NATO Using Al Qaeda "Rat Lines" to Flood Syria With Foreign Terrorists

2007-2008 US West Point reports reveal Al Qaeda network behind NATO's so-called "freedom fighters." Extremists in Syria were behind Iraq War foreign terrorist influx, not Syrian government.

By Tony Cartalucci
Global Research, October 26, 2012
Land Destroyer

Region: Middle East & North Africa
Theme: Terrorism
In-depth Report: SYRIA

The discredited and now obscure, defected Syrian ambassador Nawaf Fares, had claimed mid-summer of 2012 that the Syrian government had been behind the influx of foreign terrorists that entered Iraq during the later phases of the US-British occupation of Iraq. These terrorists took part in campaigns of sectarian-driven violence that divided and destroyed an already devastated Iraq. Fares spectacularly claimed that he himself was involved in organizing terrorist death squads in a hamhanded attempt to implicate the government of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

What Fares actually revealed however, was an invisible state within Syria, one composed of Saudi-aligned, sectarian extremism, operating not only independently of the government of President Assad, but in violent opposition to it. This "state-within-a-state" also so happens to be directly affiliated with Al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood, the leading forces now fighting in Syria with significant Western-backing against the Syrian government.

The documented details of this invisible terror state were exposed in the extensive academic efforts of the US Army's own West Point Combating Terrorism Center (CTC). Two reports were published between 2007 and 2008 revealing a global network of Al Qaeda affiliated terror organizations, and how they mobilized to send a large influx of foreign fighters into Iraq.
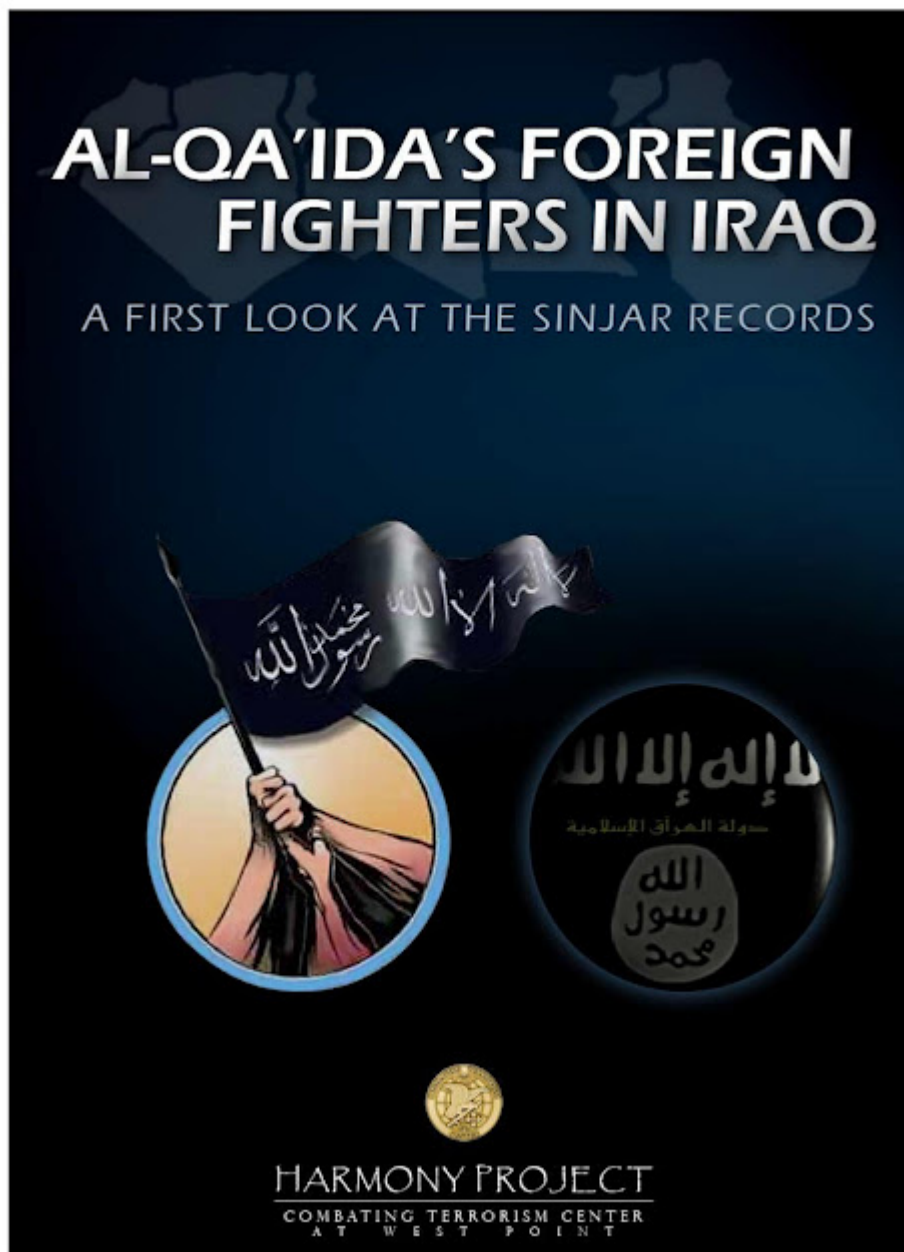
Image: Cover of the US Army's West Point Combating Terrorism Center report, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq." The report definitively exposed a regional network used by Al Qaeda to send fighters into Iraq to sow sectarian violence during the US occupation. This exact network can now be seen demonstrably at work with NATO support, overrunning Libya and now Syria. The terrorists in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi that US Ambassador Stevens was arming, is described by the 2007 West Point report as one of the most prolific and notorious Al Qaeda subsidiaries in the world.

....

The first report, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq," was extensively cited by historian and geopolitical analyst Dr. Webster Tarpley in March of 2011, exposing that NATO-backed "pro-democracy" rebels in Libya were in fact Al Qaeda's Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), listed by the US State Department, United Nations, and the UK Home Office (page 5, .pdf) as an international terrorist organization.

The West Point report exposed Libya as a global epicenter for Al Qaeda training and recruitment, producing more fighters per capita than even Saudi Arabia, and producing

more foreign fighters than any other nation that sent militants to Iraq, except Saudi Arabia itself.

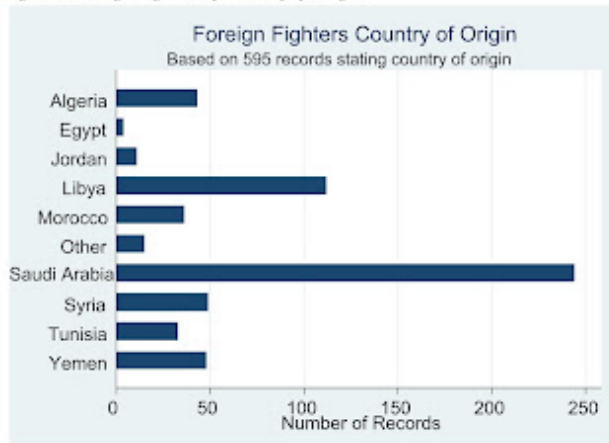Figure 3: Foreign Fighters by Country of Origin
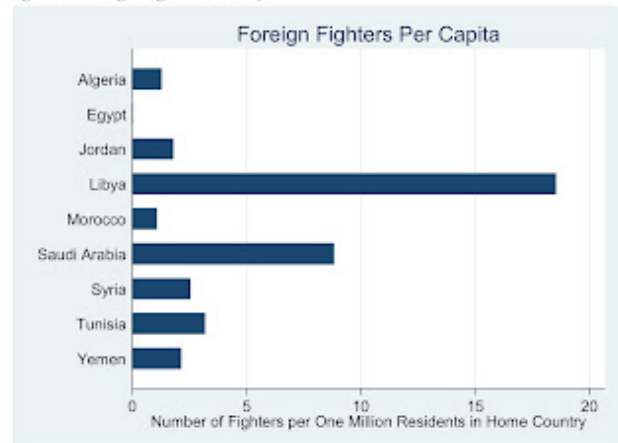
Figure 4: Foreign Fighters Per Capita

Image: Libya, despite its relatively small population, came in second overall, producing foreign fighters to wage sectarian war in Iraq. Libya exceeded all other nations per capita in producing foreign fighters, including Al Qaeda's primary patrons, Saudi Arabia. These diagrams were produced by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, on pages 8 and 9 of its "[Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq](#)" report.

....

But Libya's foreign fighters weren't drawn equally from across the nation. They predominately emanated from the east (Cyrenaica), precisely where the so-called 2011 "pro-democracy revolution" also began, and where most of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi's attention had been focused over the course of at least three decades, fighting militant extremists. The cities of Darnah, Tobruk, and Benghazi in particular fielded the vast majority of foreign fighters sent to Iraq and also served as the very epicenter for the 2011 violent, NATO-backed uprising.
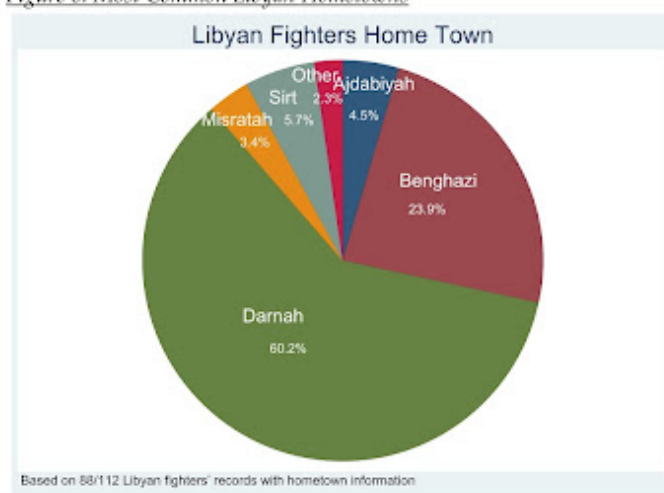

Figure 6: Most Common Libyan Hometowns

Image: (Left) West Point's Combating Terrorism Center's 2007 report, "[Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq](#)" indicates that the vast majority of Al Qaeda terrorists arriving in Iraq from Libya, originated from the country's eastern region, and from the cities of Darnah and Benghazi in particular. (Right) A map indicating rebel held territory (red) during Libya's 2011

conflict. The entire region near Benghazi, Darnah, and Tobruk served as the cradle for the so-called revolution. The US government is just now revealing the heavy Al Qaeda presence in the region, but clearly knew about it since at least as early as 2007, and as other reports indicate, decades before even that.

....

Clearly, the US military and the US government were both well aware of the heavy Al Qaeda presence in Cyrenaica since as early as 2007. When violence flared up in 2011, it was clear to many geopolitical analysts that it was the result of Al Qaeda, not "pro-democracy protesters." The US government, its allies, and a complicit Western press, willfully lied to the public, misrepresented its case to the United Nations and intervened in Libya on behalf of international terrorists, overthrowing a sovereign government, and granting an entire nation as a base of operations for the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).

A similar scenario is now playing out in Syria, where the West, despite acknowledging the existence of Al Qaeda in Benghazi, Libya, is using these militants, and the exact same networks used to send fighters to Iraq, to flood into and overrun Syria. This, after these very same Libyan militants were implicated in an attack that left a US ambassador dead on September 11, 2012.

Image: Libyan Mahdi al-Harati of the US State Department, United Nations, and the UK Home Office (page 5, .pdf)-listed terrorist organization, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), addressing fellow terrorists in Syria. Harati is now commanding a Libyan brigade operating inside of Syria attempting to destroy the Syrian government and subjugate the Syrian population. Traditionally, this is known as "foreign invasion."

....

LIFG terrorists are veritably flooding into Syria from Libya. In November 2011, the Telegraph in their article, "Leading Libyan Islamist met Free Syrian Army opposition group," would report:

Abdulhakim Belhadj, head of the Tripoli Military Council and the former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, "met with Free Syrian Army leaders in Istanbul and on the border with Turkey," said a military official working with Mr Belhadj. "Mustafa Abdul Jalil (the interim Libyan president) sent him there."

Another Telegraph article, "Libya's new rulers offer weapons to Syrian rebels," would admit

Syrian rebels held secret talks with Libya's new authorities on Friday, aiming to secure weapons and money for their insurgency against President Bashar al-Assad's regime, The Daily Telegraph has learned.

At the meeting, which was held in Istanbul and included Turkish officials, the Syrians requested "assistance" from the Libyan representatives and were offered arms, and potentially volunteers.
"There is something being planned to send weapons and even Libyan fighters to Syria," said a Libyan source, speaking on condition of anonymity. "There is a military intervention on the way. Within a few weeks you will see."

Later that month, some 600 Libyan terrorists would be reported to have entered Syria to begin combat operations and have been flooding into the country ever since.
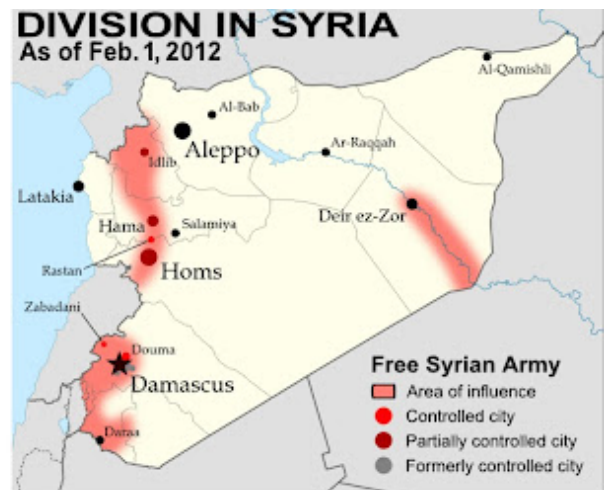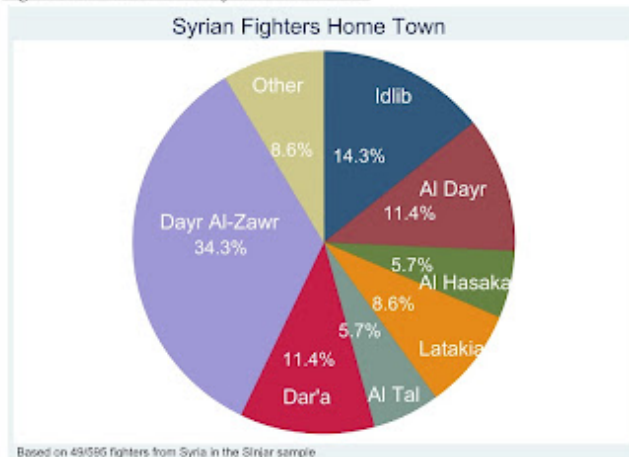

Image: (Left) West Point's Combating Terrorism Center's 2007 report, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq" also indicated which areas in Syria Al Qaeda fighters filtering into Iraq came from. The overwhelming majority of them came from Dayr Al-Zawr in Syria's southeast, Idlib in the north near the Turkish-Syrian border, and Dar'a in the south near the Jordanian-Syrian border. (Right) A map indicating the epicenters of violence in Syria indicate that the exact same hotbeds for Al Qaeda in 2007, now serve as the epicenters of so-called "pro-democracy fighters."

....

In Syria, the southeastern region near Dayr Al-Zawr on the Iraqi-Syrian border, the northwestern region of Idlib near the Turkish-Syrian border, and Dar'a in the south near the Jordanian-Syrian border, produced the majority of fighters found crossing over into Iraq, according to the 2007 West Point study.

These regions now serve as the epicenter for a similar Libyan-style uprising, with fighters disingenuously portrayed as "pro-democracy" "freedom fighters." These are also the locations receiving the majority of foreign fighters flowing in from other areas described in

the 2007 report, mainly from Saudi Arabia via Jordan, and from Libya, either directly, through Turkey, or through Egypt and/or Jordan.
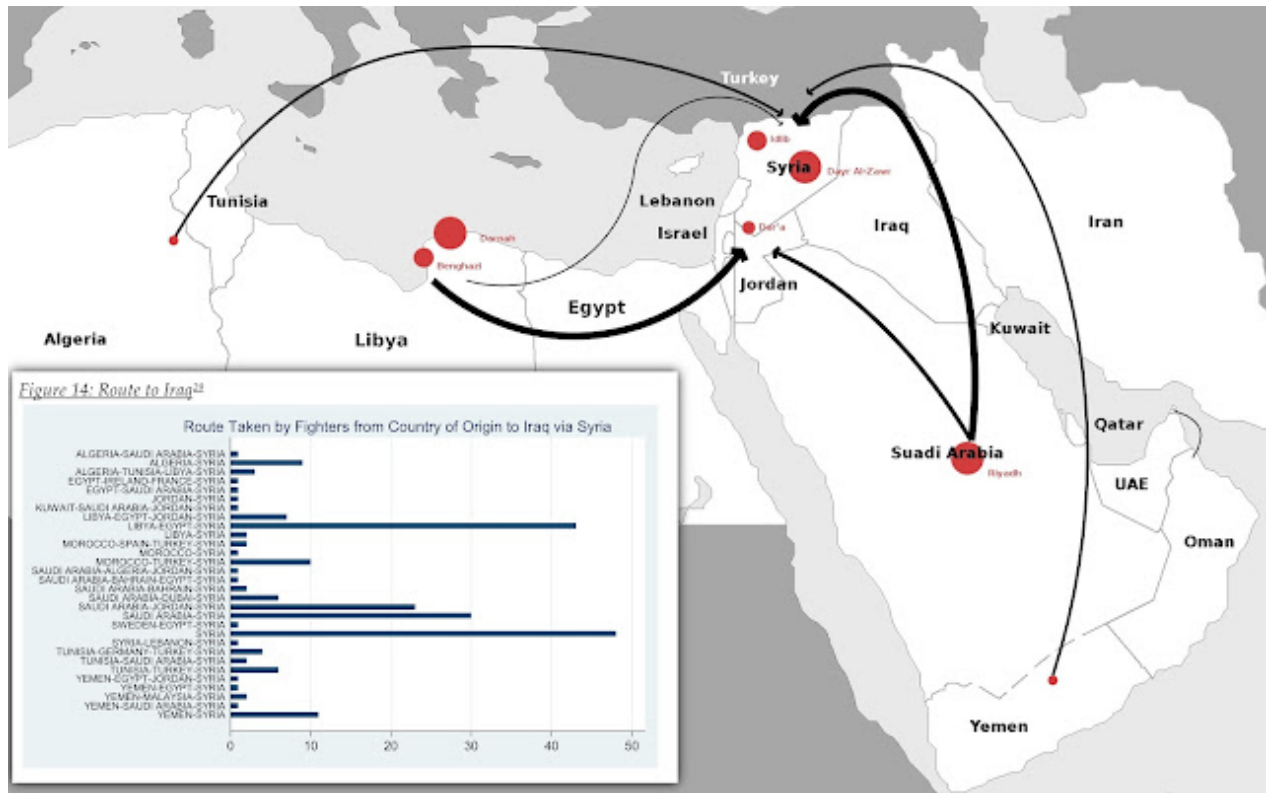

Image: The most prominent routes into Syria for foreign fighters is depicted, with the inset graph describing the most widely used routes by foreign fighters on their way to Iraq, as determined by West Point's 2007 Combating Terrorism Center report "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq" (page 20). These same networks are now being used, with the addition of a more prominent role for Turkey, to target Syria directly. (Click to enlarge)

….

The 2007 West Point report also describes the routes taken by the fighters entering Iraq. The most prominent routes by far were from Syria itself, the Libya-Egypt-Syria route, the Saudi Arabia-Syria route, and the Saudi Arabia-Jordan-Syria route. These routes are clearly being used yet again, only this time, instead of sowing sectarian violence and destabilization in Iraq, these foreign fighters, with NATO backing, are targeting Syria directly.

Subversion of Syria was Planned by the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia in 2007.

While many Western think-tank documents, including the joint US-Israeli "Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," recognized Syria as a threat to corporate-financier hegemony throughout the Middle East and beyond, it wasn't until at least 2007 that a fully articulated plan was developed for actually rolling back or eliminating Syria as a viable, independent nation-state.

The specific use of Al Qaeda-affiliated militant organizations, not just inside Syria, but from across the region was a key component of the plan, revealed by Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Seymour Hersh in his 2007 New Yorker report titled, ""The Redirection: Is the Administration's new policy benefiting our enemies in the war on terrorism?"

In the report it specifically stated:

> "To undermine Iran, which is predominantly Shiite, the Bush Administration has decided, in effect, to reconfigure its priorities in the Middle East. In Lebanon, the Administration has coöperated with Saudi Arabia's government, which is Sunni, in clandestine operations that are intended to weaken Hezbollah, the Shiite organization that is backed by Iran. The U.S. has also taken part in clandestine operations aimed at Iran and its ally Syria. A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda." –The Redirection, Seymour Hersh (2007)

Hersh's report would continue by stating:

> "the Saudi government, with Washington's approval, would provide funds and logistical aid to weaken the government of President Bashir Assad, of Syria. The Israelis believe that putting such pressure on the Assad government will make it more conciliatory and open to negotiations." –The Redirection, Seymour Hersh (2007)

The link between extremist groups and Saudi funding was also mentioned in the report, and reflects evidence presented by the West Point CTC indicating that the majority of fighters and funding behind the sectarian violence in Iraq, came from Saudi Arabia. Hersh's report specifically states:

> "…[Saudi Arabia's] Bandar and other Saudis have assured the White House that "they will keep a very close eye on the religious fundamentalists. Their message to us was 'We've created this movement, and we can control it.' It's not that we don't want the Salafis to throw bombs; it's who they throw them at—Hezbollah, Moqtada al-Sadr, Iran, and at the Syrians, if they continue to work with Hezbollah and Iran." –The Redirection, Seymour Hersh (2007)

Despite the narrative repeated by the Western press, it would appear that the US, Israel, and Saudi Arabia above all others, constitute the greatest purveyors of state-sponsored terrorism. Furthermore, it would appear that the most feared and notorious international terrorist organization, Al Qaeda, and its various affiliates including the Muslim Brotherhood political front, was in fact not only created by the US and Saudi Arabia in the mountains of Afghanistan in the 1980's, but has since then been perpetuated by the US and Saudi Arabia.

Nations accused of coddling Al Qaeda and sponsoring terrorism, including Iraq, Iran, Syria, and Qaddafi's Libya, have in fact fought the hardest against these extremist forces but have been consistently sabotaged by Western efforts portraying targeted militants as "pro-democracy protesters" as was done in Libya when Qaddafi's forces were at the gates of Benghazi. Similarly, this is being done in Syria today as the government of President Bashar al-Assad fights fiercely against these verified, documented terrorist networks, habitually referred to by the Western press as "freedom fighters" and "pro-democracy rebels."

The Syrian Government's Role in Supporting Al Qaeda in Iraq.

The Western press insists that the Syrian government constitutes a threat to international security. It has been implied on many occasions that the Syrian government has been, or still is supporting Al Qaeda. However, what does the West Point Combating Terrorism Center say about the Syrian government's role regarding the influx of foreign fighters into

neighboring Iraq during the West's occupation? Or the history of the Syrian government in relation to militant extremist groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood, the precursor of Al Qaeda itself?
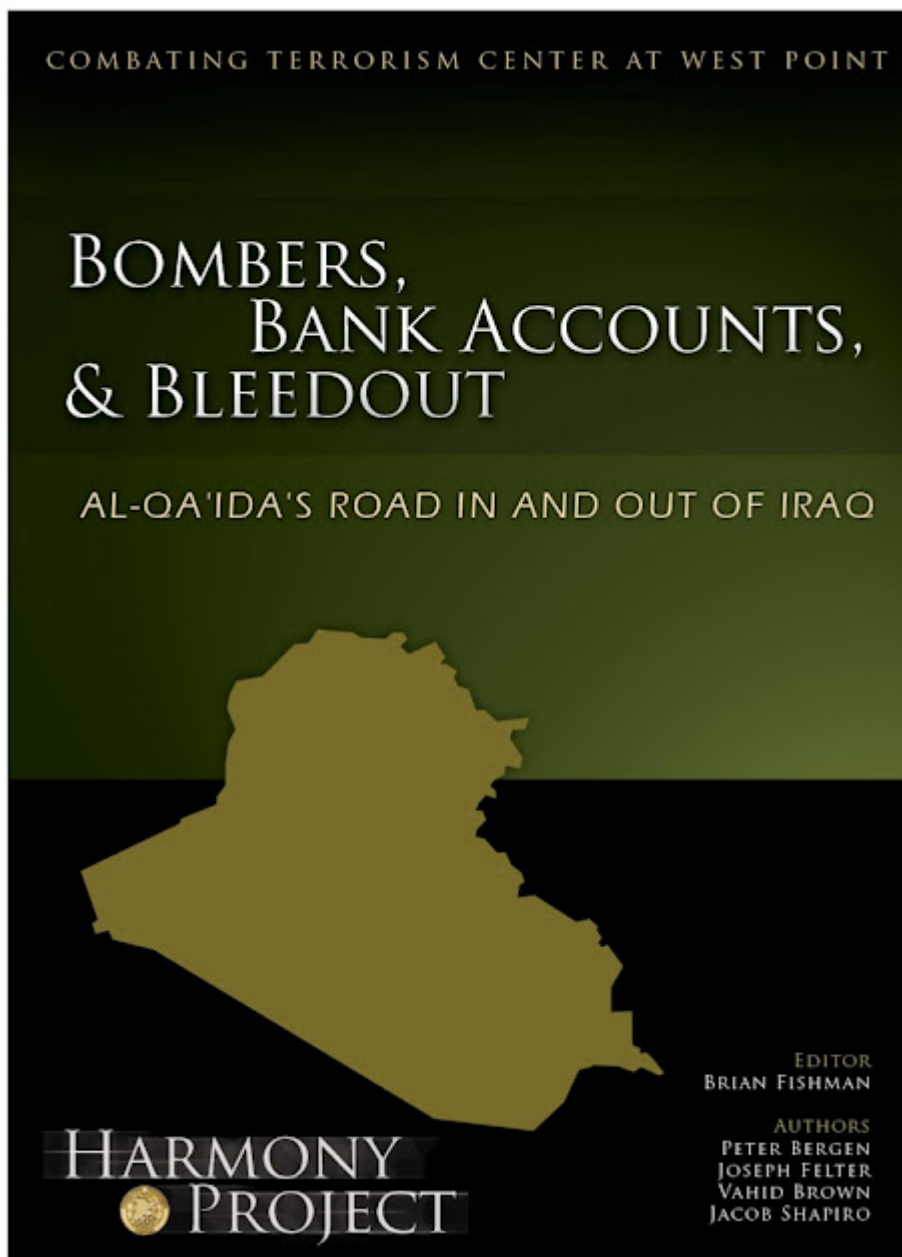

Image: West Point's second report on Al Qaeda's networks used to funnel foreign fighters into Iraq titled, "[Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq](#)," goes deeper in depth into who was really behind the influx of terrorists, how it was accomplished, and a range of options that might be applied to prevent it from happening. The report gives great insight into just how NATO and the Persian Gulf states are using Al Qaeda to now destabilize Syria.

....

In a second report, published in 2008 titled, "[Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq](#)," a rare and candid history is given regarding the genesis of Al Qaeda and the history it has had in Syria. It includes a revelation that contradicts the talking-points often repeated across Western media in regards to Syrian President Hafez Assad and his crackdown in the 1980's. The media attempts to imply that President Hafez

Assad was merely an autocrat and had brutalized civilians for simply rising up against him. The 2008 CTC report however, states (emphasis added):

> During the first half of the 1980s the role of foreign fighters in Afghanistan was negligible and was largely un-noticed by outside observers. The flow of volunteers from the Arab heartland countries was just a trickle in the early 1980s, though there were more significant links between the mujahidin and Central Asian Muslims—especially Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs. Individuals like the above-mentioned Abu'l-Walid were recruited in the early years via ad hoc outreach campaigns initiated from within Afghanistan, but by 1984, the resources being poured into the conflict by other countries—especially Saudi Arabia and the United States—had become much greater, as had the effectiveness and sophistication of the recruitment efforts. Only then did foreign observers begin to remark on the presence of outside volunteers.
>
> The repression of Islamist movements in the Middle East contributed to the acceleration of Arab fighters leaving for Afghanistan. One important process was the Syrian regime of Hafez Assad's brutal campaign against the Jihadi movement in Syria, led by the "Fighting Vanguard" (al-Tali'a al-Muqatila) of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. The crackdown initiated an exodus of Vanguard militants to neighboring Arab states. By 1984, large numbers of these men began making their way from exile in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Jordan toward southeastern Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. (page 24, "Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq," (2008)

It appears then that Hafez Assad's "brutality" was aimed at sectarian extremists – fanatics that would later form the foundation of Al Qaeda and serve as a force of violence and destabilization throughout the world, with, as mentioned by the West Point CTC itself, resources poured into them, especially from "Saudi Arabia and the United States."

The 2008 report reiterates the importance of Libya's LIFG in regards to the large numbers of fighters it sent to Iraq and its official merging with Al Qaeda, stating:

> Today, the LIFG is an important partner in al-Qa`ida's global coalition of Jihadi groups. The late Abu Layth al-Libi, LIFG's Emir, reinforced Benghazi and Darnah's importance to Libyan Jihadis in his November 2007 announcement that LIFG had joined al-Qa`ida, saying:
>
> "It is with the grace of God that we were hoisting the banner of Jihad against this apostate regime under the leadership of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which sacrificed the elite of its sons and commanders in combating this regime whose blood was spilled on the mountains of Darnah, the streets of Benghazi, the outskirts of Tripoli, the desert of Sabha, and the sands of the beach." (page 38-39, "Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq," (2008)

The report goes on to describe the manner in which these fighters eventually made it into Iraq, all traveling through Syria. The report reveals that it was "coordinators" working with extremist groups in Syria, opposed to the government, not the government itself that was recruiting and arranging transportation for fighters into Iraq. Throughout the report, measures put in place by the Syrian government in fact attempted to stop the flow of fighters through Syrian territory, but were simply ineffective due to the complicated demographics and economic conditions along border regions. The report states:

Syria can almost certainly do more to disrupt the traffic across the border. However, it is unrealistic to expect the regime to expend more energy, given the economic and internal political importance of the underground cross border trade to Syrian social and political leaders, and the inherent limits of the regime's ability to enforce a crackdown indefinitely. (page 98, "Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq," (2008)

Nowhere in the document is any evidence provided that the Syrian government actively facilitated Al Qaeda and the movement of extremist fighters through Syrian territory. Any help that might have been lent from the government would have come from characters like Nawaf Fares acting independently, whose loyalty was always questionable at best, and who eventually defected to these very extremist groups when fighters finally shifted their attention from Iraq to Syria in 2011.

It is clear that the Syrian government, for decades, has been fighting against sectarian extremism, militant terrorism, and more specifically the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Qaeda itself. What the Western press has attempted to portray as an autocratic regime brutalizing a civilian population simply aspiring for "democracy" and "freedom," is in reality a government desperately trying to protect its sovereignty and the vast majority of its population from the ravaging effects of sectarian extremism, previewed during the Iraq "civil war," and now fully realized within the borders of Syria itself.

It was perhaps the compromises made by Syria to placate a perceived "international consensus" in regards to "freedom" and "democracy" that gave militants the foothold they needed to trigger the violence now unfolding across Syria and beyond its borders. It is hoped that by documenting the evidence provided by West Point's Combating Terrorism Center, that this wave of terrorism can be better understood and therefore defeated. It is hoped that people both in the United States and in Syria can see what forces among themselves have contributed to the perpetuation of Al Qaeda and its use as a militant proxy, and purge these organizations and their ideology permanently from the body politic.
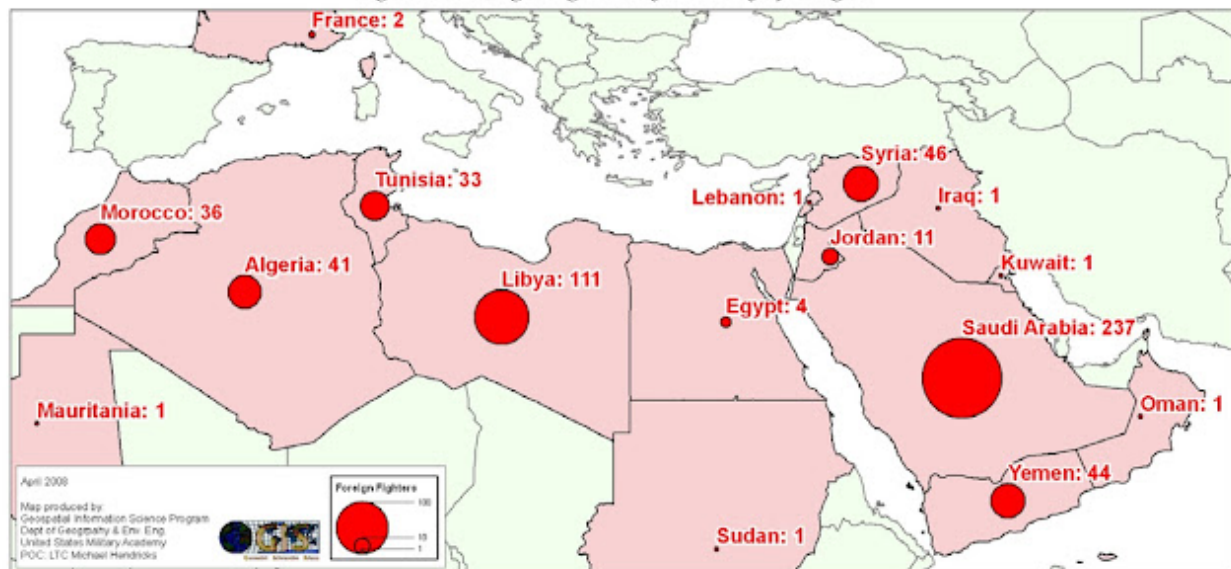

Figure 2: Foreign Fighters by Country of Origin

Image: From West Point's CTC report, "Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq," a map indicates the number of total fighters that served as the statistical basis for the center's analysis. It would appear that there are many other

potential nations that may yet suffer the fate of Libya and Syria within this network alone. A success in Syria for the West would validate this model for regime change, and surely be tried elsewhere.

....

By reading the tremendous body of work provided by the US Army's West Point Combating Terrorism Center's reports, "Al-Qa'ida's Foreign Fighters in Iraq" and "Bombers, Bank Accounts and Bleedout: al-Qa'ida's Road In and Out of Iraq," other nations at risk of potentially falling prey to a similar use of Al Qaeda as a proxy serving Western foreign policy, can begin making preparations and raising awareness regarding the truth behind this geopolitical tool.

The original source of this article is Land Destroyer
Copyright © Tony Cartalucci, Land Destroyer, 2012

Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page

Become a Member of Global Research

Articles by: Tony Cartalucci