



The War on ISIS: Another Round of Idiocy

Guest: Scott Horton

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Scott Horton hosts The Scott Horton Show Monday through Friday on the Liberty Radio Network (lrn.fm).

WOODS: We're being told that it's essential for the U.S. to get back into the Middle East again, to get involved in another Middle East war. This time we have to do it. Even some of the noninterventionists among the conservatives are saying, "Yeah, we're noninterventionist most of the time but this! Two journalists were beheaded. Surely we have to intervene now." What is your take on that? Are the conservatives just squishy on this? Or are the ISIS people really that much worse than any of the other bad guys from the past? What's going on here?

HORTON: Well, the ISIS guys really are fanatical. If you need a poster child for a group of terrorists taking over a state and being just as bad as you can possibly imagine them being, then they fit the bill. They really are civilian-butchering monsters. They're very chauvinist, they absolutely hate Shia. They basically are, minus the WMD of course, the terrorist threat that George Bush pretended that Saddam Hussein was, when he set about to make it this way. Which was exactly what was the result of his lies back then.

WOODS: Let me just jump in on that then and say, in that case, why are the conservatives not right to say most of the time we don't favor intervention because it just leads to worse outcomes, but how could there be a worse outcome than this organization gaining more and more ground? There couldn't be. So therefore we have to have the intervention. How do you answer that?

HORTON: Well, because right now they're actually very weak. They could become much more powerful, and they're more likely to become more powerful if we intervene, rather than being degraded. As you've set it up, what's the problem with the right? The problem with the right is, they see images on TV of convoys of Toyota trucks—where do they get these Toyota trucks?—coming down the road with all these ISIS guys in them and they think, wouldn't it be fun to fly an F-15 and blast these guys? Sure, no problem,

and no innocents killed there. No big deal. However, that doesn't accomplish anything, actually, other than all of their public relations goals.

Just today I interviewed the former chief of the CIA's bin Laden unit, Michael Scheuer, on my radio show, Tom, and he was saying to me that those beheadings are nothing but the worm on the hook. And we're the fish. They don't just want, they desperately need, American intervention against them. Tom, war is the health of the state, unless you completely are obliterated and lose. And so for the same reason that George W. Bush and Barack Obama need terrorist enemies, these terrorists need American enemies. If they can be seen as the ones fighting the Americans, they rally that many more people to their cause.

It's also no different if Obama is just flying air missions or sending in ground troops. Because if he's just flying air missions, he's flying air cover for the Shiite Iraqi army and militias backed by the Iranians. It's not just that the Iranians are Shiites, it's that their government is a revolutionary Shiite theocracy, so it's Shiaism in force. If those groups come in and try to take these cities that ISIS has taken, that just rallies more people to their cause. So if we back any of ISIS's enemies against them, we make them more powerful. Same thing if we send in our Marine Corps. The very most damage that we could deliver to them would be we send our Marines, they sack Fallujah, they sack Mosul, they sack Tikrit. No one doubts our Marines could do it, although I'm not sure we really have enough of them now, but maybe. But then what are they going to do? As Michael Scheuer put it on the show today, stay there forever, hold that territory forever?

The truth of the situation is the new Islamic state, so-called caliphate over there, is absolutely and completely landlocked and surrounded by enemies. And, really, the people that they've conquered, the Sunni Arabs of western Iraq and eastern Syria that they actually are ruling over, have more reason to hate them and want to be rid of them than anyone else. They are pretty much a movement that has forced themselves on these people in a lawless territory. But the traditional system in these regions is the tribal system, not hard-core Islamist, Salafist, bin Ladenite caliphatism, or whatever. In other words, they're absolutely contained just by geography by the enemies that they have in every direction. And because they're such would-be totalitarian monsters, they absolutely alienate the people that they attempt to rule. And we saw what happened when al Qaeda in Iraq, which is what this is, really, during Iraq War II, they ended up alienating all the local Sunnis that they'd been fighting for because they just took it way too far. And after Zarqawi was killed, they tried to declare themselves for the first time the Islamic State of Iraq, at which point all the local Sunni tribal and religious leaders said, "Yeah, right! This is our country." Most of these al Qaeda guys are foreigners—Saudis, Libyans, Syrians, Egyptians and Jordanians who had gone there to fight. They all said, "No, this is our country. You guys are our small minority of helpers. You're not the bosses of us," and quickly marginalized them in the so-called great victory that David Petraeus took all the credit for when the tribes marginalized the jihadists back then. In

other words, even from a non-libertarian point of view, even from just a hardcore national interest, American utilitarian point of view, the best solution here is to do nothing and to let the situation play out.

I read a scare-mongering thing from a guy from the Rand Corporation who said—it's funny, it's shades of Mike Meyers—they're making \$2 million a day. Right, like these guys have never heard of Alan Greenspan and inflation before, they still think that's a lot of money! He estimated that their annual budget this year will be \$2 billion. Not \$200 billion, not \$2 trillion, which is half of the U.S.'s budget, just \$2 billion. Not \$20 billion, \$2 billion is their annual budget. That goes to pay their fighters and their fighters' wives when they get killed—their pensions, whatever.

They have more than their hands full and enemies all around. Really, Tom, I'd argue, what conservative, liberal or anyone else could argue that now is the single best time ever to just stop intervening over there? It's 100 percent clear that this is 99.9 percent America's government's fault and there's nothing we could possibly do in intervening in the situation but make it worse, so if there was ever a time to just go cold turkey on intervention and quit trying to pretend that the next one is going to solve the problem of the last one instead of making it worse, now's the time.

WOODS: Scott, there have been a number of different estimates of the strength of the forces of ISIS. There's been a CIA estimate, which may be an over-estimate; you never know what to think of CIA estimates. So what's your sense of how substantial a force we're looking at?

HORTON: As you mention, the CIA high-end estimate is 30,000 fighters. How many of those are committed, real hardcore ideological types? Maybe half of that, probably less. The real question is, in what swamp are they festering? Why have the tribal leaders compromised with these men at all? Why have the former Baathist military commanders of Saddam Hussein compromised to work with these, you know, school shooter, Khmer Rouge lunatic types? And the answer is because they've been completely frozen out. Because not just did George Bush invade Iraq, but he stayed. And remember even libertarians, all kinds of people say, "Well we can't just cut and run now, the violence will get worse, we can't leave now, we can't leave now." They've said it for years and years. But it was America that was causing all the violence because—and this is especially easy to see now, Tom, that America has left and is now going back again and all this, you look back in hindsight: the only mission the Americans actually accomplished the entire time that they were in Iraq was to help the Iranian-backed Shiite militias kick all of the Sunnis out of Baghdad and make it an 85 percent super-majority Shiite city ruled by the 60 percent majority Shiite Arab population of the country. It was a minority ruled city, Baathist dictatorship—not a Sunni Islamist one, a Baathist one, meaning Saddam was basically a communist in olive green, with a beret and a clean-shaven chin. But he was representing the Sunni minority tribes and all of that and lording it over the Shi'a. And what Bush did was, he had the army and Marine

Corps change that and make Baghdad a Shiite city. So what did that mean? It meant that the parties that Bush chose to put in power to be the leaders of the Shiite community, to take over the new government in Baghdad, by the time America left, they didn't have one reason left to compromise with the Sunnis at all. We'd given them all of Baghdad. So from their point of view, the Sunnis can rot in the sun. If they want to fly a black flag over Mosul, Tikrit, and Fallujah, Baghdad doesn't really care about that.

The Iranian plan, and well-intentioned and well-informed commentators have been warning of this all along—Bob Dreyfuss, Justin Raimondo, and others from 2003 on—saying the Iranian plan is to run away with the land from Baghdad to Basra—Shi'as-tan, George W Bushisatan, Ayatollah-land—in alliance with Iran and they're not dumb enough to try to occupy and conquer and rule the predominantly Sunni areas of Iraq.

That's why the "Iraqi army," the Shiite army, turned and fled when ISIS came. They didn't want to fight at all, because it wasn't their city to fight for. I'm talking about in Mosul in June. That's why they turned and fled; they were occupying someone else's land and without the support to do so. So they just turned right around and went home.

The Sunnis have been completely frozen out of the process since 2003; they get none of the spoils of the oil wealth, and they have none of the security force positions in the police or the military, so they're all basically living in no-man's land. And then here comes ISIS saying, "We'll help you fight those Shiites; we'll get revenge for you, and we'll also fill the potholes and administer a local court system and we'll be less corrupt than the people that you are suffering under now." And so even though these guys are a bunch of bin Ladenites, this is the same effect that happened with the Taliban in the 1990s. The warlords fighting over Kabul were such criminals that people welcomed the Taliban because they're not corrupt. I mean, they're evil and totalitarian, but they're not corrupt. You can't bribe them; if one of them takes a bribe he gets thrown down a well, you know?

That's the kind of compromise that people are making now. They have lived in such insecurity, in such desperation, frozen out of the system of the country formerly known as Iraq, that they're now desperate enough to turn to these guys. So again back to the point that it was American intervention that made it this way.

I'll go you further, Tom, because I'm not certain if you're going to ask me or not, I'll go ahead and say the Obama strategy as he's explained it is absolutely laughable and crazy and ridiculous and cannot work. He swears there is going to be no combat troops, and he may even be telling the truth for now that that is what he wants, but then he says he is going to destroy ISIS. With what, drones and F-18s? Bombing from the air? Killing even more civilians in aerial strikes, rallying even more people to their cause?

You can't sack a city and drive a government out of control of a city with just air power, not unless you're willing to go full-scale Dresden on them, and you can't do that with

photography being what it is in the 21st century now. And this is just the Iraq side. In Syria he wants to keep backing some of the mujahideen against the other mujahideen and against the Shiite government there. I mean, he is absolutely 10 times as mad in Syria as he is in Iraq, and yet anyone can tell you—anyone who is not just hell-bent, up to their eyeballs in slogans, Tom—can tell you that this strategy outlined by the government, by Obama, by his secretary of defense, makes no sense whatsoever. It's an absolute disaster.

And that's why they say, "It might take as long as three years." It's because they have no idea how this is even supposed to work. In fact, I'll even go you one worse, which is the Kagans, the very famous neocon family, Robert Kagan and Fred Kagan. Well, Fred Kagan has a wife named Kimberly Kagan, and they were the two big think-tank supporters of the surge back in '07 which accomplished nothing other than making everything worse. They have a new study out that says Obama has got to put in at least 25,000 ground troops. That's the Institute for the Study of War, and they say right there in the preface—it's hilarious the way they say it; I'll paraphrase it very closely: "There is no articulate-able narrative for how to achieve a positive outcome in Iraq and Syria. Send 25,000 troops." We cannot even feed you a line of b.s. that we think even sounds plausible like it could work, so we're not even going to try. We're just going to tell you, "We've got to bomb them, and we've got to send troops." That's all they can say, Tom! They don't even have a line about how it's supposed to work.

WOODS: All right, so they don't have a line on how it's supposed to work, but presumably they do have some unstated real reason for what they do. Because they always have some real reason, and then they give us the b.s. reason. If they're not giving us a b.s. reason, I assume they still have some reason. Now for Obama personally, it could be nothing more than that he feels compelled to do something and he's sick of being called a wimp. I'm sure there is something more to it with him, but the people around him must have some reason for this. What is that reason?

HORTON: Well, it's confusing, because in terms of domestic politics, most of the foreign policy pressure, as you can hear John McCain stuck in the doublethink, is still focused on Assad, as though Assad is a worse threat than ISIS, and that's simply because that's what Israel wants. As Michael Oren, the former ambassador to the United States from Israel, explained, Israel has wanted Assad gone this whole time, and between these bad guys – al Qaeda – and those bad guys – Assad and Hezbollah, he prefers these bad guys – al Qaeda. Because those bad guys — Assad and Hezbollah — are backed by Iran.

So, the domestic political pressure, mostly, is still to weaken Assad and even complete the overthrow of Assad in order to destroy Iran's last alliance in the Arab world in order to weaken Iran, because that is Israel's obsession. But never mind the fact that Iran is not really America's enemy. The only thing Iran ever did to America was overthrow our sock-puppet fascist dictator monster that ruled their country, which they had every right to do. It's al Qaeda that's our enemy.

What's insane is that America has been backing the rebellion, which has included al Qaeda, for the last three years in Syria, due to this policy. Now the ship of state is so hard to turn around, they can't figure out how to go back to aligning with Assad like George W. Bush did and fighting against al Qaeda. Now they've got to fight al Qaeda and Assad at the same time. The whole thing is just chaos!

When it comes to the answer, but why attack the Islamic State, the only real political interest weighing on that that I can think of really is just the bad public relations from a narrow party politics point of view of just having basically Osama reincarnate declare himself as the caliph of this state. It's bin Laden's dream come true, and just from how it looks in a domestic politics sense, even though there is the whole confusion and dissonance with the anti-Assad Syria policy.... I think ultimately they figure from Democratic and Republican politics point of view, they just can't tolerate somebody like Baghdadi being the government of Sunni-stan in that part of Iraq. If somebody has to be the big daddy, Tony Soprano tribal chief, that's one thing, but now their Syria policy has blown up in all of our faces so big and in such an ugly way, where he is literally calling himself the caliph, I think that given the presumptions of the entire terror war they just can't let that result stand.

I've been saying this since before they sacked Mosul, I've been saying this really all year long: ISIS, al-Nusra, in Syria are getting so powerful now that I expect them to really create that caliphate between Syria and Iraq, and then for America to re-invade and go back to war against it. It's just playing out the logical thing.

In fact, a year ago I wrote a thing in the Future of Freedom Foundation saying that, that it's the rise of the caliphate and we'll end up going back to war against them. Because it's just that easy to see. In fact, Tom, it seems like really that Israel-first, support-the-mujahedeen treason to weaken Assad has actually helped prevent this war from being that much worse. If we had just had a George W. Bush Assad policy this whole time, of paying him to help kill and torture and murder these guys, then there wouldn't have been much confusion; Obama would have just declared war and we'd have gone right back to war in June.

Instead, they've had to try to figure out how in the hell are we going to sell going to war against Assad and his enemies at the same time? And it's making it very difficult—thank goodness...in an ironical kind of way.

WOODS: You know, as soon as this whole issue really broke, almost immediately we started to hear stories that had no substance to them, they were pure speculation, about ISIS sleeper cells in the U.S. There was no evidence of this, it was entirely a suspicion of an ex-CIA guy, and every right-wing radio guy ran with this sort of story. Now there is no evidence for anything like that. It's not impossible, right? It's certainly not beyond the realm of possibility. But we go from 99 percent of Americans never

having heard of these people, to the next day they're terrified that the guy running the deli down the street may actually belong to them.

HORTON: Right. No, it's crazy, and honestly, Tom, I think you're right to say that it is possible, and I think it's more likely now than ever before. I mean, I don't know what to say. I've been saying for three years in a row that it is high treason for Obama to support the rebellion in Syria — for Obama to work, and the CIA, and Americans to work, with the Saudis, the Qataris, the Turks, in order to train up and finance and support this jihadi-led rebellion, which has always been led by the suicide-bomber kooks since 2011 on. This whole time.

And yet the policy has persisted and persisted, and there are at least a couple of thousand Europeans, western Europeans, who have traveled to Syria to fight, some of whom have passports and will be able to make it back to western Europe, and there are at least tens, they say, of Americans who have gone and done the same. There was an American suicide bomber in Syria who had gone to fight, and then he came home, and then he went back and he did a suicide attack in Syria. But he was from Florida and he came back and he hung around for a while before he went back and did his suicide attack. In other words, do you have faith that the FBI and the CIA are keeping a close count on who all these guys are and where they are and making sure that none of them get back into the United States? I have absolutely no trust in that whatsoever.

And so yes, it has been an absolutely extremely dangerous policy this whole time to support this rebellion—which again, I'm not saying has been direct U.S. support for ISIS, but in effect, and indirect, enough that it is still their responsibility. I mean, Assad would have won this civil war against these jihadists back in 2011, Tom, if it hadn't been for the United States and our allies' intervention here, our satellites' intervention here.

So now is it likely that we're going to see 20 guys take 4 planes and hit 3 out of 4 targets like on 9/11 kind of a thing? No. But then again, like you said at the top of the show, all it took was a couple of journalists being beheaded *over there*—guys who were taking a risk in a foreign war zone—that apparently is a good enough excuse to go to war. I don't know if you've been watching FOX News lately but there has a story that for some reason only FOX News will cover, where a guy murdered—I think he's in the northwest somewhere—three people at random, just murdered three people on the street at random, shot them. And when he was arrested he told the cops he did it as revenge for our foreign policy. And that by definition a lone wolf, inspired type attack. This is what happens when we're now at year 13 of this and counting, and re-invading again, and more than a million people killed, the entire region bankrupted and turned upside down, destabilized, radicalized.

So, yes, you're correct there is no evidence whatsoever that there are ISIS sleeper cells in the country and that sure as hell shouldn't be a reason to go to war, that should be a reason to stay out of it, anyway. But then also you're right that it is a possibility, and

probably a greater one than ever before—again, that’s why we should not be intervening here. I mean, let’s just assume the premise for a minute, that we do have a sleeper cell in every major American city, well now what are we supposed to do, carpet bomb the caliphate over there? That’s going to—what? Make these guys give up and go home? Or that’s going to provoke them into actually killing people—you know, being activated and doing something crazy?

I’m not saying that we should negotiate with terrorists or that we should do things their way, follow their marching orders or whatever, like they tried to say about Ron Paul. I’m just saying that we’re not supposed to be doing the wrong thing in the first place, so it’s not the wrong thing to stop doing the wrong thing. And if stopping doing the wrong thing helps improve your security situation, well then good. Doing the wrong thing never helped improve it, that’s for sure.