

## Recent ISIS and Al Qaeda Rebel Gains in Syria and Iraq: A Result of US Support to Extremists

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*The rebel opposition in Syria has in recent months made a series of gains against the Syrian army, most notably in Idlib, Palmyra, and Ramadi in Iraq. However, given that from the very beginning the opposition had taken “a clear sectarian direction” and has been dominated by “ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra... in addition to other extreme jihadi groups”, itself consisting of “no moderate middle”, and the fact that “in reality there is no dividing wall between them [extremists] and America’s supposedly moderate opposition allies”, it is no wonder why all of the recent gains have been made by hard-line Islamists.(1) The radicalization of the opposition was the result of a covert US/CIA-led program in collusion with regional allies to expand the dissent base in Syria and strengthen Islamist rebels against the Syrian government.(2)*

These recent Islamist advances are the result of an increase in support from the US-led coalition to their proxies inside Syria. Recently both Turkey and Saudi Arabia, who operate out of US-led command centers in Turkey and Jordan, signed a pact in early March to coordinate support to al-Qaeda and other extremist groups in order to further attack the Syrian government. Huffington Post quotes Usama Abu Zeid, a legal advisor to the Free Syrian Army, as confirming that this new coordination had facilitated recent rebel advances.(3) The pact subsequently led to the al-Qaeda takeover of Idlib in late March, where the two countries have since set up a joint command center to further coordinate and command their extremist proxies from the captured province. Syrian government sources thus accurately blame Turkish intervention as the key factor in the fall of Idlib. The city’s fall however is only the 2<sup>nd</sup> provincial capital that has been captured by the opposition during the entire 4-year war, the other being Raqqa, which is now the de facto capital of the fake Islamic State “Caliphate.”(4)

In addition to Turkish and Saudi support to al-Qaeda extremists, so too has the US increased its support to Islamists.

In early May Charles Lister of the Brookings Institute Doha Center confirmed that “US-led operations rooms in southern Turkey and Jordan” have specifically “encouraged a closer cooperation with Islamists commanding frontline operations”, and while doing so have “dramatically increased [their] level of assistance and provisions of intelligence” to this Islamist-led opposition, all of which has led to the al-Qaeda victory in Idlib.(5) So not only has the entire support to the opposition from the beginning been coordinated and commanded by the US, so too has the US spearheaded recent support to al-Qaeda along with its Turkish, Saudi, and Qatari allies.

These Western-backed advances were facilitated by the delivery of “gamechanging” new

advanced weaponry to the extremists, including TOW anti-tank missiles. The Guardian reports that the results of this “were shocking. The regional capital of Idlib fell within days. Several weeks later, the nearby town of Jisr al-Shughour also fell to an amalgam of jihadist.”(6) All of this being “the outcome of the first heavy weapons to reach the hands of the Syrian opposition in years of civil war from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the UAE and Turkey,” which was “blessed by Washington after long hesitation.”(7)

The US recently encourages support to Islamists while it’s Saudi and Turkish allies openly support al-Qaeda linked militants, all of whom have been provided with new shipments of advanced weaponry and support which has been instrumental in their recent advances.

Qatar has made recent efforts to convince al-Nusra’s leader to detach itself from al-Qaeda and portray Nusra as though it is not planning to attack the West in an attempt to justify this increased aid. However it is important to note that “if Nusra is dissolved and it abandons al-Qaeda, the ideology of the new entity is not expected to change,” while it’s leaders would remain “close to al-Qaeda chief Ayman Zawahri [sic].” In a [recent interview](#) with the Qatari channel Al Jazeera, al-Nusra’s leader al-Golani was given a platform to say that Nusra does not plan to attack the West, yet he still reaffirmed full allegiance to al-Qaeda’s leader al-Zawahiri against the wishes of Qatar.(8) Despite the failure of re-branding al-Qaeda’s Syria faction the group still received a substantial increase in aid and support from its backers in the Gulf, Turkey, and the United States.

Given this, both the US and Turkey have in addition recently agreed “in principle” to establish a no-fly zone to further aid the forces on the ground they are supporting.(9) This is illegal, against international law, and would be de-facto support to terrorist organizations in the form of US aerial attacks against the Syrian state. It would be devastating to the region as well, only benefiting supporters of reactionary Islamic rule and Western imperial hegemony.

However, the al-Qaeda linked factions unfortunately are not the only groups that owe their recent battlefield successes to their Western patrons, so too does the Islamic State.

When the Islamic State recently took Ramadi in Iraq, they travelled a full 553km across open desert to the city from their de facto capital in Raqqa, Syria.



Despite the fact that destroying the militants along this route would have been like shooting

fish in a barrel, the US “anti-ISIS” coalition did not expend a single airstrike against them, even though the US “had significant intelligence about the pending Islamic State offensive in Ramadi. For the US military, it was an open secret at the time.” The US intelligence community “had good warning that the Islamic State intended a new and bolder offensive in Ramadi because it was able to identify the convoys of heavy artillery, vehicle bombs and reinforcements,” which were coming from Raqqa, “through overhead imagery and eavesdropping on chatter from local Islamic State commanders.” Furthermore, “It surprised no one,” US intelligence officials said. (10)

Speaking on these developments, former British MI6 agent Alastair Crooke comments that “the speculation about a coming fractured Iraq has gained big momentum from ISIS’s virtually unopposed walk-in to Ramadi. The [images](#) of long columns of ISIS Toyota Land Cruisers, black pennants waving in the wind, making their way from Syria all the way — along empty desert main roads — to Ramadi with not an American aircraft in evidence, certainly needs some explaining. There cannot be an easier target imagined than an identified column of vehicles, driving an arterial road, in the middle of a desert.”(11)



As ISIS arrived in Ramadi, the US-coalition launched a paltry [7 airstrikes](#) against them, a number so low as to be entirely insignificant. To alleviate concerns that the US openly allowed ISIS to take Ramadi, the US military blamed a great and powerful “sandstorm” for their lack of airstrikes. However, just days later they retracted these false statements. ABC reports that “Col. Steve Warren, a Pentagon spokesman, told reporters today that last weekend’s sandstorm had not affected the coalition’s ability to launch airstrikes in Ramadi, though “weather was a factor on the ground early on.””(12) Further dispelling these excuses, the day after Ramadi’s fall rows of Islamic State militants were pictured celebrated openly in the streets below crystal clear skies.



Source: MailOnline, May 19, 2015

If the US-coalition had been serious about stopping ISIS they could have easily destroyed whole factions of the group at this time. Instead, desperate for another excuse to explain their inaction, they changed their reasons and [blamed concern for civilian deaths](#) for the lack of strikes. However this excuse is so [patently absurd](#) as to be laughable, and therefore can be completely disregarded; one need only look at the grave human death tolls inflicted during the invasion of Iraq, the US support for Israel's genocidal assault on Gaza last summer, the US-facilitated devastation of eastern Ukraine, the global drone campaign, the US' own "anti-ISIS" airstrikes, and the current crazed US-backed Saudi bombing campaign in Yemen to see that Western officials lose exactly zero sleep over the civilian blood that is on their hands.(13)

The actions of the US leads to the conclusion that it either wanted or didn't care if ISIS took Ramadi and thus allowed it to happen, and very likely even facilitated its accomplishment.

Speaking the day after the city's fall, Wahda Al-Jumaili, an advisor to Iraq's parliamentary speaker, stated "Whether this was the result of treason, neglect, or conspiracy, or a regional or international plot... Even the international coalition has played a bad role. People saw the international coalition dropping weapons for ISIS. They dropped heavy weaponry to the forces of terrorism in Ramadi. This is an act of treason by the international coalition forces."(14)

This comes after countless other Iraqi officials have been accusing the US-coalition for months of dropping aid packages to ISIS militants. Video evidence has confirmed that one of these shipments has demonstrably occurred, whereas Iraqi officials have provided photographic evidence of British planes they had shot down after learning they were going to deliver aid to ISIS.(15)

Coupled with this is the fact that ISIS' long time benefactor, Saudi Arabia, has recently increased its aid to the Islamic State.

Recently the New York Times reported that the newly crowned Saudi King Salman, who the authors note has "a history of working with Islamists," has recently "sanctioned allying with Islamists to serve the kingdom's agenda", "discarded his predecessor's rejection of political Islamists", and shifted policy towards "increasing support for rebels in Syria."(16) What the Times did say is that it is primarily Saudi Arabia and other major US Arab allies who "fund ISIS," in Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey's own words, so it is

no wonder which 'Islamists' Saudi Arabia has increased support for.(17)

The official narrative is that the Saudi state is [no longer funding ISIS](#), and instead it is only private donors not connected to the government who continue the funding, all the while the state conveniently is unable to stop them, try as they might. This, of course, coming from arguably the most authoritarian and despotic regime on the planet which doesn't even balk at [imprisoning its own daughters](#), but surely it's perfectly plausible that this anachronistic monarchy which controls its population through the bludgeon and fear is simply baffled with inability at locating the guilty perpetrators.

Given General Dempsey's testimony that it was the Saudi state who funded ISIS, there is no credible evidence that any of this support from them has stopped, save vacuous statements by the US and Saudi governments who of course would predictably say as much. If any change has occurred, it is that the Saudi government has taken steps to distance its involvement in the eyes of the world while it continues to covertly go about business as usual, using wealthy donors, who were presumably providing the funds that would then be transferred by the Saudi state all along, as their proxies. In other words, it is a PR concern, not one of policy direction. Indeed, according to Britain's leading international security scholar Nafeez Ahmed, "informed sources in the region have told me that fundraising for ISIS is still being done openly across the Gulf monarchies at state-run mosques... Yet the US and UK have refused to exert any meaningful diplomatic or financial pressure whatsoever on these countries to change course."(18)

Turning back to Syria, the US is as well aiding ISIS in the same way that it did for its takeover of Ramadi.

In recent ISIS offensives in Syria the US as well took no aerial action despite the fact that doing so would have been easy and effective. A spokesman for the rebel group the Shamiah front recently criticized the US-coalition for not bombing IS convoys as they moved outward from Raqqa, saying that "There were convoys of 15 to 20 vehicles each. Only two coalition raids in the past three days would have been enough to stop the attack." Similarly, Salim Idriss, once the US' leading rebel commander, said that the US-led coalition repeatedly had allowed Islamic State convoys to pass unhindered, pointing most recently to May 31<sup>st</sup> when he said a 60-vehicle convoy moved from Raqqa to Aleppo unperturbed.(19)

This US support for ISIS and al-Qaeda might seem strange if one follows the official narratives, however the picture becomes much clearer when you look at what is being discussed behind closed doors within the US establishment.

A declassified Defense Intelligence Agency document authored in August of 2012 reveals that the West accelerated support to the opposition in Syria knowing full well they were supporting extremists and that this would pave the way for an 'Islamic State' to emerge, seeing this as the desired outcome and a key geopolitical asset for their interests in the region. "They were not only as they claimed supporting moderate groups, who were losing members to the more extremist groups, but that they were directly supporting the extremist groups. And they were predicting that this support would result in an Islamic State organization, an ISIS or ISIL... They were encouraging it, regarding it as a positive development, because it was anti-Assad, Assad being supported by Russia, but also interestingly China... and Iran..." said former Pentagon officer and legendary whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, who is accompanied by many other knowledgeable ex-US-intelligence officials who draw similar conclusions from the leaked report.(20)

Further, the report presciently predicts in 2012 the fall of both Mosul and Ramadi given that the West continues to “support the opposition” of which “the Salafists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI (al-Qaeda in Iraq) are the major forces”, stating that “this creates the ideal atmosphere for AQI to return to its old pockets in Mosul and Ramadi, and will provide a renewed momentum under the presumption of unifying the jihad among Sunni Iraq and Syria, and the rest of the Sunnis in the Arab world against what it considers one enemy, the dissenters.”

Given that in 2012 US Department of Defense intelligence knew that the opposition was “sectarian”, dominated by extremist groups, and that continued support to such an opposition would lead to the fall of Mosul and Ramadi, and the fact that with this knowledge the US actually increased their aid to the rebels rather than curtailing it, means that the US must have *intended*, either directly or indirectly, these predictable outcomes of their actions.(21)

The US predicted the rise of ISIS, supported extremist elements with the help of its allies knowing full well that a Salafist principality would emerge which would then lead to Mosul and Ramadi’s fall, and further desired the establishment of such a principality as a geopolitical asset and thus continued to support these efforts, all the while conducting an ineffective “anti-ISIS” coalition against the same extremists, which should be viewed as a PR move aimed at maintaining plausible deniability and to obscure the actual role the US has played in the facilitation of ISIS, evidenced further by ISIS’ continual growth.

The strategy is divide and rule, dominance through ‘controlled chaos’, aiming to be both the arbiters of the sides “fighting” and those supporting the extremists, and thus insuring that destabilization and US hegemony result... by any means necessary.

The recent al-Qaeda and ISIS advances are a direct outcome of this strategy, the result of the US and her allies increasing aid and the delivery of advanced weaponry to their extremist proxies in the region, all the while death, mayhem, and terror ensues upon the innocent civilian populations.

### **The Resistance Strikes Back**

Adding further to the incredulity of the US-led “anti-ISIS” campaign, recently a meeting headed by the United States was held between 20 countries to discuss their anti-ISIS strategy, however the most effective forces that have been engaged in fighting and deterring ISIS, Russia, Iran, and Syria, were absent from the meeting. This meeting perfectly represents the follies of the US strategy against ISIS and why it will fail, “The US campaign against Isis is weakened not so much by lack [of] ‘boots on the ground,’ but by seeking to hold at arm’s-length those who are actually fighting Isis while embracing those such as Saudi Arabia and Turkey who are not,” as explained by Patrick Cockburn, the leading Western journalist in the region.

While this US-led coalition expresses optimistically spurious notions of a “winning strategy”, the truth is that ISIS hasn’t been deterred since this strategy has come into effect. It should be said as well that “the ‘moderate’ rebels the US and UK support themselves openly welcomed the arrival of such extremists. Indeed, the Free Syria Army backed by the West was allied with ISIS, until ISIS attacked them at the end of 2013,” former British Army and Metropolitan Police counter terrorism intelligence officer Charles Shoebridge notes.(22)

Judging by actions rather than by words, the US-led coalition is not at all serious about defeating ISIS.

Amidst media obfuscation of those responsible for the recent al-Qaeda and ISIS victories in Syria and Iraq, there has as well been a concerted propaganda effort to weaken the moral of the Syrian army and the resistance axis of Syria-Hezbollah-Iran-Russia in the form of a torrent of Western media publications, interviews, articles, and research papers all professing that [Assad is losing the war](#). The tone of these Western protestations is nothing short of euphoric, yet those on the ground suffering from the brutality of al-Nusra and ISIS' gains are not as jubilant, nor are they under the illusion that successes by foreign-backed extremist Wahhabis constitutes the makings of a "revolution." Yet despite the West's wishful thinking and adherence to the narrative of "moderate rebels" fighting against extremists, which itself is an impressive display of willful ignorance that disciplined intellectuals must work hard to cultivate, their insistence on attacking Syrian society with terrorist proxies has not been as successful as they had hoped, and has sparked a substantial backlash from Iran.

The Qalamoun border region between Syria and Lebanon is a strategically important area and the battle for it "is likely to make major changes to the landscape of control in Syria." Control over Qalamoun threatens to cut off important rebel supply lines that runs from the Damascus suburbs to the mountain region, and to hinder the smuggling of arms and resources from Lebanon into Syria and vice versa, given the area's proximity to the Lebanese border.

In the beginning of May Hezbollah had achieved important victories over the Nusra Front-led Army of Conquest, the joint Saudi-Turkish coalition of extremists, and the ISIS militants that have been vying for control of the region. By the end of the same month Hezbollah and the Syrian army had taken full control over Qalamoun. Foreign Policy describes the victory as such: "Hezbollah fighters point out recently captured al-Nusra Front training sites and military positions, and describe how they've been able to clear the area of the jihadis. They pick their way over the remnants of the al-Qaeda affiliate's makeshift camp, where clothes, tins of foods, and shell casings are strewn across the ground." One commander had stated that they had cleared "about 40 positions belonging to the terrorists," and had "liberated 120 square miles." While another fighter described that "80 percent of the recaptured area had been under al-Nusra Front's control" prior to the offensive.

With the capture of Qalamoun the Syrian army and Hezbollah have secured the most important roads leading to Syria's capital of Damascus from Lebanon, leaving al-Nusra with only one last supply route into the Rif Dimashq Governorate, located at the Al-Zabadani-Nehleh border crossing. The victory is important for the Syrian government because "the mountain range is key in connecting Damascus to Homs and the rest of the Syrian coast," while for Hezbollah it allows for "securing the supply routes in and out of Syria and preventing armed groups from infiltrating Lebanon." As a result, "Hezbollah not only sees the Qalamoun battle as a priority for its survival, but also sees itself as the first line of defence against a threat facing the entire country." According to one resident from the Bekaa village bordering the eastern mountain range, "If Hezbollah wasn't in Qalamoun right now, we would cease to exist," adding further that "Maybe the people of Beirut aren't aware of this, but we certainly are."(23)

Coupled with this important strategic victory and the prospect of Western-backed rebels gaining even more ground after their own successes, leaders from Hezbollah and Iran have

been increasingly vocal about their support for Syria. According to the [Institute for the Study of War](#) “These incidents will likely drive Iran to increase its direct economic and indirect military support to the Assad regime in order to bolster its ability to sustain the - fight. In a speech delivered on May 23, Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah stated that Hezbollah will fight “wherever necessary” throughout Syria; other Hezbollah senior officials released their own statements confirming that Hezbollah will continue to back the Syrian regime for “however long it takes” despite recent setbacks. These messages of defiance suggest that Hezbollah will likely increase its support to the regime.”

Shortly afterwards, the normally publicly silent leader of Iran’s elite Quds Force, Major General Qasem Soleimani, asserted that plans being made by Damascus and Tehran would “surprise” the world. “The world will be surprised by what we and the Syrian military leadership are preparing for the coming days,” Iran’s official IRNA state news agency quoted the general as saying. Following this news, Israeli intelligence sources speculate that “Tehran is believed to be preparing to dispatch a substantial Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) special operations unit to Syria to tackle the separate rebel and ISIS advances closing in on the Assad regime.”(24)

While reports of IRGC forces intervening in Syria have not yet surfaced, on June 3<sup>rd</sup> AFP reports that thousands of Iranian and Iraqi fighters have been deployed to Syria to bolster Damascus’ defenses, citing Syrian security sources as stating that “Around 7,000 Iranian and Iraqi fighters have arrived in Syria over the past few weeks and their first priority is the defence of the capital. The larger contingent is Iraqi.”

Syria is believed to have appealed to Tehran and Russia to step up support following recent developments. “The goal is to reach 10,000 men to support the Syrian army and pro-government militias, firstly in Damascus, and then to retake Jisr al-Shughur because it is key to the Mediterranean coast and the Hama region,” the source said. The Daily Star quotes a Lebanese political source as stating that “Iran has sent 15,000 fighters to Syria to reverse recent battlefield setbacks for Syrian government troops and wants to achieve results by the end of the month.” According to retired senior officer of U.S. Military Intelligence and U.S. Army Special Forces Colonel W. Patrick Lang’s estimate “this is just the beginning of a large scale Iranian intervention in the Syrian civil war. The entry into the Syria war of a large number of Iranian Quds force led troops would be a game changer. Whether the fighters are Iranian, Iraqi or from the dark side of the moon their presence might well make a decisive change in the balance of combat power in Syria.”(25)

Following this reports have begun to surface announcing that [Hezbollah is making major gains on Aarsal’s outskirts](#) and that [the Syrian army has regained ground against Islamic State in Hasaka city](#).

It seems that the recent support to al-Qaeda by the US, the open intervention of Turkey and Saudi Arabia in support of jihadi extremists, the new Saudi king Salman’s increased aid to Islamists, and the recently ramped-up aid and introduction of advanced weaponry to all of these groups has finally hit a nerve with Iran and Russia, and has sparked a backlash. All of which has further corroborated who, in fact, is actually serious about defeating the scourge of Islamist radicals that have recently plagued the Middle Eastern region, and in contrast who only talks as if they do, as well as those who openly support such inhumane developments for selfish geopolitical aims and hegemony.

## Notes



- 1.) *Judicial Watch*. <http://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pg.-291-Pgs.-287-293-JW-v-DOD-and-State-14-812-DOD-Release-2015-04-10-final-version11.pdf>; Patrick Cockburn, "Preface" & "The Rise of ISIS", *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY, 2015). Pg. xx, 3. Print.
- 2.) The New York Times reports that the CIA is engaged in a clandestine operation to arm Syrian rebels, specifically choosing which rebels receive the lethal aid. Eric Schmitt, *New York Times*, "C.I.A. Said to Aid in Steering Arms to Syrian Opposition." June 21, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/world/middleeast/cia-said-to-aid-in-steering-arms-to-syrian-rebels.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/21/world/middleeast/cia-said-to-aid-in-steering-arms-to-syrian-rebels.html?_r=0); The Times subsequently reports that the US-coordinated shipments are "largely going to hard-line Islamists", Davide E. Sanger, *New York Times*, "Rebel Arms Flow Is Said to Benefit Jihadists in Syria." October 14, 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/15/world/middleeast/jihadists-receiving-most-arms-sent-to-syrian-rebels.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/15/world/middleeast/jihadists-receiving-most-arms-sent-to-syrian-rebels.html?pagewanted=all&_r=2&); A 2012 DIA report notes that "The Salafist, the Muslim Brotherhood, and AQI (al-Qaeda in Iraq) are the major forces driving the insurgency in Syria" and that "the West, Gulf countries, and Turkey support the opposition." Given this information, the US increased aid in the following years. *Judicial Watch*. <http://www.judicialwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Pg.-291-Pgs.-287-293-JW-v-DOD-and-State-14-812-DOD-Release-2015-04-10-final-version11.pdf>; A leading Syrian opposition leader, Dr. Haytham Manna, writing in *The Guardian* states "the pumping of arms to Syria, supported by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the phenomenon of the Free Syrian Army, and the entry of more than 200 jihadi foreigners into Syria in the past six months have all led to a decline in the mobilisation of large segments of the population... and in the activists' peaceful civil movement. The political discourse has become sectarian; there has been a Salafisation of religiously conservative sectors", Haytham Manna, *The Guardian*, "Syria's opposition has been led astray by violence." June 22, 2012. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/jun/22/syria-opposition-led-astray-by-violence>.
- 3.) Desmond Butler, *Huffington Post*, "Turkey Officials Confirm Pact With Saudi Arabia to Help Rebels Fighting Syria's Assad." May 7 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/07/turkey-saudi-arabia-syria-rebels-pact\\_n\\_7232750.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/05/07/turkey-saudi-arabia-syria-rebels-pact_n_7232750.html).
- 4.) Reuters, *Hareetz*, "Turkey helped Islamists take over Idlib, Syrian source accuses." March 30, 2015. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/middle-east/1.649656>.
- 5.) Charles Lister, *Foreign Policy*, "Why Assad is Losing." May 5, 2015. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/05/05/why-assad-is-losing-syria-islamists-saudi/>.
- 6.) Martin Chulov, *The Guardian*, "Amid the ruins of Syria, is Bashar al-Assad now finally facing the end?" May 23, 2015. [http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/24/syria-iran-isis-battle-arab-world?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/24/syria-iran-isis-battle-arab-world?CMP=share_btn_tw).
- 7.) *Debkafile*, DEBKA Weekly Vol. 14, Issue 663, May 15, 2015.
- 8.) "Leaders of Syria's Nusra Front are considering cutting their links with al Qaeda... sources said. Sources within and close to Nusra said that Qatar, which enjoys good relations with the group, is encouraging the group to go ahead with the move, which would give Nusra a boost in funding... Intelligence officials from Gulf states including Qatar have met the leader of Nusra, Abu Mohamad al-

Golani, several times in the past few months to encourage him to abandon al Qaeda and to discuss what support they could provide, the sources said. They promised funding once it happens... The Nusra Front is listed as a terrorist group by the United States and has been sanctioned by the United Nations Security Council. But for Qatar at least, rebranding Nusra would remove legal obstacles to supporting it." Mariam Karouny, *Reuters*, "Syria's Nusra Front may leave Qaeda to form new entity." March 4,

2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/04/us-mideast-crisis-nusra-insight-idUSKBN0M00GE20150304>.

9.) Associated Press in Ankara, Turkey, *The Guardian*, "Turkey and US 'agree in principle' to provide air support for Syrian rebels." May 25, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/25/turkey-us-air-support-syria-rebels-agree-in-principle>.

10.) Eli Lake, *Bloomberg*, "U.S. Saw Islamic State Coming, Let It Take Ramadi." May 28, 2015. <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2015-05-28/u-s-saw-islamic-state-coming-let-it-take-ramadi>.

11.) Alastair Crooke, *Huffington Post*, "If Syria and Iraq Become Fractured, So Too Will Tripoli and North Lebanon." June 1, 2015. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/syria-iraq-fractured\\_b\\_7471540.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alastair-crooke/syria-iraq-fractured_b_7471540.html).

12.) US blames lack of airstrikes on a sandstorm. Erich Shmitt, Helene Cooper, *The New York Times*, "ISIS Fighters Seized Advantage in Iraq Attack by Striking During Sandstorm." May 18, 2015. [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/19/world/middleeast/isis-fighters-seized-advantage-in-iraq-attack-by-striking-during-sandstorm.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/19/world/middleeast/isis-fighters-seized-advantage-in-iraq-attack-by-striking-during-sandstorm.html?_r=0); US retracts statement about sandstorm after evidence emerges disproving these claims. Luis Martinez, *ABC News*, "Misunderstanding May Have Led Iraqi Troops to Leave Ramadi." May 21, 2015. <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/misunderstanding-led-iraqi-troops-leave-ramadi/story?id=31219607>.

13.) Accounting Obama's global drone campaign, the Guardian notes that out of 41 men targeted in Yemen and Pakistan, a total of 1,147 were killed, at least 149 of them being children, the reported data being only a fraction of those killed overall, the total civilian death toll likely being much worse. Spencer Ackerman, *The Guardian*, "41 men targeted but 1,147 people killed: US drone strikes - the facts on the ground." November 24, 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2014/nov/24/sp-us-drone-strikes-kill-1147>; A US-led airstrikes in northern Syria targets a town without any ISIS present, kills a total of 52 civilians in the process. Maya Gebeily, *Agence France Presse*, "US-led airstrikes 'kill 52 civilians in northern Syria.'" May 2, 2015. <http://news.yahoo.com/52-civilians-dead-coalition-strikes-syria-monitor-074747525.html>; A series of Saudi airstrikes in May, conducted with the support of the US, struck a hospital and medical camp in southwestern Yemen killing at least 58 civilians and injuring another 67. The hospital was not being used by rebels and none of the dead was a rebel fighter. Despite this and much more, US support for the assault continued. Hakim Almasmari, Melissa Gray, *CNN*, "Yemeni civilians killed in Saudi Airstrikes, officials say." May 1, 2015. <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/01/middleeast/yemen-crisis/index.html>; US and Saudi naval blockade of Yemen blocks desperately needed aid, relegating 80% of the population under a humanitarian disaster. Julian Borger, *The Guardian*, "Saudi-led naval blockade leaves 20m Yemenis facing humanitarian disaster." June 5, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/05/saudi-led-naval-blockade-worsens-yemen-hum>

[anitarian-disaster](#).

14.) Quote of Wahda Al-Jumaili, advisor to Iraq's parliamentary speaker, *The Middle East Media Research Institute*, "Wahda Al-Jumaili, Advisor to Iraqi Parliament Speaker: Int'l Coalition Dropped Weapons, Which Enabled ISIS Takeover of Ramadi." May 19, 2015. [http://www.memri.org/clip\\_transcript/en/4917.htm](http://www.memri.org/clip_transcript/en/4917.htm).

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