



Episode 709: Obama, Hillary, and the Disasters in Libya and Syria

Guest: Jim Ostrowski

WOODS: So you and your brother wrote this book together. I finished reading it actually this morning about five minutes before we spoke. I'm barely surviving in the middle of this awful unpacking scenario. What I was telling you before we went on is that I like how relentlessly systematic — it's like a legal brief, in a way, which I guess is not altogether foreign to you —

OSTROWSKI: Yeah.

WOODS: This book is set up, it's extremely methodical, step by step going through the origins, what was done to these places, and what the consequences were. So you focus specifically on Syria and Libya. Let's start with Libya, because I think it's less complicated.

OSTROWSKI: Yeah.

WOODS: So I guess it was back now — boy, it's been a while — I guess 2011 when Obama decided to take action in Libya. And what I remember is being told that this was absolutely necessary because Qaddafi was on the verge of launching an attack that was going to wipe out an entire city or something. What's the real story about what was going on there?

OSTROWSKI: Well, the facts are, you know, always unclear, and what we're really doing in the book, in spite of the title, is we're asking for an investigation, because two citizen journalist investigators can't ferret out everything. But I think it was a very common scenario where there's a motivation to go to war unrelated to the reasons we're being told, so the propaganda machine is primed up. And it was exaggerated the threat that Qaddafi presented, because in fact he had already taken over a couple of towns and cities and there hadn't been any atrocities. And really, so it was like one of these preemptive strikes, where, well, we think Qaddafi might do something, so we're going to attack first. So the evidence was very unclear, and obviously there are a lot of issues involved, but no thought was given to what was going to happen after he was taken out, and that's been true basically all along for really the entire history of our intervention in the Middle East.

WOODS: Qaddafi is a guy who's had a checkered past, of course, with the United States —

OSTROWSKI: Yes.

WOODS: But yet he was considered to be — he was trotted out under George W. Bush as a great success story, because this goes to show a lot of times we don't even need to wage war against every particular country; we can wage one war, that makes us credible, and other countries will come do our bidding. And it was said that, look at Qaddafi; he's come forward and relinquished any intention to go after weapons of mass destruction. This is a wonderful thing. So how did we go from "This is a wonderful thing" to "He needs to be taken out"?

OSTROWSKI: Well, that's complicated and not necessarily answered in the book. The book, obviously we started writing it in December. It's very narrowly focused, but we do get into the Arab Spring, and I think that Hillary Clinton's presidential ambitions come to the fore, because she didn't have a lot of accomplishments. And I think that basically she was looking for a clear foreign policy victory that she could run on in her obvious presidential campaign that she was planning even back then and has probably been planning for decades.

So I think what happened is the Arab Spring, which we point out in one of the chapters, we were on both sides of the Arab Spring, which is typical for our foreign policy. We supported the dictators for a number of reasons that are explained in the book. We also backed — there's a whole, like, sort of human rights/propaganda infrastructure where money goes from the State Department to various groups, and those groups fund agitators in various countries. And so the US was really part of the Arab Spring, and this appeared to be a way to bring the Arab Spring to Libya, with the United States playing a lead role, and then a political victory — I mean, it doesn't make much logical sense, but certainly I think the clearest explanation is Obama's interest in the Arab Spring, his attempt to build on the legacy of his youth where he had obviously Muslim connections in his background. He wanted to be the savior who was going to bring all these people together, and then Hillary's political ambitions to run for president, and it all adds up to this disastrous and really illegal invasion of Libya, and Libya's never recovered to this day.

WOODS: What did the intervention actually consist of? What did the US do?

OSTROWSKI: Well, again, we're not even totally clear on that. They may have had people on the ground instigating this thing initially, but it was mainly airpower, taking out Qaddafi's forces, and ultimately when he was really on the run and really no longer an offensive threat, they really took him out. The airpower disabled his convoy and ends up on the side of some road somewhere, and really was brutally murdered by our alleged allies. Really just a brutal assassination. So mainly airpower, but there were also CIA operatives on the ground. There was supposed to be a weapons embargo, and we have a site in the book where they sort of looked the other way when the weapons went to the rebels.

And one of the points is that the UN resolution, which we denied gave legal authority for this for reasons explained in the book, was supposed to protect all civilians, but basically what happened is that our air forces and whatever covert forces were on the ground basically simply backed the rebels, allowed them to gain the advantage in the civil war, and then they committed various atrocities against civilians who had been supporting the regime. So really the whole thing was a cluster dance. They went way beyond, even if you concede that — even if you assume for the sake of argument that the UN resolution did allow the United States to go to war without a declaration of Congress, they went way beyond it. Even as *The New York Times* pointed out, it sort of quickly evolved into regime change, and that was never authorized by the UN resolution.

WOODS: All right, so they go ahead and do this. Hillary cackles about it — literally cackles about it —

OSTROWSKI: Yes.

WOODS: — and then what are the actual consequences? I mean, of course it seems like anybody at all — you don't have to have a PhD in anything. Anybody at all knows this does not end with Western-style democrats —

OSTROWSKI: No, never.

WOODS: — implementing the US Constitution. Everybody knows that.

OSTROWSKI: Never. That's the neighborhood in that part of the world. It's not New England, town hall-meeting democracies. So it's going to get very primitive in the sense that it's going to go back to religious ideologies, ethnic rivalries. There was sort of a concern of genocide against darker skinned people in Libya that many people have pointed out, and that those forces were unleashed against them. So basically there's jihadists in there; there's always of course your alleged sort of middle class moderate forces, but they don't seem to have a lot of support over there. So what we have now is it's just been chaos, sort of a lower, medium grade civil war. There's competing governments. At one point the parliament of one of the competing governments met offshore. And it's just a gigantic mess.

Obviously ISIS went down there in the chaos and started creating a power base for itself, and there was the brutal murder on the seacoast that we heard about, the killing of the Christians. I don't know if they were Coptic Christians, but they were Christians, and they were beheaded on the seashore. We all heard about that a couple years ago. So it's a complete disaster.

One of the points we try to make in the book is obviously the odds of these people being impeached are very small, but we also want to impeach their ideology, which, following up from my prior book, is progressivism. And there are some actual quotes from Obama and Hillary that are cited in the book. For example, Obama says, yeah, we didn't go in with enough force. Well, isn't that part of the whole ideology of

progressivism? When you apply that to domestic policy, they always say, well, we didn't spend enough money. But the same principle applies, except in foreign policy you're using force. And then Hillary had a couple of great lines here, where she says she wants to be caught trying — "caught trying" — and she has a deep belief in American power to do good.

So the larger point of the book is that we need to examine this ideology of progressivism, because I believe that it has influenced our foreign policy over the years, this notion that there's always a governmental solution to a problem. Obviously Libya was not a utopia and could be improved, but the question is, can the American government power in 2011 intervene and make that a better place? The progressive, for no — because progressivism's not rational; it's something else; it's emotional or whatever it is. The progressive believes this, has this irrational belief. And unfortunately, they act on their beliefs, and we have the disaster in Libya and later on in Syria.

WOODS: And incidentally you mentioned the need to study progressivism. As if anticipating the need for a convenient source on progressivism, you also wrote a book on that, which we've talked about on the show —

OSTROWSKI: (laughing) Yes.

WOODS: — so I'm going to link to your book and that episode, that earlier episode, on the page for this episode, which will be TomWoods.com/709.

OSTROWSKI: Yeah, and I appreciate that, and in all honesty, when you tackle a new project, it gives you a chance to take some of the prior work that I've done and that other people have done, and I kind of had just a sudden realization that progressivism obviously applies to foreign policy, and I talked about that in the book a year and a half ago, but it occurred to me that it's really worse in foreign policy, because at least in domestic policy they have various tools, like wasting our tax money on programs. But in foreign policy, what can the progressive do? The progressive basically reverts to brute force, which of course is there in domestic policy in sort of a very hidden way. But progressivism in foreign policy I concluded is actually worse, because its tool is basically war or covert intervention — you know, low-grade war. So I hope I've slightly advanced the work I did in the prior book.

WOODS: And that book is called *Progressivism: A Primer on the Idea Destroying America*. Let's switch gears and say something about Syria. I think for a lot of people, Syria is kind of like Bosnia in the mid '90s. It seems so complicated that the libertarian might think, well, I know the US shouldn't be involved; that's all I know. I can't make any sense out of any of this. Can you make sense out of it for us?

OSTROWSKI: Yeah, that's what I actually thought. I remember being bothered by Syria more than Libya. Maybe I was on trial or something when Libya was happening, but I just thought, wow, Syria, that's not a country that we've had much involvement with,

and why are we involved? And I remember, I just located a quick blog post I did on LewRockwell.com, calling for Obama to be impeached, and it was back in 2013.

But I think Syria is — first of all, you have to understand that Syria is a multiethnic state. It's kind of like Iraq, but the opposite. So there there are more Sunnis than Shiites, and the Shiites there are often called Alawites — and I'm not an expert on religion or theology, but it's kind of a branch of the Shiite branch of Islam. So there's a 5- or 600-year or maybe even older battle between these groups over there. Syria, it's a very rough neighborhood if you look on the map, and it has been for really all of recorded history. So somehow the Alawites got control of Syria, I don't know, 30 or 40 years ago, and they're not going to let the Sunnis back in power, because they remember, like, say 300 years ago, there was a slaughter. So this is what we're looking at.

So when you go in there and intervene for whatever bogus excuses they had, which we can discuss, you have to understand that the Alawites are going to fight to the absolute death, because they know that — they *think*. Let's just say they think that they're going to be actually physically wiped out. So this whole notion that there's been a long and brutal civil war, well, of course there has. Everybody should have known that going in.

So the question in Syria was — the facts are a little murkier there, because Clinton says, I urged Obama to go in there in full force, and he didn't do it. But the fact of it is that we were there in a covert way. There's more and more evidence coming out, and Wikileaks is threatening to release more emails to indicate that even back in the Benghazi days that the whole Benghazi operation was about gunrunning to Syria. Now, we can't certify that as true. We cite the sources and we believe that more evidence will come out.

So why were the Americans so interested in Syria? Well, as we talk about in the book, there's like this global chess game involving Iran. At various times in history we look at the Sunni forces as the enemy. These days we're sort of working with the Sunni forces in countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, which is of course very bizarre, given their alleged ties to terrorism, given how poorly they treat women and we have the first woman candidate for president.

But these days, the big enemy is Iran, and I think the Syria's main importance is it's considered to be part of the Iranian Shiite empire, so let's take out Assad over there. And there's been various attempts to do it. I think they wanted to go in with great force after the sarin gas attack, and then it was kind of unclear who actually did the attack. Some people think it was Erdogan in Turkey, the fellow who just "survived the coup," which, some people are very suspicious of what happened with that coup. But it is quite confusing, but I think it's ultimately about a larger chess game involving Iran, where the pro-Israel faction of American foreign policy believes that Iran is the great threat to Israel. I think that was a factor, and there's an email from Jamie Rubin that Hillary seemed to have passed on in approval indicating that Assad would ultimately help Israel.

WOODS: All right, so where does Syria stand now, in terms of — like, how can we describe the consequences of American involvement, if we can disentangle how American involvement has affected the situation?

OSTROWSKI: Well, it's funny because early on before we had even thought about writing the book, I remember just casually hearing that — or getting the impression from the mainstream media — which, by the way, I call them *Pravda* now; it's just gotten so bad. But I always had the impression that the Syrian rebels were just on the edge of the capital and about to hang Assad by the lamppost. But in fact, Assad had a tremendous amount of support, and obviously an organized central government. And the rebels were never able to defeat him — but egged on I think by American intervention and sort of covert aid, and some of the aid was not covert, and I contend really that that's sort of almost an act of war in itself, when you provide support to a side in a civil war.

But the civil war has dragged on. It has generated hundreds of thousands of refugees leaving Syria going into Europe. Maybe ISIS has smuggled in terrorists in that group. Nobody really knows. It's caused chaos in Europe; it's become an issue in the presidential campaign currently. So you know, like Libya basically there's been a lot of murder, mayhem, chaos. And the big problem with Syria is that the Russians came in, because the Russians are long-time allies of Syria. So at one point, the US had two factions — the CIA was arming one rebel faction, and the Pentagon was arming allegedly another moderate faction, which turned out to consist of, like, maybe 12 people. And these two sides were fighting each other. Turkey shot down a Russian military plane right on the border, and who knows what the actual facts are there.

So our concern in the book, and really, if you look at the cover of the book there's a photo, which is actually probably a cruise missile or something like that, in Libya, but it looks like a nuclear mushroom cloud, and that's quite deliberate, because for no particular important reason affecting the United States, Obama and Clinton has us involved in a scenario where for the first time in really a really long time, maybe even Vietnam, we have American forces or forces allied or supplied by Americans on the same battlefield with Russia, which is obviously a serious superpower.

And obviously Russia and United States — or China — they're not going to deliberately start a nuclear war. These things happen like you see in the movies. There's mistakes and misunderstandings and things escalate. If Russia had escalated — you know, we're told that Putin is such a madman. He used incredible restraint against Turkey after their military plane was shot down, but what if he hadn't? What if he had gotten up on the wrong side of the bed that day? Now we have an alliance with Turkey. Are we going to fight Russia over that? So this thing is — I just saw an ad today about Trump and the nuclear codes and everything. And it's not a partisan book. I haven't endorsed anybody for president. But who's really the nuclear threat here? We have one candidate who has supported an involvement in a war which at least creates a serious threat of a nuclear confrontation with Russia.

WOODS: How does ISIS fit into the story you're telling in the book?

OSTROWSKI: Again, Tom, very, very complicated, very murky. So basically, as I see it, the US goes into Iraq and — I wrote about this at the time, and others did, that, look, Iraq's an artificial country. So long story short, they have elections; the Shiites are the majority there, about 60%. And guess what: the Shiites control the government. And guess what: in that part of the world, that's a life and death matter. And the Sunnis perceive — whether true or not, probably true, but it doesn't matter — but they perceive that they're going to be victimized, and they start various low-grade sort of rebellions against the Shiites.

This goes on for a number of years, and ultimately a guy named Zarkawi, he kind of takes the market competition and direction of whoever's the most vicious is going to get the most attention and really take power. He was a pretty nasty guy. And he created a force there that ultimately turned into ISIS. He was killed before ISIS. So basically ISIS is what happens when the Sunni area of Iraq has no government that any of them consider to be legitimate or acting in their favor. It's a tough neighborhood. There's no — the way to express your opposition is through force over there. So ISIS sort of rose out of this power vacuum where there is no Sunni government that the Sunnis recognize.

But ISIS gets its big chance when the Libya, when Qaddafi is toppled, and there's this very large country in the general neighborhood in the Middle East available to go in there and occupy and set up camp. And the Syrian war also creates an opportunity for ISIS to go into the Sunni areas of Syria, which are significant, as I already said. Syria has a very large Sunni population. So ISIS was not created by Obama or Hillary; however, it was a relatively small force before Libya and Syria — Libya and Syria gave ISIS the opportunity to grow and really thrive as they have and really become a threat to Europe. Obviously there have been terrorist attacks in the United States. So this has become a worldwide mess.

WOODS: Now, why did you write this book the way you did and not writing it as a book about, hey, here's some bad policy decisions that led to some terrible consequences? Why is it framed in terms of impeachment? There's no chance either — well, certainly can't impeach Clinton now — no chance of impeachment, so why are you framing it this way?

OSTROWSKI: I believe the framers took impeachment very seriously, and I think it's the lack of impeachment over the years for some of the things that presidents have done in foreign affairs, or at least the threat of impeachment, that has basically allowed Obama and Hillary when she was Secretary of State to just have this sort of casual attitude about, oh, you know, well, War Powers Act doesn't apply; there's no declaration of war, but, you know, all the other presidents have done it, so I'm going to do it. I know you guys aren't going to impeach me. So although we're not naive about the prospects for an actual impeachment of either Obama — time's ticking on that — or Hillary if she does get in there, we do believe that if we're going to stop these foreign misadventures, which have plagued us for about 100 years now, there should be a serious talk about impeachment.

Now, point two, the book just came out; I just got copies myself the other day. And I'm going to be dropping off copies to local congress people around here, and we're going to start to do that slowly. Every member of Congress — of the House, because they're the ones who do the initial impeachment — they're all going to get a copy, so we can hold them accountable. If they don't care about the obligation they have to impeach, then we can hold them accountable. But we also believe — it is a policy wonk book in the sense that we do talk about the ideological attitudes like progressivism that lead to bad policy such as this. There's a phrase in the book: "We want to impeach progressivism," which is probably more the point of the book. But impeachment has been just like a scarecrow, and it should be a serious threat if we want these constant foreign wars to stop.

WOODS: Of course one of the people you're talking about in the book and in your very title is running for president this year, so this is not entirely removed from immediate events. I mean, it's certainly still current events, but it is relevant to what's going on right before our eyes here. Now at the same time, she's running against Donald Trump, who says it was a big mistake to go into Libya and it was a big mistake to go into Iraq, but a number of people have pointed out to me that at the time he was demanding more action on Libya before it actually happened, and he did favor the Iraq War, so it's hard even to know where he stands on this. But how do you situate your book in terms of the election?

OSTROWSKI: Well, I'm hoping that, given the unlikelihood of actual impeachment, I am hoping to have an impact on some of the voters who read the book. We do want to get the book out to some of the candidates, you know, the minor party candidates obviously. We hope that Donald Trump reads the book. The funny thing is that after we came up with the idea for the book, which was in December, we noticed that Trump — I know he's not tapping our phones or anything, but I just noticed that Trump started to talk about Syria and Libya. So even though his early comments on these subjects were somewhat casual and somewhat contradictory, he does deserve credit I think from libertarians for criticizing these policies.

I'm not thrilled with his solutions, and I'm not sure that he has sort of a deep understanding of the problems here, but the bottom line is that these issues, the campaign has gotten so off course. We're talking about gold star parents and so on. There's real issues here that both Hillary has to answer for and Trump has to explain how he's going to do better, not just that, oh, I don't agree with Syria and Libya. What are you going to do better? He's talking about going after ISIS, but without an understanding that unless there's a Sunni-friendly government in that area, there's going to be turmoil for the next 500 years. So I'm hoping that the voters read the book; I'm hoping the media discusses the book. I hope the candidates read the book and maybe open their minds a little bit to some of the ideas in it.

WOODS: All right, so how can people get a copy? I assume through Amazon.

OSTROWSKI: Yeah, Amazon's great. It's Kindle and paper at this point. It's priced to sell; it's a short, readable book, but there's a lot of stuff in there. It's kind of packed with good stuff I think.

WOODS: Yeah, exactly. I mean, I sometimes talk about how much I can't stand books that are just fluff, and I sit there, I read 300 pages, and I've learned four things. Shame on me for going through the whole thing at that point. But yours is shorter, but there is no fluff, and every single sentence packs a punch. So the book is *The Impeachment of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton for High Crimes in Syria and Libya*. Linking to it, of course, at TomWoods.com/709. Good luck with it, Jim. Thanks for doing it.

OSTROWSKI: Tom, thanks a heck of a lot.