

The Network of Illicit Arms Shipments to Syrian Terrorists: US and Allies including Israel and Saudi Arabia Arming Terrorist Proxies

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The recent revelations by Edward Snowden the former national security agency whistleblower about the role of Saudi Arabia in the ongoing war in Syria has raised fresh questions about role of Saudi Arabia and others in arming the various terrorist factions in Syria.

According to the documents released by Snowden the Saudis were arming their terrorist proxies in Syria is early as March 2013. The documents also disclose that the National Security Agency of United States was fully aware of the actions of the Saudis and the terrorist proxies, and raised no objections because the United States and Saudi Arabia had a common goal of regime change in Syria. Saudi Arabia and other supporters of the terrorist proxies have continued to provide vast financial and military aid to the terrorist groups. This information needs to be put alongside other recent revelations about the supply of armaments to the terrorist groups.

A series of investigative reports by the Bulgarian Investigating Reporting Network (BIRN) has disclosed a whole network of illicit arms shipments to the Syrian terrorists by United States and its allies. This has continued notwithstanding that President Trump ordered the cessation of the arms supplies in July 2017. For example the Croatian island of Krk has been used as recently as September 2017 for United States arms shipments to the Middle East.

The upsurge in the supply of arms by alternative routes such as from Croatia and Azerbaijan follows the concern of the German government that the Americans had been using their German military bases for the purposes of supplying arms to the terrorists.

The German concern appears to have been founded on two fundamental bases. The first of these is that Germany is bound by the 2008 Common Position on arms exports that form part of European Union law. Member States of European Union are required to take into account eight separate criteria before approving shipments of arms from their territory to 3rd parties. Those criteria include whether or not the recipient country respect human rights and also the preservation of regional peace, security and stability.

It could not be said that the shipment of arms to Syria and in particular the supply of those arms to sundry terrorist groups that are supportive of US geopolitical goals meets the requirement of respecting human rights, much less contributing to regional peace, security and stability.

The hypocrisy, which is inherent in the European Union's stance, may be seen from the fact

that the European Union's arms embargo on Syria was lifted in May 2013. The embargo was lifted because of pressure from France and the United Kingdom to allow arms supplies from their countries to reach the Syrian opposition groups.

The second factor, which is of relevance in this context, is the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty of 2014, which came into force on 24 December 2014. Article 6 of the Arms Trade Treaty prohibits the supply of arms by a country where they were aware or should normally have been aware that those arms would be used in attacks against civilians or in the commission of war crimes.

Article 11 of the treaty covers the situation where arms are sent to one location and diverted to a third party. Member countries to the treaty are required to take steps to prevent this from happening. This is clearly not being done.

Among the countries that have ratified the Arms Trade Treaty are Australia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, and the United Kingdom. All these countries have been complicit in the supply of arms and ammunition to, among others, Saudi Arabia and Israel. This is especially problematic because the United States, Saudi Arabia and Israel are not parties to the treaty. All three countries have been significant suppliers of arguments to terrorist groups operating in Syria and elsewhere. The latest revelations from Mr Snowden confirm what had been widely known or suspected for a considerable period of time.

The Saudi backed terrorist group Jaysh Al-Islam has carried out summary executions of civilians, deployed chemical weapons for attacks upon civilians and has also used civilians as human shields. Again this is well documented but has not stopped the United States and Saudi Arabia from supplying arms to this and similar groups.

The fact is that these arms shipments are continuing notwithstanding President Trump's order of July 2017. The supply of such armaments under the code name of Operation Sycamore raises serious questions about the extent to which Trump is actually in control of his military and the CIA.

The principal organisers of this arm trade appear to be both the CIA and the Special Operations Command. Both groups are known to operate independently of effective control. Prior to the latest revelations by the BIRN there had been earlier reports by the same organisations of the use of Silk Airways, a company based in Azerbaijan, for distributing arms to terrorist groups using this civilian airline. This is also contrary to international aviation agreements, which prohibit the use of civilian airlines for the shipment of military equipment.

Australia, which is a signatory to the Arms Trade Treaty, appears to be untroubled by the destination of its arms exports, or the uses to which those arms might be put. In July of this year the defence industry Minister Christopher Pyne expressed his desire that Australia should become a much greater exporter of armaments. He was quoted as saying that the exports would be used to cement relationships with countries in volatile regions such as the Middle East. He also said that such exports could be used to bolster military ties with key States such as the United Arab Emirates with whom Australia shared an interest in both the fight against Islamic State and "balancing Iran's growing power in the region."

Mr Pyne's statement would seem to fall foul of both article 6 and article 11 of the Arms Trade Treaty in that he knows or ought to know that the end user of those arms exports are

terrorist groups. Far from fighting Islamic State the United Arab Emirates has long been named as one of its principal supporters.

It is also difficult to understand why Mr Pyne should wish to “balance Iran’s growing power in the region” when it is obvious that Iran’s intervention in both Iraq and Syria, at the invitation of the legitimate sovereign governments of both of those countries, has been a major factor in the increasingly successful battle against IS and similar terrorist groups. The groups whose Mr Pyne’s allies are arming not only sought to undermine the governments of those two countries, but have also been the source of untold death, destruction, and human misery.

The revelations of the documents released by Mr Snowden and the various reports relating to the illegal shipment of arms to terrorist groups have been given little or no coverage in the Australian mainstream media. This reflects a general reluctance by the mainstream media to accurately describe what is happening in Iraq and Syria, and in particular the role played by the various terrorist groups and the support they receive by countries allied to Australia, in particular Saudi Arabia and the United States.

The unequal media treatment accorded to the various parties in Syria can be illustrated by the differential analysis applied to the liberation of Aleppo and Raqqa. In the former case the terrorists were removed from Aleppo by the combined operations of the Syrian Army and their Russian, Iranian, and Hezbollah allies. Civilian casualties were invariably described in terms of a wanton disregard as to human life by the Syrian and Russian forces.

The battle against Isis forces in Raqqa was largely conducted by the US and it’s so-called “coalition” allies including Australia, as was the earlier and very similar destructive operation in Mosul. Raqqa has been almost totally destroyed. Accurate comparisons have been drawn with the fate of both Dresden and Berlin at the conclusion of World War II. The death toll for civilians has been in the thousands. Accurate numbers cannot be ascertained until the rubble has been cleared. The scale of the destruction and the death toll has barely been reported in the mainstream media.

The most likely explanation for this is that to tell the truth about the pattern of arms supplies to terrorists, and the illegal intervention by the US and it’s “coalition” allies in Syria, such as Australia, falls outside the preferred narrative which is to constantly demonise Syria, Russia and Iran irrespective of the actual evidence.

In Australia’s case, because unlike the United States, Israel and Saudi Arabia, it is a signatory to the United Nations Arms Treaty it therefore has an additional responsibility in respect of the uses to which arms supplied to the terrorists are put. That would require inter alia, criticism of United States. The history of the last 70 years shows that adopting an independent and principled stand on such matters is more than can reasonably be expected of successive Australian government.

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