

The Al Qaeda Insurgency in Syria: Recruiting Jihadists to Wage NATO's "Humanitarian Wars"

PART III

By [Prof Michel Chossudovsky](#)
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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)
Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)
In-depth Report: [SYRIA](#)

Part I



[A "Humanitarian War" on Syria? Military Escalation. Towards a Broader Middle East-Central Asian War?](#)

Part I of a three part series

- by Michel Chossudovsky - 2011-08-09

The road to Tehran goes through Damascus. A US-NATO war on Iran would involve, as a first step, a destabilization campaign ("regime change") directed against Syria.

Part II



[The Pentagon's "Salvador Option": The Deployment of Death Squads in Iraq and Syria](#)

- by Prof. Michel Chossudovsky - 2011-08-16

Recent developments in Syria point to a full-fledged armed insurgency, integrated by Islamist "freedom fighters" covertly supported, trained and equipped by foreign powers.

What triggered the crisis in Syria?

It was not the result of internal political cleavages, but rather the consequence of a deliberate plan by the US-NATO alliance to trigger social chaos, to discredit the Syrian government of Bashar Al Assad and ultimately destabilize Syria as a Nation State.

Since the middle of March 2011, Islamist armed groups covertly supported by Western and Israeli intelligence have conducted terrorist attacks on government buildings and acts of arson.

Amply documented, trained gunmen and snipers have targeted the police, the armed forces as well as unarmed civilians.

The objective of this armed insurrection is to trigger the response of the police and armed forces, including the deployment of tanks and armored vehicles with a view to eventually justifying a "humanitarian" military intervention, under NATO's "responsibility to protect" mandate.

The Nature of the Syrian Political System

There is certainly cause for social unrest and mass protest in Syria: unemployment has increased in recent years, social conditions have deteriorated, particularly since the adoption in 2006 of sweeping economic reforms under IMF guidance. The later include austerity measures, a freeze on wages, the deregulation of the financial system, trade reform and privatization. (See IMF Syrian Arab Republic — IMF Article IV Consultation Mission's Concluding Statement, <http://www.imf.org/external/np/ms/2006/051406.htm>, 2006).

Moreover, there are serious divisions within the government and the military. The populist policy framework of the Baath party has largely been eroded. A faction within the ruling political establishment has embraced the neoliberal agenda. In turn, the adoption of IMF "economic medicine" has served to enrich the ruling economic elite. Pro-US factions have also developed within the upper echelons of the Syrian military and intelligence.

But the "pro-democracy" movement integrated by Islamists and supported by NATO and the "international community" did not emanate from the mainstay of Syrian civil society.

The protests largely dominated by Islamists represent a very small fraction of Syrian public opinion. They are of a sectarian nature. They do not address the broader issues of social inequality, civil rights and unemployment.

The majority of Syria's population (including the opponents of the Al Assad government) do not support the "protest movement" which is characterised by an armed insurgency. In fact quite the opposite.

Ironically, despite its authoritarian nature, there is considerable popular support for the government of President Bashar Al Assad, which is confirmed by the large pro-government rallies.

Syria constitutes the only (remaining) independent secular state in the Arab world. Its populist, anti-Imperialist and secular base is inherited from the dominant Baath party, which integrates Muslims, Christians and Druze. It supports the struggle of the Palestinian people.

The objective of the US-NATO alliance is to ultimately displace and destroy the Syrian secular State, displace or co-opt the national economic elites and eventually replace the Syrian government of Bashar Al Assad with an Arab sheikdom, a pro-US Islamic republic or a compliant pro-US "democracy".

The role of the US-NATO- Israel military alliance in triggering an armed insurrection is not addressed by the Western media. Moreover, several "progressive voices" have accepted the "NATO consensus" at face value: "a peaceful protest" which is being "violently repressed by the Syrian police and armed forces".

The Insurgency is integrated by Terrorists

Al Jazeera, the Israeli and Lebanese press confirm that "the protesters" had burned the headquarters of the Baath Party and the court house in Daraa in mid-March, while at the same time claiming that the demonstrations were "peaceful".

Terrorists have infiltrated the civilian protest movement. Similar acts of arson were carried

out in late July in Hama. Public buildings including the Court House and the Agricultural Bank were set on fire.

This insurgency is directed against the secular State. Its ultimate object is political destabilization and regime change. The hit squads of armed gunmen are involved in terrorist acts directed against both Syrian forces and civilians.

Civilians who support the government are the object of threats and intimidation. Pro-government civilians are also the object of targetted assassination by armed gunmen:

In Karak, a village near Dara'a, Salafis forced villagers to join anti-government protests and remove photos of President Assad from their homes. **Witnesses reported that a young Muslim man who refused to remove a photo was found hanged on his front porch the next morning.**

"People want to go out and peacefully ask for certain changes, but Muslim Salafi groups are sneaking in with their goal, which is not to make changes for the betterment of Syria, but to take over the country with their agenda," (International Christian Concern (ICC), May 4, 2011, emphasis added)

In late July, terrorists attacked a train travelling between Aleppo and Damascus:

"The train was carrying 480 passengers... The terrorists dismantled the rails which caused the accident... The leading carriage was burnt... Other carriages were derailed and turned over onto their sides... (quoted in [Terrorists attacked a train traveling from Aleppo to Damascus - YouTube](#), Truth Syria). Most of the passengers on the train "were children, women and patients who were traveling to undergo surgeries."([Saboteurs Target a Train Traveling from Aleppo to Damascus, Driver Martyred - Local - jpnews-sy.com](#), July 24, 2011)

The Recruitment of Mujahideen: NATO and Turkey

This insurgency in Syria has similar features to that of Libya: it is integrated by paramilitary brigades affiliated to Al Qaeda. Recent developments point to a full-fledged armed insurgency, integrated by Islamist "freedom fighters" supported, trained and equipped by NATO and Turkey's High Command.

According to Israeli intelligence sources:

NATO headquarters in Brussels and the Turkish high command are meanwhile drawing up plans for their first military step in Syria, which is to arm the rebels with weapons for combating the tanks and helicopters spearheading the Assad regime's crackdown on dissent. Instead of repeating the Libyan model of air strikes, NATO strategists are thinking more in terms of pouring large quantities of anti-tank and anti-air rockets, mortars and heavy machine guns into the protest centers for beating back the government armored forces. ([DEBKAFfile](#), NATO to give rebels anti-tank weapons, August 14, 2011)

A NATO-led intervention is on the drawing board. According to military and intelligence sources, NATO, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have been discussing "the form this intervention would take".

Shift in Turkey's Military Command Structure

In late July, the Commander in Chief of the Army and head of Turkey's Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Isik Kosaner, resigned together with the commanders of the Navy and Air Force. General Kosaner represented a broadly secular stance within the Armed Forces. General Necdet Ozel has been appointed as his replacement as commander of the Army and head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

These developments are of crucial importance. They point to a shift within Turkey's military high command in favor of the Muslim Brotherhood including enhanced support to the armed insurrection in Northern Syria.

Military sources also confirm that Syrian rebels **"have been training in the use of the new weapons with Turkish military officers** at makeshift installations in Turkish bases near the Syrian border." ([DEBKAFfile](#), NATO to give rebels anti-tank weapons, August 14, 2011)

The delivery of weapons to the rebels is to be implemented "overland, namely through Turkey and under Turkish army protection....Alternatively, the arms **would be trucked into Syria under Turkish military guard and transferred to rebel leaders at pre-arranged rendez-vous.**" (Ibid, emphasis added)

These various developments point towards the possibility of the direct involvement of Turkish troops in the conflict, which could potentially lead to a broader process of military confrontation between Syria and Turkey, as well as the direct involvement of Turkish troops inside Syria.

A ground war involving Turkish troops would involve sending troops into Northern Syria and "carving out a military pocket from which Syria's rebels would be supplied with military, logistic and medical aid." (Assad may opt for war to escape Russian, Arab, European ultimatums, <http://www.debka.com/article/21255/> Debkafile, August 31, 2011).

As in the case of Libya, financial support is being channelled to the Syrian rebel forces by Saudi Arabia. "Ankara and Riyadh will provide the anti-Assad movements with large quantities of weapons and funds to be smuggled in from outside Syria" (Ibid).

The deployment of Saudi and GCC troops is also contemplated in Southern Syria in coordination with Turkey (Ibid):

Recruiting Thousands of Jihadists

NATO and the Turkish High command, also contemplate the development of a jihad involving the recruitment of thousands of "freedom fighters", reminiscent of the enlistment of Mujahideen to wage the CIA's jihad (holy war) in the heyday of the Soviet-Afghan war:

Also discussed in Brussels and Ankara, our sources report, is **a campaign to enlist thousands of Muslim volunteers in Middle East countries and the Muslim world to fight alongside the Syrian rebels. The Turkish army would house these volunteers, train them and secure their passage into Syria.** (Ibid, emphasis added)

This recruitment of Mujahideen to fight NATO's humanitarian wars (including Libya and Syria) is well underway. Some 1500 jihadists from Afghanistan trained by the CIA were dispatched to fight with the "pro-democracy" rebels under the helm of "former" Libya Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) Commander Abdel Hakim Belhadj:

"Most of the men have been recruited from Afghanistan. They are Uzbeks, Persians and Hazaras. According to the footage, these men attired in the Uzbek-style of shalwar and Hazara-Uzbek Kurta were found fighting in Libyan cities." (The Nation, Pakistan,

The Libyan model of rebel forces integrated by the Islamic brigades together with NATO special forces is slated to be applied in Syria, where Islamist fighters supported by Western and Israeli intelligence have already been deployed.

The Triggering of Factional Divisions within Syrian Society

Syria is a secular state where Muslims and Christian have shared a common heritage from the early Christian period and have lived together for centuries.

Covert support is channelled to the jihadist fighters, who in turn are responsible for acts of sectarian violence directed against Alawite, Christians and Druze. In early May, as part of the anti-government "protest movement", armed gunmen were reported to have attacked Christian homes in Daraa in Southern Syria:

In a Christian village outside of Dara'a, in southern Syria, eye witnesses reported that **twenty masked men on motorcycles opened fire on a Christian home** while shouting malicious remarks against Christians in the street. According to another ICC source in Syria, churches received threatening letters during the Easter holidays telling them to join Salafi protestors or leave.

Last week in Duma, a suburb of Damascus, Salafis chanted, "**Alawites to the grave and Christians to Beirut!**" according to an ICC source and Tayyar.org, a Lebanese news agency. Christians in Syria are concerned that the agenda of many hard-line Islamists in Syria, including the Salafis, is to take over the government and kick Christians out of the country. "If Muslim Salafis gain political influence, they will make sure that there will be no trace of Christianity in Syria," a Syrian Christian leader told ICC.

"We want to improve life and rights in Syria under this president, but we do not want terrorism. Christians will be first to pay the price of terrorism. ... What Christians are asking for is the realization that when changes are happening, it should happen not under certain agendas or for certain people, but for the people of Syria in a peaceful way under the current government." Aidan Clay, ICC Regional Manager for the Middle East, said, "Unlike in Egypt, where Christians predominantly supported the revolution that removed President Hosni Mubarak from power, Syrian Christians have desired peace while demanding greater freedoms under the current government. Christians anticipate that only chaos and bloodshed will follow if Salafi demands are met. We urge the U.S. government to act wisely and carefully when developing policies that have deep political ramifications for Syria's minorities by not indirectly supporting a foothold to be used by Salafis to carry out their radical agenda."

[\(Syrian Christians Threatened by Salafi Protestors, Persecution News, International Christian Concern \(ICC\), May 4, 2011\)](#)

The attacks on Christians in Syria are reminiscent of the death squadron killings directed against Chaldean Christians in Iraq.

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Towards a Syrian Government in Exile. The Formation of a National Salvation Council (NSC) Modelled on Libya's Transitional Council (TC)

A first step towards establishing a provisional government in exile was envisaged at a so-called National Salvation Conference in Istanbul (July 16, 2011) integrated by some 300 Syrians in exile. This conference venue led to the formation of a National Salvation Council (NSC), composed of 25 members, modelled on Libya's Transitional Council.

“Those present finally agreed on an initiative that will select 25 from 300 present in Istanbul and 50 more from inside Syria, resulting in a 75 member council to represent the current uprising. This 75 member council will also work towards forming a national unity government that can guide Syria in a transitory period, should the regime fall. This transitory period will seek to administer a road-map that re-structures the Syrian state from a dictatorship, dismantling a police state, to a representative democracy. However, those present have refused the idea of forming a shadow government at this moment....” [Syrian opposition conference in Istanbul and the formation of a joint council](#) Syria Revolts, July 18, 2011)

The NSC envisaged the formation of an 11 member “Cabinet”, which could act as a de facto provisional government in the case of a “regime collapse”. The NSC is dominated by the outlawed Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and Liberals from the Syrian exile community. [Syrian exiles vote for 'transitional government'](#), Sidney Morning Herald, July 19, 2011)

The Central Role of General David Petraeus: President Obama's New Head of the CIA

Obama's newly appointed CIA head, David Petraeus who led the MNSTC “Counterinsurgency” program in Baghdad in 2004 in coordination with Ambassador John Negroponte, is slated to play a key intelligence role in relation to Syria -including covert support to opposition forces and “freedom fighters”, the infiltration of Syrian intelligence and armed forces, etc. These tasks would be carried out in liaison with Ambassador Robert S. Ford. Both men worked together in Iraq; they were part of Negroponte's extended team in Baghdad in 2004-2005.

According to reports, General Petraeus, travelled to Turkey in mid July to meet members of the National Salvation Council. The meeting organized by Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu took place immediately following the National Salvation Conference (July 16-18, 2011): “[T]he source noted that Petraeus stressed his support during the meeting for the idea of establishing an exile-government, a government which is led by the Muslim

Brotherhood and their allies and assisted by American military officials...” (See [The Syrian Opposition and the CIA - Another Evidence of Treason - YouTube](#)).

While Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s official visit to Turkey coincided with the holding of the National Salvation Conference, there was no confirmation that Clinton had met up with members of the NSC. Officially, Hillary Clinton met members of the Syrian opposition “for the first time” on August 2nd. ([Syria Opposition Meets With Clinton - WSJ.com](#), August 3, 2011).



The Role of the Western media

The Western media has played a central role in obfuscating the nature of foreign interference in Syria including outside support to armed insurgents. In chorus they have described recent events in Syria as a “peaceful protest movement” directed against the government of Bashar Al Assad, when the evidence amply confirms that Islamic paramilitary groups are involved in terrorist acts. These same Islamic groups have infiltrated the protest rallies.

Western media distortions abound. Large “pro-government” rallies (including photographs) are casually presented as “evidence” of a mass anti-government protest movement. The reports on casualties are based on unconfirmed “eye-witness reports” or on Syrian opposition sources in exile.

Sham News and the London based Syria Observatory for Human Rights are profusely quoted by the Western media as a “reliable source” with the usual disclaimers.

Israel’s Debka Intelligence news, while avoiding the issue of an armed insurgency, tacitly acknowledges that Syrian forces are being confronted by an organized paramilitary:

“[Syrian forces] are now running into heavy resistance: Awaiting them are **anti-tank traps** and fortified barriers manned by **protesters armed with heavy machine guns.**” [DEBKAfile](#).

Since when are peaceful civilian protesters armed with “heavy machine guns” and “anti-tank traps”? What we are dealing with is a trained paramilitary.

While Shaam News is quoted as the source of Associated Press reports and photos, Sham News (SNN) is not a recognised news agency. SNN describes itself as “a group of patriotic Syrian youth activists demanding the freedom and dignity for the Syrian people ...” with pages on Facebook and Twitter. See [Shaam News Network](#)

An Associated Press photo of a mass rally in Hama indicates the following disclaimer

The Associated Press is unable to independently verify the authenticity, Content, location or date of this handout Photo. Photo: HO / Shaam News Network.

Yet these same unconfirmed photos are used profusely in the mainstream media.

The absence of verifiable data, however, has not prevented the Western media from putting forth “authoritative figures” on the number of casualties: “Over 1,600 dead, 2,000 wounded (Al Jazeera, July 27) and nearly 3,000 disappearances (CNN, July 28).”

What are the sources of this data? Who is responsible for the casualties?

The US Ambassador Robert S. Ford candidly stated to a Senate Committee hearing that: “The most dangerous weapon I saw was a sling-shot”.

And that sling-shot catch phrase, which is an outright lie, has been quoted profusely to uphold the non-violent character of the protest movement as well provide a “humanitarian face” to Ambassador Robert S. Ford, lest we forget, who was part of Negroponte’s plan to set up death squadrons in Iraq modelled on El Salvador and Honduras.

The Lie becomes the Truth.

Responsibility of the Syrian Government

The Syrian government, its military and police force, bear a burden of responsibility in the way they have responded to the insurgency which has resulted in deaths of civilians and police. But this issue, which is the object of open discussion in Syria, cannot be meaningfully addressed without analyzing how the US and its allies have supported and financed an insurrection integrated by Islamist paramilitary groups and death squads.

The primary responsibility for the civilian deaths rests with Washington, Brussels and Ankara, which have supported the formation and incursion of Islamist “Freedom Fighters”. They have also facilitated the financing and delivery of weapons to the insurgents.

Since the existence of an armed insurgency (supported by foreign powers) is not acknowledged by NATO governments and the Eastern media, *pari passu* these deaths are attributed without further explanation solely to government forces “shooting on defenseless civilians” or government forces shooting at police defectors...

Dangerous Crossroads: Towards a Broader Middle East Central Asian War

Escalation is an integral part of the military agenda. Destabilization of sovereign states through “regime change” is closely coordinated with military planning. There is a military roadmap characterised by a sequence of US-NATO war theaters.

War preparations to attack Syria and Iran have been in “an advanced state of readiness” for several years.

US, NATO and Israeli military planners have outlined the contours of a “humanitarian” military campaign, in which Turkey (the second largest military force inside NATO) would play a central role.

In recent developments, Turkey has intimated that Ankara is considering military action against Syria if the Al Assad government doesn’t cease “immediately and unconditionally” its actions against “protesters”. In a bitter irony, the Islamist fighters operating inside Syria who are terrorizing the civilian population, are trained and financed by the Turkish Erdogan government.

These veiled threats point towards the possible involvement of Turkish troops inside Syria, which could evolve towards a full-fledged “humanitarian” military intervention by NATO.

We are at dangerous crossroads. Were a US-NATO military operation to be launched against Syria, the broader Middle East Central Asian region extending from North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border with China would be engulfed in the turmoil of an extended regional war.

There are at present four distinct war theaters: Afghanistan-Pakistan, Iraq, Palestine and Libya.

An attack on Syria would lead to the integration of these separate war theaters, eventually leading towards a broader Middle East-Central Asian war.

The road to Tehran goes through Damascus. A US-NATO sponsored war on Iran would involve, as a first step, a destabilization campaign (“regime change”) including covert intelligence operations in support of rebel forces directed against the Syrian government.

A war on Syria could evolve towards a US-NATO military campaign directed against Iran, in which Turkey and Israel would be directly involved. It would also contribute to the ongoing destabilization of Lebanon.

It is crucial to spread the word and break the channels of media disinformation.

A critical and unbiased understanding of what is happening in Syria is of crucial importance in reversing the tide of military escalation towards a broader regional war.

Parts I and II of this article

Part I



[A “Humanitarian War” on Syria? Military Escalation. Towards a Broader Middle East-Central Asian War?](#)

Part I of a three part series

- by Michel Chossudovsky - 2011-08-09

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Part II



[The Pentagon’s “Salvador Option”: The Deployment of Death Squads in Iraq and Syria](#)

- by Prof. Michel Chossudovsky - 2011-08-16

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If a military operation were to be launched against Syria, Israel would in all likelihood also be involved, leading to a process of escalation



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The ultimate purpose is to trigger sectarian violence and political chaos within Syria by covertly supporting Islamic terrorist organizations.



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Michel Chossudovsky is an award-winning author, Professor of Economics (Emeritus) at the University of Ottawa and Director of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG). He is the author of *The Globalization of Poverty and The New World Order* (2003) and *America's "War on Terrorism"* (2005). His latest book is entitled [***Towards a World War Three Scenario, The Dangers of Nuclear War***](#) (2011). Michel Chossudovsky spent over a month in Syria in January-February 2011.

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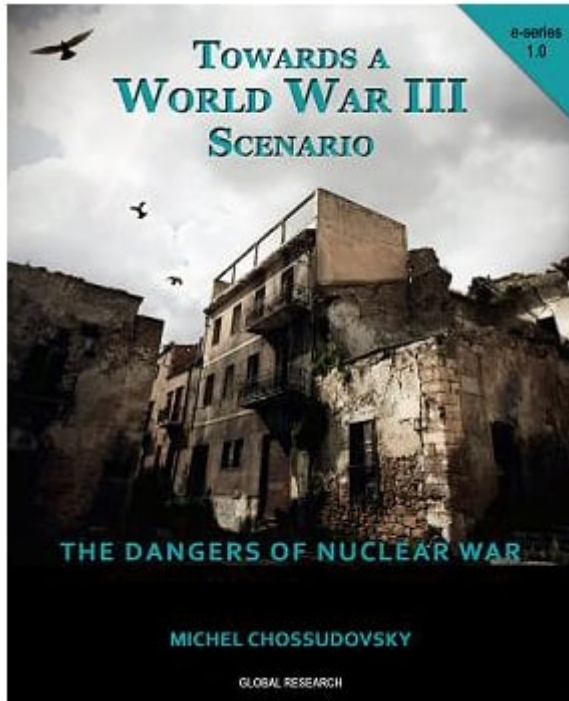
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