

# CIA directing arms shipments to Syria's "rebels"

By Bill Van Auken  
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CIA agents have been deployed to Turkey to organize the arming of the so-called rebels in Syria seeking the overthrow of the government of President Bashar al-Assad, the *New York Times* reported Thursday.

The report, citing information provided by senior US officials as well as Arab intelligence officers, states that the CIA operatives are directing a massive smuggling operation through which "automatic rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, ammunition and some antitank weapons, are being funneled mostly across the Turkish border by way of a shadowy network of intermediaries, including the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, and paid for by Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey."

The day before the publication of the *Times* piece, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland reiterated the Obama administration's public line. "We have repeatedly said that we are not in the business of arming in Syria." She went on to describe Syria's ambassador to the United Nations, Bashar al-Jaafari, as "deluded" for charging that major foreign powers were backing "armed terrorist groups" in his country and trying to escalate Syria's crisis into an "explosion" in order to bring about "regime change."

The *Times* article only confirms earlier press reports and provides further detail in exposing the same, barely covert, operation directed at fomenting and arming a sectarian civil war in Syria.

Last month, the *Washington Post* reported that the so-called rebels had "begun receiving significantly more and better weapons in recent weeks, an effort paid for by Persian Gulf nations and coordinated in part by the United States." The *Post*, in its May 16 article, also stated that US operatives had "expanded contacts with opposition forces to provide the gulf nations with assessments of rebel credibility and

command-and-control infrastructure."

And last week, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that "the Central Intelligence Agency and State Department—working with Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Qatar and other allies—are helping the opposition Free Syrian Army develop logistical routes for moving supplies into Syria and providing communications training."

The result of this operation has been a sharp escalation in the armed violence in Syria, with a spike in the number of Syrian soldiers killed and wounded and a proliferation of terrorist attacks.

The Obama administration's pretense that it is not arming the Syrian militias for the purpose of toppling the Assad government has been thoroughly exposed. Its claim is based on the fiction that Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, none of which would carry out such an operation without Washington's approval, are doing the arming, and the CIA agents are merely "vetting" the Syrian rebels to assure that weapons do not fall into the wrong hands.

The *Times* report quotes one unnamed senior American official as claiming that the CIA is working on the Syrian-Turkish border "to help keep weapons out of the hands of fighters allied with Al Qaeda or other terrorist groups."

Such claims are absurd. The reality is that the operation being mounted by the CIA against Syria bears a striking resemblance to the one it carried out in the 1980s along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, when Saudi Arabia also provided much of the funding for arms and Al Qaeda was born as an ally and instrument of US imperialist policy.

There is increasing evidence that Islamist elements from within Syria and from surrounding Arab countries are the backbone of the imperialist-backed insurgency seeking regime change in Damascus. The Associated

Press Thursday carried a lengthy report on Tunisian *jihadis* flocking to Syria. It reports that fundamentalist Islamic clerics are urging youth to make their way to Syria to topple the “unbeliever” regime.

According to an earlier report in the German daily *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* “at least 3,000 fighters” from Libya have reached Syria, most of them through Turkey. Other similar forces have crossed the border from Iraq to prosecute a sectarian conflict similar to the one that unleashed a bloodbath between Sunnis and Shiites in that country under American occupation.

The result, as the AP reports, is that “Al-Qaida-style suicide bombings have become increasingly common in Syria, and Western officials say there is little doubt that Islamist extremists, some associated with the terror network, have made inroads in Syria as instability has spread.”

On the one hand, Washington and its regional proxies—Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey—are lavishing arms and funding on the so-rebels, while, on the other hand, the major powers are seeking to quarantine the Syrian regime and starve it of resources by means of ever-tightening sanctions and international pressure.

While covertly pouring weapons into the country, US officials have denounced Russia for maintaining ties to Syria, Moscow’s sole remaining ally in the Middle East and the site of its Mediterranean naval base at Tartus. US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton unleashed a propaganda campaign against Moscow, charging falsely that it was supplying Damascus with new Russian attack helicopters.

Russia responded that there were no new helicopters, but rather it was sending back old aircraft that Syria had bought decades earlier and had been sent to Russia for repairs. The ship carrying the refurbished helicopters, the Curacao-registered MV *Alaed*, was forced to turn back to the Russian port of Murmansk on Thursday after the British government compelled a London-based insurance company to withdraw its coverage of the vessel. According to press reports, the British government had considered using military force to board the ship.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov denounced the British move as an attempt to impose unilateral sanctions on other countries. “The EU sanctions aren’t part of the international law,” he said, vowing that the

cargo would be reloaded on a Russian-flagged ship and sent to Syria.

“This is a very slippery slope,” Lavrov told Russia Today television. “This means that anyone—any country or any company—who is not violating any international rules, who is not violating any UN Security Council resolutions, might be subject to extra-territorial application of somebody else’s unilateral sanctions.”

Perhaps of greater concern than the Soviet-era helicopters to Britain and the other major imperialist powers, the ship that was compelled to curtail its voyage was also carrying what was described as a new and advanced air defense system. Such a system could prove an obstacle to an attempt by the US and its NATO allies to reprise the kind of bombing campaign used to topple Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

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