

# Syria: A Time of Tremendous Hope

*The following interview with Virginia State Senator Richard Black was conducted Dec. 1 by EIR Editor William Wertz.*

My name is Will Wertz. I'm a member of the editorial board of *Executive Intelligence Review*, and we are here today interviewing Richard Black, who has really stood up in a unique and courageous way over really a long period in fighting for principle, in a number of nations across the globe, certainly including the United States, but, especially in the Middle East and northern Africa, opposing the policy of regime change which has targeted many countries which, ironically, are countries where there has been religious freedom, where you have secular governments, where people have lived together from different ethnic backgrounds and religious denominations for centuries. And we are meeting today because the battle of Aleppo is in the process of being resolved.

As you may have seen in the news, in recent days the Syrian Army and its allies, with the support of the Russians, have liberated over 40% of eastern Aleppo. That is, something in the range of 90,000 people were liberated, many of those, children. Tens of thousands of people who had been held hostage by the terrorists, by Al-Qaeda, which is the actual way to identify Al-Nusra, and all of the "moderate" terrorists who work with Al-Qaeda/Al-Nusra, have now been able to leave the city. There are reports of tens of thousands of people who are now fleeing out of the humanitarian corridors which the Syrians had set up, but which the terrorists had mined and had shelled in order to prevent them from leaving. Many of these are children; there are many who require medical treatment. The Russians are sending in mobile hospitals to help out in the situation.

It is a little bit over a year ago, in September of last year, that President Putin of Russia went before the General Assembly at the UN and proposed an international coalition to fight terrorism, similar to the international coalition which succeeded in defeating the Nazis over 70 years before. Unfortunately, under the Obama

administration, that proposal for an international coalition was not acted upon. Today, in Russia, Putin reiterated that call. He signed a decree which is entitled, "The New Foreign Policy Concept of Russia," in which he called for a broad international anti-terrorism coalition which would be based upon respect for international law, respect for the diversity of people throughout the world. And we have a situation in the world, following the recent election in the United States, where perhaps it will be possible for the United States to change direction in a decisive way, and join in such an effort which would be to the benefit of all humanity.

So I wanted to just start out with your assessment of the situation surrounding the battle of Aleppo, and also what the prospects are for changing the course of U.S. policy.

**Sen. Richard Black:** Well, first of all, going back a number of months, the Syrian Army has managed, through some very fine tactical maneuvers, managed to cut off and isolate the Aleppo pocket. The Aleppo pocket is said to contain 275,000 civilians. This is the official UN and mainstream media figure. I question it; my guess is that the actual number is perhaps significantly less than this. However, what happened within the last week is that, in the northern part of this, roughly a kidney-shaped pocket, there was a tremendous moral and military collapse of Al-Qaeda, and its allies, and they essentially panicked, they went into a full-bore retreat. The Syrian Army moved very quickly and took over almost half of the entire Aleppo pocket.

In the course of this, we had been told by the media that somehow President Assad was surrounding the Aleppo pocket with desires of killing everybody who was inside. Well, he had set up a number of humanitarian corridors; he had tried to get the terrorists to allow the escape of the civilians so that they wouldn't be caught in the middle. When the first civilians tried to get out, I'm not sure how many actually tried to move through one of the corridors, 26 of them were machine gunned and killed. There have been other attempts and, at first, the Al-Qaeda and their allies were able, through

snipers and so forth, were able to kill all of the people trying to escape, or almost all.

With the cataclysmic collapse of the northern end of the Aleppo pocket, they simply could not maintain control. They were so busy trying to stay alive, they were just trying to get out of there; there was a massive flood of refugees. At first they reported 600, then 1,500, then it went up, and before long it was 10,000, then 15,000. I've even seen a figure of 30,000. I don't know whether that is accurate. But there are certainly photos and videos of massive numbers, crowds of people, and the Syrian government—they are not killing them as they were supposed to be doing according to the mainstream media—they are sending buses to pick them up; they are sending troops to do some very rudimentary screening to make sure people don't slip in wearing suicide bombs and kill a lot of civilians.

So, throughout the war, President Assad has consistently maintained this policy of allowing civilians to escape the battleground, and sometimes it's been frustrating to military people like myself. I fought in some of the most fierce combat with the First Marine Regiment, and to allow your enemy to escape, is frustrating, but what he [Assad] is doing is he's trying to, number one, save the lives of civilians; and number two, preserve infrastructure, because he knows that eventually he has to rebuild the country. And so he allows them to escape. We don't know exactly what will happen in Aleppo. The fighting continues, but it is clear that the terrorists are going to lose the battle for Aleppo, and the government is going to secure the Aleppo pocket.

Every time that they are on the losing end, the UN can be counted on to demand to have a stop, a ceasefire, a pause, so that additional weapons can be sent in to the terrorists. The time for this is finished. I don't think we will see another humanitarian pause. I think the battle will continue until it reaches its conclusion. And so I think we will see that the Aleppo pocket has essentially been a tumor, like a cancerous tumor of terrorists. Now

remember, Al-Nusra is the group that holds together all of the others. Al-Nusra is Al-Qaeda in Syria. Al-Qaeda is the group that flew the planes into the Twin Towers and sent 3,000 Americans to their fiery deaths, a quarter of a mile below the top of the Twin Towers.

We should be rejoicing that we have captured Al-Qaeda's biggest army in Aleppo and that they are going to be destroyed. So, what will happen at this point? Aleppo will be completely liberated. Now, keep in mind that the Aleppo pocket has only been about one eighth of Aleppo. It's always described in the media as, well, Aleppo is roughly divided into half. It's not. It's

clearly not. They've claimed a quarter of a million people, and at the same time all figures are that there are at least a million people in the government-held area of Aleppo. It's irrational to claim that they have held half of Aleppo; they haven't. They've held a small portion, and it's growing smaller. It may be a twelfth, a fifteenth, a sixteenth of Aleppo, but it is a small and shrinking tumorous mass that will eventually disappear, and hopefully the city will be cancer-free and there will be no more of Al-Qaeda.



EIRNS/Stuart Lewis

*Virginia State Senator Richard Black*

### **A Change in U.S. Policy**

So, I think there is tremendous hope. The plan is to basically take this off the plate

before the new Administration [in Washington] takes power, so that they don't even have to deal with it. They will certainly achieve that. I think there is no doubt that that will occur before January 20th. Where does that leave us? I think we have a new Administration coming in; [President-elect] Donald Trump, in my view, has expressed a very clear vision of what's going on in Syria. His National Security Adviser, Lt. General Michael Flynn, clearly understands the nature of the terrorists who have been invading Syria. He warned Obama repeatedly that the ratline which was the transfer of weapons from Libya into Turkey and across the border into Syria, originally it was purportedly designed to supply weapons to moderate rebels. The Defense Intelligence Agency, in 2013, rendered explicit findings in which

they said this had degenerated into an indiscriminate program which supplied all rebels, and they explicitly named Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The United States taxpayer was funding Al-Qaeda and ISIS, and so this will end. I have every reason to believe, I think that under Donald Trump, and with Lt. General Flynn, I think what we are likely to see is a total cutoff of weapons going to all of these traditional terrorists, and we may still see weapons reach the Kurds along the Turkish border, because Syria is facing a very dangerous invasion by Turkey and by President Erdogan, who has become an absolute dictator and tyrant. He has not only invaded Syria, but he's also invaded our ally Iraq. And so I think as far as the rest of the terrorists, the terrorists are quickly being purged from the whole Damascus area. That has been a stronghold of theirs throughout the war. Damascus is being taken. It will leave them with one area that they control in Idlib, but Idlib does not begin to compare to Damascus or to Aleppo.

And so I think we will see, I believe we'll see, a partnership between Russia and the United States in fighting genuine terrorism, not only in Syria, but I think throughout the world. And I think this is a very positive development. Under President Obama we've seen an explosion of terrorism across the globe. We've seen it hit cities across the United States. We had a Somali incident, a fellow—we keep bringing in people who come with a tremendous hatred of this country and a desire to commit acts of jihad, and just two days ago, we had one of those. They seem to happen almost weekly now.

I think Syria has been the breeding ground for terrorism. Saudi Arabia gives them this vile Wahhabi philosophy which teaches them that they are to go forth, they are to purge the world of Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, everybody except Wahhabis, including Sunni Muslims, if they do not adapt to seventh-century standards. So I think there is a great deal of reason to hope, and I think we are going to see very good things in the coming year.

## Turning Back Barbarism

**Wertz:** Now, you've been in Syria, including to Palmyra, I believe, and of course when the Syrian Army liberated Palmyra, there was no celebration among the supporters of the so-called moderate terrorists in Syria from the West.

**Black:** No!

**Wertz:** Similarly, as Aleppo has been in the process

of being liberated, you've had calls from the U.S., from the United Kingdom, from France to impose sanctions on the Russians for the liberation of Aleppo from terrorists. You were mentioning the whole question of Al-Qaeda. The fact of the matter is that the head of Al-Qaeda, [Ayman] al-Zawahiri, about a year ago, called for Al-Nusra to create an Al-Qaeda Caliphate in Syria.

**Black:** Yes, there's no doubt. It started off where the two progeny of Al-Qaeda worldwide were ISIS and Al-Nusra. They began to squabble among themselves, to fight among themselves, but philosophically they are very much like two drug cartels. They have absolutely the same objective, which is to spread heroin, cocaine, all sorts of narcotics throughout the world, but they conflict because they each want leadership. There is no greater difference; ISIS and Al-Nusra are identical in terms of their philosophy. They believe that not only should they conquer Syria, but they believe that they should go forth, they should conquer Europe; I think Europe is clearly in their sights.

There is no question that if the Obama Administration had succeeded in toppling President Assad, we would have had an Al-Qaeda or Al-Nusra government and we would have gone into one of these seventh-century caliphates. We would have seen slave markets, just as we've seen in ISIS; we would have seen the beheading of millions of Christians, Alawites, Shiites, Druze. We would have seen their children and their wives sold as sex-slaves—because this is what they do. And we—fortunately—we have documentary proof of it, and I will tell you, I have watched one thousand videos, because I don't believe in getting information second-hand; and because they believe in terrorism, the terrorists love to put evidence of what they do on video. And so, I have watched one thousand people beheaded. I have watched thousands of people lined up and executed and fall into graves. I've watched people burn to death; I've watched people crucified. These are the people that we consider “moderate rebels.” And these are the people we have supported.

When I went to Palmyra—which was just disgraceful that we had allowed it to fall—Palmyra was one of the gems of all human civilization; it contained four thousand years of layer after layer of temples and monuments and so forth. When Jesus walked the earth, Palmyra was two thousand years old, and the ISIS troops who seized it had to cross 100 miles of barren desert. There was no cover, there was no concealment, there were no dust storms because this is all rock, it's not



creative commons

*Tetrapylon in Palmyra.*

sand. And so the American-led coalition saw this massive army with hundreds of tanks and artillery pieces and armored vehicles and trucks and so forth, and watched them move across to Palmyra, where they proceeded to defeat the Syrian Army, seize the place, and they began blowing down ancient Roman columns that had stood for thousands of years perfectly preserved; and they destroyed them.

Why did we not drop a single bomb? And I have confirmed we did not drop a single bomb to stop this massive army that was in clear view. The reason is because from where ISIS stood, to where Palmyra stood, to where Damascus, the capitol of Syria stood, Palmyra was halfway. If they could seize Palmyra, the hope was of the American-led coalition, that they would forge on and they would seize Damascus. Had they seized Damascus, they would have purged it of all evidence of civilization just as they have attempted to do in Palmyra; and we have always rooted, we have always thrown our full diplomatic support towards those who behead priests, who rape nuns, who rape little girls. One of the leaders of one of these terrorist groups had a 13-year-old little girl whom he gang-raped, and when he would ride into battle, in his American built armored Humvee, he would strap her to the windshield, because he knew that the Syrian soldiers were civilized and they would not kill a young naked helpless girl. And that was his defense.

The war crimes on the side of the people that we have supported have been grotesque. They have equaled or exceeded anything that ever happened with the Nazis in the Second World War, and yet we have funded them, we have armed them; we have given them our full diplomatic support. I think it's one of the great stains on the history of America, and one that I hope that the new Administration will reverse.

### **Binding up the Nation's Wounds**

**Wertz:** One of the things that is generally not known is that Assad has essentially offered a pardon to any militant who lays down his arms and is willing to settle his legal status. This included, just in the recent days,

over 500 armed men who left eastern Aleppo, and 484 of those were immediately pardoned by the Assad government because they were local residents of Aleppo.

**Black:** They are taken under the wings of the Reconciliation Commission, and they are questioned to be sure that there are not some who are extreme war criminals. Many of those freed are going to be war criminals, but unless they are truly, truly notorious, if they are Syrian citizens, they want them to return, they are so intent on reconstructing the fabric of Syrian society and culture. They don't want to leave hurts and animosities that they can avoid. I find a little difficulty accepting that because of my military background, but I do somewhat admire them for at least attempting to do that.

**Wertz:** It somewhat reminds one of Abraham Lincoln's policy.

**Black:** It does; it does. And the idea, had he survived, it was clear at Appomattox he had given instructions that you are to treat the South with dignity, and that Robert E. Lee would be treated with complete dignity, and that I'm sure did not just originate with General Grant. I'm sure that that was coordinated with the White House, and that it was President Lincoln himself who said, "We are going to bind the wounds that afflict this nation," and I think, had he lived, I think we would have much more effectively resolved the Civil War. We would not have had the terrible period of Reconstruction.

## Winning the War—and Civilian Casualties

**Wertz:** The Foreign Minister of Russia today, Mr. Lavrov, said that the situation in East Aleppo is in no way different than the situation currently in the city of Mosul, in Iraq; and I was just wondering,—although obviously there is a double standard in terms of the western countries on this issue,—I was just wondering what you think about that.

**Black:** Well it's interesting. In Mosul we are liberators. Just tonight I think CNN was reporting that the conditions for civilians were a catastrophe. Well, the fact of the matter is that when you fight an urban war, civilians will be killed. It is inevitable and it is inescapable; and rather than face that, with what the Syrians and the Russians were handling in Aleppo, we acted as though they were somehow doing something that was terrible.

Here we are in Mosul, and we are finding that we have precisely the same problems—that there are civilians who are dying, they are innocent civilians just like they are innocent civilians in Aleppo; and we have two alternatives, and this is what you face in urban combat. Either you can surrender and say, “We simply won't accept any civilian casualties,” or you can simply pray and say, “God help them. We will try to kill as few as we possibly can, but we have got to win this war.”

It has amazed me. I've looked at the figures. They've said that within—this is the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights; they said there have been 300 civilians killed in the Aleppo pocket in the last month. I find that figure to be stunningly low. I will tell you I fought in Viet Nam; I was a forward air-controller. I flew helicopters, but then I was on the ground as a forward air-controller, and I dropped bombs. Well, the Viet Cong chose to fight from villages, and in Viet Nam, throughout the war, we were killing 300 civilians every day. And here they are, they have very carefully targeted, they have taken tremendous casualties, the Syrians and their allies, trying to reduce the number of civilian casualties, and they have. They have been very successful. If you look at the overall casualties throughout the war, most casualties have been the Syrian Army or the rebels; and then a smaller portion, I don't know what the percentage would be, whether it would be 25%, have been civilians, but it is a remarkably low portion of the casualties, and this is, I'm relying on pro-rebel figures, not on government figures. It has been amazing, and I think we are going to find in Mosul that we are not going to take Mosul without civilian casualties.

There are going to be a lot of them, and I don't blame our government, I don't blame the Iraqi government: it is simply the nature of urban combat.

## Re-building Syria

**Wertz:** When we started this discussion, you made reference to the need to rebuild Syria, and General Flynn recently called for a Marshall Plan for northern Africa and the Middle East. I know that a few weeks ago there were a number of heads of private firms in Russia who were in Syria as part of a delegation there to discuss reconstruction there and keeping the economy of Syria—they have been denied two of their exports, grain and oil—so basically the idea was to really begin this process of rebuilding. The Chinese have also had a presence in Syria, which has not been so visible, but of course what the Russians and the Chinese have been working on is essentially the One-Belt-One-Road policy of China and the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia; and it is very clear that there is going to be a big need for reconstruction of Syria, but actually of the entire area.

**Black:** It's going to be huge. We have destroyed it. We went into Libya; Libya at the time we went in, was our closest ally in the war on terror. They had the highest per capita income of any North African country. We went in and under the guise of a no-fly zone, we bombed them into the Stone Age. They essentially have no government today. At one point in the last year or so, their parliament had to meet on a ship offshore because they couldn't control a ten-acre plot of land. They're absolutely in anarchy; there is no government.

We did that; we did that to them. They were highly successful before that. We have gone into Syria; we have created just gargantuan destruction in there. Had we not initiated the war in Syria, there would not have been a war in Syria. It was the United States who first decided, under Hillary Clinton, that we were going to go in, we were going to destroy Libya, capture their weapons, ship them to Turkey and across the border into Syria.

Under Ambassador Ford, who was there—and he was working with the French Ambassador—when there were some demonstrations he broke diplomatic protocol, and he worked his way in to talk to the demonstrators, and he assured them that we were with them. And he turned ordinary demonstrations into a revolution. From that time on we have poured billions of dollars—we're training terrorists in Jordan, in Saudi Arabia, in Qatar and in Turkey. These are people, we give them





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*Aleppo before the civil war.*

basic training and then they go into the market, some of them to ISIS some of them to Al-Qaeda, some of them to other places.

We have done this destruction: we have trained them in how to blow down bridges, how to blow apart buildings, how to destroy things. No country on earth, including China, has the economic wherewithal to do the reconstruction that we do, and no country has the moral imperative to reconstruct like we do. The first thing we need to do is we need to drop the sanctions on them. Right now our sanctions actually prevent them from getting prosthetic devices; it prevents elderly people from receiving cancer medications. This is through the way that we manipulate the financial structure. It's a very cruel type of sanction that hurts innocent people. We need to get rid of the sanctions.

We have a mission that operates in Washington, DC. It's run by the terrorists and they lobby Congress for money to get weapons to go over and kill people. We need to shut down that mission immediately. At the same time, we need to establish a mission for the legitimate government of Syria in the United States. We have been so cautious of allowing anyone to have a voice on Syria that the UN Ambassador to Syria, Ambassador [Bashar] Al-Jaafari, has been restricted, and they say he cannot travel more than 25 miles from the UN. Why isn't he out on college campuses? Why isn't he facing hard questions where people could say, what about this, what about this? We're supposed to be a

nation that loves free speech, and yet we have cut off every bit of free speech. We will not allow them.

Before the election in 2014, what did we do? We knew what the election outcome would be if Syrian expatriates were allowed to vote in the United States. We shut down the Embassy! And we got western countries all over to do it because we'd have had an enormous black eye, because what would the Syrians have done? They'd have voted overwhelmingly for President Bashar Al-Assad. We didn't want this. So we have censored this war in a way that is disturbing to me that our government has the power to be so ham-handed in its censorship. But we need to do those things. We need to begin to coordinate with the Syrian armed forces. American forces, American generals need to be talking to Syrian generals, and they need to be in the same room with Russian generals figuring out, where do we go, what do you need, how can we eliminate this last pocket, how can we bring peace? We need to be peacemakers, not war makers. We have a Department of Defense, not a Department of War which we did have long ago, and we need to revert to defense, and not to the creation of war throughout the world.

### **A 'Time of Tremendous Hope'**

**Wertz:** As you know, in Palmyra, once it was liberated, the Russians sponsored a concert in the same location where ISIS had beheaded residents of Palmyra. In a certain sense that was emblematic of two different

conceptions of man, a completely bestial notion of man which the terrorists hold, and those who support the terrorists effectively hold, versus a conception of man which really is inspiring because you can just hear the work of Bach spreading throughout, not only the city, but throughout the desert and throughout the world.

**Black:** You had a solo violinist playing and sounds of that drifted over the desert and here he was in an amphitheater with columns around it. While I was there, I had the honor of shaking the hand of the man whose father had been beheaded because he refused to disclose the location of hidden antiquities which ISIS wanted very badly, so that they could ship them to the Turks, and the Turks would market them throughout the world to greedy oligarchs who wanted some piece of world history hanging in their study where they could look at it as they sipped their cocktails. And I shook the hand of this man and I said, “You know what? A thousand years from now when people come to Palmyra to look at this architectural gem, they’re going to hear about your father and how he preserved the antiquities that they are seeing in Palmyra.”

I think that we have a time of tremendous hope, a time of rebuilding of this great country. I think Syria has the opportunity to be great again. It is truly—I’m very religious—to me it is a miracle from God that a country of 23 million has managed to be cohesive and has faced NATO, the U.S., France, Britain, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, all of the world’s powers, the enormous power, and they’ve been descended on. Tens of thousands of jihadist mercenaries have been sent in and yet they have remained resolute, they love their President, they love their army, they despise the terrorists, and they consider every rebel to be a terrorist.

So I think the coming year is going to be very exciting for us, Will, and I think we are going to see great things happen. I think we are going to see an end to the Bush-Obama doctrine of regime change, and we are going to see a time when the world, perhaps, will see peace. This now, as you know, is the fifteenth anniversary of war for the United States. We have fought 15 continuous years of war. We have been bombing Iraq, believe it or not, for a quarter of a century, intermittently, but off and on we have dropped a third of a million bombs on Iraq, a country which never took any aggressive action towards us, a nation which never har-

bored terrorists, and yet here we are after 25 years, we are dropping bombs and we’re killing people in Iraq. It’s just amazing the failure of American elites to comprehend the complexity of foreign policy. There has been a void that is remarkable and I think almost a historic void in our comprehension of other cultures and other civilizations. I think that it’s long time that we wrapped it up and took a different direction, and I think we’re going to do that.

**Wertz:** I saw recently a report that over 25,000 Syrian children had entered the second stage of the Science Olympiad and that basically there was going to be another round, and then the finalist would participate in the international Science Olympiad which will occur next year; but it really hit me—here in the middle of this war, of this terror that has been visited upon this people—you still have children who are engaging in science projects and can compete internationally in this Olympiad. And I just think what you were saying in terms of the fact that this small country has stood up—I think instead of people vilifying Assad, they should be grateful for him, because if he hadn’t stood up, think of the world we would be confronted with.

**Black:** If he hadn’t stood up, Lebanon would have fallen, Jordan would have fallen, Israel would have been confronted with ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and instead of people with knives going out and committing acts, they’d have had 40 armored vehicles rush the gates and explode themselves; they’d have had divisions of Al-Qaeda troops pouring across the border, and who knows what that would have brought. We would have seen Turkey mobilize, once they had the Caliphate behind them, they would have begun to move towards Europe already. Erdogan has brought into question the treaty of 1923 that establishes the demarcation line between what is Europe and what is Turkey. Potentially we would have seen the loss of Europe, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, and so we have dodged a bullet despite ourselves. I think it is time that with the new President, I think a Marshall Plan would be a wonderful thing, and I think we owe it to the Syrians. We need to put our faults behind us; we don’t need to dwell too much on them, but we need to restore order to the Middle East, and I think we’re going to do it.

Will, thank you very much for being here tonight, I’ve enjoyed it very much.

**Wertz:** Thank you Senator. It’s good seeing you.

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