

Sticking Point In Syria Truce: Washington's Support for Al Qaeda

By [Bill Van Auken](#)

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Testifying Tuesday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Secretary of State John Kerry faced intensely hostile questioning as he defended a Syrian "cessation of hostilities" reached with Moscow that is supposed to go into effect this weekend.

Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer of California suggested that the agreement might be little more than a "rope-a-dope" deal, while the committee's Republican chairman, Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee, warned that Russia would "continue to kill the folks that are our friends and allies."

Kerry responded by stressing that there was a "significant discussion taking place now about a Plan B," presumably entailing a major escalation of the US military intervention in Syria and a potential armed confrontation with Russia, should the truce deal fail to further Washington's aims.

The key sticking point in the US-Russian deal is precisely the status of those to whom Senator Corker referred as "the folks that are our friends and allies." He, like the Obama administration, the Pentagon, the CIA, and the entire political and media establishment, carefully avoided any precise identification of these "folks."

The dirty secret they are all doing their best to conceal is that Washington's most important "friend" and "ally" in the war for regime change in Syria has been, since its inception nearly five years ago, Al Qaeda. It is this criminal relationship that is at the heart of the difficulties in brokering any kind of negotiated halt to the grinding sectarian war that has killed more than a quarter of a million Syrians and turned 11 million more into homeless refugees.

The cessation of hostilities that is supposed to take place on Saturday specifically excludes both the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), a split-off from Al Qaeda, and the al-Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's designated Syrian franchise. The High Negotiations Committee, the Syrian "rebel" front cobbled together by the Saudi monarchy for the purpose of UN-sponsored negotiations, has rejected any ceasefire that fails to protect al-Nusra.

US intelligence analysts have warned that al-Nusra and the so-called "moderate" terrorists promoted by Washington are "intermingled." Brett McGurk, the Obama administration's envoy to the "coalition" participating in the US-led war in Iraq and Syria, told a White House press briefing Tuesday that the supposed moderates and the Al Qaeda group "are marbled together."

Behind such awkward formulations, the reality is that Al Qaeda and related groups have long constituted the principal proxy ground forces utilized by US imperialism and its allies in the brutal war to topple the government of President Bashar al-Assad. They have served as a mercenary army, which has been massively funded and has received an avalanche of arms from the US and its principal regional allies, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Qatar. What is commonly referred to as the Syrian civil war is nothing less than a massive CIA regime-change operation.

This bloody intervention in Syria exposes as a fraud the entire “war on terror,” which has served as the linchpin for the conduct of war abroad and the buildup of state repression at home for nearly 15 years, under both the Bush and Obama administrations. The US is not involved in some existential struggle against terrorism in general and Al Qaeda in particular. Rather, it is employing Al Qaeda killers to do its dirty work in the struggle to establish US hegemony in the Middle East.

The latest incarnation of this supposed struggle, the campaign against ISIS, has, within the space of less than five months, been exposed as a phony war. Russia’s intervention, with far fewer military resources than can be brought to bear by the Pentagon, has reversed the tide of battle in Syria, cut off routes used by ISIS to receive arms and supplies, and destroyed its lucrative oil business with Turkey. Washington had failed to prosecute any such campaign because ISIS served as an instrument of US policy in the war to overthrow Assad and was therefore effectively protected.

A revealing report in the *Wall Street Journal* Wednesday quoted senior Obama administration officials who indicated increasing “discord” between the Pentagon, the CIA and the State Department over the course of the Syrian regime-change operation. The CIA, the *Journal* reported, is “infuriated” because Russian airstrikes “have aggressively targeted relatively moderate rebels [i.e., the al-Nusra Front and its allies] it has backed with military supplies, including antitank missiles.”

The article suggests that there are differences within the US state apparatus over whether to supply these same “rebels” with Manpads, advanced portable anti-aircraft weapons, that could bring down Russian jets, potentially triggering a wider war pitting the US against Russia. The CIA, at the same time, is warning that if action isn’t taken to defend the Islamist militias, Saudi Arabia or Turkey could “decide to break ranks with Washington and send large numbers of Manpads into northern Syria to shoot down Russian bombers.” In other words, the incredibly reckless policy pursued by Washington may yet unleash a conflict that could end in a nuclear exchange.

Al Qaeda and related groups constitute a kind of Frankenstein’s monster created and cultivated by Washington as an instrument of imperialist intervention and counterrevolution. As is well known, Al Qaeda itself was born as a creature of the CIA, together with Saudi and Pakistani intelligence, during the US-instigated war against the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan in the 1980s. It served then, as it does now in Syria, as an agency for funneling money, arms and foreign Islamist fighters to prosecute Washington’s proxy wars.

Washington’s promotion of reactionary jihadist currents goes back much further—to the 1950s and the US attempts to utilize these forces as a means of combating Arab nationalism and the influence of socialism, which were both deemed mortal threats to the domination of the Middle East by the American oil corporations.

Ever since, the relations between the American intelligence agencies and Al Qaeda and similar jihadist outfits have remained intimate. This is what explains why, in virtually every terrorist incident, from 9/11 to the Boston Marathon bombing and beyond, the perpetrators were well known to US agencies and allowed to travel freely in and out of the country with no questions asked.

Today, US imperialism is more heavily invested than ever in these forces, and not only in the Middle East, where they have been employed to bring down the government of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and in the attempt to do the same to Assad in Syria.

Among the foreign fighters who poured into Syria, one of the largest contingents is made up of Chechens and other Islamists from Russia's North Caucasus region. China has reported that significant numbers from its Uighur Muslim minority in the western Xinjiang region have gone there to join ISIS. These forces are being trained in the Syrian bloodbath in preparation for their utilization in far more dangerous imperialist operations aimed at subjugating and dismembering Russia and China.

Having organized, armed and funded such organizations, the US military and intelligence apparatus has no doubt made them various pledges of support, which are now being called into question by a Syrian truce deal that, in the final analysis, has been forced upon Washington by Russia's intervention. This is what accounts for the explosive anger within both official US circles and the Al Qaeda-dominated Syrian rebel fronts over the deal reached by Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

There is an obvious danger that the Islamist outfits will devise their own "Plan B" involving retribution against their imperialist patrons for what they see as a betrayal. This is a familiar pattern, seen in the evolution of those around Osama bin Laden who were abandoned after the Soviets withdrew their troops from Afghanistan. The ultimate result was the deaths of nearly 3,000 Americans on September 11, 2001.

The criminal and reckless actions Washington is carrying out in Syria and elsewhere pose the imminent threat of spawning an even more deadly blowback operation by the "moderate" terrorists that the CIA has armed and supported.

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Articles by: [Bill Van Auken](#)

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