

# Explaining Syria: It's Everyone's Fault Except the U.S. and Israel

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

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),  
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*The first week in February was memorable for the failed impeachment of **President Donald Trump**, the “re-elect me” State of the Union address and the [marketing of a new line of underwear](#) by Kim Kardashian. Given all of the excitement, it was easy to miss a special State Department press [briefing by Ambassador James Jeffrey](#) held on February 5<sup>th</sup> regarding the current situation in Syria.*

Jeffrey is the United States Special Representative for Syria Engagement and the Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL. Jeffrey has had a distinguished career in government service, attaining senior level State Department positions under both Democratic and Republican presidents. He has served as U.S. Ambassador to both Turkey and Iraq. He is, generally speaking, a hardliner politically, closely aligned with Israel and regarding Iran as a hostile destabilizing force in the Middle East region. He was between 2013 and 2018 [Philip Solondz distinguished fellow](#) at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), a think tank that is a spin-off of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). He is currently a WINEP “Outside Author” and go-to “expert.”

**Professor John Mearsheimer** of the University of Chicago and **Stephen Walt**, academic dean at Harvard University ‘s Kennedy School of Government, describe WINEP as “part of the core” of the Israel Lobby in the U.S. They examined the group on pages 175-6 in their groundbreaking book [The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy](#) and concluded as follows:

“Although WINEP plays down its links to Israel and claims that it provides a ‘balanced and realistic’ perspective on Middle East issues, this is not the case. In fact, WINEP is funded and run by individuals who are deeply committed to advancing Israel’s agenda ... Many of its personnel are genuine scholars or experienced former officials, but they are hardly neutral observers on most Middle East issues and there is little diversity of views within WINEP’s ranks.”

In early 2018 Jeffrey co-authored a WINEP special report on Syria which urged “...the Trump administration [to] couple a no-fly/no-drive zone and a small residual ground presence in the northeast with intensified sanctions against the Assad regime’s Iranian patron. In doing so, Washington can support local efforts to stabilize the area, encourage Gulf partners to ‘put skin in the game, drive a wedge between Moscow and Tehran, and help Israel avoid all-out war.”

Note the focus on Iran and Russia as threats and the referral to Assad and his government

as a “regime.” And the U.S. presence is to “help Israel.” So we have Ambassador James Jeffrey leading the charge on Syria, from an Israeli perspective that is no doubt compatible with the White House view, which explains why he has become Special Representative for Syria Engagement.

Jeffrey [set the tone](#) for his term of office shortly after being appointed by President Trump back in August 2018 when he argued that the Syrian terrorists were “. . . not terrorists, but people fighting a civil war against a brutal dictator.” Jeffrey, who must have somehow missed a lot of the head chopping and rape going on, subsequently traveled to the Middle East and stopped off in Israel to meet Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. It has been suggested that Jeffrey received his marching orders during the visit.

Two months later James Jeffrey [declared](#) that he would like to see Russia maintain a “permissive approach” to allow the Israelis to attack Iranian targets inside Syria. Regarding Iran’s possible future role in Syria he observed that “Iranians are part of the problem not part of the solution.”

What Jeffrey meant was that because Israel had been “allowed” to carry out hundreds of air attacks in Syria ostensibly directed against Iran-linked targets, the practice should be permitted to continue. Israel had suspended nearly all of its airstrikes in the wake of the shoot down of a Russian aircraft in September 2018, an incident which was caused by a deliberate Israeli maneuver that brought down the plane even though the missile that struck the aircraft was fired by Syria. Fifteen Russian servicemen were killed. Israel reportedly was deliberately using the Russian plane to mask the presence of its own attacking aircraft.

Russia responded to the incident by deploying advanced S-300 anti-aircraft systems to Syria, which can cover most of the more heavily developed areas of the country. Jeffrey was unhappy with that decision, saying “We are concerned very much about the S-300 system being deployed to Syria. The issue is at the detail level. Who will control it? what role will it play?” And he defended his own patently absurd urging that Russia, Syria’s ally, permit Israel to continue its air attacks by saying “We understand the existential interest and we support Israel” because the Israeli government has an “existential interest in blocking Iran from deploying long-range power projection systems such as surface-to-surface missiles.”

Later in November 2018 James Jeffrey [was at it again](#), declaring that U.S. troops will not leave Syria before guaranteeing the “enduring defeated” of ISIS, but he perversely put the onus on Syria and Iran, saying that “We also think that you cannot have an enduring defeat of ISIS until you have fundamental change in the Syrian regime and fundamental change in Iran’s role in Syria, which contributed greatly to the rise of ISIS in the first place in 2013, 2014.”

As virtually no one but Jeffrey and the Israeli government actually believes that Damascus and Tehran were responsible for creating ISIS, the ambassador elaborated, blaming President Bashar al-Assad for the cycle of violence in Syria that, he claimed, allowed the development of the terrorist group in both Syria and neighboring Iraq.

He said “The Syrian regime produced ISIS. The elements of ISIS in the hundreds, probably, saw an opportunity in the total breakdown of civil society and of the upsurge of violence as the population rose up against the Assad regime, and the Assad regime, rather than try to negotiate or try to find any kind of solution, unleashed massive violence against its own

population.”

Jeffrey’s formula is just another recycling of the myth that the Syrian opposition consisted of good folks who wanted to establish democracy in the country. In reality, it incorporated terrorist elements right from the beginning and groups like ISIS and the al-Qaeda affiliates rapidly assumed control of the violence. That Jeffrey should be so ignorant or blinded by his own presumptions to be unaware of that is astonishing. It is also interesting to note that he makes no mention of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, kneejerk support for Israel and the unrelenting pressure on Syria starting with the Syrian Accountability Act of 2003 and continuing with embrace of the so-called Arab Spring. Most observers believe that those actions were major contributors to the rise of ISIS.

Jeffrey’s unflinching embrace of the Israeli and hardline Washington assessment of the Syrian crisis comes as no surprise given his pedigree, but in the same interview where he pounded Iran and Syria he asserted oddly that “We’re not about regime change. We’re about a change in the behavior of a government and of a state.”

Some of James Jeffrey’s comments at last week’s press conference are similarly illuminating. Much of what he said concerned the mechanics of relationships with the Russians and Turks, but he also discussed some core issues relating to Washington’s perspective on the conflict. Many of his comments were very similar to what he said when he was appointed in 2018.

Jeffrey expressed concern over the thousands of al-Nusra terrorists holed up in besieged Idlib province, saying “We’re very, very worried about this. First of all, the significance of Idlib – that’s where we’ve had chemical weapons attacks in the past... And we’re seeing not just the Russians but the Iranians and Hizballah actively involved in supporting the Syrian offensive... You see the problems right now in Idlib. This is a dangerous conflict. It needs to be brought to an end. Russia needs to change its policies.”

He elaborated, “We’re not asking for regime change per se, we’re not asking for the Russians to leave, we’re asking...Syria to behave as a normal, decent country that doesn’t force half its population to flee, doesn’t use chemical weapons dozens of times against its own civilians, doesn’t drop barrel bombs, doesn’t create a refugee crisis that almost toppled governments in Europe, does not allow terrorists such as HTS and particularly Daesh/ISIS emerge and flourish in much of Syria. Those are the things that that regime has done, and the international community cannot accept that.”

Well, one has to conclude that James Jeffrey is possibly completely delusional. The core issue that the United States is in Syria illegally as a proxy for Israel and Saudi Arabia is not touched on, nor the criminal role in “protecting the oil fields” and stealing their production, which he mentions but does not explain. Nor the issue of the legitimate Syrian government seeking to recover its territory against groups that most everyone admits to be terrorists.

Virtually every bit of “evidence” that Jeffrey cites is either false or inflated, to include the claim of use of chemical weapons and the responsibility for the refugees. As for who actually created the terrorists, that honor goes to the United States, which accomplished that when it invaded Iraq and destroyed its government before following up by undermining Syria. And, by the way, someone should point out to Jeffrey that Russia and Iran are in Syria as allies of its legitimate government.

Ambassador James Jeffrey maintains that “Russia needs to change its policies.” That is not

correct. It is the United States that must change its policies by getting out of Syria and Iraq for starters while also stopping the deference to feckless “allies” Israel and Saudi Arabia that has produced a debilitating cold war against both Iran and Russia. Another good first step to make the U.S. a “normal, decent country” would be to get rid of the advice of people like James Jeffrey.

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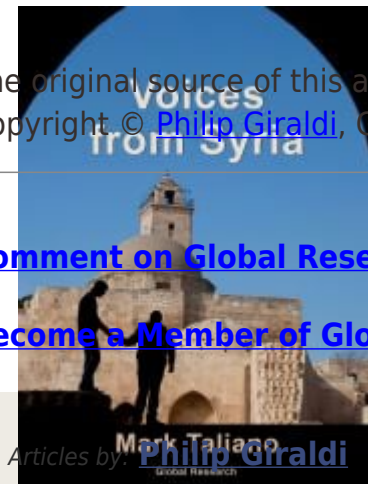
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