

US covers up Islamist involvement in Aleppo bombing

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Two bomb blasts at the University of Aleppo on January 15 killed at least 87 people, and wounded dozens more. The US State Department denounced the bombing as a “deadly attack,” claiming it was “carried out by the Syrian regime.” The evidence strongly suggests, however, that the atrocities were inflicted by Al-Nusra, an organisation with links to Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The massacre highlights the hypocrisy of the major powers, who are stoking up a sectarian civil war aimed at ousting the Assad regime, under the banner of “humanitarianism” and the “protection of the Syrian people.” In reality, the war is largely being fought by Islamists, seeking to establish a state based on sharia law.

The support given by the US and its allies to the Syrian opposition again demonstrates that the difference between “freedom fighters” and “terrorists” depends entirely on the geostrategic and economic interests of the major powers. The collaboration with Islamic fundamentalists and cover up of its atrocities in Syria stands in contrast to the denunciations of the Al Qaeda-linked Islamists responsible for last week’s hostage crisis in Algeria.

The bloody denouement to that crisis saw Algerian forces storm the natural gas facility where hostages were being held, resulting in the deaths of 48 hostages, and as many as 32 Islamist fighters—a high death toll, but still less than that of the Aleppo massacre.

Likewise, France’s invasion of Mali, launched on January 14, has been carried out on the spurious pretext of combating Islamist forces in the north, many of whom were involved in the US-NATO overthrow of the Gaddafi regime in Libya. France’s intervention is not about “terrorism” but reasserting French interests in North Africa amid an accelerating scramble for the

continent’s resources.

Washington blacklisted Al-Nusra as a terrorist organisation last December. The move was no more than a ploy in response to growing revelations about the extent of Islamist participation in the Syrian opposition, and has not altered the Obama administration’s support for the opposition forces. In an acknowledgement that Al-Nusra is playing a critical role in the conflict, other Syrian opposition groups opposed its blacklisting.

Al-Nusra has carried out similar atrocities to that at Aleppo university before, including car bombings in Aleppo on October 3 that resulted in 48 deaths and more than 122 serious injuries. It has also been linked to other prominent terrorist attacks in Syria, including:

- * A suicide bombing in Damascus in December 2011, which killed 44 people and wounded 166 others.

- * The murder of 13 men in execution-style killings in the Deir ez-Zor, a city in Syria’s east, last April.

- * An attack on a government TV station in Drousha, south of Damascus, and the killing of seven people, including three journalists, last June.

- * The kidnapping and execution of a government TV news reporter in July.

Much of the American and international media has uncritically repeated opposition claims that the Syrian government carried out the attack on Aleppo university. They have been unable to explain the basic rationale for such an attack.

As Bill Neely, the international editor of Britain’s ITV news, commented: “The obvious question is why would a government warplane attack a government university in a government held area of the country’s biggest city? There is no logical answer. There was no threat at the university at the time to the army.”

Neely noted that the hesitancy of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to describe the attack as a war

crime was bound up with the likelihood that the bombings were carried out by the Syrian opposition, which is backed by the “international community.” Instead Ban cautiously described the bombings as “heinous” and said attacks on civilians in general constituted war crimes.

According to the *AsiaNews* website, some members of Al-Nusra claimed responsibility for the attack on Aleppo university. “Fearing reprisals, the rebels have denied it but they cannot hide the fact of their presence on the ground. Pick-ups and cars with black flags with religious inscriptions are visible in the streets,” the report stated.

Despite evidence to the contrary, Syrian opposition groups have continued to claim that the bombing was the work of the Assad regime, underscoring the importance of Al-Nusra’s activities to the “rebel” forces as a whole.

Al-Nusra played a leading role in this month’s capture of the Taftanaz air base, in the northern province of Idlib. The base, the first of its kind captured by the rebels, had been the scene of fierce fighting for months, and appears to have been seized primarily as a result of the efforts of Al-Nusra and other Islamist militias. Tanks, ammunition and rocket launchers at the base are now in the control of opposition groups.

Following bread shortages, blamed by many on corruption and the theft of flour by opposition Free Syrian Army forces, Al-Nusra has taken over the distribution of flour to bakers in opposition-controlled areas of Aleppo. Along with three other Islamist groups, Al-Nusra has also set up a sharia court in Aleppo.

In an interview with the BBC, Abu Lokman, an emir and senior Al-Nusra commander, spelled out the group’s reactionary ideology and political program. “People here are fed up with socialist and secular regimes,” he said. “They are all looking forward to an Islamic state. It is impossible there could be anything else in Syria.”

When asked whether Al-Nusra would support a bombing campaign by the US and its allies, Lokman did not oppose direct imperialist intervention. “We are not campaigning for or against this. Of course, if they destroy the regime’s military posts, that is in our favour,” he declared. Far from opposing imperialism, Al Qaeda and its offshoots simply represent the

interests of sections of the Arab bourgeoisie seeking a more favourable accommodation with imperialism.



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