

# Pentagon Think-Tank Praises Al Qaeda as ‘Moderate’ Islamists

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Global Research, November 04, 2017

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

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Media Disinformation](#),  
[Terrorism](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Featured image: Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

An October 24th article by Colin P. Clarke of the Rand Corporation — the main think-tank for the Pentagon — is headlined [“The Moderate Face of Al Qaeda”](#), and a section of it is headed “A Moderate Alternative,” presenting Al Qaeda as the moderate alternative to ISIS. That article praises the 5 July 2005 decision, by Al Qaeda’s then #2 leader — who now is their #1 leader after the killing of Osama bin Laden — Ayman al-Zawahiri; Clarke’s article praises there Zawahiri’s decision to chastise [the founder of ISIS, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi](#), who was then in Iraq. Zawahiri chastised Zarqawi for slaughtering Shia Muslims. However, if one looks at [the Zawahiri letter](#), Zawahiri actually says there that Shia ought to be slaughtered, but not now, because most Muslims won’t understand why Shia deserve death. The matter is presented by Zawahiri as a severe PR problem for jihadists at this stage of building the fundamentalist Sunni movement to establish a global Islamic Caliphate or theocracy, if they slaughter Shia Muslims (such as ISIS does), and not only **non-Muslims** (such as Zawahiri recommended). Here are excerpts from Zawahiri’s letter to Zarqawi, on that:

The majority of Muslims don’t comprehend this and possibly could not even imagine it. For that reason, many of your Muslim admirers amongst the common folk are wondering about your attacks on the Shia. ... My opinion is that this matter won’t be acceptable to the Muslim populace however much you have tried to explain it, and aversion to this will continue. ... And can the mujahedeen kill all of the Shia in Iraq? ... You are justified. However this does not change the reality at all, which is that the general opinion of our supporter does not comprehend that.

Clarke’s article opens by noting with approval that:

Throughout 2016, al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate [underwent](#) a series of rebrandings — from Jabhat al-Nusra to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham to [Hayat Tahrir al-Sham](#) — all in an attempt to present itself as a moderate alternative to more extreme groups operating in Syria, including [the Islamic State \(ISIS\)](#).

And although the rebranding [was regarded](#) as a bald-faced feint by many counterterrorism scholars, it just might have worked to recast al Qaeda’s image within Syria. Al Qaeda in Syria’s carefully calculated decision to distance itself from its parent organization was an effort to [portray](#) itself as a legitimate, capable, and independent force in the ongoing Syrian civil war. Another objective was to prove that the militants were dedicated to helping Syrians prevail in their struggle. Finally, it would give al Qaeda central a modicum of plausible deniability as it [paves the way](#) for its erstwhile allies to gain eligibility

for military aid from a collection of external nations.

Those unnamed “external nations” are America’s allies, the fundamentalist-Sunni Arabic oil kingdoms: Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, and Kuwait — and definitely don’t include any Shia at all, because they’re all (except, recently Qatar, which no longer is) at war against Shia. And, just as Zawahiri in 2005 was, in this letter, hoping, all of those countries did continue, in secret, to fund and arm Al Qaeda.

Later in the article comes this:

#### A Moderate Alternative

One of [al Qaeda’s](#) first steps in presenting itself as more evenhanded was to denounce blatant sectarianism and work to convince one of its main franchise groups, al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), to jettison sectarianism as a guiding principle. In what has become an infamous incident, in July 2005, al Qaeda’s future leader Ayman al-Zawahiri [penned a letter](#) to the leader of AQI, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, chastising him for his group’s wanton slaughter of Shiites. Zawahiri stressed the harm that Zarqawi’s approach was having on the overall al Qaeda brand and [urged him](#) to eschew targeting other Muslims. Zarqawi essentially ignored Zawahiri’s advice, cementing AQI’s reputation as a ruthless and sectarian organization.

[U.S. policy in Syria during Barack Obama’s Presidency was to protect Al Qaeda there](#); and until 9 September 2016, Obama was steadfast in not allowing his second Secretary of State, John Kerry, to agree to his Russian counterpart, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s insistence that in order for any cease-fire and peace talks to start so as to end the U.S.-Saudi-Qatari-UAE-Kuwaiti-Turkish war against Syria,

Syria’s ally Russia would be allowed to continue its bombing against both ISIS and Al Qaeda forces there. President Obama wanted bombing to continue only against ISIS, but not against Al Qaeda; but Putin insisted that there be no protections for either of those two main jihadist groups, who were trying to overthrow and replace Syria’s Government.

Kerry didn’t want to protect Al Qaeda, but his boss Obama demanded it until finally allowing Kerry to sign with Lavrov, on 9 September 2016, a cease-fire, in which Russia was allowed to continue bombing both ISIS and Al Qaeda. ([The U.S. relied heavily upon Al Qaeda in Syria. Both America and Russia were against ISIS, but only Russia and its allies were also against Al Qaeda.](#)) Then, the cease-fire went into effect, on September 12th; and, just five days later, on September 17th, the Lavrov-Kerry peace-process abruptly halted, when the U.S. violated the agreement and bombed Syrian Government forces in Deir Ezzor, where ISIS forces were fighting against the Syrian army in order to grab control of Syria’s oil-producing region, of which Deir Ezzor is the capital. That sabotage, by Obama, against Kerry’s effort and against Kerry’s year-long effort to achieve a cease-fire with Russia, ended any trust that Russian President Vladimir Putin still had in Obama’s basic decency; and, so, Putin promptly started, along with Iran, and with Russia’s new semi-ally Turkey ([against which Obama and NATO had perpetrated a failed coup-attempt on 15 July 2016](#)), began their own peace-process for Syria, without America’s participation, the peace-talks that are still ongoing in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

After the U.S. coup-attempt against Turkey, Turkey has been a neutral country, and far less

cooperative with America's NATO than it had previously been. Turkey therefore greatly reduced its cooperation also with America's other regional allies: Israel, the Saud family, and all of the Sauds' Gulf Cooperation Council's fellow fundamentalist-Sunni kingdoms, all of which (but especially the Sauds, who own Saudi Arabia, and the Thanis, who own Qatar) are heavy financial backers of Al Qaeda. So, Obama's failed coup-attempt against Turkey helped, along with Obama's sabotage of the September 9th Lavrov-Kerry peace-process, to generate Putin's Astana peace-process.

Israel, of course, is also a member of the U.S.-Saudi alliance against Shia. Thus, in [a late April 2012 email](#), Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said:

The best way to help Israel deal with Iran's growing nuclear capability is to help the people of Syria overthrow the regime of Bashar Assad. ... Speaking on CNN's Amanpour show last week, [Israel's] Defense Minister Ehud Barak argued that "the toppling down of Assad will be a major blow to the radical axis, major blow to Iran.... It's the only kind of outpost of the Iranian influence in the Arab world...and it will weaken dramatically both Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza." Bringing down Assad would not only be a massive boon to Israel's security, it would also ease Israel's understandable fear of losing its nuclear monopoly.

The alliance's anti-Shia war continues under U.S. President Donald Trump. For example, at [an October 26th press conference](#), U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson asserted:

As we've said many times before, the United States wants a whole and unified Syria with no role for Bashar al-Assad in the government.

Al Qaeda, yes; but al-Assad, no (just like ISIS, no). America's main goal in Syria is conquest of Syria, and Al Qaeda in Syria has been providing the leadership for all of the jihadist groups there, except ISIS. [Without Al Qaeda, America wouldn't be able to do anything to Syria](#). As [I've previously quoted](#) from a news-report that was dated 12 December 2012:

"The head of the [U.S.-backed] Syrian National Coalition, which was recognized yesterday by the United States as the legitimate representative of the Syrian people, is urging the US to drop its designation of the Al Nusrah Front as a Foreign Terrorist Organization. ... And lest we think he is alone, 29 Syrian opposition groups have signed a petition that not only condemns the US's designation, but says 'we are all Al Nusrah.'"

And, here's the CIA's Graham Fuller, in his 1983 memo, ["Bringing Real Muscle to Bear Against Syria"](#):

Summary:

Syria at present has a hammer lock on US interests both in Lebanon and in the Gulf — through closure of Iraq's pipeline thereby threatening Iraqi internationalization of the war. The US should consider sharply escalating the pressures against Assad through covertly orchestrating simultaneous military threats against Syria from three border states hostile to Syria: Iraq, Israel and Turkey. ... Faced with three belligerent fronts, Assad would probably be forced to abandon his policy of closure of the pipeline. ...

Perhaps it's no coincidence that the Boston Marathon Bombing was carried out by the Tsarnaev brothers, two Chechens who happen to have formerly been in-laws of Graham Fuller. His daughter had [married into the Tsarnaev family but divorced prior to the Boston Marathon bombing](#). With a father who was so sympathetic toward fundamentalist Sunnis, Samantha Ankara Fuller (married name Tsarnaev) might, as a child, have heard favorable things not only about Ankara Turkey, but about Sunni fundamentalism, which was rising in Turkey at the time.

So: the recent article from the Rand Corporation is entirely in accord with U.S. Government tradition on the Syria matter.

Al Qaeda, at least in Syria, is perhaps [the key ally of the U.S. Government](#), and long has been.

And, not only is Al Qaeda 100% fundamentalist-Sunni, but so too is ISIS; and not only were all funders and participants in the 9/11 attacks fundamentalist-Sunnis, but so too were the Tsarnaev brothers who did the Boston Marathon bombing; and [so too are all "radical Islamic terrorists" except for ones whose terrorism is directed against Israel, because Israel does suffer attacks not only from Sunnis, but also from Shia](#). But Israel is a unique case. And, [the entire U.S.-Saudi-Israeli alliance is pro-Sunni and anti-Shia](#).

So: the reason why Pentagon think-tanks and the Pentagon itself and all U.S. Administrations play down the dangers and evils of fundamentalist Sunnis, and vastly exaggerate the dangers and evils of all Shia, is that the U.S. aristocracy, and the fundamentalist-Sunni aristocracies, and the Israeli aristocracy, are allied together against Shia, and against the major ally of Shia, namely Russia. Protecting the public is irrelevant, to each of these aristocracies, including the U.S. aristocracy.

*Investigative historian Eric Zuesse is the author, most recently, of [They're Not Even Close: The Democratic vs. Republican Economic Records, 1910-2010](#), and of [CHRIST'S VENTRILOQUISTS: The Event that Created Christianity](#).*

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