



The Bipartisan Foreign Policy Is a Failure

Guest: Michael Scheuer

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Michael Scheuer is the former head of the CIA's Osama bin Laden unit.

WOODS: You have written on your blog—which I strongly urge people to read, by the way: non-intervention.com—a post, “Obama Leads His Coalition of Arab Tyrants Into Another Losing, Islamist-Boosting War.” I love how not subtle that title is. I want you to defend that statement.

SCHEUER: Well, I think anybody with common sense in the United States, we’re seeing an anomaly from any sort of logical progression in U.S. foreign policy by our re-involvement in Iraq. The people we’re fighting and have been fighting for two decades, one of their main grievances against us is our continuing support for tyranny in the Muslim world, and especially in the Arab world. So Mr. Obama now goes to war at the head of a coalition of police states, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, and any other tyrant who wants to jump on board—Jordan. And so not only are we again involved in a war we cannot win—air power wins nothing. It kills some people, it gets you a body count, but it doesn’t win. And we’re reinforcing the belief across the Muslim world that the Americans will always come down on the side of tyranny.

WOODS: But it could be said, and indeed the neoconservatives have said, that at some level we can’t really care what our enemies think. Presumably the Germans didn’t like that we were bombing them, but we had to bomb them anyway. So why can’t the same logic apply here?

SCHEUER: Because we don’t have to fight these people, Tom. War, the founders, the American founders thought war was—we were hard-wired for war, and it was just a part of human life, but they didn’t go searching for it, and they didn’t want to get us involved in wars that we had nothing at stake in. Certainly in the Iraq/Syria theater today we have nothing at risk. Indeed, what could be better for the United States than Shias killing Sunnis? Especially since we’ve managed to lose wars in Iraq previously and in Afghanistan. The U.S. military is kind of the Chicago Cubs of the military profession. It’s an insane thing.

The neoconservatives are the deadly enemies of the United States because they want to remake the world in their image, and they will intervene for any reason at all, whether it’s for

Israel, to make Arabs love women's rights, or any other nonsense that you can encounter. I don't care, frankly, how many Arabs we kill if we have to kill them. In fact, the only mercy in any war is a speedy conclusion. But I think at the moment the neoconservatives have done nothing but get us involved in wars that we have no stake in. And they are all, in essence, chickenhawks because they will not endorse the use of the military to the extent that will be necessary if we choose to defeat the Islamists solely with military means.

WOODS: Mike, what would you say not to neoconservatives, but to more or less noninterventionists—to people who were skeptical, for example, of the Iraq war and generally favor nonintervention, but who, as you may have noticed, when ISIS came along, said: now, look, people, we can't be dogmatic about this. Sometimes there is an enemy so barbaric you just have to intervene. And ISIS is what everybody pretended Saddam was. It's got ambitions, and they cut people's heads off, which we don't recall Saddam doing. So in this case, I'm sorry, you've got to abandon your noninterventionist predilections and just go in and get rid of them. What could be the harm of getting rid of them? So in other words, you've got people who by and large are with us 80% of the time, but they say, no, this has to be the exception.

SCHEUER: Well, don't you think that speaks more to the narcissism in this day and age and this society than it does to the question of national security? These men getting their heads cut off is a tragic, barbaric thing to have happened. But it's no threat to U.S. national security. It offends our sensibilities, but it does not offend our security at all. And we operate from a calculus sometimes that doesn't match threats with capabilities. ISIS, if it consolidates its position in northern Iraq and eastern Syria, then what are they going to do? They're going to strap some kind of bomb to a pigeon to get over the Atlantic to us or over the Pacific? They're as unthreatening to us where they sit at the moment as Saddam was when he was in Baghdad. You can't stop thinking just simply because you are appalled by an act of violence overseas. From my own position, what's more barbaric than Americans having killed almost 60 million unborn people since 1973? I think we live in a land of barbarism at the moment.

WOODS: What did you think when the news reports were coming out a couple of months ago that there were people stranded up on that mountain and ISIS was planning to slaughter them, and they needed immediate intervention? What was the deal with that whole story, and did that in any way make you think that maybe a brief, little strike might be necessary? I'm playing devil's advocate.

SCHEUER: Yeah, I know you are, and a lot of people do, and I appreciate it because I'm kind of a little brain. I appreciate being tested on this. But I still think at the end of the day we should abide by what the Founders said, and that's to stay out of things in which we have no interests. We are not a nation of Red Cross people going to assist. We are not a nation of visionaries out to convince people why they should be democrats. As a friend of mine once wrote, we need to watch people die very calmly and without much concern, because we can't do much about it except ruin ourselves.

WOODS: Now, that's tough medicine for a lot of people to take, but it seems like for conservatives in particular, it really shouldn't be. A conservative is supposed to have a sense of the finite possibilities of this world. A conservative is not supposed to write a book called *An End to Evil*. A conservative is supposed to understand there's only so much you can accomplish in this fallen world. You try to send best wishes, you try to do what you can spiritually to help people, but really you can't solve all problems, and you can make an awful lot of problems worse, as the coming centenary of Woodrow Wilson ought to remind us. But I want to ask you—

SCHEUER: I have got my black arm band out already to wear for that year.

WOODS: (laughs) Exactly. I know it. I've already done a week of shows commemorating the beginning of World War I, but definitely when Woodrow Wilson comes along with the intervention in 1917, we have to do a whole month of shows, probably.

I think I want to talk a little bit about your own personal history, if I might, because you came to the attention of a lot of people in waves. First, there was the controversy over your book *Imperial Hubris*, which was written anonymously. I'll get to that in a minute. And then when you came out and endorsed Ron Paul, that was a very dramatic moment as well, when Dr. Paul was giving that reading assignment to Rudy Giuliani. That was fantastic. So that was another wave of attention where people began to get to know you. But let's go back to that book *Imperial Hubris*. I understand you actually had not wanted to write this book anonymously, but there was some kind of CIA protocol that required it?

SCHEUER: Well, I wrote the book largely in 1999. It was ready to publish in 2000, and the agency's senior people stopped publication—wouldn't give me permission to publish it either anonymously or under my own name because they were afraid it would offend Arabs. After 9/11 they became less concerned with those kinds of feelings, but yes, when I finally got approval to publish it, it was on the condition that my name would not be attached to it, and so we published it anonymously. It didn't last for long. Someone leaked it out of the agency to a journalist in Boston, and so I was revealed I think within six weeks or eight weeks.

WOODS: What do you think the aim was in leaking your name? Was it to hurt you?

SCHEUER: Yeah, because one of the arguments that I have been told went on is, let him publish it because he's an idiot. None of this stuff is going to be correct, and people will just think he's a madman. So the idea was to associate my name with the book, because the powers that be within the agency thought that what I had written was plainly stupid and would never come to pass, because we were omnipotent and all-knowing as a country, and I would ruin myself by publishing it.

WOODS: So what was your thesis in that book that was supposedly so wildly implausible?

SCHEUER: (laughs) That we should often stop, if we have declared enemy, and listen to what he is saying, Tom.

WOODS: How about that?

SCHEUER: And just listen to him. And then what I said was, you can't take a man at his word. But if a man matches deeds with words, you'd better pay attention. And in the case of Osama bin Laden from 1996 until his death, I think the correlation is probably around 75 or 80%, and that which doesn't correlate is because they found it impossible to do. I tried I two books. The book before that was called *Through Our Enemy's Eyes*. I tried in both of those books to say, listen, this is not a flash in the pan. This is a man who has stopped trying to rouse the Muslim world because Americans drink whiskey, have X-rated movies, their daughters go to university, and instead he is focused on substantive foreign policy issues that have a tendency to unite the Muslim world, from Milwaukee to Manila, against the United States. But, as always, people seem to—in America at least, policymakers seem to think that they know better what an enemy intends than what he himself says he intends.

WOODS: And this doesn't make any sense at all, because the idea of perpetrating terrorist acts is to advance your stated goals. Why would you muddy the waters by being unclear about your stated goals? I see no reason—that doesn't seem to make sense for him to obscure what his goals would be.

SCHEUER: No, it was clearly in his favor in terms of his Islamic audience to state his goals as clearly, precisely, and as substantively as possible. And he turned out finally—he was able to find out finally that he could do that with increasing precision and clarity, because the enemy was ignoring what he was saying.

WOODS: I was going to say I think it's very telling that the Iranians did try to get people worked up in the 1980s about the decadence of the West, and it didn't really go anywhere. Whereas bin Laden's got this defensive program. What is his defensive program? What is it that he was calling for?

SCHEUER: Well, he was calling for—to stop Americans supporting tyranny. These police state he would say—Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the rest of them in the region—exist because the Americans support them militarily. They buy oil from them. They support them diplomatically. And we need to attack this. We need to get rid of this tyranny. Where is the weak link? America was the weak link. They are on the Arab Peninsula. The Arab Peninsula belongs to Muslims. Mohammed said on his deathbed: if I live, no one but a Muslim will be living on this peninsula. What else? Israel. After 9/11 the neocons came out in force to say that, well, bin Laden didn't care about Israel and Palestine; it's only since 9/11 that's he's become involved in it. In his declaration of war in 12 pages of text, he mentions Israel 13 times.

Those are the grievances, and they are grievances that are felt across the Muslim world, Tom. The issue of Israel-Palestine is an everyday discussion point among Muslims in the Philippines and Malaysia and Montreal. Our presence in the Holy Land in Saudi Arabia, our military presence, is a point of discussion. These are very substantive issues for Muslims, and these are the things he concentrated on. He has not attacked our movie industry, although I'm sure he

loathes it. But he is really focused on issues of substance, and I think perhaps American policymakers—they can't all be stupid, but they must be afraid of going to the American people and saying, listen, Osama was right. They hate us because of what we do, not who we are. They don't give a flying fig about what we do in North America, but what they're trying to do is get us out of their hair, and now, in some ways under Obama and Mrs. Clinton, especially, they have brought Professor Huntington's clash of civilizations even closer, because they have been driving on the social issues; women's right, secularism, democracy. They have stoked this war up at least as much as Osama bin Laden was able to do during his life.

WOODS: All right, let me ask you something a little bit out of left field. If it's true that it makes no sense for a leader like bin Laden not to be frank and up front about what he's doing and why he's doing it, then what do we make of the fact that bin Laden resolutely denied being involved in 9/11, and when Afghanistan said you've got to send us the proof and then we'll send him to you, no proof was forthcoming. Can you sort that all out for us?

SCHEUER: Well, I think if you read their—al Qaeda is a learning organization, and unfortunately for us, Islamism, the movement that bin Laden helped to generate, attracts the best and the brightest in the Muslim world. And documents we captured after 9/11 very clearly said about the use of propaganda that the Americans in the West are so powerful in the media that we cannot beat them head on. When they take up the theme of, for example, what you said: al Qaeda did 9/11. If we go out and say that we did it, we'll just gin up that fervor in the West and create a greater desire for them to respond militarily against us, us being al Qaeda and its supporters. So they said wait. Wait until it dies down. So they didn't claim it for two years, and by that time we were mired in Afghanistan. We were having people killed. We clearly had not won, and Osama came out, and his lieutenants came out and celebrated the fact that they did indeed do 9/11.

WOODS: All right, what about the killing of Osama bin Laden. Does anything about that strike you as fishy—that we got him, but we got rid of his body? There's no evidence of anything, but we got him. Does that at least sound a little bit odd from people who lie 24 hours a day? Is there anything fishy about that to you?

SCHEUER: Well, the behavior after the fact was fishy. I don't think that it's fishy. I think he is dead, and I think they killed him, the SEALs killed him, and I wouldn't be surprised to find out at some point that Obama had to be forced into doing it by his lieutenants. But the way they handled it afterwards just goes to show, Tom, I think, the fact that we haven't learned anything since 1996 when we declared war, or since 2001 when they attacked us here. We have learned nothing about Islam. They were afraid, they said, that if the shot-up body of Osama was—the pictures of it were released, the Muslim world would rise up and do bad things to us. So they buried him at sea. Well, anyone who knows anything about Islam knows that it is a disgrace, almost a heresy, to bury someone at sea unless they are sick on a boat and risking contaminating other people. And they also argued, well, if we bury him on land, his supporters would build a shrine, and people would make pilgrimages to it.

Well, bin Laden is part of a sect in Islam that specializes in tearing down any kind of shrine that seems to equate a man, a human, with a divinity, or with God, and so their arguments were nonsense. The other point in killing bin Laden—I personally believe it was a great thing that they killed him, because although al Qaeda was not any more than the first among equals at that point in the Islamist movement, he was definitely at the core of whatever was going to be planned against the United States, so it was important to kill him. But he died a completely successful man. His goal from the start was to use al Qaeda as a vanguard organization and use it to try to incite the Muslim world to a defensive jihad against the United States that would make al Qaeda almost, not irrelevant, but again, just one of many. And when he died, that was exactly the situation. The jihad was self-perpetuating. They now have groups that are stronger than al Qaeda who control areas and not just hit-and-run groups, and yet we don't seem to realize what's going on around us. We thought the president and many Republicans and Democrats said, well, the end of Osama is really the beginning of the end of the movement, and now we see almost a nation-state of Islamists established in Iraq and Syria. The paucity of brain power that we've brought to bear on this issue...is really astounding now.

WOODS: Well, going back to the current day, what do you say to people who say we wouldn't be in the current predicament we're in in Iraq, for example, if only we had listened to Bush that if you withdraw—you heard this, right?—then all the crazies are going to take over, so you've got to just stay in there. And people are saying, my goodness, how prophetic was that George W. Bush! When you hear that kind of statement, what does that do to you?

SCHEUER: It makes me terribly nervous about the American educational system, because we seem to have forgotten that we started that war, and we never intended to win it. One of the problems with war-making since September 1945 is that we forgot that war is about killing people until they don't want to be killed anymore, and so we dabble with it. That's why we have so many wars. Bush started a war—in many ways Osama bin Laden could not have accomplished what he accomplished without us. Bill Clinton, George Bush, and Barack Obama did for Osama what Osama would have maybe one chance in five of doing for himself over the next x-number of years. They were the perfect foil. Every time bin Laden turned around, there we were in another Muslim country. What Bush did, against the advice of large parts of the intelligence community, was to go into Iraq after Saddam, who was not a threat to the United States, but by going into Iraq, Bush gave the Islamists and bin Laden the predicate for a defensive jihad. We invaded Iraq without any challenge to us. Saddam didn't declare a war at us. We invaded a Muslim a country. We occupied it. We established a government that was made up of secular laws, not God's law, and it was an oil-rich country. It was almost—it was like the script was written by Osama bin Laden and company for Bush to stumble into. What does Bush mean if we withdraw? Does he really think 30,000 American troops left behind would have made any difference? It would have been like a small Fort Apache garrison in that world at the moment, just like the 10,000 who are going to be left behind in Afghanistan. It's nonsense. It's only going to get our people killed.

WOODS: But how would you make the argument that in fact to the contrary had it not been for Bush's intervention to begin with, not the failure to stay? The problem was the intervention in the beginning. Had it not been for that, we wouldn't be in the situation we're in now because certainly Saddam didn't have the ambitions that ISIS has, and he wasn't doing some of the things that, as you say, offend our sensibilities the way they are. So couldn't you make the case that certainly we'd be much better off had there been no intervention at all from the start?

SCHEUER: That's absolutely the case, Tom. That was a war that never should have been started. I tend to think that once it was started, it had to be won, but it was a double loss for us. We never should have invaded. That was a loss when we did, and we should have never left without some kind of victory, because the Muslim world now regards that as a defeat of the second superpower as they will in Iraq, as they will in Afghanistan, and as they will again in Iraq when Obama throws in the towel there. Certainly it would have been better if he had never done it. He gave the predicate for this perpetual jihad to the Islamists.

WOODS: Do you see any—I am sorry to make you be a prognosticator—possibility that the American public might be willing to listen to a different narrative, a different version of events? Because we're heading into, if you can believe it, already almost heading into another presidential election season. They get earlier every year. I can't imagine listening to the Republican presidential debates this year. It's just going to be a horror show. Any chance of that ever changing?

SCHEUER: I am frankly not sure where Dr. Paul's son stands on a great many issues. Without Dr. Paul's voice in the Congress on a consistent basis, the American people won't be hearing a contrary opinion. They will be hearing varying opinions on the same theme. And if you read this morning in one of the papers Graham and McCain writing an op-ed about this is time for war, and we need to do this, that, and the other thing with the military. I don't know. I think the polling clearly shows that Americans are sick and tired of war, but they really have no feeling, I think, that there's any other kind of foreign policy than interventionism. It's not taught in our schools. It's not taught that for 150 years it protected America from the foolishness of the rest of the world. Our schools teach denigration of the Founders because they are either old men or dead white men who had slaves.

I don't see it, Tom. Unless Rand Paul develops a very clear position, but at the end of the day, we saw him roughly in support of Israel—certainly more than roughly in support of intervening in the Ukraine if it was necessary. I don't know where the voice is going to come from. It's a very sad situation, and things unfortunately don't change in America unless there is a calamity, and I think there's probably a calamity on the way, and maybe there'll be an opportunity then, but until then, we're probably going to ride the war horse for the foreseeable future.

WOODS: It's a real shame, because it seems to me that even from his own political point of view it would make sense for Rand to be more willing to differentiate himself from the pack—because otherwise, why wouldn't a standard Republican voter choose Ted Cruz over him? I'll

get all the good parts of Rand, plus I'll get all the hawkishness I want. That seems like a losing proposition, not a winning one. I keep getting told, oh, Woods, you're always expecting perfection. No, I am expecting somebody to sensibly differentiate himself so that he doesn't get lost in the Republican pack, and it's vastly more important, vastly more important for the country that somebody get up there at his own personal expense and speak truth to the public than it is that he keep shedding everything that he believes in so that he can have an empty victory that probably won't come anyway. Anyway, that's just my own personal view of that.

SCHEUER: I am not far from that, Tom, either. I think we need to have some straight talk to the American people about not only what we're involved in overseas, but the deceitfulness and corruptness of the ruling class in this country in both parties. But where are you going to find the podium? Ron Paul had one by the force of his personality and by the public support he could generate. Right now I think that public support, which was very intense for Ron Paul, is just dissipating for Rand because no one knows what the heck he's doing or why.

WOODS: I'm just about to let you go, but I will tell you the most politically exciting event of my life, and probably will remain that way, was those initial Republican debates, where Ron took the contrarian views on foreign policy, and he took views that were so contrarian we had never heard them in a Democratic debate, never heard them in a Republican debate—never heard them. And when Giuliani attacked him for saying it, everybody expected, well, we all know what happens. When you get attacked for accidentally telling the truth in America, you immediately apologize and you beat your breast, and I am so sorry that I accidentally told you the truth. He doubled down and insisted that he was right. I thought, this is the most thrilling moment of my life, and I fear I may not get any more such thrilling moments. So any of you younger people out there someday give me a thrill. All right, will you? By getting out there and trying to do what Ron did. It's really, really hard, but it would be great. Just before I let you go, tell people about your website.

SCHEUER: Well, thank you, Tom. It's called non-intervention.com, and it is a place where I try to give a perspective that is pretty similar to Dr. Paul's on specific issues of foreign policy whether it's Israel or the Ukraine, mostly about the Middle East, but I've also started to write a little about the American people's responsibility for eventually resisting the tyranny that's growing in the White House. That has earned me a lot of dislike from a lot of people, but I think it's important. We were not meant to be passive in the sense of losing liberty, and I think the time is coming where we have almost exhausted the ballot box as a tool to change things, and that presents you with the ultimate problem in a republic. I'm trying to remind people that they don't have to acquiesce, and I think it's important for Americans to guard the Second Amendment with great vigilance and to make sure that they don't passively go into a state of authoritarianism, which is exactly where we're headed at the moment under both Democrats and Republicans. I think Democrats are worse by far. I think they are tyrannical by nature. But that's what it's about. I have a hard time. I had to cut off comments a couple of weeks ago because the pro-Israeli people sent in about 45,000 emails, and it crashed the company that

hosts it. It crashed part of their system, so I cut off the comments. But it's non-intervention.com, and perhaps in the future I will be able to have comments again.