

Washington “Discovers” Terrorists in Syria

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The US State Department on Tuesday formally designated one of the leading militias fighting for the overthrow of the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad as a “Foreign Terrorist Organization.”

The group, known as Jabhat al-Nusra, or the al-Nusra front, is widely credited as being the most effective fighting force in the bloody struggle in Syria. It has recently overrun at least three Syrian military bases and seized control of territory in the eastern part of the country.

In a teleconference with select members of the media Tuesday, an unnamed senior State Department official justified the designation by charging al-Nusra with “hundreds of attacks, nearly 600, in major city centers across Syria in which numerous innocent Syrians have been injured and killed.”

Earlier, US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said in a statement: “Al-Nusra has sought to portray itself as part of the legitimate Syrian opposition while it is, in fact, an attempt by AQI (Al Qaeda in Iraq) to hijack the struggles of the Syrian people for its own malign purposes.”

When it comes to hijacking, Washington is the past master. Since the outbreak of protests in Syria two years ago, it has worked to hijack popular discontent and stoke up a sectarian civil war in a bid to bring about regime-change and install a puppet government. This is part of a wider strategy of asserting US hegemony over the geo-strategically vital and oil-rich regions of the Persian Gulf and Central Asia. Syria is a lynch-pin in this imperialist campaign, in large measure because of its close ties to Iran, which Washington has identified as the main obstacle to establishing neocolonial control.

The formal significance of designating al-Nusra as a terrorist organization is that any US citizen providing it with assistance would be liable for criminal prosecution. It is highly unlikely that any charges will ever be brought, however, as the only Americans engaged in such activities are covert operatives of the US Central Intelligence Agency.

According to multiple reports appearing in the US and European media, al-Nusra and similar Sunni jihadist militias are the best armed and equipped groups challenging the Syrian regime. While the weaponry and supplies have reportedly come largely from Qatar and Saudi Arabia, Washington’s closest allies in the region, the CIA set up a command-and-control center in southern Turkey earlier this year for the purpose of coordinating the distribution of these arms and materiel to the Syrian “rebels.”

Other weapons and foreign fighters have poured into the country from Libya in the wake of last year’s US-NATO war to topple the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. As in Syria, the brunt of

the fighting there was undertaken by jihadist elements that emerged from the Al Qaeda-linked Libyan Islamic Fighting Group.

As is now well known, thanks to an apparent falling out between US officials and a section of these Islamist fighters in Libya that cost the life of the American ambassador and three others, the CIA had set up a sizable secret headquarters in the eastern port city of Benghazi. It is undoubtedly the case that a key function of this outpost was coordinating the flow of arms and fighters into Syria.

The US has been directly involved in supporting and arming Al Qaeda elements, even as it dismissed as a “diversion” charges by the Syrian government that it was under attack by the international terrorist group. The State Department’s designation stands as a damning self-indictment. Washington, by its own admission, is exposed once again as the foremost state sponsor of terrorism.

How does this cynical designation serve US interests? The timing is highly significant. The role of al-Nusra in Syria has been reported widely in the media for months, and according to government sources, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and her aides had decided on the designation a month ago.

The announcement, however, comes just one day before the convening of a “Friends of Syria” conference in Marrakesh, Morocco. France, Turkey and the Persian Gulf monarchies have already recognized the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces as the “sole legitimate representative” of the Syrian people, and President Obama in a TV interview Tuesday said the US would follow suit. It is anticipated that Washington will make the official announcement at the Marrakesh meeting.

There is no indication that the coalition, however, is anything of the kind. It was cobbled together under the direction of the US State Department and Washington’s ambassador to Syria, Robert Ford, at a luxury hotel in Doha last month. Its head, Ahmed Moaz al-Khatib, has been promoted by Washington and in the Western media as the reincarnation of Gandhi, described as a “moderate” and a “unifier.”

In point of fact, Al-Khatib is aligned with Syria’s Muslim Brotherhood and has a record of making inflammatory sectarian indictments of non-Sunni sects. His principal attraction as a leader appears to be his long and intimate association with Shell Oil.

In distancing itself from al-Nusra before the conference, Washington is attempting to create the optimal conditions for more directly intervening in arming the “rebels” under the pretense that it is aiding only the supposedly “secular” and “democratic” militias under the direction of the Coalition, which will likely be given status as a transitional government.

The designation serves another purpose—providing a pretext for direct US intervention. Washington’s unsubstantiated charges that the Assad regime was preparing to use chemical weapons against the Syrian population was followed by statements of concern from Obama, Clinton and others that such weapons would fall into the hands of Al Qaeda-connected forces. The Pentagon has stated that the deployment of 75,000 troops in Syria would be required to secure such weapons.

The war in Iraq was launched on the pretext of an imminent threat of “weapons of mass destruction” falling into the hands of Al Qaeda. This same pretext is now being readied to

justify a direct military intervention in Syria.

What emerges from the Syrian events and the entire record of US militarism in the region over the past decade is that all the regimes targeted for overthrow by Washington have been secular and hostile to Al Qaeda. In Iraq, Libya and Syria, the effect of US intervention has been to dramatically increase the influence of Al Qaeda. In the latter two countries, the US has used the Islamist organization as a proxy force in wars for regime-change.

The developments first in Libya and now in Syria have laid bare the fraud of the so-called "war on terrorism" as promoted first by George W. Bush and then Barack Obama. It is impossible to comprehend US policy in the Middle East without recognizing that American imperialism is allied with Al Qaeda. Having helped found the organization during the US-backed war against the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan in the 1980s, since the terrorist attacks of 9/11 it has utilized it as a bogey man to justify militarism abroad and sweeping attacks on democratic rights and constitutional principles at home.

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