

The Battle for Aleppo and the Hypocrisy of US War Propaganda

By [Bill Van Auken](#)

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This week marks two years since President Barack Obama initiated the latest US war against Iraq and Syria, launched in the name of combating the Islamic State militia. The American president cast the new military intervention as not only a continuation of the “global war on terrorism,” but also a crusade for human rights, invoking the threat to Iraq’s Yazidi population and insisting that he could not “turn a blind eye” when religious minorities were threatened.

The toll of this supposed humanitarian intervention has grown ever bloodier. According to a report released this week by the monitoring group Airwars to mark the anniversary, more than 4,700 civilian non-combatant fatalities have been reported as a result of the “US-led Coalition’s” air strikes (95 percent of which have been carried out by US warplanes). More innocent Iraqi and Syrian men, women and children have been slaughtered by American bombs in the course of two years than the total number of US soldiers who lost their lives during the eight years of the Iraq war launched by President George W. Bush in 2003.

All of Washington’s lies and pretexts about its latest war in the Middle East—as well as the decade-and-a-half of wars waged since 9/11—have been exploded in the course of the past several days as the US government and media celebrated purported victories by “rebel” forces in the battle for control of Aleppo, Syria’s former commercial capital.

That the “rebel” offensive has been organized and led by an organization that for years constituted Al Qaeda’s designated Syrian branch, and the operation was named in honor of a Sunni sectarian extremist who carried out a massacre of captured Syrian Alawite soldiers, gave none of them pause. So much for the hogwash about terrorism and human rights!

The scale of the military gains made by the Al Qaeda-led forces in Aleppo are by no means clear. They have, however, apparently succeeded in placing under siege the western part of the city, which is under the government’s control and where the overwhelming majority of the population lives. The “rebels” have killed and maimed hundreds of people with mortar and artillery rounds.

Washington and its allies, the Western media and the human rights groups that accused the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad of crimes against humanity for bombing the jihadists in eastern Aleppo are now indifferent when these imperialist-backed terrorists are killing civilians in the western part of the city.

Sections of the Western media have gone so far as to celebrate the exploits of “rebel” suicide bombers for providing a strategic “advantage” for the Western-backed militias.

Among the most dishonest and duplicitous accounts of the recent fighting are those that have appeared in the pages of the *New York Times*, whose news coverage and editorial line are carefully tailored to serve the predatory aims of US imperialism.

In a Monday article on Aleppo, the *Times* wrote that the challenge to government control had been mounted by “rebels and their jihadist allies.” The article continued: “A vital factor in the rebel advance over the weekend was cooperation between mainstream rebel groups, some of which have received covert arms support from the United States, and the jihadist organization formerly known as the Nusra Front, which was affiliated with Al Qaeda.”

The newspaper reports this as casually as if it were publishing a report on the late artist formerly known as Prince. The Nusra Front changed its name to the Fatah al-Sham Front and announced its formal disaffiliation from Al Qaeda—with the latter’s blessing—just one week before it launched the offensive in Aleppo.

There is every reason to believe that this rebranding was carried out in consultation with the CIA in an attempt to politically sanitize direct US support for an offensive led by a group that has long been denounced by Washington as a terrorist organization.

The *Times* never names any of the “mainstream rebel groups” it says are fighting alongside the Al Qaeda militia, suggesting that they constitute some liberal progressive force. In point of fact, one of these groups recently released a video showing its fighters beheading a wounded 12-year-old child, and virtually all of them share the essential ideological outlook of Al Qaeda.

The *Financial Times* of London carried one of the frankest reports on the Aleppo “rebel” offensive, noting that it “may have had more foreign help than it appears: activists and rebels say opposition forces were replenished with new weapons, cash and other supplies before and during the fighting.” It cites reports of daily columns of trucks pouring across the Turkish border for weeks with arms and ammunition, including artillery and other heavy weapons.

The newspaper quotes one unnamed Western diplomat who said that US officials backed the Al Qaeda-led offensive “to put some pressure back on Russia and Iran,” which have both provided key military support to the Assad government.

The *Financial Times* also quotes an unnamed “military analyst” as stating that the character of the fighting indicated the Al Qaeda forces had received not only massive amounts of weapons, but also professional military training.

Significantly, even as the fighting in Aleppo was underway, photographs surfaced of heavily armed British commandos operating long-range patrol vehicles in northern Syria. Similar US units are also on the ground. These are among the most likely suspects in terms of who is training Al Qaeda’s Syrian forces.

They would only be reprising the essential features of the imperialist operation that gave rise to Al Qaeda 30 years ago, when the CIA—working in close alliance with Osama bin Laden—supplied similar support to the mujahedeen fighting to overthrow the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan.

While the blowback from that episode ultimately gave us September 11, the present operation in Syria holds far greater dangers. In what is now openly described by the

corporate media as a “proxy war” in which Al Qaeda serves as US imperialism’s ground force, Washington is attempting to overthrow Russia’s key Middle East ally as part of the preparations for a war aimed at dismembering and subjugating Russia itself.

The frontrunner in the US presidential contest, Democrat Hillary Clinton, has repeatedly signaled that she intends to pursue a far more aggressive policy in Syria and against Russia, making neo-McCarthyite charges of Vladimir Putin’s supposed subversion of the US election process a central part of her campaign.

Whether Washington can wait till inauguration day next January to escalate its aggression is far from clear. The “rebel” gains in Aleppo may be quickly reversed and the fighting could end with the US-backed Al Qaeda militias deprived of their last urban stronghold.

US imperialism is not about to accept the re-consolidation of a Syrian government aligned with Moscow. Pressure will inevitably mount for a more direct and more massive US intervention, threatening a direct clash between American and Russian forces.

Fifteen years after launching its “war on terror,” Washington is not only directly allied with the supposed target of that war—Al Qaeda—but is preparing to unleash upon humanity the greatest act of terror imaginable, a third world war.

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Articles by: [Bill Van Auken](#)

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