

II. Against Murder by Sanctions

INTERVIEW: Col. Richard Black (ret.)

Sanctions Are Barbaric and Immoral, and Must Be Ended

April 23—Col. Richard Black (ret.), former Chief of the Army Criminal Law Division at the Pentagon, and a former member of the Virginia House of Delegates and later the Virginia Senate, was interviewed by Harley Schlanger of the Schiller Institute. Black has traveled to Syria and been active in pursuing peace and economic reconstruction there. The full video of the interview is available [here](#).

Harley Schlanger: Joining me today is Col. Richard Black. His warning before the 2020 election of the danger of the possibility of a military coup, alerted many people to that. The September 5, 2020 [video](#) of that went viral, and I think it did a lot to make sure that there was no funny business involving some renegades in the U.S. military.

Today, he's joining me to speak about U.S. policy towards Syria. On March 21, he told a Schiller Institute conference, in talking about the so-called Caesar Sanctions, that "Sanctions do nothing but attack the innocent, the poor, the helpless. They are the most cruel and



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Col. Richard Black (ret.).

barbaric type of warfare we can wage."

You've visited Syria and have been involved in policy discussions on what to do about the problems there: What's your assessment of the present situation there in the context of these so-called Caesar Sanctions that were initiated by [Trump's Secretary of State Mike] Pompeo and passed almost unanimously by the Congress?

Col. Richard Black: The United States started the war in 2011. We sent CIA agents, special operatives. They went to coordinate and lead the efforts of the al-Qaeda-linked terrorists who were attacking Syria at that time, attacking the legitimate government. They were sworn to behead all the Christians, the Alawi, the Shi'a Muslims; but particularly with a focus on the Christians. Killing them; selling their daughters, their wives at slave markets. The United States



Courtesy of Richard Black

Orphans of war. An orphanage in Maaloula, taken during Col. Black's trip to Syria in September 2018.



U.S. Army Reserve/DeAndre Pierce

The U.S. Army, in Syria illegally, has been an unwavering supporter of al-Qaeda, to topple the legitimate government and install Islamic extremists. While Obama was planning to put the Army in Syria, he said repeatedly, “We will have no boots on the ground.” Here, U.S. Army “boots on the ground,” November 11, 2019.

became implacable allies. We have been unwavering supporters of al-Qaeda since then. Remarkably, this is the group that brought down the Twin Towers and attacked the Pentagon on 9/11, and here just ten years after the national trauma of losing 3,000 people to the biggest terrorist attack in history, we were fully aligned and sending Central Intelligence Agency operatives to lead al-Qaeda in an attempt to take over from the legitimate government of Syria.

I got very involved in it back in 2011, before the war began, because I was curious. What were we doing in Libya? Because we were overthrowing the government of Libya, which had been a close U.S. ally up to that point, and I realized that we were looting their tremendous stores of weapons and shipping them over to Syria to supply the terrorists there. That’s what really got me involved, because I’ve shed blood for this country on the battlefield, and somehow the idea that we were allied with al-Qaeda was shocking. I’ve studied it intensely since then and have never found any suggestion to the contrary. To this very day, we support al-Qaeda.

The people of Syria have totally rejected all the terrorists that we put forward. Eventually they rose up behind President Bashar al-Assad and the Syrian Army, and they were able to force the hand of the terrorists and drive them from the country. They would have com-

pletely purged Syria of the terrorists were it not for the fact that the U.S. went in and physically put boots on the ground. You may recall President Obama, perhaps 20, 30, 50 times saying, “We will have no boots on the ground.” At the very moment he was saying that, we were making the plans to put boots on the ground, and we now have a significant force that occupies northern Syria. There’s no political legitimacy to it, but U.S. and Turkish forces have occupied the northern part.

The northern part of Syria is very special, because it is the breadbasket for all of Syria. The vast bulk of the wheat produced to feed the Syrian nation is produced there. We have deliberately cut that off. Most of the oil and natural gas is also produced there, and by occupying that area, we have seized the oil and natural gas, giving it to

U.S. companies, and especially to groups that are using it to hold control. We have a Kurdish minority, and we use that minority as our allies, basically, to rob the entire nation of its wheat and its fuel. That’s what we’re doing.



SANA

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made a rare public appearance as he visited elated troops on the front line in newly captured areas near the capital Damascus in eastern Ghouta, March 19, 2018.

But even that was not sufficient to bring down the government. We’ve never shifted our objective, which is to bring down the government and install an Islamic extremist government that will behead the Christians, the Alawites, the Shi’a, and the moderate Sunnis. That’s our objective.

Famine, Death, and Destruction

And now this “Caesar Civilian Protection Act” has been introduced in the Congress and passed with very little debate or dissent. The purpose of this is to create famine and destitution within Syria, and to prevent the Syrians from rebuilding after ten years of war that we have imposed on them.

So, right now, we’re creating famine, death, destruction. We have blockaded the Syrians from receiving medical supplies. I saw this back as early as 2016 when I visited hospitals there. Over and over, they told me about the fact that they could not receive prosthetic devices for people injured by the landmines we planted.

parties. Secretary of State Pompeo is the one who initiated the Caesar sanctions. Our current Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who criticized the Obama administration for not doing more to overthrow Assad, is a strong supporter of these sanctions.

Endless Wars

So, here’s my question: You know that in the 2016 campaign, Donald Trump ran as an opponent to these endless wars, and he pledged to end them. He was opposed by members of both parties in his efforts to do it. But the American people voted for Trump, because I think the American people want to get out of these wars.



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Public domain

Northern Syria is the breadbasket of Syria and also produces most of its oil and natural gas. The U.S. occupying force has seized the food and oil resources and denied them to the Syrian people. Shown is a wheat field in Beshindla and a pumpjack in the Rmelan oil and gas field.

Additionally, they can’t receive cancer medications. So, for a woman who has breast cancer in Syria, she simply dies of it. And, this is very treatable. My own wife has experienced this within the last year. There have been tremendous advances in the ability to treat breast cancer, thankfully. But the United States, deliberately, intentionally, prevents Syrian women from receiving breast cancer medication.

It is remarkable how cruel and savage U.S. policy is.

The members of Congress, so many of them, just seem totally oblivious. They don’t care; and they don’t understand. They don’t know what they’re doing, but they go in and they take away the ability of a country to use its own currency. They support naval blockades of countries that have never done anything to us; never the first hostile act towards the United States. Then we create famine and starvation: small children starving.

Schlanger: This has been a bipartisan policy. Both

What is the goal of the war-hawks then, who keep these wars going? Those in the foreign policy and defense and security establishment. Are they just ignorant, or is there a bigger intent to this?

Black: There is a larger intent. There is a group of global oligarchs, people of fabulous wealth, people whose personal wealth is literally more than the wealth of great nations. These people gather in places like Davos, Switzerland periodically, to coordinate their efforts. It is my impression that their overall plan is to dissolve nation-states, to create a state of chaos and disorder. Not only overseas. We’re doing this to nations overseas, but it’s being done in this country also. The disorder that you see today in America; the tremendous attack on basic morality and decency. The unleashing of criminal elements all over the nation. You see this eating away at the foundations of America. At the same time, the U.S. Armed Forces and the U.S. foreign policy establishment is being

employed to destroy and undermine other nations.

I think ultimately their goal is to dissolve nation-states and to create a singular government which will essentially be immune to public concerns. As government gets higher and higher, more distant from the people, then the people have less and less influence on what happens to it. I think that is where we are headed, rather rapidly. You can see with the censorship that's being imposed throughout the media and that type of thing. This is the direction.

But keep in mind, these are people who are becoming fabulously wealthy from all of this. They're looking only at their bottom lines. These are very sadistic, selfish people who really take pleasure in creating starvation, and war, and death.

Sanctions Kill

Schlanger: The Caesar Sanctions are not just being deployed against the Syrian people, but will be applied to any country or any business or individual, that tries to trade with Syria.

The Schiller Institute has initiated a mobilization in support of the statements of the Apostolic Nuncio to Syria, Cardinal Mario Zenari, who criticized the Caesar Sanctions and warned that 90% of the people of Syria are now living below the poverty line. His call was endorsed by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, who called for the sanctions to be lifted immediately and for economic reconstruction to begin. You made the point that with these sanctions, there can be no economic reconstruction.

As a military veteran who has experienced the devastation of war firsthand, and who has been in Syria and seen the results of the civil war there, what can you say to the American people who remain indifferent in the face of this kind of suffering that's being done in their name, and supposedly providing security for the American people?

Black: If Americans understood what their government was doing, they would be aghast. I think one of the greatest difficulties of getting people to comprehend the gravity of what we are doing, is that people



Cardinal Mario Zenari, Apostolic Nuncio to Syria, has criticized the Caesar sanctions, warning that 90% of Syrians are now living in poverty.

have been raised to understand that the U.S. is good, the U.S. does good things. I think historically we've been a pretty good country overall. I've certainly shed my blood trying to make things better, I thought.

But it's important for people to understand what sanctions do. Sanctions create starvation and hardship for common people. In northern Syria, in the breadbasket of Syria, all the wheat is being taken by powerful Kurdish warlords. It's being kept away from the people. Most of the people in northern Syria are Arabic. There are quite a few Christians also, but we have decided that everything goes to the Kurds, or to

U.S. companies up there.

It has gotten so bad, the famine that we have imposed is so great, that even in the breadbasket of Syria, where they used to export wheat to other countries, families are having to go to U.S. bases where the Americans throw their trash out in the dump, and they take their small children and they wipe food from the cans that is left over in the garbage that Americans have thrown out. So, we now have reduced the once-proud, highly intelligent, highly productive Syrian people to where, now, they're taking their children and they're having them root through American garbage so that they can feed themselves. This is so tragic! It just—it sickens me that we put our American troops in this posture, because our American soldiers and Marines are patriotic, they're good people, they want to do good things. And we're forcing them to do the devil's work in Syria. We're forcing them to support al-Qaeda; in some cases, ISIS. It's just this bizarre situation, making them cause such hardship.

We talk about the Nazis, we talk about the Bolsheviks, we talk about Mao Zedong with the mass starvation in China. We are doing this deliberately in Syria today. It may not be on the magnitude, because Syria is a small country. But considering the size of the country, yes: It is the equivalent of what was done in Nazi Germany, what was done during the Bolshevik Revolution, and done by Mao Zedong with the Great Leap Forward. Even Mao Zedong didn't deliberately cause starvation. He just did it through ineptitude—50 million Chinese died, way back in Chinese history.

But *today*, in modern day, we are *deliberately* causing starvation. We are deliberately causing the spread of disease. We are deliberately causing people to freeze to death in the winter in a country that used to be able to export a little bit of oil and natural gas—not a lot. They shipped some agricultural products, they shipped some oil, they had natural gas for export. They shipped a lot of machinery; they had a wonderfully balanced economy with a very productive people. We’ve wrecked their economy. We have helped the Turks to loot over 1,000 factories in Aleppo city. And now we have stolen their wheat and their fuel, so that we can create starvation and famine.

A senior fellow from the UAE-financed Middle East Institute, which is very committed to overthrowing Syria, has forecast growing destitution, famine, and predatory behavior, resulting from the new Caesar sanctions. He says he sees human suffering as an opportunity for the U.S. to achieve regime-change. So, we can’t convince the Syrians to accept a radical Islamic government that is devoted to beheading so many Syrian civilians. So instead, because they won’t accept this from us, we’re saying “OK, let’s create enough suffering, famine, starvation to where people will simply be forced to kneel before the U.S. and comply with what we’re trying to do.” It is despicable! I am ashamed of what we are doing. It is not the America that I grew up in.

Schlanger: That is exactly what Ambassador James F. Jeffrey, the former envoy of the Administration to Syria, said was the intention: to use sanctions as a form of regime change.

This is a horrible tragedy. I commend you for speaking out in spite of the general lack of awareness in the country, and also the hostility to even thinking about these things. But what can the ordinary citizen do to put an end to the sanctions? I know most people are pessimistic; they’ve been convinced they don’t know enough, it’s outside of their control. But we can’t sit by and let this happen, can we?

We Are Taught To Hate

Black: No, we really can’t. Why are we being taught to hate so many people? China’s not attacking us. Russia’s not attacking us. Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Venezu-

ela are not attacking. Cuba’s not attacking us. And yet, we teach our children, almost from the time they’re born, to hate and despise these other people. There are things that I would change if I were a citizen of China or Iran or other such countries. But my country is the United States. And believe me, we’ve got problems enough of our own without going over and trying to dictate lifestyles to other nations.

We have a generally Christian nation. People might reflect on the fact that it was Jesus who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be the children of God.” When was the last time the U.S. has spoken about peace? When was the last time we said, “Let’s end the wars!” We don’t talk about ending wars anymore; we talk about continuing them indefinitely. I think its time we began to question why are we taught to hate so many



Courtesy of Sen. Black

Col. Richard Black meeting with President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus, April 28, 2016.

people in this country?

We need to start looking at sanctions. *Sanctions are sadistic; they’re evil actions.* We never could do what we do today without computer technology. Today, we can control the flow of information. We devalue countries’ currencies. The Syrian pound was doing OK, and now we have prohibited banks from exchanging Syrian pounds. So, the Syrians cannot purchase repair parts for American-built machinery. They can’t purchase medicine to heal cancer or heart disease or diabetes, things like that. We prohibit the importation of food and fuel to Syria. We have imposed a naval blockade; we seize ships at sea with no authorization. The seizure of a ship from another nation that you’re not at war with is illegal under international law; and because it’s illegal if you don’t have a declared war against the nation whose shipping you’re seizing, then the seizure is an act of

piracy. The United States is actively engaging in piracy against oil ships that are sent by Iran and other countries to supply the Syrian nation.

Americans need to start to challenge and question the whole idea of sanctions. It has become the case that every time we have some little irritation with one country or another, something we dislike, we say “Oh, let’s get out there. Let’s sanction them. Let’s cause suffering.” We’re even talking about sanctioning Germany because it wants to complete the last 1% of a gas pipeline between Russia and Germany. Germany is one of our oldest and most staunch allies, and we’re talking about punishing them because they trade, as they are allowed to do, with other countries.

Sanctions Are Cruel and Evil

We’re also threatening Australia, believe it or not! I know there are some people who are my age, who took R&R in Australia during the Vietnam War, and we learned to love the Australian people. We are now telling Australia to shut down its coal industry, because we’ve decided that in the United States the governing elite is going to cut off all carbon fuels, and we’re going to live on windmills and sun chips and corn alcohol in the gas tank. It’s bizarre!

We have become sort of a global dictator. We don’t try to find common ground any longer with countries, with whom we inevitably have some disputes. Today, we simply have Secretaries of State—and I think Mike Pompeo was a classic example; John Kerry was very bad. Pompeo got even worse; he was just a bombastic, selfish bully! He struck you less as a diplomat, and more as the kind of schoolyard bully who would walk around with a gang of kids behind him. He would see a little boy with a crutch walking by himself on the playground, and he’d say, “Hey, watch this!” He’d run over and kick the crutch and throw the kid down on his face and laugh for the other kids. This guy is despicable! I can’t believe that he prides himself on the fact that he has been able to create so much suffering!

I don’t see things getting better under Tony Blinken. He’s been threatening Australia with sanctions, and saying, “We’re not going to have you making your own decisions on your national energy policy. We’re going to make your policies in Washington.” We are the worst ally a nation could ever have, because we don’t hesitate to threaten and bully all the countries that are supposedly allied with us. It’s a very strange thing.

Americans have got to wake up to what these sanctions are. Every time they impose a sanction, they say,



DoS/Ron Przynsucha

Former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who initiated the Caesar sanctions, which Antony Blinken has continued.

“We don’t do this to cause suffering for ordinary people. It’s targeted at the leadership.” That is almost a standard operating procedure. It is unequivocally false: The impact falls on the ordinary person who suddenly finds that the cash in their wallet is devalued; who finds that they don’t have enough bread to feed the family; who finds they have to go out to American trash dumps to wipe little bits of food from the cans that were thrown away by American soldiers, just so that they can keep their children alive.

This is not America, and Americans really need to come to grips with this casual implementation of sanctions. Sanctions are fundamentally cruel, evil actions, and there is simply no justification. If you’re not in an active state of war with a nation—which I hope doesn’t happen—there is no legal justification for them, and there certainly is no moral justification. They are just the antithesis of Christianity; they are the antithesis of other religions, of Islam. They are incompatible with any notion of mercy and kindness and decency.

I would like to see our churches begin to question sanctions. What are we doing? Why are we so cruel towards other people?

Schlanger: I think some of the churches are starting to speak out, but we need much more, as you point out. It’s the ultimate irony that we talk about a rules-based order, when we’re the ones who make the rules. The American establishment, the City of London, NATO. And imposing these cruel sanctions, as you point out. Thank you very much for joining me today, and for laying this out so clearly.

Black: Thank you for what you’re doing. I really appreciate it very much.