



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on November 28, 2016

American Military Death in Syria Raises Questions

“I am deeply saddened by the news on this Thanksgiving Day that one of our brave service members has been killed in Syria while protecting us from the evil of ISIL,” said Ashton Carter, U.S. secretary of defense under President Barack Obama, in a released statement about the death of Senior Chief Petty Officer Scott C. Dayton, who was killed by an improvised explosive device (IED) in northern Syria.



Dayton’s death is the first American to die in Syria since President Obama deployed a contingent of Special Operations forces there in October 2015 with the mission of assisting a coalition of Kurdish and Arab forces (known as the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF) fighting the Islamic State.

American policy in Syria has vacillated between attempting to oust President Bashar Assad and attacking the Islamic State, known as ISIS or ISIL.

Dayton was a U.S. Navy bomb disposal technician who was killed near Ain Issa, which is about 35 miles northwest of Raqqa. The Islamic State has claimed Raqqa as its capital.

Lieutenant General Stephen Townsend, commander of the American-led coalition fighting ISIS, responded to Dayton’s death: “The entire counter-coalition sends it condolences to this hero’s family, friends and teammates. On this Thanksgiving please be thankful there are service members willing to take up the fight to protect our homeland from [ISIS’] hateful and brutal ideology.”

While Carter and Townsend rightly expressed regret at the passing of Senior Chief Petty Office Dayton, the commander-in-chief, Barack Obama, issued no similar statement. But, he did take time to issue a statement mourning the passing of musician Prince when he died this last spring.

All Americans should be grateful for the brave service of those like Dayton, who are willing to serve. Since Dayton entered the Navy in February 1993, he had received 19 awards, including the Bronze Star. He served multiple deployments to Iraq.

Defense Secretary Carter asked for Americans to keep Dayton’s “family, friends and teammates” in their “thoughts and prayers,” adding that he hoped all would “join me in expressing thanks to all of our dedicated troops who selflessly protect us every day.”

But is sending American troops into a country such as Syria, that has been embroiled in a multi-faceted civil war for several years, a wise move?

First of all, it seems that Obama does not have a consistent policy in Syria. At one point, Obama wanted to intervene into the country in an effort to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad. Responding to an outcry against such an intervention by the American populace, Congress declined to issue any resolution authorizing such a move by the president.

At that time, the forces desirous of ousting Assad included ISIS fighters, which Obama then dismissed as the “JV team.” But it has been the goal of the United States, over several presidential administrations, both Democrat and Republican, to replace secular strongmen, including Assad. The



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problem, however, has been what or whom to replace them with.

When he was running for president, Senator Ted Cruz (R-Texas) said, “The Middle East was better off with Saddam Hussein and Moammar Gadhafi in power.” Cruz, speaking on MSNBC’s *Morning Joe*, said, “We’ve seen a consistent mistake in foreign policy, we’ve seen Democrats and a lot of establishment Republicans in Washington get involved in toppling Middle Eastern governments, and it ends up benefitting the bad guys. It ends up handing them over to radical Islamic terrorists.”

Cruz added, “Was the world in fact a better place, the Middle East a better place, when Moammar Gadhafi and Saddam Hussein was in power and when Assad wasn’t fighting for his life in Syria? Of course it was. That isn’t even a close call.”

Senator Cruz’s position was largely echoed by fellow presidential candidate Senator Rand Paul (R-Kentucky), and more significantly, then-candidate Donald Trump, who is now the president-elect. During his debates with Hillary Clinton, Trump repeatedly said he would prefer to oppose Islamic terrorism, rather than resurrect the regime change policy of Bill Clinton, George Bush, and Barack Obama.

Former Congressman Ron Paul (R-Texas) recently said in an interview with Peter Lavelle that when the American public becomes more informed, they are much more reluctant to support foreign interventions.

Will Trump continue with his noninterventionist position, which contributed to his surprise victory over Clinton, an ardent interventionist, in the presidential election? Clinton had even called for a “no-fly zone” over Syria. Can one imagine a foreign country declaring a no-fly zone over any part of the United States? We would rightly conclude that was an act of war.

Bush’s decision to seek regime change via military force in Iraq in 2003 led to the ouster of Iraqi strongman Saddam Hussein, who, incidentally, was placed into power with U.S. assistance. While there is no doubt that Hussein was a brutal dictator, has the country been better off since the ouster and execution of Hussein?

Since 2002, deaths in the Middle East as a result of terrorism have increased 4,500 percent. In Iraq, before the 2003 U.S. invasion, there were zero suicide attacks. Since then, the country has suffered 1,892. Before the Iraq war, there were more than 1.5 million Christians in Iraq. One million fled to Syria, and today there are less than a half million Christians remaining in the two countries, and they are frequent targets of ISIS and other extremists.

And, of course, this weakening of the Assad regime has resulted in thousands of refugees, seeking asylum in Europe and other western countries, including the United States. And mixed in with these actual refugees are no doubt ISIS or ISIS-like terrorists, anxious to launch murderous attacks upon Americans on our soil.

Fourteen years after the “War on Terror” began, the United States is approaching \$6 trillion spent on wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — which translates to roughly \$75,000 per American household.

President Bush’s intervention into Iraq to rid the Middle East of Saddam Hussein was sold as making Iraq a “showcase for democracy” in that region. This is eerily similar to the campaign of President John F. Kennedy to make Vietnam a “showcase for democracy” in Asia. Again, comparisons can be made in the way the policies of the U.S. government vacillated in both instances. At one time, the U.S. supported Ho Chi Minh against the French, only to reverse course and then support the French against Ho Chi



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Minh. In the Middle East, the United States has both supported and opposed secular dictators such as Hussein and Gadhafi. It is hard to argue that the ouster of Gadhafi was a success for the United States in Libya. And who can forget the supposed Arab Spring in Egypt?

Nearly 7,000 American military personnel have died in these Middle Eastern wars.

Now, these military interventions have claimed the life of an American serviceman in Syria, the first in that conflict. Let us hope that President Trump understands that Dayton's life should be the last.



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