

Syria Shocker: John Kerry Torpedoes US ‘Moderate Rebel’ Narrative

By [Vanessa Beeley](#)

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“Thank you very much. It’s a great honor and pleasure for us to have a man I’ve admired – most of us have admired – for many years, a man who – U.S. Naval, served in Vietnam, won the Purple Heart – I mean, three Purple Hearts, the bronze medal, the silver medal, has been a senator, candidate for president, and now our Secretary of State.”

These accolades were the opening salvo from Walter Isaacson in a conversation with US Secretary of State, John Kerry. A conversation held in front of an audience, June 28th 2016, at the Aspen Ideas Festival held in Colorado and recorded by the [US State Department](#).

What John Kerry said in this conversation effectively demolishes the foundations of US “regime change” policy in Syria and its support of the so called “moderate rebels”.



Background on Ahrar al Sham ~ The Favourite US Terrorists

Many of you may remember the 21st Century article [US Smoke and Mirrors to Protect Terrorist Proxies in Syria](#). In this article [Yalla la Barra](#) explained the US State Department policy of shielding their “moderate rebel” gangs under the Ahrar al Sham

umbrella which served to detach them from the Al Nusra/Al Qaeda body of terrorism and to designate them a branch of US friendly “opposition” conveniently “intermingled” with Al Nusra thus prohibiting Russian targeting of Al Nusra just in case they hit one of the moderates in the process.

Throughout the two and a half months that have passed since the start of the Cessation of Hostilities (CoH), the State Department has refused to acknowledge that the US backed rebel factions are fighting in Aleppo and elsewhere alongside Jabhat al-Nusra, Al-Qaeda’s branch in Syria.

There has not been a single press briefing where the spokesman has not accused Russia and Syria of targeting US backed rebel factions and civilians.

Whether it’s John Kirby or Mark Toner, the spokesman keeps talking about intermingling between the “moderates” and the Al-Qaeda affiliate and that the Russians/Syrians need to be able to separate the two. At the [press briefing](#) of April 25, 2016 Mr Kirby said:

So again, I go back to what I said before. We want to see the cessation observed by all parties. As I said in my answer to Said, we’re not blind to the fact that it’s a very dynamic situation in Aleppo and that there is intermingling. We’ve said that for a while now... ~ US Smoke and Mirrors to Protect Terrorist Proxies in Syria

As a further reminder here is the video of Mark Toner’s painful explanation of the “intermingling” of terrorist factions:

In July 2015, former US Ambassador to Syria and suspected death squad creator, **Robert Ford** had this to say about Ahrar al Sham in an article penned by Ford and Ali el Yassir, entitled appropriately, [Yes, Talk with Syria’s Ahrar al Sham](#).

Moreover, lumping Ahrar and Nusra together is intellectually sloppy, especially when they exhibit ideological and political differences... Our refusal even to talk with groups like Ahrar further reduces the little influence Americans still have in Syria. As the Assad regime steadily weakens, the administration keeps trying to lead the opposition from behind, hoping for an opposition white knight to appear. Instead, because Islamist groups like Ahrar strongly influence decisions about the fate of Syria, Washington will be left behind.

Ford insisted on dialogue with Ahrar al Sham, he also attempted to divorce them from Al Nusra/Al Qaeda, somehow whitewashing their brutality by highlighting their nationalism, a claim that is bizarre in the *extreme* when one considers how few Syrians, if any, actually belong to the group which consists predominantly of foreign mercenaries as do [90% of the “armed opposition”](#) inside Syria.

UK educated leader of Ahrar al Sham, **Labib Al Nahhas**, has even been given a platform on the [Washington Post](#):

The group to which I belong, Ahrar al-Sham, is one example. Our name means “Free Men of Syria.” We consider ourselves a mainstream Sunni Islamic group that is led by Syrians and fights for Syrians. We are fighting for justice for the Syrian people. Yet we have been falsely accused of having organizational links

to al-Qaeda and of espousing al-Qaeda's ideology.

The Telegraph:

By Labib Al Nahhas, Foreign Affairs Director at Ahrar Al Sham: Ahrar Al-Sham, as a mainstream Sunni Islamist group deeply rooted in the revolutionary landscape, is forging that alternative. But those expecting a "perfect" Sunni alternative according to Western liberal standard are sure to be disappointed.

As we should all know by now, political systems and models of government cannot be imported into the Middle East and expected to flourish where historical experiences, political cultures and social structures are so radically different. There needs to be a major role for religion and local custom in any political arrangement that emerges out of the debris of conflict, and it should be one that corresponds with the prevailing beliefs of the majority of Syrians.

The Guardian:

A Spanish citizen who studied in Birmingham and headed a tech company based in a London suburb is leading efforts to rebrand one of Syria's most prominent armed Islamist opposition groups. Labib al-Nahhas is the "foreign affairs minister" for Ahrar al-Sham, a group that has fought in alliances with al-Qaida's Syrian franchise, and aims to establish a Sunni theocracy in Syria.

One of its original leaders also had [personal connections with Osama bin Laden](#). After graduating he spent time in France, the Netherlands and the US, as well as the UK, where official documents list him as director of a company based in a west London suburb. But in 2010 he moved back to Syria, finding a job in the telecoms industry.

Ahrar al Sham as a group have had their *virtues* extolled by other prominent mainstream media outfits.

BBC:

"The Ahrar al Sham is part of a broad coalition of Syrian opposition groups, the Islamic Front. And it is among the most powerful force and better organized," says the [BBC's Middle East correspondent, Jim Muir](#).

Professor Scott Lucas at [EA Worldview](#):

Recent efforts by Ahrar al-Sham to portray itself as a moderate group may be linked to the increasing number of assassination attacks. According to Syrian journalist Akil Housain, the movement is in the process of purging its traditional leadership, which is considered more radical, and replacing it with younger leaders. This process has apparently angered Ahrar al-Sham ally and Al Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al-Nusra.

Charles Lister: Supreme "Moderate" Myth Creator:

The editorial's author was someone I have come to know very well personally amid Syria's conflict. Labib al-Nahhas is Ahrar al-Sham's "head of foreign

political relations.” Better known as Abu Ezzeddine, Nahhas is an ordinarily clean-shaven young man from Syria’s central city of Homs. Originally a political official in the Homs-based faction Liwa al-Haq, Nahhas has risen in stature since his group merged with Ahrar al-Sham in December 2014.

A fluent English speaker and a seat-holder on the Executive Council of Syria’s Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), his ability to combine an understanding of both Western (he has spent time in both the United States and Europe) and Syrian mindsets has demonstrated a level of political capacity often lacking in Syrian armed revolutionary circles. ~ writing for the Qatarifunded [Brookings Institute](#)

Al Nahhas was even allowed to enter the US on a European passport in May 2016 even though the US State Department claimed it “*didn’t know*”.

Labib al Nahhas, who calls himself “a chief of Foreign Political Relations at Ahrar al-Sham,” arrived in the US capital for a visit lasting a few days in December, according to McClatchy DC news. The [report](#) cites “four people with direct knowledge of the trip.

As one of them told the network’s reporter, Nahhas arrived in the US to speak with “third parties” even though he would not elaborate further. The other speakers revealed a few more details about the visit, saying that Nahhas had been in Washington to meet with lobbyists and Middle East researchers.” ~ [RT](#)

Ahrar Al Sham the bloodthirsty “moderates”

Ahrar al Sham as a stand-alone “moderate” US backed group has been responsible for some of the most hideous ethnic cleansing of Syria’s minorities. It has mercilessly and brutally terrorised the Shia villages of Kafarya and Foua, placing them under partial siege since 2011 and full siege since March 2015.

Over 1700 civilians, many women and children, have been massacred by these self-proclaimed “free men of the Levant” and Kafarya and Foua continues to suffer daily shelling and sniping. I was told by a resident of al Foua that Ahrar al Sham do not even behave like Muslims, the bodies of their own dead are put on display to drive fear into the hearts of the villagers already starving and imprisoned.

The UN has failed to deliver humanitarian aid to Kafarya and Foua on numerous occasions deterred by the threat of the Ahrar al Sham checkpoints which are considered too serious a security risk.

Read more on Kafarya and Foua: [The 21st Century Wire Syria Files](#)

In May 2016, Ahrar al Sham massacred scores of Alawite villagers in Al Zara and kidnapped others. Claims that they did not harm anyone who did not resist were cited [by Reuters](#) and other western media outlets but witness and survivor statements told a different story. One [photo that circulated](#) after this horrifying mass murder showed Ahrar al Sham fighters standing over the dismembered and bloodied corpses of women.

Ahrar al Sham made no effort to deny this image, they merely stated that these women had taken up arms and as such were legitimate victims of their bloodlust, a claim seemingly endorsed by western media pundits who staunchly stood by their “moderate” killers.

“Strangers came to our village. Most of them were foreigners, we understood that they weren’t from Syria from the way they looked. They attacked our village, many were killed. My brother is among the dead, his children were wounded. They killed entire families,” said [Ahmad Muhammad al Qasem](#).

“They perpetrated a massacre,” said another villager, Munzer Qasem. “I heard of two or three entire families killed. Abu Naval’s family was killed. He was an old man and was killed together with his daughters. They were slaughtered in their own house.” ~ [Syrian Free Press](#)

Ahrar al Sham were also implicated in the mass suicide bombing, May 2016, that claimed the lives of over a hundred civilians and severely injured many more in the coastal towns of Jableh and Tartous that are also refuge to huge numbers of internally displaced Syrian refugees. The western and gulf media was quick to claim ISIS responsibility for the attacks but local residents and TV Channels informed us that Ahrar al Sham had already taken responsibility.

The western protection of its assets was again demonstrated by its eagerness to distance these crimes and mass murder of civilians from its terrorist forces operating under the Ahrar al Sham umbrella.

Ahrar al Sham has been complicit in a multitude of crimes against humanity in Syria, according to many it is actually even more brutal than ISIS in its extremism and targeting and ethnic cleansing of minorities such as the Alawites and Shia muslims. The US defense of Ahrar al Sham as a “moderate opposition” and its platforming of Ahrar al Shams desire for an Islamic state has underpinned their “regime change” policy in Syria.

The John Kerry Grenade

Lets now return to the discourse between Walter Isaacson and John Kerry. During this conversation, Kerry makes two astounding statements that completely overturn the US dialectic regarding Ahrar al Sham.

1: “Everybody knows the threat. We’ve all awakened to the news that I just announced to you. How many times have you awakened to it? Vicious attacks perpetrated by a lone wolf or by a group, inspired on the internet or otherwise. From Orlando to San Bernardino to the Philippines and Bali, we’ve seen pictures and we’ve heard testimony of shocking crimes committed by al-Qaida, by Boko Haram, by Jaysh al-Islam, by Ahrar al-Sham, by al-Shabaab, Daesh, other groups against innocent civilians, against journalists, and against teachers particularly.”

http://21stcenturywire.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/kerry-cock-up-2.mp4?_u=1

2: “But the most important thing, frankly, is seeing if we can reach an understanding with the Russians about how to, number one, deal with Daesh and al-Nusra. Al-Nusra is the other group there – Jabhat al-Nusra. They are a designated terrorist group by the United Nations. And there are a couple of subgroups underneath the two designated – Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra – Jaysh al-Islam, Ahrar al-Sham particularly – who brush off and fight with that – alongside these other two sometimes to fight the Assad regime.”

[http://21stcenturywire.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Kerry-cock-up.mp4?_ =2](http://21stcenturywire.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Kerry-cock-up.mp4?_=)

Thanks to @Walid970721 for the videos.

In one fell swoop, Kerry has demolished the US State Department argument for not targeting their pet killers in Syria. Is this a deliberate shoe in the face of the US and by default, Saudi interests and operatives in the region? Was it a genuine moment of honesty for the usually duplicitous and hypocritical Kerry?



The Washington Post reaction certainly seems to point to the latter as they swung into damage limitation mode:

But then Kerry, **perhaps accidentally**, threw two other Syrian rebel groups under the bus by calling them “subgroups” of the terrorists.

“There are a couple of subgroups underneath the two designated — Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra — Jaysh al-Islam, Ahrar al-Sham particularly — who brush off and fight with that — alongside these other two sometimes to fight the Assad regime,” he said, referring to two rebel groups that the United States has not named as terrorist groups until now.....

Two administration officials who work on Syria told me that Kerry’s naming of the Jaysh al-Islam and Ahrar al-Sham as “subgroups” of the terrorist organizations was not only inaccurate but potentially harmful to U.S. government efforts to convince the Russians and the Syrian government not to attack them.

“For months, we’ve been arguing to make sure the Russians and the Syrian regime don’t equate these groups with the terrorists,” one senior administration official told me. “Kerry’s line yields that point.

Another U.S. official simply emailed, “Baffled. SMH[Shaking my head].
~ [Washington Post](#)

Probably unwittingly the author Josh Rogin ends the article on a comedic note:

“Kerry muddied the waters. That’s typically Moscow’s job.”

Perhaps we are seeing a genuine face saving exercise on behalf of the Americans under Russia’s tutelage and the Washington Post has not been informed?

Undeniably, among those responsible for *muddying* the water on the Syrian narrative and advocating the murder of its people are the western media who have formed a battalion of war harpies and sectarian propagandists intent upon facilitating the mass slaughter of the Syrian people in service of NATO’s oil and geo-political interests in Syria and the region.

Certainly Kerry’s “slip of the tongue” should not go unnoticed and should be used to remind the media of their accessory to murder when they are finally brought to justice for their role in the “dirty war on Syria”.

*Author **Vanessa Beeley** is a contributor to 21WIRE, and since 2011, she has spent most of her time in the Middle East reporting on events there – as a independent researcher, writer, photographer and peace activist. She is also a member of the Steering Committee of the Syria Solidarity Movement, and a volunteer with the Global Campaign to Return to Palestine. See more of her work at her personal blog [The Wall Will Fall](#).*

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