

Sen. Richard H. Black

## Lessons of Syria

*Senator Richard Black spoke to the Schiller Institute's conference, "The World at a Crossroad: Two Months into the New Administration," on the March 21 panel, "Southwest Asia: Pivot for War, or Peaceful Development with the New Silk Road."*

**Moderator:** Now we are going to go to the United States. Former Virginia State Senator Richard Black, who is also a veteran of the Vietnam War, where he served in the Marines, and then became Judge Advocate General for the Army at the Pentagon. He is extremely knowledgeable about Syria, in particular. And what he will be speaking on is the truth about Syrian crisis, and he will also be with us at the end for questions & answers.

**Senator Black:** I'm Sen. Dick Black, and I'm a retired colonel, who served in uniform for 32 years. I love my country. I flew 269 combat missions in Vietnam as a Marine helicopter pilot, and I crash-landed once after machine-gun fire cut my flight controls. Afterwards, I made 70 combat patrols as a ground air controller for the 1st Marine Division. I was in intense, fierce combat during almost the entire time, and I was wounded and my radiomen were both killed beside me.

So with that background, let me say that I'm appalled by the indecency of American aggression toward Syria.

Just the other day, Secretary of State Tony Blinken chastised his Chinese guests in Anchorage, Alaska, by saying that they failed to respect the "rules-based order," without which there would be "much more violence in the world."

But what is this "rules-based order" we're always touting? It seems the rules are whatever the United States decides it wants at any given moment.

By what right do we seize other nations' ships on the high seas? The rule says that doing so is an act of war. But we're not at war, so the rules go on to say if you're not at war, then seizures of ships on the high seas are acts of piracy. Are these not acts of piracy



Schiller Institute

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when we seize these ships?

What rules allow us to establish naval blockades on Syria, Iran, and Venezuela? Are those not acts of war?

What "rules-based order" says we can punish Germany for connecting a gas pipeline to Russia? What "rules" in this rules-based order allow us to dictate the trade of any sovereign nations?

### Conquest, Not War on Terror

The American March of Conquest spans the globe. We've invaded sovereign countries like Serbia, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, and Syria, leaving them all in smoldering ruins.

Does the "rules-based order" not prohibit wars of aggression? Did we not prosecute Nazis at Nuremberg for just such actions? What "rules" make wars of aggression crimes for Nazis, but not for us?

We're told that we're fighting a "War on Terror," but we're not. We're closely allied with terrorists, like al Qaeda, in an endless quest to destroy Arab civilizations throughout the Middle East.

Few Americans can even name all of our wars: Serbia, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Ukraine. None of them attacked us; we attacked all of them.

Let's just look at the case of Syria.

Remember what Syria once was? Before the war Syria had a nicely balanced economy: It produced most of its own industrial goods, produced its fuel and agricultural products, had little poverty, and enjoyed thriving trade. It was financially responsible.

It enjoyed 40 years of peace with Israel. And the constitution drafted under President Assad guarantees equal rights for women; and importantly, it guarantees religious freedom in three different parts of the text: I've read it. Syria is a model for other Arab states, especially ones like Saudi Arabia, which has no constitution at all.

We call Syria's President a dictator, but in 2014, he was overwhelmingly elected by the people of Syria in a fair and free election. It was very heavily monitored; there were lots of observers, and all agreed it had been a true and valid election. So, Syria is a model of elec-

tive democracy, if you want to call it that, for the Arab world. But Americans pretend that the election never happened. And yet, many Syrians, who spent 15 hours in the blazing Sun so that they could vote for President Assad, were targeted and killed by U.S.-backed rebels, who fired mortars into their midst and killed them.

After ten years of war—I think it’s important to recognize—after ten years of war, not a single rebel leader has ever emerged as a popular figure with the Syrian people. The West loves the terrorists that the people of Syria despise.

We’re taught to hate President Assad because he cracked down on rioters in 2011 and they say that he “gassed his people.” But that’s not true. Because we decided to attack Syria ten years before all of that.

In 2001, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld ordered the Pentagon to draft plans to overthrow seven countries in the Mideast, beginning with Iraq, then Syria, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and finishing off with Iran. Not one of them had harmed the United States.

In 2006, the U.S. Embassy in Damascus drew up detailed plans to destabilize and overthrow Syria. Those were widely disseminated to the Pentagon, to various unified commands; they went to NATO; they went widely across the world—the specific plans to destabilize and overthrow Syria, and that was long before the demonstrations had ever occurred in Syria, and yet we claim them as the reason that we oppose President Assad.

## **Help to Terrorists**

In March of 2011, the United States, U.K., and France attacked and overthrew Libya, brutally executing Colonel Qaddafi. The U.S. then turned over control of a Libyan airfield to the Turks, who used it to transport advanced weapons that had been plundered from Libya, and sent them eventually to supply the terrorists that were organizing in Syria.

In 2011, also, during the Arab Spring, the highly secretive Central Intelligence Agency Special Activities Center sent paramilitary teams into the sovereign territory of Syria, to identify, train, equip and lead terrorists to overthrow the Syrian government.

In 2013, Barack Obama formalized this long-standing support for anti-Syrian terrorists, by secretly authorizing CIA Program Timber Sycamore. Under Program Timber Sycamore, the CIA’s Special Opera-

tions Division trained, armed and paid thousands of terrorists to fight against Syria. Those armies were totally under our control, and in one case, a group in Aleppo, we had paid over a thousand of their people salaries, given them arms, given them training. And it wasn’t until they kidnapped a small Palestinian boy, who was being treated in a hospital; they kidnapped him, they took him to the central square in Aleppo, and in order to terrorize the people into not fleeing Aleppo—which was being cordoned off by Syrian troops—they took him to the center in a pickup truck, they grabbed the little boy by the hair, they took a knife, and they slashed his head off! And then they paraded it! They held it up and waved it in front of the crowd as a warning: Don’t escape from Aleppo. We paid the salaries of every man who held that boy’s head aloft. We gave them their weapons. We gave them their truck. We gave them everything they needed. And it was only after that very gruesome incident that we decided, “Well, that’s an embarrassment, we better not pay them.” We had been paying terrorists like this throughout the war.

NATO and the U.S. maintained an intense propaganda campaign against Syria from the outset. Sarin gas attacks that killed civilians were blamed on President Assad. But not one reporter ever asked why Assad would use gas against children, but not against armies of terrorists bearing down on the capital of Damascus! The reason is obvious: There is no answer for that. And the journalists are smart enough to know that if they ask that question, their career in journalism is finished.

Secretary of Defense James Mattis admitted, in 2018, that the U.S. had no evidence that Assad had ever used sarin gas. Two courageous Turkish Members of Parliament were quickly accused of treason after they revealed a criminal indictment that showed how an al-Qaeda cell had infiltrated 2.2 kilos of sarin gas across the border from Turkey for use in Syria, most likely going to Damascus for the initial attack that was the “red line” attack that almost sent American troops into Syria.

## **Stealing Resources**

So, why do we attack Syria? Well, there are a number of reasons. Part of it ties in with Israeli foreign policy. But the U.S. seeks to capture oil and gas routes serving Saudi Arabia and Qatar. In addition to pipeline access, Saudi Arabia wants to impose harsh Wahhabi Islam on the religiously harmonious Syrians. The Turks cast a

greedy eye on the industrial city of Aleppo. The Turks also want to capture the oil and the agricultural produce of the nation, that is produced in northern Syria.

So there are many people who have these desires, and there are many reasons behind the war. Certainly, American arms dealers profit immensely from lucrative deals like the 600 BMP-71 anti-tank missiles that the Central Intelligence Agency rushed to al-Qaeda in 2014, to prepare them to attack across the Turkish border. It was only with those CIA-provided anti-tank weapons that the al-Qaeda terrorists were able to break through the Syrian armor and through Syrian lines, and seize the beautiful town of Kessab, and behead Armenian Christians who were there, in all the churches, and smash ancient tombstones with sledgehammers. That was done thanks to the CIA. Al Qaeda never could have broken the Syria lines without those anti-tank missiles.

Many terror groups have sworn to behead all Christians and Alawites and to make sex slaves of their wives and daughters. One jihadist, famously, drove his American-made HUMVEE into battle with a naked slave girl lashed to his windshield. He knew that the Syrian soldiers would hesitate to shoot at his Humvee as long as there was an innocent girl lashed to the windshield. And that's why he used it, and that's why he put this poor girl up there, and drove her first into battle as his shield.

In 2015, U.S. troops illegally invaded Northern Syria and unlawfully seized Syria's oil. We authorized an American oil company to build a refinery for \$150 million, and drill for more oil on sovereign Syrian land. Before the war, Syria never needed to import oil or natural gas because it was self-sufficient. It exported a little bit, but it was not a big oil-producing country. But what was important is that it provided all of the fuel, all of the gasoline, all of the heating fuel, for the power plants and so forth, in Syria. But now, the legacy of the nation has been stolen by the United States, leaving Syrians to freeze to death in the winter, as we steal their fuel.

The same region, northern Syria, is the breadbasket of Syria. It grew enough wheat to feed the nation, to export a little bit. This too has been stolen: We gave it to the Kurds who are shipping Syrian wheat to Turkish merchants, while Syrian peasants starve.

To tighten the noose on Syria, Secretary Mike Pompeo bragged about cutting Syria off from sources of currency and blockading oil tankers arriving from Iran. He is right; we have caused immense death, disease and suffering for poor Syrians.

Americans are routinely reminded that "We are not targeting the common people, only the leaders." Rub-

## Sen. Black's Speech Hits Syria's English, Arabic Press

March 29—The Syrian official English-language daily, *Syria Times*, published today a short review of what it considers the main points of former Virginia State Senator Richard Black's speech at the Schiller Institute international conference on March 21. The daily included a link to the video of the speech in its [coverage](#).

On the same day, the official Arabic daily newspaper in Syria, *Al-Thawra*, published a report on Black's speech under its banner headline, "Senator Richard Black: This Is the Truth About Our Role in Syria." That article is [here](#).

—Hussein Askary

bish! That's a total lie! Sanctions do nothing but attack the innocent, the poor, the helpless! They are the most cruel and barbaric type of warfare that we can wage. We steal food, fuel, and medicine from the poor. We blockade supplies for rebuilding, so that young Syrian men must fight for a living or starve.

If we ended the blockade, they could work rebuilding the country. Syrians are *tired* of war! We've imposed ten years of war on them. They want to rebuild—the young men—the time that fighting wars is exotic, is over. They want to go home, they want to build families, they want to rebuild their homes and their businesses. But the United States blockades all materials necessary for rebuilding, so that young Syrian men must fight for a living, or starve. As it is, the only work is fighting, which will go on as long as we continue funding it.

The world must reject these endless wars. We've fought 10 years against Syrians, but we've oppressed the Iraqi people for *30 years*—we dropped over a quarter of a million bombs on Iraq, and we bombed them, even while we sit in military base camps occupying the country. This madness must stop.

I thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today.

**Moderator:** Thank you very much Senator Black. That is something that I think people in this country need urgently to hear, and coming from someone whose loyalty to the United States and patriotism really cannot be questioned.