

Syria's "Moderate Terrorists" Supported by the the CIA. Media Disinformation

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The New York Times recently ran a big [front-page piece](#), taking up more than a full page, seeking to explain the recent developments in Syria. Anne Bernard, the Times' leading reporter on the Middle East, who mainly operates from Beirut and gets her information from rebel sources, unfortunately grossly fails to inform her readers on some very basic and easily accessible facts that would be journalistic commonplace if we had anything remotely resembling a free press in the US.

The piece begins with some good reporting on the ceasefire and the problems and successes of its implementation, and then goes on to note one of the main talking-points of the opposition: "One of the main concerns of beleaguered opposition forces was that the government would continue to take territory, attacking all insurgents while claiming it was battling only the two groups excluded from the truce: the Islamic State and the Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's Syria affiliate."

Firstly, the characterization of the rebels as "opposition" and "insurgents" is common practice in Western media reports, yet it shields the fact that the rebel opposition is, and has been for years, dominated by al-Qaeda and ISIS.(1) In failing to report this fact, which is also available from [multiple US intelligence agency reports](#), Bernard and the NYT in effect protect the al-Qaeda forces on the ground from the eyes of the Western public, and in doing so protect the complicity of Western governments in supporting them.

Instead of fulfilling its journalistic function of holding accountable those in power, the NYT instead serves to propagandize for government policy.

Bernard further does this by describing the non-ISIS opposition as "a broad array that includes the Nusra Front, Islamists, and relatively secular groups led by army defectors and backed by the United States and its allies," failing to note the prominence of the extremists and the fact that the "relatively secular groups" "only [operate under license from the extreme jihadists](#)." Also, describing the "moderates" as secular is entirely misleading and false, as [almost all want some form of Islamic state](#) and are [almost exclusively Sunni Muslim](#).

Going further the intimate, longstanding, and "brotherly" working relationship between the US-backed FSA and al-Qaeda is described in the piece only as "different degrees" of "tactical alliances."

Initially after the signing of the ceasefire deal, the US-backed FSA were [some of the biggest critics](#) of the fact that their al-Qaeda ally was not included, which the US [initially tried to](#)

[make happen](#) before the proposal of protecting al-Qaeda terrorists was rejected by Russia. Main FSA leaders described al-Qaeda as their “partners”, as an “honorable” faction, and claimed that it fights on the ground with “most of the brigades that attended the Riyadh conference,” which essentially includes all the main groups except for Nusra and ISIS.

A few months before that al-Qaeda made a video showing a Nusra leader [presenting a gift](#) to an FSA commander, thanking him [for using US-supplied TOW anti-tank missiles in support of al-Qaeda](#) while claiming that al-Qaeda and the FSA “[are one.](#)”

In 2013, the US-backed FSA commander Col. Okaidi, described as one the biggest recipient of US aid, who to this day can be seen being [given air time by Western media](#) to mobilize support for the opposition, described his relationship with ISIS as “[good, even brotherly](#)” after having won a main victory while [exercising a degree of operational command over ISIS](#). After having admitted to fighting alongside al-Qaeda, Okaidi explains that al-Nusra does not “[exhibit any abnormal behavior, which is different from that of the FSA,](#)” admitting that the sectarian ferocity of al-Qaeda which is often pilloried by the West was no different from the actions of his FSA rebels, that the US supports.

Yet not only is this an intimate alliance that is years in the making, it is as well one that has been ordered by the US and its allies.

In the overtaking of Idlib in 2014, Charles Lister, at the time of the Brookings Doha Center, revealed from interviews with rebel commanders that they received specific instructions from US-led operations rooms to [align themselves within al-Qaeda’s ranks](#) and to use their increasing shipments of US-supplied weapons in support of al-Qaeda.

Earlier in 2014 the commander of the US-backed SRF revealed that “those who support us”, i.e. the CIA and its allies, specifically “told us” to “[send weapons to \[Islamist fighters in\] Yabroud](#)” and therefore “we sent a lot of weapons there.”

Anne Bernard however thought only to describe all of this as the rebels having “joined in tactical alliances to different degrees.”

This, in turn, is said to be a “political conundrum” since “Mr. Assad and his allies argue that that makes all rebels legitimate targets.”

In the world of the NYT, the fact that the US and the CIA are supporting al-Qaeda, arming and funding fighters that fight alongside them [and pass weapons to them](#), thus actively committing treason by providing material support to US-designated terrorists organizations, is not something of much note or something that necessitates further investigation to get to the bottom of. Even if such collaborations were only “tactical alliances to different degrees”, this should be headline news. Instead, Assad and Russia are made out to be the irrational ones, arguing that they have a right to strike US-backed rebels operating under license from and in support of al-Qaeda within an al-Qaeda dominated insurgency.

Yes, of course *they* are the crazy ones, and not us for openly supporting rebels that make up al-Qaeda’s ranks.

And despite this ubiquitous narrative of “Russia and Assad are targeting the moderates”, the NYT informs us that in reality Russia has attempted to alleviate US concerns by “challenging Washington to provide the coordinates for the groups it supports to prevent

them from being attacked.” So far, however, the US has refused.

And it’s easy to see why, if they complied it would expose the fact that in effect the US-sponsored groups operate [mainly as weapons conduits for the al-Qaeda](#) rebels winning the battles. This allegation is so strong in fact that it was enough for the UK courts to drop [multiple cases against individuals](#) they attempted to prosecute for aiding terrorist organizations, the defendants arguing that if they were guilty so was the UK. In addition, classified US intelligence reports which detail how most of the CIA arms shipments were going to “[hard-line Islamic jihadists](#)” was reported by the NYT itself back in 2012. Further, in 2014 none other than Vice President Biden said that “there was no moderate middle” that the US was supporting since “the moderate middle are made up of shopkeepers, not soldiers,” and instead “the people who were being supplied were al-Nusra and al-Qaeda and the extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.”(2)

This non-controversial, easily-accessible information is however spared from the informed readers of the NYT.

Furthermore, one of the biggest pieces of recent news wasn’t even reported in the NYT piece.

Just a few days ago Kurdish forces in the district of Sheikh-Maqsood near Aleppo claimed that they were [struck by chemical weapons](#) that were launched at them from the Turkish-backed al-Qaeda rebels. They go on to directly accuse Turkey of supplying the chemical weapons. This claim is not at all far-fetched, as recently a Turkish MP has come out with various forms of evidence [linking Turkish authorities to aiding the smuggling of sarin precursors into Syria](#) prior to the 2013 attacks. So while the Western media, as the [former British ambassador Craig Murray](#) notes, fakes allegations of chemical weapons attacks by Assad it specifically refuses to cover when rebels backed by the West use similar chemical weapons against the Kurds.

Lastly, the Anne Bernard report correctly notes that, “There is no clear count of [ceasefire] violations, though various parties are trying to keep track.” However, it is interesting the note the few examples that she did include; all of the so-called government violations were within or on the borders of Idlib Province. It just so happens that [Idlib is completely dominated by al-Qaeda](#), and al-Qaeda is not included in the ceasefire.

Also to note is the fact that multiple instances of “insurgent” violations were shellings and sniper attacks against the besieged towns of Foua and Kafarya. Kafarya and Foua are [towns that have been under brutal siege](#) by al-Qaeda and US-backed “moderate” rebels, and have been besieged for many months prior to the beginning of the highly publicized government siege of Madaya. Residents there are suffering from starvation, a lack of adequate food and water supplies, a severe shortage of fuel, electricity, and badly needed medicine. Despite some recent aid deliveries, as with Madaya it is not enough, and on top of all of it the civilian population are [constantly subjected to deadly attack](#) by the rebels in the form of unrelenting rocket shellings, suicide bombings against civilians, and murderous sniper attacks. Apparently they are “unworthy victims”,(3) as the paper doesn’t even attempt to provide context for their plight, nor explain, let alone show outrage, over the fact that the Western-backed opposition is constantly attacking the trapped civilians, not even relenting during the ceasefire. Instead it is just reported in passing that “Insurgent snipers attacked the besieged towns of Fouaa and Kfarya, killing at least one person and injuring several,” and “Islamist insurgents shelled a village near Fouaa.”

One wonders how different the report would look if Assad or Russia had been indiscriminately shelling and sniping off trapped civilians in Madaya.

The New York Times, and its chief Syria reporter Anne Bernard, continually fail to in their journalistic duties. Instead they have served to mobilize support for the government and the powerful societal interests that control and finance them.(4)

If we even had a pretention of living in a society with a semblance of a free press these kinds of basic facts would be readily reported to the American public.

Instead, the NYT continues to mislead and deceive.

Notes:

1.) "... [2014] the Syrian military opposition is dominated by ISIS and by Jabhat al-Nusra, the official al-Qaeda representative, in addition to other extreme jihadi groups. In reality, there is no dividing wall between them and America's supposedly moderate opposition allies." Patrick Cockburn, "The Rise of ISIS", *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY, 2015), pg. 3. Print

2.) Ibid.

3.) Noam Chomsky, Edward S. Herman, "Worthy and Unworthy Victims", *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, 2002), pg. 37-86. Print.

4.) Ibid, pg. xi.

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