

Two Ambassadors to Syria with Wildly Different Analyses

By [Rick Sterling](#)

Global Research, March 31, 2021

[Antiwar.com](#) 29 March 2021

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),
[US NATO War Agenda](#)

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In the past few months, [Grayzone](#) journalist Aaron Mate has interviewed two former ambassadors to Syria: former UK Ambassador Peter Ford and former U.S. Ambassador Robert S. Ford.

The two ambassadors have a common surname but dramatically different perspectives. This article will compare the statements and viewpoints of the two diplomats.

UK Ambassador Peter Ford (PF)



Peter Ford trained as an Arabist and served in the British foreign service in numerous cities including Beirut, Riyadh, and Cairo. He was Ambassador to Bahrein from 1999 to 2003, then Syria from 2003 to 2006. From 2006 until 2014 he was a senior officer with the UN Relief Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees.

The [interview](#) with UK Amb. Peter Ford (PF) shows why he is exceptional former diplomat. He analyzes and criticizes western aggression against Syria.

PF describes the current situation:

“The Syrian government forces control about 70% of the country. There’s that pocket of jihadi fighters controlling Idlib province and a couple of patches of neighboring provinces, and then you’ve got the big – what I call the wild east of Syria – the big triangle of land up all the way along the thousand miles along the Turkish border and then down the Iraqi border, and that is effectively a US

protectorate. There are US forces there being helped on the ground by basically Kurdish militia, the so-called Syrian Democratic Forces.”

PF describes the crushing economic sanctions:

“It’s utterly shocking...The policy has been effective in the sense that Syrian people are suffering every day. There are long queues for bread, long queues for gasoline. The policy of sanctions and denial of assistance for reconstruction has been effective, but what kind of policy is it that tries to immiserate a whole country? It’s delusional because it’s not even going to work....

“The experience of 10 years of this conflict is that the Syrian government is amazingly resilient. They’ve been on the ropes many times in this conflict and pulled through largely because they have the support of great swaths of the Syrian populace. Assad is not going to buckle under this new increased economic pressure. It is utterly delusional to believe that this cynical, callous policy could work.”

PF analyzes the US troops in north eastern Syria.

“By their mere presence, they’re preventing the advance of the Syrian government forces. The result is that the Syrian people are denied the great oil and grain wealth of that triangle, the territory. And, so the war over the last year has been more an economic war than a military war...

“The troops are there basically as a tripwire, a deterrent, so that if the Syrian government forces advanced, they would trip over a few American soldiers and that would incur the massive intervention of the US Air Force. This is what it comes down to. They don’t even need big numbers of troops to create the tripwire.

“Even so, it’s interesting that the architects of this policy in the permanent government of the US found it necessary to deceive the head of the executive, the President, keep him in the dark about the numbers.... So, the deceit that has gone on – on every level – is jaw-dropping to me as a former ambassador and an insider in the British system. I find it absolutely incredible.”

PF describes what the war is and is NOT about.

“US policy is NOT about installing in Syria a democratic government, because there is no prospect of that while the US is effectively supporting Islamist fanatics, and while it’s supporting elsewhere in the Middle East regimes like the feudal regime of Saudi Arabia. No, it’s not about democracy. It’s about helping Israel on the one hand and scoring points against Russia on the other. And when it comes down to it, that is what this whole war is really about, from the US standpoint.”

PF analyzes accusations Syrian government used chemical weapons.

“The world has amnesia over Iraq, the non-existent weapons of mass destruction, the Colin Powell dossier proof presented to the UN. It’s like Groundhog Day when you hear the claims made about Assad, the use of chemical weapons.

"In the first place, it would make no practical sense for Assad to use chemical weapons; it could only ever have been an own goal. If he wanted to invite heavy Western intervention, he would not have gone about it any other way. You'd have to be incredibly either twisted or delusional to believe that Assad could have been so stupid as to do the one thing – use chemical weapons – which would bring about, or possibly bring about, his obliteration.

"I'm quite convinced this is an elaborate hoax. A series of hoaxes. It's very revealing that not one of the alleged instances of use of chemical weapons was investigated on the ground by any UN or other international investigations, with the sole exception of Douma. And why Douma? Because that was a piece of territory that the government forces managed to recover immediately after the alleged incident, so that the US and its allies were unable to keep away the international investigators.... That ultimately is the purpose of the chemical weapon hoaxes – to justify the occupation of northeast Syria and the continuing cruel economic pressure."

PF comments on the senior staff from the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons who say they did NOT find evidence of chemical weapons attack and their findings were changed by management.

"These gentlemen [from OPCW]) drafted a report stating that they found evidence that was consistent with staging of an incident, rather than an authentic incident. And ever since, they have been vilified, condemned, undermined. And the campaign against the truth goes on and on and on...."



PF comments on the role of the "White Helmets".

"The White Helmets' role is absolutely crucial, pivotal to the Western effort to undermine Syria through these accusations of use of chemical weapons. I think, basically, what happened is that Western governments realized that after the Iraq debacle, that if they were going to use claims about WMD, chemical weapons, whatever, again, they were going to have to produce some kind of smoking gun.

"And this is the role of the White Helmets. They produced the phony pictures of phony incidents which constitute the smoking gun. And that is absolutely pivotal to the propaganda to justify the bombing and the relentless economic and military pressure on Syria.... Western governments [have] been funding the White Helmets to the tune of about \$50 million a year. That's peanuts compared to what they see as the advantages of bringing Syria to its knees."

PF predicts what may happen ahead.

"I think things are likely to get worse, rather than better.

"What we'll probably see is simply a continuation of the status quo. The current policies will simply be extended.... to prolong the conflict, to prevent Assad gaining military victory, the continuation of economic warfare to try to bring Assad to his knees and force him to sign a suicide note, which would be acceptance of elections on US terms. I'm sure these policies will be continued.

"But there's a question mark over whether policy might not become even more adventurous and interventionist with a beachhead of a few thousand soldiers already occupying part of Syria. I greatly fear that Biden might be tempted to increase those numbers, put some military pressure on the Syrian government forces, create more no-fly zones. Already, there's effectively a no-fly zone over that big triangle of territory that's occupied by the US forces and Kurdish allies. An attempt might be made to create the no-fly zone of Idlib, which would be ironic. It would mean that the US Air Force was the air wing of al-Qaeda...

"I'm definitely not optimistic. And I fear things could get even worse."

US Ambassador Robert S. Ford (RSF)



Robert S. Ford was a US diplomat in numerous cities including Algiers and Cairo. He was Deputy Chief of Mission in Bahrain from 2001 to 2004, then Political Counselor at the US Embassy in Baghdad from 2004 to 2006. As an Arabic speaker, he may have helped Ambassador John Negroponte launch the ["El Salvador option"](#) (death squads) in Iraq. Robert S. Ford was Ambassador to Syria from the end of 2010 until 2014 when the US terminated diplomatic relations with Syria. He has continued as an unofficial advisor on Syria policy.

In contrast with the Peter Ford interview, the [interview](#) with US Ambassador Robert S. Ford (RSF) is a case study in public relations. Interviewer Aaron Mate asks important questions but RSF deflects the questions, claims ignorance of new revelations, and repeats standard talking points on Syria.

RSF acknowledges there has been "mission creep" for US troops in Syria.

"American troops were sent into Syria originally to fight ISIS. Now that that job is more-or-less finished, we have a sort of mission creep where now the American forces are there not to defeat ISIS – ISIS is already defeated... But

now, so what are the Americans doing? Well, now they sort of changed the mission to putting pressure on Damascus, the Assad government, trying to get the Iranians out, trying to limit the Russian influence.”

RSF implies the sanctions on Syria are just.

“Sanctions is a different question, Aaron. I think a lot of it is emotional here in the United States. There’s a desperate desire for justice after all the war crimes committed in Syria. And I think getting rid of the sanctions is going to be a much harder battle to fight in the Congress. So, the sanctions have very strong approval in Congress...”

RSF maintains the initial protests were “almost entirely peaceful”

“In March and April, May into June, the protests were almost entirely peaceful. That’s not to say there was no violence. In the first protest, for example, in [Daraa](#), in which we’re now coming up on the 10-year anniversary, yeah, the protesters did attack the telephone office [Syriatel] that’s owned by Bashar al-Assad’s cousin, Rami Makhlouf. They did attack a court building...”

[Fact check: RSF neglects to mention [seven police](#) were killed in the “almost entirely peaceful” Daraa protest.]

RSF acknowledges US allies were sending weapons early but claims the US began sending weapons in 2013.

“Those countries [Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey] did send in weapons before the Americans...”

“I supported arming factions of the Free Syrian Army as early as the summer of 2012. And it took the president a year to get to a decision.”

[Fact check: US Central Intelligence Agency was [sending weapons](#) from Benghazi Libya to Syria in Oct 2011.]

RSF compares the Free Syrian Army to the anti-Nazi resistance in WW2.

“The United States never gave anti-tank weapons to al-Qaeda.... the number might be half a dozen.

“I want you to think about this in historical context. Do you think when the Americans airdropped weapons into the French resistance against the Nazis in France, do you think the Nazis never got their hands on any of those air drops?...”

“The leakage to the al-Qaeda elements, there was a small amount of leakage, but much, much, much more of their weaponry came from the Assad government, either, because the Assad soldiers were corrupt, as we said, we talked at the start about corruption. They sold them, or in some cases, they surrendered, and with that, huge caches of weaponry made their way into al-Nusra hands. The amount of material that al-Nusra got from the United States wouldn’t have lasted them for a day of combat.”

Fact check: This claim is preposterous. As reported by Janes Defense, the US supplied nearly [one thousand TONS](#) of weapons in December 2015, much of which [ended up in Nusra \(Al Qaeda\) hands](#). Nusra obtained weapons when they over-ran Syrian military bases, but otherwise they were amply supplied with weapons by the Gulf monarchies, Israel, Turkey, the US and UK.

RSF claims the Syrian government has primary responsibility for the war and are the “bad guys”.

“What I hope your listeners will take away from this is that it is not an equal combat on both sides; is not an equal responsibility on both sides. One side from the beginning was using torture and shooting at innocent people, thousands of arrests. And one side was trying peacefully, for a very large part, to bring about change. And, unfortunately, in this instance, the bad guys won.”

Fact check: The campaign against Syria has been waged by a coalition of western powers, Turkey, Israel and the Gulf monarchies. About [121 thousand Syrians in the Syrian army and militias have died defending their country](#).

RSF claims that Syria is responsible for the war refugees and destabilizing its neighbors.

“Even had Turkey, Qatar and the United States, Saudi Arabia, stayed out of it, there still would have been huge refugee flows trying to escape from those same brutal Syrian security forces, and they still would have flooded the borders of Lebanon and Jordan and of Turkey, which is itself destabilizing, particularly in Lebanon, but some places like Jordan, Turkey. Therefore, you can’t just say that all these other countries intervened in sovereign Syrian territory. The Syrian government itself was taking actions which were destabilizing to its neighbors.”

Fact check: Most refugees fled when their neighborhoods were taken over by militants and became battle zones, NOT because they were afraid of Syrian security.



RSF criticizes Turkey but thinks Syrian government bears primary responsibility.

“I’m never going to justify the Turks allowing Salafi jihadists to go into Syria. I think that I’ve already said that that was a bad mistake. And we criticized them at the time of playing with snakes. I’m never going to justify it. But I have to say, Aaron, that in the end, they came in response to what the Assad government was already doing. And so, the principal responsibility ... do the Americans have a share of responsibility? Of course, we do. Yeah. It was our antitank missiles blowing up Syrian government tanks, and not just a few; I

mean, hundreds of them.

“I think we have to go back to where it started in 2011. And that’s with the Syrian government...”

RSF says he is not aware of the huge scandal at the OPCW but believes Syria has used chemical weapons.

“I’m not familiar with that controversy within the OPCW....

“But I guess I would just say this, Aaron. There’s plenty of documentation by the UN’s joint investigative group with the OPCW that looked at incidents in Syria chemical weapons use, from 2013 onwards. They’ve issued several reports.... So, the 2018 incident, I don’t know about that report, but I have no doubt whatsoever that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons on multiple instances, the same government that bombs hospitals, the same government that bombs bakeries, the same government that kills people in detention routinely. Look at the photos that were brought up by the military defector. You know, why would you think they wouldn’t use chemical weapons? Why would you think they would suddenly have moral scruples against these? It doesn’t make a lot of sense.”

[Fact check: the [OPCW scandal](#) has confirmed manipulation of that organization by the US and west. The “military photographer” refers to the ‘Caesar torture photos’ [propaganda stunt](#).]

RSF wants to increase humanitarian aid to Syria refugees.

“Something the Americans could do that would be hugely helpful is to increase humanitarian aid to the Syrian refugees that number some five million, particularly in Lebanon, where their living circumstances are precarious, very precarious, but also in Jordan and Turkey... I’d like to spend less on the military operation and much more on humanitarian aid.

“And then there is the issue of Northwest Syria, Idlib, where the UN is in charge of an operation getting humanitarian aid to some two million displaced Syrian civilians.”

[Fact check and observation: Idlib province is dominated by Nusra (Al Qaeda). Robert Ford seems to want to perpetuate the AQ stronghold and refugee crisis by supplying aid to Idlib and foreign countries while preventing return of refugees and rebuilding war torn Syria.]

Conclusion

Both ambassadors speak Arabic and have intimate knowledge of Syria.

Robert S. Ford criticizes some past decisions and tactics, but not the assumptions or right of the US to violate the UN Charter and commit aggression against Syria.

Meanwhile, Peter Ford is doing his best to expose the reality of the situation, contrary to government and media bias and falsehoods. Like Daniel Ellsberg, Scott Ritter and Katharine Gun, he is using his special knowledge to publicly challenge the claims and assumptions of western policy. With Ellsberg it was about Vietnam. With Ritter and Gun, it was about Iraq.

With Peter Ford, it is about Syria.

The [full interview](#) with UK Ambassador Peter Ford is well worth watching or reading.

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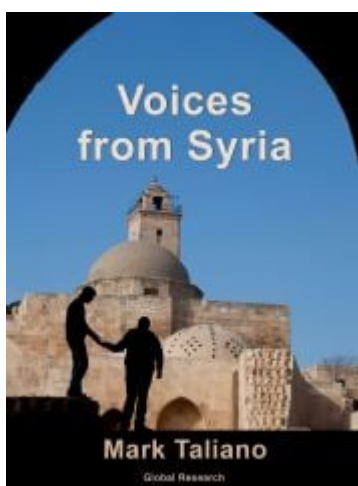
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