



## Episode 602: The Insane U.S. Policy in Syria

Guest: Scott Horton

**WOODS:** It's been quite a while since we've talked to you, Scott, but I think Syria's a good topic. It's in the news — it's always in the news. It's been in the news for years. It's all over the Republican debates. They're talking about Syria, and they're talking about the Syrian president and how terrible he is and we have to get rid of him and all that. So it's all over the news, so we have ample reason to discuss it. Before we talk about the ceasefire, I want to talk about — well, when I saw "I want to talk about" it, I mean I want to have you talk about it. I want to hear about the different parties that are involved in the Syria civil war, because of course we have parties that are internal to Syria, and then we have major powers outside of Syria that for one reason or another think they have an interest in the outcome. So go through those one by one, and then we'll try and tackle what does each one of these stand to gain, what's their interest in the whole thing.

**HORTON:** All right, well first of all, I think there's so much foreign intervention involved in the Syrian conflict from the beginning that it's actually inaccurate to call it a civil war.

**WOODS:** Ah.

**HORTON:** I mean, clearly there are Syrians fighting, but you could just as easily call it an invasion by America's CIA and their lackeys. Since 2011 there's been covert operations, CIA covert operations to try to overthrow Bashar al-Assad. And so that's first of all, and I'll try to get to the — well, anyway, it'll all explain itself here in a second.

Basically what happened is in Iraq War II, 2003, George W. Bush's invasion of Iraq, as we've discussed before on the show, it was a huge own goal from the point of view of American foreign policy in that they gave the entire east of the country basically to the most Iranian-tied factions. All the land from Baghdad down to Kuwait is basically a satellite state of Iran now because of the invasion. So they decided finally in 2005 and '6 — well, 2006 and '7 that, oops, we just screwed up and fought a giant war for Iran, and it wasn't supposed to work out this way, but they're the ones who benefitted the most, so now we need to redirect towards Saudi Arabia, and that's the famous article by Seymour Hersh in *The New Yorker*; it's called "The Redirection."

And ever since then, starting with George W. Bush, and then the same policy continued through Barack Obama, they've basically been guilty of high treason in providing aid and comfort to literal al-Qaeda guys. And starting with Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon, various Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda-type groups in Syria — and again, we're going back to 2006 here — and Jundallah, which is a bin Ladenite group in eastern Iran. And the point of all of this — and all of these guys being backed by the U.S. in cooperation with Saudi Arabia. And of course remember the reason al-Qaeda hates us in the first place is because we're too good of friends with their governments. They're not from Iraq, Iran, and Syria, our Axis of Evil; they come from our allied states who hate us for propping up their dictators and being that close to them.

But when it comes to the sectarian civil war across the entire region, the Saudis, aka the Americans, are perfectly happy to use these al-Qaeda-type groups, these bin Ladenite groups as long as they can bludgeon Iran with them. So put yourself in George W. Bush's position in 2007. Well, I can't start the Iraq War all over again against the Shiites I just fought for, so consolation prize, let's overthrow Assad. Let's work on getting rid of Assad's only Arab-allied government in the region, Bashar al-Assad's government in Syria.

So then in 2011 the Arab Spring breaks out, in great part due to the destabilization brought by Iraq War II in the first place, and Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama take the side of the bin Ladenites in Libya and in Syria, and they, you know, doubled, tripled, quadrupled down on George Bush's policy of backing bin Ladenites in Syria. And from the very beginning, from early 2011 on there were reports beginning to come out about CIA and Saudi Arabia shipping off mujahideen to start the war to overthrow Assad in Syria.

By the end of the year — and multiple reports, including our friend Eric Margolis, was reporting in the summer of 2011. I remember him coming on my show and explaining he'd just gotten back from France, where — Eric Margolis, for people who aren't familiar, is a very experienced war reporter. And he had just gotten back from France and had been talking with French intelligence and French special forces and said they are on the ground now as part of a NATO-CIA regime change job, coordinating the rebels in trying to overthrow Assad. Barack Obama came out and said Assad must step down. Hillary Clinton tried to create these Friends of Syria groups to create governments in exile in Qatar to try to install in power there. And oh, I should mention, Giraldi reported in December of 2011 that Obama had signed a new finding authorizing stepped up covert action, CIA covert action against Syria in order to overthrow Assad.

And it's been clear, Tom, all this time — I mean, I don't speak Arabic. You don't have to be a real expert in the region. All you have to do is pay attention to this stuff as an average news consumer over a long enough period of time, and all of this is just right in front of your face. It's even in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* going back to 2012 that, guess what, all CIA efforts to arm "moderate" rebels in Syria are only arming the jihadists.

And the field has been dominated on the so-called rebels' side by al-Qaeda in Iraq in Syria, which is also known as the al-Nusra front, but they're the Syrian veterans of al-Qaeda in Iraq from Iraq War II. They have dominated the field the entire time. The Islamic State is only a break-off group of that same al-Qaeda in Iraq, the one that George W. Bush created by invading Iraq. I mentioned Iran inherited eastern Iraq; well, western Iraq became Jihadistan, where the bin Ladenites triumphed more than anyone else.

And then all the experts — you know, the best journalists, people like Patrick Cockburn, he was on my show for 2011, 2013, 2013, and the beginning of 2014, saying hey man, the American and allied support — oh, and I should say that means Saudi, Qatar, Turkey, and Israel — our support, our side's support for the mujahideen, Sunni-based insurgency in Syria is, quote — Patrick Cockburn's quotes — "reenergizing the insurgency in Iraq," the guys who were the bad guys that our guys fought for eight years there in Iraq War II against the Sunni-based insurgency. It's reenergizing them.

And yes, the DIA — and I urge everybody to look up Brad Hoff and his great blog, [LevantReport.com](http://LevantReport.com), where he has all the great write ups on the DIA report predicting the rise of the Islamic State in 2012. You didn't even need to be the DIA; you just had to be an expert guest under questioning on my show in 2012 and '13 to say that, yes, there is a very real possibility here that the United States of America is creating, could create that giant, fake, Islamofascist caliphate that was nothing but a lie in the fever daydreams of the George W. Bushies and of Osama bin Laden, whose caliphate was his attic where he was hiding from his wife as recently as 2011. 2011, his caliphate was one room on the third floor, and it's now a land the size of Great Britain that rules more people than more than half the nations in the U.N. And you know, I'm not saying, oh God, so we have to be afraid of them, but I'm saying there was no such thing as this until George Bush ruined everything and then Obama tripled it by taking the side of the bin Ladenites in Syria.

**WOODS:** Let's go back, though, to just ticking down who exactly are the parties. Just give them to me one at a time. We've got al-Nusra. Who else?

**HORTON:** Okay, well al-Nusra I think are pretty much the strongest force on the ground on the side of the rebels, and then you have the Islamic State that rules the city of Raqqa and much of eastern Syria. And then you have Ahrar al-Sham, which is just another name for al-Qaeda, really. It's just another — it's basically the so-called moderate front who are acceptable for the Americans to be the arms dealers. Through the Saudis we arm and finance these guys, and then they turn around and give all the guns and money to al-Nusra and fight under al-Nusra.

But it's just like, you know, in Iraq War II, where you had this widespread Sunni-based insurgency, and al-Qaeda in Iraq was the smallest part of it. Well, in Syria al-Qaeda in Iraq completely dominates — that is, al-Nusra completely dominates the insurgency, and the other factions are the minority parties fighting under them. So Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam and the few other — I don't know if the al-Farouq Brigade and Northern Storm Brigades even exist anymore. There was the al-Hazim Brigade.

Basically these are just mythical moderates who are not really moderate, but they don't carry the brand name al-Qaeda and therefore it makes it easier for the U.S., Turkey, and Saudi to give them guns and that kind of thing. But basically, when they say mythical moderates, all they mean is non-ISIS al-Qaeda in Syria. Ahrar al-Sham and al-Nusra are basically indistinguishable from themselves, and any other so-called mythical moderate groups pale in comparison in numbers and power to them and are basically irrelevant.

And then on the other side, you have the Baathist, basically fascist government in Damascus, which is backed by Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah, and they're basically the ones that the Americans have been trying to overthrow all this time until the Russians last fall called our bluff and said, you know, when the Army of Conquest, which is just another name for al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham, when they made major successes in the Idlib province and threatened the major highway I guess between Aleppo and Damascus, that was when Vladimir Putin said, that's it, line crossed, and he launched an air war basically calling Obama's bluff, that you cannot have your regime change here. He's going to back the Syrian state.

And when you want to get to the — well, I'm sorry. We'll get back to the insanity and the ironies here in a second. Well, here, you ask, so who's on Assad's side. I mentioned Iran and Hezbollah and Russia. Well, guess who else is fighting for Assad right now: the Iraq Shiite militias. The Badr Brigade, which America fought for for eight years in Iraq War II, which America fought for and with in the Battle of Ramadi just two months ago. America is still, ever since 2003, fighting for Iran's auxiliary Iraqi army, the Badr Brigade, and that policy continues to this day. We just helped them take the city of Ramadi from the Islamic State in Iraq at the same time they are fighting against our guys in Syria.

And now you want to make it even more complicated than that? Guess what, Tom. The military, our Pentagon is arming and backing the Syrian Kurds, who in the last week have gone to war against the CIA-backed bin Ladenite terrorists. And so now in our six-way fight here and whatever, we have in two different ways at the same time, we have America backing both sides of this war. We're backing — our Shiite allies from Iraq are fighting for our Shiite enemies in Syria, and our Kurdish allies in Syria are fighting against our Sunni allies in Syria.

**WOODS:** All right, I don't even know how to make any sense of all this, but I'm sure I'm not alone in that. Here's what I want to ask you: do you know what the John McCain/Lindsey Graham position is on Syria, and if so, how does it differ from the existing policy towards Syria?

**HORTON:** Well, their position is that Obama hasn't gone far enough. This is the Hillary Clinton position and the Marco Rubio position as well, that Assad must go and that he is the reason for the fight. In other words — let me try to make an analogy here. It's kind of a rough one. But if we were the British talking about intervening in the American Civil War, the argument would be, well, we've got to overthrow Lincoln first, because after all, that's what the Southerners are fighting about. And so as British

interventionists, if we want to crush the Confederacy, our first stop is the North. Huh? That's what they're arguing, that Assad is the reason that the Islamic State exists, not all their support for this mujahideen war for the last five years. But Assad, who they're fighting against, he's their motivation, so we've got to overthrow him.

Now, who's supposed to replace him other than the al-Nusra Front in Syria? I've never heard a straight answer to that question in my life honestly, and the real answer is it'll be al-Qaeda. If they overthrow Assad and the Baathist state there, then next come the head choppers, because right now the state is backed by a coalition of all the different kinds of Christians, the Druze, the Shiite Arabs, the Alawites, and a great many of the Sunnis – at least a plurality if not a majority of the Sunnis support the state as well. But if the state is broken and the Syrian army is scattered, then that's just the beginning of Chapter Two of this thing. That'll just be all hell only now breaking loose once Damascus falls and, you know, beheadings all the way around. So that's why people would side with the Baathist state at all in the first place is that it's the only thing standing between them and a good beheading, and they know it. I mean, the closest thing to an answer I've ever heard from a Republican or a Democrat on this as what's supposed to happen after Assad falls, a Republican I saw on CNN, a congressman, said, well, at that point we hope someone will come to the fore.

**WOODS:** (laughing)

**HORTON:** Yeah, that's going to be great.

**WOODS:** Oh, that's terrible.

**HORTON:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** That's terrible. All right, in just a minute I want to ask you what in all this really could possibly be the U.S. interest, but first let's pause for a word from our sponsor.

[Sponsored content]

All right, we've been talking about this, and you've been talking about just how convoluted the whole Syrian story is from the point of view of the U.S. intervention, that the U.S. is just all over the map here. So it leads me to the much more fundamental question: why does this matter to the U.S. at all? And of course the quick answer is it doesn't, but why did the American policymakers think it matters?

**HORTON:** Well, okay, so those are a few different things. Yes, absolutely from the point of view of a national interest, meaning including the 300-something million of us who live here, no, there is no interest of ours that's being represented here whatsoever. Maybe our, you know, morals and principles are being exploited in a way when they say, oh, we have to go in and save the poor people and that kind of thing, but that certainly has nothing to do with the motivation here. The imperial interest – you know, it's just like with the Iraq thing, and this is really the lesson of Iraq War II, is

that there were 20 reasons, and none of them were good enough by 10 miles, right? But it was a lot of little not-good-enough reasons to start a war and that kind of confluence of interests.

So in this case, Obama even explained to Jeffrey Goldberg at *The Atlantic* magazine in 2012 that this is kind of a sop to Israel, that, yes, he insists on pursuing a nuclear deal with Iran, but you know what, as a consolation prize we'll help weaken Assad in Syria, which will help weaken Iran's influence and, geez, yes, you're right, Jeffrey Goldberg, if we could get rid of him that would be a great way to take Iran down a peg. And of course, you know, at least in the Likudnik imagination and maybe for real, it would mean an end or a break in Iranian and Syrian support for Hezbollah on Israel's northern border and southern Lebanon there. So Obama just said that, yes, this is — you know, and they gave a little bit of a sop to human rights and this and that, but they made it pretty clear that, you know, this was basically a way to — you know, kind of like I said about from George Bush's position back in '06, that this is a consolation prize. After empowering Iran, this is a way to take them down on a different peg if not the original one where we accidentally — "we" — where George Bush accidentally had propped them up so high. So there's that.

And now there's a great article that just came out yesterday in *Politico* magazine by RFK, Jr., and it's all about the pipeline politics and how Saudi and Qatar and Turkey all wanted to build this pipeline that would go through Syria, and how Assad in 2006 had said no, because that would hurt the Russians and they're our friends, so we don't want to hurt their interests. And it's in the Wikileaks — everyone pause and give thanks to Chelsea Manning doing 35 years in the brig right now for our government's sins, who exposed in the Wikileaks in the State Department cables that this completely set off the empire, that Assad may be useful for torturing al-Qaeda guys for us and that kind of thing, but if he's going to stand in the way of this pipeline deal then we're going to get him. So that was really a big part of it.

Now, in RFK's article, I think he makes the whole thing about the pipeline plan, and I think he kind of oversimplifies it, and in fact, I think if you read the article you'll notice after 5,000 words or so at the end that his conclusion paragraphs are little bit sketchy about just exactly how these facts influenced those decisions. So it's not everything; however, I would certainly recommend it as a great little history of, well, American intervention in Syria since World War II, but especially pipeline politics through Syria in the 21st century and how Assad's refusal to go along with the Saudis, the Turks, and the Qataris certainly helped to explain their animus toward them.

And of course again with the Israelis it's always about Hezbollah and always about Iran, whether Hezbollah is really a threat to Israel or whether Iran is really a threat to them or not. And Michael Oren, the former ambassador, Netanyahu's ambassador to the United States, has made it clear on numerous occasions, in an interview with *The Jerusalem Post*, in two separate letters that he wrote to *The Wall Street Journal*, plus in an interview that you can find on YouTube where he's talking to Jeffrey Goldberg, in fact, at an Aspen fancy pants forum there. All you have to do is type in "Oren" and

"Sunnis" and the YouTube will come right up, where he explains — and this is right after the establishment of the Islamic State.

This is in June of 2014, the same month that Baghdadi declared himself the caliph and conquered Mosul, and Michael Oren says to Jeffrey Goldberg that, look, even though they're horrible, even though they just massacred thousands of prisoners in the field, even though they do head choppings and suicide bombings — he makes it very clear he's not talking about any mythical moderates; he's talking about the Islamic State and al-Qaeda in Syria, the worst of the Sunni jihadists, the bin Ladenites — and he's saying, still, look at who they're up against: Assad, who's backed by Iran. And so then he goes on to blame every single death on both sides and on all sides of the war on Assad, which is a typical talking point that they use, try to blame all casualties on the one side. And then he falsely accuses Iran of having military nuclear technology, as he calls it. So those are his two excuses, two huge lies, for why Israel prefers that, as he put it, the Sunni evil should prevail over the Shiite evil, because they're backed by Iran. So there's the Saudi, the allied interest. And honestly, I think Obama's interest is just appeasing the Saudis and the Israelis and the Turks.

**WOODS:** All right, I want to ask you before I forget because this was part of the reason I wanted to have you on, what's the deal with the ceasefire? And are all the parties to the violence a party to the ceasefire? And I ask that knowing that the answer is no. So what does it all mean?

**HORTON:** Right. Okay, well even the official headline version is that no, all parties are not involved. The two biggest, again, the most dominate jihadist factions, al-Nusra, which is just al-Qaeda still loyal to Ayman al-Zawahiri, the Butcher of New York City, and the Islamic State, which is ruled by Baghdadi the caliph and all that, they're not party to the treaty whatsoever, to the ceasefire whatsoever. Ahrar al-Sham, which is again nothing but also al-Qaeda, they are a party to it, and yet who actually has the ability to make them ceasefire? Maybe the Saudis. But do the Saudis even have an interest in seeing that through, and does America even have the influence with Saudi anymore to insist that they insist that Ahrar al-Sham ceasefire? I don't buy it.

So in other words, on the Russian side, if Lavrov says I promise, I will have Iran and Hezbollah and Assad ceasefire, we can pretty much take that to the bank. They have a chain of command that is answerable to the Kremlin, when it comes to this anyway. I'm not saying on every single thing. But if you look at what happened in 2013, Putin told Assad, give up your chemical weapons, and he said, sir, yes, sir, whatever you say, and he gave them up in order to avoid the American bombing there back then. So there's every reason to believe, I would think, that the Assad side of this, the Russian side of this have the ability to force a ceasefire.

But American support is for a bunch of bin Ladenite suicide bomber lunatics. How the hell are they supposed to control them? Pardon me. How the heck are they supposed to control them, Tom? I don't think that they can. I don't think that John Kerry's in any position to promise a ceasefire from Ahrar al-Sham, and if he can't promise one from al-Nusra and the Islamic State, what good is it anyway? I mean, are we now supposed

to believe that the so-called mythical moderates and Ahrar al-Sham that fight with al-Nusra every day, all day for the last five years, that these guys are going to now turn on al-Nusra and help Assad and Hezbollah and Iran and Russia fight against al-Nusra and ISIS and kick them out of Syria? I don't think so.

I mean, maybe the plan would be to just completely stab them in the back and leave them absolutely high and dry and let Assad and Russia finish them off, just as well as al-Nusra and ISIS when they get around to that — although, I don't know if John Kerry can get away with that level of betrayal, because see, you know, the Turks, I don't know so much about the Saudis, but the Turks seem willing to possibly invade and especially to attack the Syrian Kurds that America and Russia are both backing right now, but who of course are the biggest threat to the Turks, because the YPG, the Syrian Kurdish faction, is of course allied with the PKK Kurds inside Turkey who want independence there. There are so many competing interests at stake here.

Some of the more hyperbolic of us have been warning that this could in effect lead to a real war between the United States and Russia, even though on the face of it we're on the same side against the Islamic State, is priority number one, right? Obama already backed down on getting rid of Assad, right, and Islamic State is the enemy, and yet, our allies the Turks have already shot down one Russian jet and have threatened to attack the Russian-backed Kurds inside Syria. And what Obama would do about that I don't know, but at least — in fact, I think it was Patrick Cockburn, a very credible reporter, had it the other day, and I'm not sure what the original source was, but they said that Obama was on the phone with Erdoğan — that's the president of Turkey — was on the phone with him for an hour and a half trying to convince him that you have to back down here, and if you start a war with Russia, presumably he told him, you know, we're not honoring a NATO obligation if you start a conflict. But this is the level of nonsense that we're dealing with here, where our NATO allies could get us into a war with Russia over something that, again, has no interest of the actual American people whatsoever.

**WOODS:** Scott, one more thing before I let you go. I know obviously you're not a Donald Trump supporter, but I just remember in, it was either the last debate or the one before that, he kept saying over and over again his opposition to involvement in Syria. He kept saying, we're backing people in Syria we don't even know who they are. Now, when you hear something like that, is he right, or is it the case that in fact we know all too well who they are?

**HORTON:** Yeah, exactly, I would say that is really the case. We do know who they are, and you know, like Julani, the leader of the al-Nusra Front, is still sworn and loyal to Ayman al-Zawahiri. There's no question about who he is. He's the leader of al-Qaeda in Syria. But you know, Donald Trump puts it in the most polite way possible. But the thing is about him, though, Tom, is the other day, I think it was the day after the last big debate there when they interviewed him in a press conference I guess it was, he said, yeah, we could do a safe zone in Syria. And he's just, with a wave of his hand and a shrug, he changes his position from, let's stay out of that mess, to, let's carve out a safe zone. Well, safe zone, that is what Jeb Bush and Hillary Clinton support. It means



invading Syria, carving out a giant chunk of it, threatening the Russians that they'd better not fly their planes anywhere near it, and carving out a space for those very same people that he says he doesn't know who they are to gather —

**WOODS:** Yeah, no, I get that —

**HORTON:** — in protection from the Syrian state. Now, I don't know if he means it, but he's willing to just flip flop around on a whim like it's nothing.

**WOODS:** Of course, of course. That seems to be his way in a lot of areas. My instinct is that this stuff about Syria is not really where his heart is. I don't think he really cares about it. I think he wants his agenda regarding trade and immigration. Those are his two things. I think those are things that he wouldn't flip flop on. But this, I just don't think he's engaged in it. I don't think it really matters that much to him, so that he could go from one to the other just like that. Whereas somebody like Marco Rubio, I know for a fact that he's going to take the Lindsey Graham line and stick to it.

**HORTON:** Right.

**WOODS:** So Trump's an odd case precisely because he's not a politician. He can go from one position to the other in 24 hours, and you don't know what in the world is going on. I mean, figuring him out is like trying to figure out Pope Francis, you know? I give up at this point. I give up. I have too many other things that I want to do to try to trace out a consistent lineage of thought from these people.

All right, that's enough for today. I'm going to link to — you sent me one piece, although it's from a couple of weeks ago. We probably need some stuff since the ceasefire. But we'll get some good information about Syria up there. Ron Paul did a video on it recently. This'll be at [TomWoods.com/602](http://TomWoods.com/602). I do want you to say a little something about your own show before we finally do part for today.

**HORTON:** All right, well, thanks very much for having me. I'm on the Liberty Radio Network from noon to two, Eastern Time. That's [LibertyRadioNetwork.com](http://LibertyRadioNetwork.com). And my own website is [ScottHorton.org](http://ScottHorton.org). Basically I interview journalists. I have my own say as well, but mostly it's an interview show and primarily just libertarian foreign policy stuff. And all the archives, more than 4,000 interviews now, are all at [ScottHorton.org](http://ScottHorton.org).

**WOODS:** And really, there just isn't — you know, we have libertarian think-tanks that have policy wonks who do U.S. foreign policy, but it's always — maybe not always, but pretty darn close to always written and spoken in the language of the bad guys. It's always, well, "U.S. interests, blah, blah, blah." That's the way politicians talk. That's the way Washington talks, not the way we should talk. You just tell it like it is. There's no namby-pamby, well, the U.S. should change its policy by 38% or — there's none of that. In the libertarian world, with the exception of [AntiWar.com](http://AntiWar.com), there's very, very little foreign policy commentary. We've got Daniel McAdams now with the Ron Paul Institute, but it's still slim pickings, and you've been out there year after year with

that *Scott Horton Show*, which is why I am very glad to make a donation to *The Scott Horton Show* every single month, because I value — even when I don't get a chance to listen, I'm glad you're there, and I hope other people will feel the same way, that even if they can't listen to you every single day, they're glad you're there, they want you to stay there doing what you're doing. So ScottHorton.org is where I'd like people to go visit, and Scott, we're going to have you on more often. It's my fault for not reaching out to you, so we'll get you back on soon. Thanks again.

**HORTON:** Thank you, sir.