

Washington's proxy in Syria: Al Qaeda

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Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday issued a warning against anyone “attempting to exploit the misery of the Syrian people, either by sending in proxies or sending in terrorist fighters.” She insisted that such actions would “not be tolerated.”

Neither she nor the State Department cared to spell out precisely which countries or organizations were being warned. Hidden behind Clinton's hypocritical statement is the reality that US imperialism and its allies are themselves relying on, bankrolling and arming just such “proxies” and “terrorist fighters” to pursue their war for regime-change in Syria.

Chief among these forces is Washington's supposed arch enemy, the Islamist terrorist organization Al Qaeda.

The growing acknowledgment within official circles that Al Qaeda is playing a decisive role in Syria's civil war exposes both the real nature of the US-backed bid to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad and the fraud of Washington's “war on terror.”

Having for months dismissed as “propaganda” the Syrian government's statements that it is battling Al Qaeda terrorists, the corporate media and sources close to the US government are now not only acknowledging the role of this organization in the Syrian events, but celebrating it.

The major US news networks all carried reports on Monday and Tuesday highlighting Al Qaeda's presence inside Syria. These follow a report in the *New York Times* late last month that Al Qaeda is operating in the heart of the so-called Syrian “revolution” through three groups: the Al Nusra Front for the People of the Levant, the Abdullah Azzam Brigades and Al Baraa ibn Malik Martyrdom Brigade.

The frankest admission of the significance of Al Qaeda's role came Monday in an article posted on the web site of the Council on Foreign Relations by Ed Husain, a senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies and

one of the council's chief analysts on Islamist political movements in the Middle East.

Husain wrote: “The Syrian rebels would be immeasurably weaker today without al-Qaeda in their ranks. By and large, Free Syrian Army (FSA) battalions are tired, divided, chaotic, and ineffective... Al-Qaeda fighters, however, may help improve morale. The influx of jihadis brings discipline, religious fervor, battle experience from Iraq, funding from Sunni sympathizers in the Gulf, and most importantly, deadly results. In short, the FSA needs al-Qaeda now.”

Husain predicts that “Al-Qaeda could become the most effective fighting force in Syria if defections from the FSA” to its ranks continue growing and “the ranks of foreign fighters continue to swell.” Recent media reports have made clear that Islamist fighters from as far away as Chechnya are being funneled into Syria across the Turkish border, along with many more from Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Jordan and elsewhere.

The US reaction? “Thus far, Washington seems reluctant to weigh heavily into this issue,” writes Husain. “The unspoken position of policymakers is to get rid of Assad first—weakening Iran's position in the region—and then deal with Al-Qaeda later.”

Such statements are not made lightly and are based upon intimate knowledge of American policy. The Council on Foreign Relations has the closest ties to the State Department of any Washington think tank. Sitting on its board of directors are two former secretaries of state, Colin Powell and Madeleine Albright.

What is involved here are political realities that serve to blow up the pretexts for both the war in Syria and the “global war on terrorism” that has served as the touchstone for US policy, both foreign and domestic, for over a decade.

Washington is not waging a crusade for democracy and human rights in Syria. It is involved in a dirty war

in which carnage is being unleashed against the Syrian population as a means of toppling a regime that has historic ties to Tehran. This, in turn, is meant to pave the way for a wider war aimed at eliminating Iran as a rival for regional hegemony in the energy-rich and geo-strategically vital regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia.

That Iran itself recognizes these aims was spelled out Tuesday by Iranian envoy Saeed Jalili, who traveled to Damascus. “What is happening in Syria is not an internal Syrian issue but a conflict between the axis of resistance and its enemies in the region and the world,” he said.

The *New York Times* as much as admitted the accuracy of this assessment, acknowledging that it is not “surprising that Tehran should view the internal conflict in Syria as part of a wider international war--with Iran as the ultimate target.” It continued: “To understand the roots of Iranian paranoia, just look at the map. Iran has been steadily encircled by a network of US military bases in the decades since the Iranian revolution of 1979.”

As for Al Qaeda, after being used as a bogeyman to justify two wars of aggression and a sweeping and continuing assault on democratic rights within the US itself, it now emerges as the indispensable shock troops in Washington’s war for regime-change in Syria.

This alliance is virtually a direct repetition of the relations established by the CIA and Washington when Al Qaeda was founded by Osama bin Laden in the early 1980s. Then it funneled Islamist mujahideen fighters across the Pakistani border into Afghanistan in a war against a Soviet-backed regime that was orchestrated by the CIA and funded with billions of US dollars.

Now the CIA is playing a similar role in Syria, overseeing a huge logistical operation on the Turkish border. Can anyone believe that armed Chechen jihadis are marching across Georgia and Turkey into Syria without the active collaboration of US intelligence?

All of the rhetoric about a global war against Islamist terrorism notwithstanding, the reality is that US imperialism has utilized such forces over the course of decades. Saudi Arabia, which provides these forces with both financial and ideological backing, is Washington’s key Arab ally. Throughout the Cold War, the US government promoted the virulently anti-communist forces of political Islam in the Middle East

as well as Asia as a means of destabilizing and toppling nationalist and secular regimes and countering the development of socialist movements.

The response of the US media and the political apparatus as a whole to revelations about Al Qaeda’s role in Syria goes beyond cynicism. It expresses deep-going political disorientation. In Orwellian style, the media reports that yesterday’s mortal enemy has turned into today’s ally without skipping a beat and without seeing the need for explanation. Not a single leading politician has seen fit even to publicly question this transformation.

The lineup of US imperialism and Al Qaeda in Syria exposes even more glaringly the reactionary role played by pseudo-left groups like the International Socialist Organization (ISO) in supporting the imperialist-led drive for regime-change and even casting it as a “revolution.”

Do they all really believe that the American people won’t notice, after having been dragged into two protracted wars, costing the lives of thousands of US soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi and Afghan civilians, as well as trillions of dollars, all in the name of the struggle against Al Qaeda? If so, they are deeply mistaken. These revelations will have an explosive effect in laying bare and discrediting the entire US ruling establishment.

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