Video shows US-backed opposition fighter cannibalizing Syrian soldier

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A gruesome video posted on YouTube shows Khalid al-Hamad, the leader of the opposition Farouq Brigade, desecrating the corpse of a Syrian soldier, cutting out his internal organs and biting into one of them.

The video makes clear the barbaric character of the Sunni Islamist militias Washington has mobilized in its proxy war against the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. The video was made to terrorize Syria's Shiite Alawite community, from which most of the Assad government is drawn, and to encourage donations from the Farouq Brigade's financial backers in the Persian Gulf oil sheikhdoms.

While desecrating the Syrian soldier's body, an action that legally is a war crime, Hamad screams: "I swear we will eat from your hearts and livers, you dogs of Bashar… Look at the heroes of Baba Amr, slaughtering the Alawites and eating their hearts."

Founded as the Syrian war began in mid-2011, the Farouq Brigade has been active around the Baba Amr area of the city of Homs, an early center of armed Islamist opposition to Assad. There are varying reports of its strength, ranging from a few thousand to 20,000 men.

Hamad contacted *Time* magazine on Tuesday to confirm that he had indeed bitten one of the dead soldier's organs, as shown in the video.

He then called for a sectarian genocide of Alawites, telling *Time*: "Hopefully we will slaughter all of them. I have another video clip that I will send to them. In the clip, I am sawing another *shabiha* [pro-Assad militiaman] with a saw, the saw we use to cut trees. I sawed him into small piece and large ones."

Hamad, also known as Abu Sakkar, has also been videotaped indiscriminately firing rockets into Lebanon and posing with the corpses of fighters of Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shiite militia allied with Assad. Peter Bouckaert of Human Rights Watch said, "Abu Sakkar is a very significant commander—he's in charge of one of the most important battles happening in Syria right now."

Significantly, Western officials speaking to the BBC described the Farouq Brigade as a "moderately Islamist" tendency inside the US-backed opposition, as compared to supposedly more extremist forces like the Al Nusra Front, which is affiliated to Al Qaeda.

This shows that current proposals in Washington to only arm "moderate" opposition forces, presented as an alternative to arming the entire opposition, including Al Nusra, are a cynical fraud. In either case, Washington and its European allies are arming war criminals calling for sectarian mass murder.

While Hamad's video is particularly gruesome, numerous graphic videos posted by the US-backed opposition have made its bloody, sectarian character clear from early on. To name only a few, such videos include Sunni Sheikh Adnan al-Arour's July 2011 threat to run Syrian Alawites through a "meat grinder," and 2012 videos of opposition fighters beheading a prisoner and another forcing a child to do so.

The anti-Assad militias have all along enjoyed the support of governments, political parties and the media. The Obama administration has continued funding them to the tune of $500 million—as its Persian Gulf allies also poured money and thousands of tons of weapons into the opposition—even after Washington formally designated Al Nusra as a terrorist group last December.

As reports of Hamad's video broke in the British press on Monday, British Prime Minister David Cameron said that he might sanction direct military intervention in Syria to back the opposition, citing claims that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons. Allegations of chemical weapons use by

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Assad had already been refuted by UN investigator Carla del Ponte, who said that these weapons, used in March, were fired by the opposition.

The Syrian war has been enthusiastically supported by reactionary pseudo-left groups such as France's New Anti-capitalist Party, Germany's Left Party, and the American International Socialist Organization (ISO). Hamad's cannibalistic video is yet another refutation of the ISO's claim that the Syrian proxy war is a "people's revolution for freedom and dignity." (See "The International Socialist Organization and the imperialist onslaught against Syria")

These parties have functioned as a key barrier to the development of popular opposition to the Syrian war and to its continuous promotion in the media.

As part of this pro-war agitation, the media has largely sought to divorce Hamad's video from the US-led war, or to present it as an isolated incident posing a vexing obstacle to attempts by Washington and its allies to escalate the war.

Thus, while discussing Hamad's video, the BBC asked: "It is a reminder of the horror and bestiality of warfare—especially civil warfare, waged within a society. But does it tell us anything more than that?"

It also complained that "key governments in the West are trying to clarify their approach and push for a more active engagement on the side of the rebels. A man ripping out the heart out of a dead opponent—isolated episode or not—makes this task much harder."

In reality, the promotion of bloody sectarian war by the US-backed opposition—both the so-called "moderate" and extremist elements—is not a coincidence, but a reality reflecting the essential character of the opposition and of US imperialist strategy.

The war is fought to topple an Alawite-led regime in Syria, which is supported by the Shiite regime in Iran and the Hezbollah militia in Lebanon. Both of these are targets of US military intervention: oil-rich Iran is the main obstacle to US strategic hegemony in the Persian Gulf and thus the world oil trade, while Hezbollah is the main obstacle to Israeli domination of the Near East.

For this reason, Washington has sought to mobilize sectarian Sunni forces tied to its right-wing Persian Gulf allies, such as Saudi Arabia, to topple Assad. Hamad's gruesome video is the outcome of these reactionary politics.

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