

International Socialist Organization promotes Clinton's new strategy against Syria

By Johannes Stern
6 November 2012

On October 24 the International Socialist Organization (ISO) published an interview titled “Organizing the fight in Syria,” promoting the National Unity Brigades (NUB), an umbrella group of Syrian opposition militias. The interview substantiates the *World Socialist Web Site's* analysis that the ISO and similar pseudo-left groups function as political agents of US imperialism.

The ISO has long helped provide a “left” cover for a CIA-backed US proxy war in Syria. For a year and a half, the US has worked closely with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar to funnel money, weapons and Islamist fighters into Syria to bring down the regime of Syrian President Bashar Al-Assad. The ISO has glossed over these facts or advanced cynical explanations why this criminal imperialist operation is a “revolution” that should be supported.

By reposting this interview—apparently conducted by a journalist named Nader al-Homsi with a NUB fighter and first published on his web site, *DarthNader.net*—the ISO is implicitly backing the NUB's calls to reorganize the Syrian opposition. While it still accepts aid from Washington, the NUB proposes centralizing the opposition's command and covering the opposition's sectarian Islamist character behind slogans for a “civil, democratic state” in Syria.

Discussing outside support for the Syrian opposition, the NUB representative says, “The root of the problem is that the various brigades aren't unified. Support and donations should go to the military council, and the military council should distribute the aid accordingly. Unfortunately there are some brigades who get donations exclusively to them... We want justice and fairness when it comes to support. We want to unify the efforts to liberate Syria under one umbrella.”

The NUB fighter also played down the

Sunni-sectarian character of the opposition: “We are trying to distance ourselves from religious or ideological stamps. Our brigades contain everyone: Muslims and minorities.”

By advancing such proposals, the ISO and the NUB are falling in line with priorities laid out by Washington, and particularly by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. Speaking in Zagreb last week, Clinton proposed to reorganize the Syrian opposition, preparing to intensify the US war drive against Syria after the US presidential elections.

She proposed shifting away from the Syrian National Council (SNC), considered too weak to unify the military efforts of the various anti-Assad brigades in Syria. She said the opposition could not be led by people who have “not been inside Syria for 20, 30, or 40 years,” but should consist of “those who are on the front lines, fighting and dying today to obtain their freedom.”

Clinton also proposed crafting a new image for the Islamist-dominated opposition, in which Al Qaeda type elements play a major role. (See, “Washington's proxy in Syria: Al Qaeda”) She said the opposition should “be on record strongly resisting the efforts by extremists to hijack the Syrian revolution.”

Clinton's arguments reflect a cynical attempt by Washington to deal with the problems caused by its open reliance on Islamists in Syria. Millions of Syrians who oppose Assad are even more hostile to the US-backed opposition, which is a collection of armed Islamist gangs. US reliance on such forces internationally has also backfired—as when a similar group in Libya attacked the US consulate in Benghazi, killing US Ambassador Christopher Stevens.

The ISO responds by following every twist and turn of Washington's bloody Syria policy. Just as

Washington concludes that a more unified and less visibly Islamist opposition is needed for a successful US intervention to oust Assad, the ISO posts an interview to promote forces who obligingly adopt such positions.

Asked about the NUB's "position on foreign military intervention," the NUB fighter signals that he could support it. He declares that the NUB rejects "any intervention that is conditioned on anything that will restrict the future of Syria. But we also acknowledge that the decision is ultimately up to the Syrian people," who "have sacrificed a lot, and deserve freedom, justice and dignity."

These are simply cynical evasions, aimed at soft-pedaling the implications of imperialist intervention in Syria. Washington's decision about whether to bomb and invade Syria is not "up to" the Syrian people or its aspirations for social progress. It will be based on a cold calculation of whether it is in US imperialism's strategic interests to defy mass anti-war sentiment in the US and in the Middle East, repeating in Syria the type of slaughter it has inflicted in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya.

The NUB fighter's implicit speculation about a US intervention that might not "restrict" Syria's future is absurd and repulsive. A US intervention would inevitably devastate Syria. The NUB only poses this question because, being armed by Washington and its allies, it supports US intervention and hopes to play a more prominent role in a US-dominated Syria. It would do so, moreover, in close collaboration with far-right Islamists.

The NUB works closely with jihadist elements that provide much of the Syrian opposition's military capability. The NUB fighter says, "Our relations are good with all the brigades without exception. The National Unity Brigades are not against any brigade that is fighting against the regime. We have fought in battles side by side with Islamist and Jihadist brigades."

This underscores the deeply reactionary character of ISO, which endorses forces armed by US intelligence that fight side-by-side with Al Qaeda-type elements. The NUB fighter's claims to be opposed to sectarianism are absurd lies.

This is the inescapable conclusion of the interviewee's endorsement of Syrian opposition

councils. He comments that NUB members "seek unification of military efforts in a military council that represents the free army and revolutionaries in the form of a 'Revolutionary Military Council.' This is occurring throughout Syria, where military councils have been created after the Free Syrian Army moved its headquarters from Turkey to Syria to unify the forces on the ground."

The military councils the NUB and ISO promote include right-wing sectarian figures. On September 28, a meeting of all the military councils was organized in Syria. The Salafist Adnan Al-Arour was invited as a keynote speaker and honored sheikh. Arour recently returned to Syria after spending 20 years in exile in Saudi Arabia, having fled Syria due to his role in the 1982 Islamist uprising in Hama that was brutally suppressed by Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad.

Arour has publicly advocated mass killings of Alawite Muslims. Speaking last year on Saudi Arabia's Wesal-TV, he infamously vowed "harsh and painful" punishment for Alawites who supported the Assad regime against the opposition: "by Allah, we shall mince them in meat grinders, and we shall feed their flesh to the dogs."

These comments from the NUB's Islamist allies expose the political dishonesty of the ISO's promotion of the NUB as hostile to sectarianism or, in another passage in the interview, "committed to the Geneva Conventions." In fact, they are promoting bloodthirsty forces that, like the ISO itself, function as political tools of American imperialism.

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