President has incredible roadblocks ahead of him, including, to be honest, his own chief negotiator, who has misrepresented not only the U.S. position, but also international law. I'm talking about Wendy Sherman, Secretary of State for Political Affairs. We had an article on our site this past week, Tom, from Hillary and Flynt Leverett, who are two experts on Iranian analysis and they're also on the board of the Ron Paul Institute. We're lucky to have them. They pointed out that she went before Congress and told a blatant lie: that Article 4 of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty says nothing about the right of signatory

nations to enrich. All it takes is someone to simply go to the NNPT and read Article 4, which says, "Nothing in this Treaty shall be interpreted as affecting the inalienable right of all the parties to the Treaty to develop research, production and use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes without discrimination." So his own negotiators are putting forth this lie, so it really is wrong-footing if the President is sincere, it really is wrong-footing his effort. So really this is one of the more exciting, I'd have to say, international negotiations we've seen in years, and it kind of puts you on the edge of your seat.

WOODS: I think we hardly know what to make of it because we never see negotiation. We really don't. Usually we have some belligerent U.S. demand, and each time it's met, the demand grows more unreasonable and more belligerent until it can't possibly be met and then invasion comes. It's the usual pattern. I don't remember seeing anything quite like this.

Now let me play devil's advocate. Let me try to get into the mind of a sincere neoconservative. I'm not talking about somebody who just wants to make money for the military-industrial complex or something. I'm talking about the average person who reads neocon newspaper columns. That person may say, "You can enter negotiations in good faith with a lot of different types of people, but the Iranians are just too radical. Plus, they are sincere Muslims, and Islam is a violent religion that teaches you can lie to your enemies and you can deceive them if it benefits you. So that is of course what they're going to do to us and we're going to be naïve, left-wing progressives who go along with the Iranians and before you know it, they're going to wipe us all out with their secretly developed weapons." I think that's what the typical neocon thinks.

McADAMS: Sure, and you're absolutely right. Unfortunately, that is the dominant position that the media takes. You're viewed as a weakling if you don't believe it, but with any crime you need to see evidence. I hate to say this, and actually I'll probably sound like a progressive, which I'm not really, but a lot of it does go back to racial stereotypes, racial prejudice, religious discrimination and—going back to Wendy Sherman, I hate to pick on the lady, but here's what she said about the Iranians last month: "We know that deception is part of their DNA." Can you imagine saying that about any other ethnic group or religious group? You'd be drummed out of your position. You'd be drummed out of society. So they can get away with these things. The truth is the Islamic Republic of Iran does hold social values that most of us find unusual and we probably wouldn't want to subscribe to them. However, that's the way the world is, isn't it, Tom?

WOODS: Well, I happen to think, Daniel, that it would be fantastic. I would be cheering if somebody anywhere in the world said of the American ruling class that deception is part of their DNA. Because that's the only way I can account for it. Even if I ask Barack Obama what his favorite color is, I think he'd lie to me even though he stands to gain nothing from that lie. They can't help themselves.

McADAMS: Absolutely, but the ruling class is really different from talking about a race of people. It's a little bit ugly if you ask me. I don't like that sort of generalization. I think it is very ugly.

WOODS: I think anybody in the world who said what I'm proposing ought to be said to our ruling class would actually single out, they would exempt the American public. The American people are probably more or less decent and even the ones who are belligerent, half the time they're really just uninformed—and I don't mean they're not culpably uninformed, they really need to know more than they do—but most of them are just reading the newspaper and they don't realize because they're busy people, you can't trust the newspapers in the U.S. I wish more people understood that, but they really don't. It's interesting here, and it warms my heart to hear that you are following what's going on with the Iranian situation with great interest and sympathy, and it sounds like maybe something good could conceivably come from it.

Meanwhile, we have in the U.S. people who just can't take yes for an answer. Is there any conceivable type of offer the Iranians could make that would so corner the American neocons that it would be impossible for them to continue in belligerence?

McADAMS: Well, the only thing that the neocons here would accept would be a complete cessation of enrichment of uranium, and that is such an affront to Iranian sovereignty. Iran in a way played the high road. They signed the NPT. We know, for example, that Israel is a nuclear power. They refused to sign the NPT, so Iran is sort of playing by international rules. It signed it and this is what most Americans don't understand: Iran has never been found in violation of the Nonproliferation Treaty. It's never been found in violation. They signed it, they're playing by the rules, and the other side of those rules requires you to have the ability to enrich uranium for peaceful purposes. After years and years of inspections, no one has ever proven that they have diverted this material for weapons purposes. You talk about transparency and maybe they have not had enough transparency. But what about the transparency—if you want to look at it from another perspective, look at the transparency of the U.S. military establishment. The U.S. government over the past ten or fifteen years, how many aggressive wars have they entered into? Would they open themselves up to this kind of inspection to have people look into their intentions and their capabilities and, if you remember, Tom, this is exactly what happened in the run-up to Iraq. The inspectors were in there, they were finding nothing, and that still wasn't good enough to prevent an attack. A long answer to your short question: short of giving up their sovereignty, which they're not about to do, nor would any country with its head on straight give up their sovereignty. Short of that, there is nothing they can do to satisfy the neocons. Just like short of Saddam Hussein leaving within the 48 hours, I guess is what was said, that's the only way he could have avoided it. I'll also mention Yugoslavia, if you go back a few years ago, he had to allow his country to be completely occupied by NATO troops or they'd bomb. So they give you an offer there is no way you can accept or we'll bomb,

and thankfully we haven't gotten to the "or we'll bomb" part, but the senators and congressmen are certainly pushing in that direction.

WOODS: Now, I know, Daniel, that people like you and me and Ron Paul often say there's no real difference between the parties, there's no real difference between the presidential candidates. And there's a lot of truth to that. But they do vary in style, they do vary in emphasis and I wonder—given the fact that the administration more or less gave up on bombing Syria, where you know John McCain would have bombed Syria. The less evidence there was, the more he would have wanted to bomb Syria. Obama has had all the opportunity in the world to bomb Iran if he really wanted to do it. It's true he's used the drones and he's been belligerent in his own way, but do you think that maybe it could be the case that his heart is just not in this, that he genuinely doesn't want to be involved in a war?

McADAMS: It's kind of a Kremlinology or something to try to decipher what's in his heart, but I've thought that myself many times and I've entertained the fantasy that it is these horrible, I hate to say it, these horrible, extraordinarily aggressive women in his Cabinet who are pushing him toward this—and maybe I should include Kerry in that to make it both genders. But you have Susan Rice, you have Samantha Power, and you're right. There are some subtle differences between parties and people like Rice and Power will push bombing for humanitarian reasons—which really if you had to choose, I find that almost more disgusting than someone like McCain who just acknowledges, "Look, I just want to take everyone out." It almost seems more vulgar to put a humanitarian gloss over something so horrible and destructive as bombing a country.

WOODS: Okay, let's shift gears now. I want to talk about what's been going on in Syria because I think it kind of dropped off people's radar once it became clear that it was unlikely that any bombing would take place in the U.S., so now there's no interest in it. Now, apparently, our friends the Saudi Arabians are funding fighters to overthrow Assad, just as the US government wanted to. I don't think the Saudis are interested in funding the installation of liberals in Syria, so what really is going on here?

McADAMS: Well, if you had another round you know the Saudis have already spent hundreds of millions of dollars bankrolling the rebels in Syria, and I would never call them Syrian rebels because certainly the majority of them are not Syrian. They're foreign jihadists who have gone into Syria. They've come from Yemen. They've come from Saudi Arabia. They've come from Germany and the U.K. and they've come from America to a degree. These are foreign fighters who view this as their next jihad to overthrow a secular leader. The Saudis have no military despite spending billions and billions to keep the American military-industrial complex happy, so all they can do is write the checks. So they're writing yet another round of checks to send an army of several thousand, say 4000 all the way up to 50,000 people, to go into Syria and again to overthrow the government, which we have no affection for other than the fact that it is a sovereign government that is being overthrown from without.

But if we rewind the tape a little bit, this is also something no one ever talks about. This whole Syria thing was supposedly the next chapter in the Arab Spring. Democratic feeling was in the streets and the Syrians themselves were rising up to demand more freedom against the dictator. That narrative has been lost in several other subnarratives because it's become embarrassing since these aren't Syrians rising up. These are international jihadists going in to overthrow a secular government in favor of something that would be anathema to those who are being forced to pay for it, say, here in the U.S. We sort of tossed that narrative aside that this is a popular uprising and now it's simply, "We've got to overthrow this guy no matter what." It's disturbing that the Saudis are funding it and last Wednesday, I believe it was, these wonderful Syrian rebels, not Syrian rebels, but international insurgents, bombed the embassy of the Vatican in Damascus and yet this is just one in a string of embassies that they are bombing. They bombed the Russian embassy. They bombed the Chinese embassy. They bombed the Iraqi embassy. Every government that is not getting behind their fight against Assad, somehow finds a mortar lobbed in its neighborhood. I think that says a lot about what kind of people we're dealing with.

WOODS: I want to switch gears yet again. I just read your write-up on the speech that Congressman Walter Jones gave about a week and a half ago. Now Congressman Jones, for those of you who don't know, is a congressman from North Carolina. This is the guy who came up with the term "freedom fries," he was very gung-ho about the Iraq War, and then, even though it practically guaranteed him nothing but grief, changed his mind on the war. He changed his mind on war in general, practically, and now is a board member of the Ron Paul Institute. So he gave a speech in which he basically called for ending U.S. military action in and ending the flow of U.S. tax money to Afghanistan. What types of arguments is he putting forth? He comes from a district that is very, very heavily military. He has to bear that in mind in how he phrases his argument. What's he saying? How's he making this appeal?

McADAMS: The other thing about Congressman Jones, who is just one of the real gems in Congress, is that he took a lot of heat from his fellow congressmen when he did decide to turn on Iraq. And the reason he did it was that he kept writing letters to families of soldiers that were killed, and it caused him to pause and think about the idiocy of the war. He dug further and further into it because he got angry, and he discovered that he had been lied to by Condi Rice and all the other criminals in the Bush administration, and it made him so angry. If you talk to him in person, he is so animated by this anger over having been lied to and realizing how many people were killed because of the vote of so many of them to go into Iraq, so in some ways it's sort of a Greek tragedy or something. He's trying to make up for a mistake he feels that he's made. I think the rest of us would say he's more than made up for it with all the speeches that he's done on the floor and how much he has made it [opposition to the war] okay for conservatives. He himself is a very conservative Christian, as you pointed out coming from a conservative district. I think his great achievement is he has made it

okay for conservatives to question war. He and another member from the Ron Paul advisory board, Congressman John Duncan from Tennessee, two strong conservatives who have spoken out against the war as conservatives and as far as what Walter Jones said recently on the floor, very, very powerful. He said it's time for Congress to face the fact that we have our own problems in the U.S. Sending over \$600 billion to Afghanistan to build roads, schools and utility plants so the Taliban can blow them up makes no sense. He said it's also time for little girls like these two, and he was holding up a picture of two young girls, to have their daddy at home and not to have their daddy in a coffin. Very, very moving speech on his part. God bless him.

WOODS: I happen to love this type of populist rhetoric. He's basically saying that even though we have been taught to cheer for this stuff and not ask questions about it, the fact is we all suffered from it. It has hurt us. It has made it harder for us to solve our own problems. It hasn't done a whole heck of a lot of good for people overseas, either. It's hard to see who the winners really are here, but the losers are everybody who has mindlessly cheered on the war machine. And how refreshing that is. I think it would be fun if somebody like him or if Congressman Duncan had presidential aspirations because I'd love to hear rip-roaring speeches from people like this and not mealy-mouthed stuff about how we can't afford this, maybe we have to rethink it, but people who are just going to call a spade a spade on this stuff.

McADAMS: Sure, and you know what he gets for it? He gets some creep neocon who's trying to challenge him now in the Republican primary next time. The Republican Party has had him in their sights for a long time. I don't think there's anyone who can challenge him, but you never know. They can put a lot into it. So it shows where they are. The Republican Party has no intention of changing their views on the warfare machine.

WOODS: So tell me what the Ron Paul Institute is up to these days? What sorts of stories are you guys tracking?

McADAMS: What we try to do is we try to take a look at the news. We try to look at things, myself and some colleagues who work with me have a combined total of 2+ decades working for Ron Paul, so we try to look at things through his eyes and collaborate with him on a regular basis. He's very much a part of it. He's our founder and chairman and we want to present the news and the events of the day from a deep-rooted analytical perspective. We want to not be your standard think-tank where you have a bunch of PhDs sitting in a room talking to each other. Like you do, Tom: you have an amazing ability to explain very complex things in very simple, readable ways. I'll always remember you did a piece in the *American Conservative* a while ago explaining the whole concept of nullification. I'm not an expert in these things. I remember reading it thinking, "I finally get it."

So that's our intention. We want to speak to people who are uncomfortable with what they're hearing in the media and we want to show them that there are alternatives, that there are people like the Leveretts out there who are very responsible professors, intellectuals who are nevertheless challenging the predominant paradigms. We also, to be honest, want to have a little fun, too, so we do poke fun at people like McCain and Graham and we have a regular column called Neocon Watch where we keep our eyes on the stuff you guys are writing and putting it back in their face. It's a little cheeky, too. We don't want to be somber and serious and we also want to tell some good news stories. We're not just doing foreign policy. We're also doing civil liberties quite a bit, and so we're covering things like food freedom and farm freedom, and there's some good news there. We're covering the drug war and we're doing quite a bit. And we've been building up the website and next thing we're going to be starting some programs. We've had about six months to get the website running. We've got an amazing response from readers and we're so happy we've built up the readership. Our next move is to start with some projects we have in mind, including a summer school next summer for university students in a kind of modified internship program. We've got plenty of stuff on the horizon.

WOODS: Are you guys a 501c3?

McADAMS: Yes, as a matter of fact we are a project of Congressman Paul's 501c3 called the FREE Foundation, which he founded in the '70s, so we are completely, entirely under Dr. Paul's legal umbrella. We are definitely part of his personal 501c3.

WOODS: Especially as we get to the end of the year and people are wondering about gifts they can give and you're looking for a 501c3, I can hardly think of one that is more worthy than the Ron Paul Institute because of what you have done and what you have the potential to do. I had Congressman Paul on this program a couple of weeks ago and I asked him, "Has there ever been a noninterventionist organization in American history as far as you know?" And he couldn't think of one. You really are treading on virgin ground here. It's tremendous what you guys are doing and I'm going to continue to pick your brain on a regular basis once or twice a month to keep an eye on what they're doing overseas. So, Daniel McAdams, best of luck and I hope everybody visits you at RonPaulInstitute.org.

McADAMS: Thank you so much, Tom!