



Iran Sanctions
Guest: Daniel McAdams
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Daniel McAdams is executive director of the [Ron Paul Institute for Peace and Prosperity](#), and served for many years as foreign affairs, civil liberties, and defense policy adviser to Congressman Ron Paul.

WOODS: A lot to talk about here. The first thing is what's just happened in Fallujah. Tell us about that.

McADAMS: Well, it really is interesting. You'll remember, Tom, that this is the great myth of the Iraq War, which is in the recap the so-called second battle of Fallujah in 2004, where about 1000 Americans lost their lives for recapturing the Al Anbar province. The surge afterward, which they say cemented the victory for the U.S., it's all gone up in smoke completely. Things are back to where they were status quo—and worse, even. The neocons are scrambling to explain it, because they never of course admit they're wrong. So they say that it's all Obama's fault. That al-Qaeda has strengthened its position in the Anbar province, for a time had control of Fallujah; I don't know what the exact situation is today. There have been some countermoves on the part of local militias and the Iraqi government. Sort of a three-way civil war has been created.

So you can imagine what the situation is like for the people who were supposedly liberated by our invasion when you've got three different fighting factions all over the place. Fallujah was an absolute disaster. The U.S. flattened it literally in the second invasion, and then of course there are reports of using this white phosphorus, cluster bombs, and all sorts of horrific things. We've seen certainly a lot of, at the very least, anecdotal reports about serious birth defects that have subsequently been discovered there. So Fallujah I think has blown up with the resumption of al-Qaeda-like activities in the town and certainly in the whole region.

WOODS: It's a bit rich for them to claim that Obama is to blame for the presence of al-Qaeda anywhere in Iraq, when of course the question we ought to be asking is: what presence did they have in Iraq *at all* before the year 2003 and the war? I mean, is that just a rhetorical question?

McADAMS: Exactly. You know, they're the ones to blame for this entire disaster. Of course they'd never take blame. Dr. Paul did a column last week where he talks about this Fallujah takeover. There was a wonderful quote he found from Richard Perle. Richard Perle—you know, the big cheerleader for the war, it's going to be easy, we can do it, or they can do it, not me. He was asked in early 2013 the old Madeleine Albright question, "Considering everything that's happened, do you think it was worth it?" And he sort of shrugged and said, "Well, that's not a fair question, you know. We were doing what we thought necessary to protect American security at the time."

They'll never accept blame, but of course there's a logical fallacy in the whole argument for the neocons now. If the invasion was supposed to stabilize Iraq and create a democratic Iraq on the road to modernity and all these wonderful things they were talking about, then why is it that the only thing that can guarantee that is the continued presence of a massive U.S. military force? The two don't make sense. If you've delivered this society to freedom why do you have to continue to occupy it? It doesn't make any sense.

WOODS: I don't see that there is an answer to that.

I am intrigued by your parsing of what Secretary of State John Kerry said, using what you call State Department speak. He says in regard to the whole situation in Iraq, "We are not obviously contemplating returning." By the way, I love his insertion of the word "obviously." As if anything would be obvious with the American regime! That it would be *obvious* that they wouldn't intervene. What's obvious about that? It would have seemed in 2001 that it would be, "obvious" there'd be no invasion of Iraq at all, because it had nothing to do with 9/11. I would have thought *that* was obvious.

But anyway, he goes on to say, "We are not contemplating putting boots on the ground." Now you immediately recognize that that does not mean "we" are not contemplating intervention.

McADAMS: Yes, exactly.

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WOODS: Is it beyond the realm of possibility that they could want to have air strikes? What could be going through his head?

McADAMS: His next statement in the piece was a telling one, which is something along the lines of: of course we will do everything that we can to defend Iraq, or whatever it is he said.

WOODS: He said, "This is their fight, but we're going to help them in their fight." That sounds exactly like Vietnamization in 1972. "Were just going to help them."

McADAMS: You took the words out of my mouth, because Dr. Paul was generous enough to give me a little Christmas present: the book by Stephen Kinzer on the Dulles brothers. I just finished reading it. It's an absolutely fascinating read. But as this was happening, I was transported back to the chapters in the book where he discussed Vietnam. You can substitute the word Diem. Of course the Vietnamese fight, but we're behind Diem every inch of the way. We won't put any boots on the ground, honest.

WOODS: Speaking of books, let's talk about this new book *Duty* by Robert Gates. He's former Secretary of Defense, and this book has got a lot of people up in arms. Some people are cheering him. Some people are booing him. Some people are in between. Saying okay, it's good that you say these things now, but it would have been a heck of a lot better if you'd said them a long time ago. Tell us, first of all, what kind of job you think Gates did as defense secretary, or was he in a position that no matter how good he was really he was in an impossible situation? There was nothing that could have been done?

McADAMS: It's so hard to judge. As you mentioned, I wrote a little blog piece where I guess I must have been in a good mood, because I was being a little bit more sanguine about his whole coming around on some of these things. Of course remember that when he was in the CIA in the 1980s he was the one who was inflating the Soviet threat and that sort of thing, and he's certainly gone along with all of the crimes of the Bush Administration. I think there's a reasonably good counterargument that he was playing the role of the grownup in the room, and that came out a little bit I think in some of the excerpts. I have not read the book. I read excerpts from it, where he told his people at the Pentagon not to let Samantha Power get a hold of anything, because she's so convinced she's an expert. She'll be writing the military plans herself.

I think there was a disconnect among a lot of people that the military and the Pentagon is gung-ho for war. And that really isn't the case. It really is the ideologues, the political appointees in the White House, who are more ideologically predisposed. I think there are a lot of cool heads. And we had a lot of them actually come through when I was with Dr. Paul in Congress. We had a lot of recent military, including some joint chiefs, who came in and talked to us about how reticent they were. So I think these guys who have to carry out these plans are terrified of the Samantha Powers of the world.

We quoted a couple of quotes that we've seen from the book, and I think there was a great point that he made whether he's a good guy or a bad guy. I think history has to judge overall, but he does make this great point: "On the left, we hear about the 'responsibility to protect' civilians to justify military intervention in Libya, Syria, Sudan and elsewhere. On the right, the failure to strike Syria or Iran is deemed an abdication of U.S. leadership." That in itself, that sense, captures what's really wrong with our foreign policy.

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WOODS: It doesn't matter to me what the justification is if the policy that results from it is the same. Incidentally, a lot of times we talk about realists and idealists in foreign policy. Some of the neocons, you know, Daniel, are just such idealists at heart. You know their hearts are just burning with love for free societies around the world. Sure, they may stumble in trying to bring democracy around the world, but they're just idealistic. Then we have the more hard-nosed "realists" who say we don't need to install democracy. We're just going to level the place. This is supposed to be the big divergence, the big difference in foreign policy, but both of them lead to war. So who cares about that difference?

McADAMS: And after the war is even worse, the aftermath. I wrote a piece last week. If you remember when it was clear that the military venture in Afghanistan was going south very quickly you'll remember that the right U.S. leadership people started falling in behind the left responsibility-to-help-women-in-Afghanistan people. Hillary Clinton was herself on the Hill when she was Secretary of State many times before the foreign affairs committee, going on about the glories of helping Afghan women. This is all about helping Afghan girls get to school.

WOODS: Of course.

McADAMS: The report came out last week, and in the past year there's been a 25 percent increase in brutal attacks on women in Afghanistan. So of course the neocons would say, well, that's because we stopped occupying it. But the fact of the matter is our occupation of the country was supposed to transform it, and it obviously has had the opposite effect.

WOODS: Daniel, I want to talk about an op-ed that appeared last Friday in the *Washington Post* by Robert Menendez, and it had to do with the subject of sanctions on Iran. Maybe you can tell us what's being argued in there and what's wrong with that piece.

McADAMS: Sure, it's an argument in favor of the bill that he introduced with Senator Kirk, the Nuclear Weapons Free Iran Act. What it really should be is the Let's Scuttle Diplomacy and Go to War Act. As you said earlier, it's just so disgusting. He said, "The American public supports diplomacy and so do I." And that's why he introduces this bill that would put yet another round of sanctions on Iran. This is what they're doing. Cantor and the House are doing the same thing. There was a six-month interim agreement between the U.S. and Iran, and it basically was testing the ground, testing the waters, building some confidence. Iran said okay, guys, we'll give up some of this. The U.S. said okay, we'll give you some of your money back. And it's just a way of testing the ground. But immediately Congress felt itself so wrong-footed by the opening of diplomacy. Of course the Saudi and Israeli lobbies went absolutely nuts, as you can imagine, on the Hill. So this is sort of the Empire Strikes Back.

What they want to do is treat the interim six-month agreement as if it were a set-in-stone, legal commitment by the Iranian government to do X, Y, and Z. You cannot enrich past five percent. You cannot strike the heavy water reactor in Arak. You cannot do these things. Otherwise the sanctions and worse will come to the fore. What it does, it just sends Iran away from the negotiating table. There was a temporary lull in the negotiations, a temporary break in the negotiations when the U.S. increased the number of companies that were forbidden from doing business with Iran. It's just a show of bad faith at a very delicate time.

The other thing this bill is—I think it’s a backdoor to war, because as Menendez says late in the op-ed, so very sneaky, he says this is not a march to war as some of the critics have suggested. The legislation does not explicitly authorize the use of force. But then he goes on. You have to put two and two together with these people. Although it does restate this resolution supporting our commitment to Israel should Israel be forced to defend itself against Iran, i.e., attack Iran. So basically, it’s a backdoor, because it reaffirms that the U.S. will go to war if Israel finds itself tangled up with Iran. But if you look at what the neocons are doing, William Kristol earlier in the month wrote this horrible article saying okay, Israel, the Americans are too wimpy to do this. You’ve got to go in and do it. Go on, go ahead and attack. So the neocons are trying to get this guarantee for Israel and then send Israel off to war, and no doubt mayhem through the region. It’s so disingenuous. I mean I could go on about this, but Congress is not out of this game yet.

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WOODS: But on the other hand, it seems to me that if even under George W. Bush they couldn’t get their war against Iran, maybe this horse has left the stable. Maybe there’s no traction behind it. But I say that, and of course there was no traction behind a war in Iraq, either. That didn’t stop them, I suppose.

McADAMS: Sure, and when Menendez starts his article with a bunch of really scary sounding facts like they have 19,000 centrifuges. What does that mean? It sounds terrifying. I’m not an expert. I don’t know what it means. But that would be like saying hey, Tom Woods has just got 28 guns. They’ve never been shown to have diverted the enriched uranium from peaceful to non-peaceful means. Woods has not been shown to take those guns out and shoot people at random. So therefore, what is the point? It’s scary. It sounds scary. They fired rockets into space showing that they’re developing space technology. It’s all of these scary things that are put down to frighten people. So I think they do have the power of propaganda that they’ve developed over decades. You may be right but I think they’re down but not out.

WOODS: What else are you guys following over at the Ron Paul Institute these days? It seems to me that foreign policy has been put on the a back burner. The Syria thing they just couldn’t drum up any popular support for, and normally they would just go ahead and do it anyway. For whatever reason they decided they wouldn’t. But other than that, people just don’t seem that interested. Do you think that it’s as relevant and as important as ever, but people are just more focused on the economy now? The neocons are still sort of scheming in the background. What are the real flashpoints that we should be keeping an eye on at a time like this?

McADAMS: I think you’re right, and the old Obamacare debate has really gotten people’s attention. They’ve generally shied away from it. But the strange thing is that this past couple of weeks the big story as we discussed in the beginning is al-Qaeda taking over in Iraq. The U.S. is having a conniption about it. But the same al-Qaeda, the ISIS and other groups, the same al-Qaeda is operating in Syria with impunity. And not only impunity, with U.S. assistance. There was a piece in the *New York Times* at the end of last week where they talked about how the U.S. is considering sending some additional “nonlethal military aid to Syria’s moderate opposition...even if some of it ends up going to the Islamist groups that are allied with the moderates.” Excuse me: the “Islamist groups that are allied with the moderates” happen to be the Islamic front and the Al Nusra front, which have worked together with al-Qaeda, the ISIS, on a number of projects. So it’s really bizarre when you have the U.S. up in arms about al-Qaeda taking over parts of Anbar province, and the same groups that are allied with al-Qaeda are going to continue receiving U.S. aid in Syria. I mean, is that insane or what?

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WOODS: I also feel like I can’t let you go without talking about something on the domestic front that seems equally insane, and that’s this Walter Pincus. He’s from the *Washington Post*, and he’s impatient with people who are upset about the NSA. And so now he says, “If there’s another [terrorist] attack, today’s

complainers may be as much at fault as the intelligence community, which nonetheless will get most of the criticism.” So if you’re a complainer about this secret program—which, as Judge Napolitano notes, is gathering information in a dragnet fashion, so this is more than we were aware of from the disclosures in the *New York Times* years ago about the program—then it’s really your fault if there’s a terrorist attack. Where’s the evidence that they’ve stopped any? Is there any evidence that they’ve stopped any plans that didn’t actually consist of FBI informants undercover anyway?

McADAMS: It’s conceded that it’s not on its own been responsible for stopping any terrorist attack whatsoever. But what Pincus wrote really coincides with the second federal judge’s decision on the NSA mass spying, which is that they’ve got to collect it all. They’ve got to go big. This whole thing only works if they collect everything. And so that’s what Pincus is supporting in this. Any limits on the NSA’s ability to collect it all almost begs for another attack. So shut up or you’ll be responsible.

WOODS: It’s like what they’re trying to do with the airports and everything else. If somebody wants to engage in really terrible mischief he’ll figure out a way to do it. So if you’re going be groping people, they can set off the bomb at the ticket counter. They can set off the bomb on the side of the road. Unless you’re going to turn the entire society into a prison there really isn’t any way to get rid of every conceivable source of risk, and even as we try to do it, we can still imagine a terrorist who comes up with something we haven’t anticipated. Meanwhile, all we’ve done is spy on our people and turn the society into a police state.

McADAMS: Sure. It’s the domestic equivalent of the preemptive war. The neocons quietly take out anyone who might be a threat in the future. What does it do? It just creates more threats. Who knows what will happen in the U.S. under increased pressure on our civil liberties? People will start to crack. I think that is a given. So it almost becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

WOODS: And, of course, we’re supposed to discount the possibility that just maybe some of this information that’s gathered might be used to blackmail influential congressmen or whatever. How could you possibly be so cynical as to propose something like that? But when you look at people who are such sociopaths in Washington—worse than at any time in my life—how could you put something as mundane as the use of intelligence for blackmailing purposes past them?

McADAMS: I’ll bring it back up again, but it all goes back to the amazing 1950s. This was the birth of the intelligence network in the U.S., the CIA and the NSA, and that’s precisely what they did. And we only know now because it’s come out. Because so many years passed. But what will happen when the history of our era is written—we know a little bit from some of these leaks that we’ve seen. It really had its beginnings in the 1950s, and God knows how much they’ve increased it these days.