

The New York Times promotes the Syrian contras

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On October 5 journalist C. J. Chivers published a long article in the *New York Times*, sympathetically recording the views of the US-backed Syrian opposition, titled “Rebels Say West’s Inaction Is Pushing Syrians to Extremism.”

The article comes amid rising tensions between Washington and the proxies that it is arming and backing in the war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. After Libyan Islamists previously backed by the US in last year’s war against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi attacked the US consulate in Benghazi on September 11, a debate has broken out in the American state over how aggressively to back similar forces in Syria.

Chivers, an ex-Marine whose reporting relies on his high-level US military and intelligence connections, speaks for the factions in Washington who want to intensify the war, topple Assad, and put the opposition in power. His argument itself reveals the right-wing character of the forces the US is supporting, however. The unmistakable content of his argument is that Washington should attack Syria and put the Islamist-dominated opposition in power, because otherwise they will use their training to mount terrorist attacks on the US.

He paraphrases comments by rebel commander Majed al-Muhammad: “The Syrian people are being radicalized by a combination of a grinding conflict and their belief that they have been abandoned by a watching world. If the West continues to turn its back on Syria’s suffering, he said, Syrians will turn their backs in return, and this may imperil Western interests and security at one of the crossroads of the Middle East.”

To speak plainly, Syrian opposition groups angry with Washington could decide to “imperil Western

security” by launching attacks against US targets.

Later on, Chivers adopts this argument as his own. He notes “rising frustration” in the Syrian opposition with alleged lack of US support, adding: “As anger grows, armed groups opposed to the United States may grow in numbers and stature, too.”

Chivers is well aware that the Syrian opposition is receiving aid and training from the US and its allies in order to carry out terrorist attacks. Indeed, one of his recent video reports for the *Times* covered bombings against Syrian government targets carried out by the Islamist group Lions of Tawhid (i.e., Lions of Monotheism). Chivers and the *Times* filmed them for five days in August as they organized and carried out various operations.

In Chivers’ video, the Lions of Tawhid commit a war crime, tricking a prisoner of war into functioning as an unwitting suicide bomber, driving a truck bomb. None of this apparently disturbed Chivers, who does not criticize the Lions of Tawhid in his video.

Chivers presents the Syrian opposition’s pro-war arguments with complete contempt for popular opposition both in Syria and in the NATO countries.

A 55 percent popular majority in the United States and a 59 percent majority in the European Union oppose intervention in Syria. After the bitter experience of spending trillions of dollars on wars in Afghanistan and Iraq that cost millions of lives, workers in the NATO countries do not want to be dragged into another bloodbath. Yet this is inevitably what acting on the demands of the Syrian opposition cited by Chivers would produce.

In his article, Chivers is even at pains to defend the Syrian opposition against potential criticism. He cynically echoes the Syrian opposition fighters’ false claims that they are not receiving US help and that

descriptions of them as Islamist terrorists constitute slander.

He writes, “None of the half-dozen fighting groups visited by journalists for the *New York Times*, or the many commanders interviewed in Turkey, claimed to have seen, much less received, American aid ... Many Syrian men also bristled under what they called common descriptions that their uprising is driven by foreign fighters, or hosts groups linked to Al Qaeda.”

These are legalistic dodges. US allies including Saudi Arabia and Qatar are arming the Syrian opposition, which receives massive weapons shipments through the Turkish city of Adana, the site of the American Incirlik Air Base. Whether or not Syrian opposition groups admit that such aid is “American,” this aid depends entirely on US support and approval.

As for the claim that the Syrian opposition does not harbor Al Qaeda-type forces, it is widely acknowledged that Al Qaeda-linked groups like the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group in Libya and the Al Nusra Front in Syria play major roles in US wars in their countries. Chivers’ denials of the Syrian opposition’s right-wing, terroristic character is all the more absurd, in that he himself has filmed Islamist terrorist groups operating in Syria.

Chivers’ article casts a revealing light on the rotten politics of these groups, particularly when he interviews Syrian opposition militia leader Ghassan Abdul Wahib. Like the right-wing *contra* rebels in Nicaragua or the anti-Soviet *mujahedin* in Afghanistan of the 1980s, from which Al Qaeda emerged, they function as bribed tools of US imperialist intrigue.

Wahib angrily blames the US for not helping the Syrian opposition more, telling Chivers that the US and its allies “want war so it destroys Syria and puts us back 100 years. In this way, Israel will be safe. The United Nations is a partner in destroying Syria.”

Nonetheless, these views do not stop “rebel” fighters like Wahib from seeking out Washington’s help. Chivers writes that his Syrian opposition contacts “still crave Western military assistance, even if it would only be a no-fly zone to ground the Syrian Air Force”—that is, a massive bombing campaign to destroy Syrian air defenses and give the US command of Syrian airspace.

Such comments underscore the fact that political forces that promoted the Syrian opposition as “revolutionary,” including the International Socialist

Organization in the United States or the New Anticapitalist Party in France, were themselves acting as tools of imperialism. They were trying to promote the Syrian *contras* by painting them in “left” colors.

Though its author certainly did not intend it, Chivers’ article also makes clear the political fraud perpetrated upon the American people by successive administrations that launched their wars in the Middle East based on claims they were fighting a “war on terror.” In fact, now as during the 1980s, US imperialism is willing to back the most reactionary forces, including terrorists, when it serves its geopolitical interests.



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