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CIA Boosts Support for Iraqi Militias

By John Glaser

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The White House has directed the CIA to increase its cooperation and backing of Iraqi state militias to fight al-Qaeda affiliates there and cut off the flow of fighters pouring into Syria.



According to US intelligence, the Islamic militant group al-Qaeda in Iraq has for years been sending fighters over the border into Syria's civil war in an attempt to overthrow the regime of Bashar al-Assad. In Syria, the offshoot goes by the name of Jabhat al-Nusra, a group the State Department designated a terrorist organization last year.

To stem the flow of these fighters into Syria, the Obama administration has been employing the CIA to work with Iraq's Counter-Terrorism Service, or CTS, a state militia bred and trained by the US prior to the withdrawal and which now answers directly to Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

The White House directed the CIA to support CTS in a series of secret orders from 2011 to late 2012, according to the *Wall Street Journal*.

Most Americans have been led to believe that all US forces besides those guarding the massive American Embassy in Iraq have been withdrawn since the end of last year.

In reality, US Special Operations Forces as well as the CIA have been providing this support to these elite Iraqi forces that report directly to the increasingly authoritarian Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. They have essentially been used as a secret police force for Maliki to attack, detain, and torture his political opponents and crack down harshly on public dissent.

While the newly revealed CIA operations appear to be a way to undercut the foreign terrorist elements of the Syrian rebel opposition, the approach is riddled with potential complications.

For one thing, al-Qaeda in Iraq is itself an outgrowth of the US invasion and occupation. One particularly conspicuous consequence of this has been the overflow of terrorist groups into Syria's unstable civil war. Further meddling on the side of Iraq's unscrupulous security forces will likely cause similar unforeseen blowback in the future.