



Militants Take Key Iraqi Cities

Guest: Daniel McAdams

June 11, 2014

Daniel McAdams is executive director of the [Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity](#).

WOODS: We have a lot to talk about with foreign policy now. It seems like lately foreign policy has been more or less on the back burner. There's a lot of bluster from certain U.S. officials and from the ever-reliable John McCain, but now all of a sudden there really is some news, just from the past 24 hours, about what's going on in Iraq. As you described it to me just before we started recording, this is the most important development over there since 2003. What just happened?

McADAMS: Well, it's incredible. The Islamic state in Iraq and Syria, the ISIS, essentially yesterday overran the second largest city in Iraq, Mosul, which is a town of 1.8 million people. At least as importantly, it is also the center of oil production in Iraq and very close to the Kurd area. As a matter of fact, several Kurdish leaders live there. It is an enormously significant on a number of levels, which I think we can go into. First of all, as you know, ISIS took over Fallujah a few months ago, and that was of symbolic importance. But this is of strategic importance. And just before you and I started talking today, it turns out that Tikrit also fell to ISIS today, and as you remember, that's actually the home and the birthplace of Saddam Hussein, so a bit of irony there. But the ISIS is one of the groups in Syria that has benefited from the U.S. support for the overthrow of the Assad government. So that makes it additionally interesting. And there were several issues in the paper, the *Post*, the *Times*, everyone was writing about it yesterday, how not only did they take over Mosul, they captured an enormous amount of military equipment that the U.S. had just sent there to fight them or to keep Mosul. So they've captured tons and tons of stuff—tons and tons of weapons and have become instantly enormously more powerful and significant. So how's that for the wonderful glories of the Iraq war.

WOODS: Let's hone in on this issue of Syria, and the U.S. attempts to destabilize Assad. It doesn't matter whether you like Assad or you don't. You and I have no particular dog in this hunt one way or the other. But the point is that Assad is the enemy of these people who are now taking over these Iraqi cities, and yet McCain wants to destabilize him and yet presumably

also fight these people. At some point you've got to just come up with a coherent policy and stick with it.

MCADAMS: Exactly. You almost have to wonder, if you are a cynic: do they want this chaos? Is that what they really want? Are they lying through their teeth, or are they just that incompetent? As you say, neither of us have booked our tickets to Syria to retire, but however, the fact of the matter is, whatever his faults, the same with Saddam Hussein, Assad hated these radical jihadists. He was brutal. I am sure the human rights people were furious with how he treated them. However, undermining Assad has given the ISIS, particularly in eastern Syria, an enormous foothold, from which—I was just looking at a map this morning at all the territory that's now controlled by ISIS, and it is significant in that region. So by allowing them, and supporting them, and giving them safe haven, the U.S. has created an enormous problem. You remember Obama's big foreign policy speech in West Point, the other day, the other week, he said, "The major threat to America is still al Qaeda." Well, why is U.S. policy doing everything it can to strengthen them? It just makes no sense.

WOODS: You were wondering is this incompetence? Is it deliberate? I think for some of the neocons it probably would be deliberate in a certain sense, in that they do like to have a pretext for intervention—although it seems like they don't even need a pretext for intervention. But I think in the case of McCain, you know I like to keep this program at a relatively high level, but I think McCain really is dumb as a stick. (laughs) You know what I mean? I think there is no grand scenario, some grand plan in his mind.

But now, how does this development over the past couple of days affect the narrative about the Iraq war that is now pretty conventional: that yes, we had some ups and downs, but ultimately it turned out okay. That's the Democrat line, that's the neocon line, that's the Ann Coulter line—that the Iraq War was actually a smashing success that has been obscured by the media.

MCADAMS: And the surge was the greatest tactical move—

WOODS: In the history of the world!

MCADAMS: And the COIN philosophy, the counterinsurgency strategy, was wonderfully successful. All of these shibboleths have fallen by the wayside. And Tom, what's interesting is just following all the tweets yesterday from all the various U.S. government agencies, there's an awful lot of silence out there. They are not saying a lot. (Too early to comment. Can't say. Don't know. They are still fighting hard.) It's very funny. But back to whether they want it or not, the one thing you can say with the neocons is they have always had their sights set on Iran, and an ISIS victory in Iraq and in Syria does put more pressure on Iran, which has supported Assad in the past. So they may have this philosophy, as you know, they love the scorched earth. They may want, and they did this during the Iran/Iraq war. They want to build up the ISIS so that it can take out the Iraqi government, which has been somewhat close to Iran since it was put into

power, ironically, by the U.S. So this may be what they have in mind. It certainly doesn't jibe with the rhetoric coming out of Washington. So that's why they're silent, I think.

WOODS: Daniel, I am reading on the BBC website: "The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIS, has 3,000 to 5,000 fighters." So that's not—they don't sound poised to take over the country. What is the significance of this group, then?

McADAMS: Well, they were vastly outnumbered in Mosul, from what I read, and basically this Iraqi army that we spent Lord knows how many billions training and equipping, just turned tail and ran. And I saw some almost comical pictures—I hate to say it in a war zone—but not only did they run and leave their equipment, they actually took off their uniforms and ran. So they stripped down and turned tail and ran, so thanks a lot for all the money they've wasted training these guys. And I can't blame them [for not wanting] to stick around and get blown up by these pretty vicious warriors. But it just goes to show that Lenin was right: you don't have to have a majority. You just have to be very disciplined and motivated, and they've certainly shown this. And in Syria, this is the other thing. The ISIS and the other radical groups have routinely captured U.S. military equipment that's designed for the so-called "moderates" there. This is their *modus operandi*. It's happened over and over again. So we actually equip them, by default, in Syria to go attack our so-called allies in Iraq. It's dizzying.

WOODS: Daniel, suppose this kind of development continues—that we see more victories from this group. There's more instability in Iraq. We are inching our way, believe it or not, to another presidential election cycle already. It seems that they start earlier and earlier every cycle. How does this affect the Republican primaries, and do you think that even the Republican faithful are a little bit war weary? Are the candidates going to make any hay out of this?

MCADAMS: Well, I think if you look at the polls, even with Republicans you see a real turning away from the use of the military. I just did a piece last week on a most recent poll about this, but it's absolutely the case, and I think we're already seeing those with their political antennae finely tuned. I don't know, you probably saw this, but the big news a couple of days ago was Hillary Clinton came out and said if I could do it over again, I wouldn't have supported the Iraq war—something like this. So she's already rewriting her own history to try to ride this wave. As you know, she was one of the biggest war hawks in the administration before Kerry came along. So I think you're seeing this, and I think we're seeing some different Republican fights. And as you know, the Republican majority leader yesterday lost in the primary, which is pretty unprecedented, and he always ran as a neocon Republican. I'm talking about Eric Cantor. He always ran as a neocon Republican—very, very pro-war. He hated Ron Paul with a passion. And shock defeat last night in the primaries. It's tempting to make too much of this. It may not be anything. But I would say if any candidate is smart, he would understand that the American people are sick of it, and they are sick of the use of the military, and it's like—it really is like the quantitative easing. It's like interest rates at zero. There's nothing else they can do. I was on a show yesterday with Jeff Deist, a colleague in Dr. Paul's office, and he pointed out that monetary policy is over. I think the same is true with military policy. It's got to the point where

can you imagine if the president came and said we need to go back into Iraq? I think people would go nuts.

WOODS: Yeah, for what? At this point we're so removed from 9/11—which some people still thought Saddam Hussein had a hand in—that people's brains might be functioning again. What possible stake could we have in which of these groups is doing what? The Hillary Clinton craze, by the way—I am glad to see she's getting some pushback on her book. That's at least something, some sign of life out there. But it shows the utter uselessness of the Democrats. Here's a woman in the foreign policy arena, under Obama anyway, who was dead wrong on the issue of our time in foreign policy, which was the Iraq war, that anyone with even the tiniest glimmer of statesmanship in him would have stood up and said, this is absurd. It's preposterous. It's based on nothing. We all know it's based on nothing. You know it. I know it. It's all made up, and of course we can't support it. We all know how it's going to turn out. It's going to be a fiasco. It's immoral. It's expensive. Everything that could possibly be wrong with it is wrong. That's what needed to be said. Instead, she went along because that's what fashionable opinion was doing, and now, years later, standing to lose nothing, she says, oh, I wish I had been against it from the start. I wish I hadn't supported it. Well, that's easy for her to say now. At that time there was some war fever in the country she would have had to stand up to. But now almost everybody realizes it was a mistake. What a complete bunch of losers these people are with their "Ready for Hillary" signs. Yeah, we're ready for another mindless drone who refuses to stand up to the establishment—who now *is* the establishment.

MCADAMS: Exactly. A bunch of the bumper stickers "Pro Obama, Pro Peace," or something like that.

WOODS: Yeah! Do you read the newspapers?! Come on!

MCADAMS: She's been behind every one of these interventions. She was solid behind Libya, which is the next absolute fiasco. Maybe in five years, or maybe before the election she'll say I wish I hadn't been for that, either. Who knows?

WOODS: (laughs) Exactly, yeah. I wish she hadn't been, either. Let's look at Libya. I'm seeing a headline now about airstrikes being launched in West Benghazi. So it sounds like Libya might also not be a fairy-tale story about democracy and freedom coming to a place courtesy of John McCain. What's actually happening there?

MCADAMS: It's three years after they were supposedly liberated from Gaddafi. It's three years after democracy was to have taken hold and all of the aspirations of the individuals would have been realized and all of these things, and you look at it, and it's absolutely a disaster. They've not been able to contain a government. They've had militias running things in different sorts of fiefdoms, and now you have this guy who many suspect and who never denied that he had CIA ties. He lived in Fairfax, Virginia, out by where the agency is. For a number of years he went back there and basically just started bombing the government in place—took over parliament—said I am taking over now. And it's an absolute disaster area. That's why—and this is what we

always say that after these great liberations happen, the press goes home, and that's it. Nobody wants to talk about it. No one wants to hear about Libya these days. Nobody wants to hear about Yugoslavia, Serbia. Nobody wants to hear about Kosovo. Nobody wants to hear about Iraq. So they just ignore it. But there are real people who live there, and their lives have been destroyed unfortunately, and much of it is because of the interventionists and neocons here in the U.S.

WOODS: You know what? There is a good e-book for you to put out to promote the Ron Paul Institute—*The Interventions America Forgot*.

MCADAMS: That's a great idea. Thank you.

WOODS: Bring us up to date on what's been going on in those places. Christiane Amanpour doesn't show up there anymore, and yet life is going on in very challenging circumstances.

I want to try and fit in everything that I want to discuss in this potpourri episode. I realize this has fallen a bit out of the news cycle, although I see a recent piece here on CNN, so it is sort of still in the news: what was the deal in Nigeria with the missing girls and Barack Obama's wife, Michelle, did some kind of public service announcement about it? What was the actual story there, and what would be the take of the Ron Paul Institute on it?

MCADAMS: Well, it's interesting, and I do say it reminds me a couple of years ago of, do you remember this Kony 2012 when everyone was mindlessly holding up these signs saying we've got to drop everything and go find this guy that nobody's seen for a number of years? Nobody knows if he's even alive. And I think it's a great diversionary tactic to do this, especially to have the first lady holding up this ridiculous sign "Bring Back Our Girls," which doesn't make any sense. But if you look at it through the lens of we non-interventionists, and actually Dr. Paul had a column last month where he discussed it briefly. But if you look at things like Boko Haram, which is the group which supposedly kidnapped these girls, how is it that they became such a significant force in the region? How did they become so well armed? How did they become so powerful? Well, it's interesting: in Dr. Paul's column a couple of weeks ago, he cited a U.N. report from 2012, which was just months after the U.S. attack on Libya, and it said, "Some of the weapons could be sold to terrorist groups like al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, Boko Haram, or other criminal organizations." And those are the weapons that scattered when the U.S. destabilized and overthrew the government in Libya. So under the guise of getting rid of Gaddafi who was, as Assad, probably not someone we'd want to have over to dinner, nevertheless, the country was plunged into chaos. Weapons went all through Africa, all through the Middle East, into Syria and all of these groups, and so essentially, it's U.S. interventionism that created the very problem that now is demanding we do something to solve.

WOODS: You know what? That gives me another idea. I am giving you more work, Daniel. I know you've been sitting around—

MCADAMS: I am going to give you a cut. (laughs)

WOODS: (laughs) Well, I know you spend most of your time thinking, “If only I had something to do. (laughs) If only I could keep busy.” All right, here’s my next idea: a little e-book called *Backfired*, and the subtitle would be about the foreign policy of the last 10, 15 years. And you just look at: here were the stated goals of this foreign policy. So even from a neocon standpoint, here were the stated goals—here’s what actually happened, and you price it at x-dollars, and you say if you become a member of the Ron Paul Institute, you get this e-book for free plus the other one that Woods told me to write I am in the process of writing, and you’ll get that one for free as well. Anyway, I love giving other people ideas so that I don’t have to do them.

MCADAMS: Fantastic idea. Thank you very much for it. As a matter of fact, we are actually focusing on publishing some books this year. That’s our next push, so I thank you for these wonderful ideas.

WOODS: Oh, look, I am glad to supply them. I love giving other people ideas.

MCADAMS: We want to do one on the neocons, too, on what is neoconservatism, because so many people have written and asked. They say, you talk about it a lot, but why don’t you run it down? So we’re doing that. And I think that will be neat. And, of course, Dr. Paul’s terrific speech on neocons.

WOODS: I was going to say you would have to include that, yeah. Who are the neocons? Oh, my gosh, would that get attention for you guys. Oh, this is just great. You and I have to have war room sessions like this more often. But the good kind of war room session, where nobody dies. (laughs)