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How the US Supports Regimes That Support Terrorism



Obama meeting with the Kuwaiti Emir, Shaikh Sabah

By John Glaser

April 28, 2014

Washington has an advanced relationship with Kuwait, the small Persian Gulf country out of which the U.S. pushed invading Iraqi forces in the 1991 Gulf War. U.S. troops are stationed in Kuwait on a more or less permanent basis, Kuwait receives considerable military assistance and training from the U.S., and in return, Kuwait is “the leading source of funding for al-Qaeda-linked terrorists fighting in Syria’s civil war,” according to the *Washington Post*.

Like most of Washington’s military and economic relationships with the Arab Gulf states, overriding geopolitical goals like maintaining U.S. hegemony and containing Iran outweigh

concerns about Kuwait's support for the kind of Islamic jihadists that have allegedly propelled the bulk of post-9/11 foreign policy. Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups are the enemies of the U.S., Washington officials remind us constantly, and they are persistently plotting to kill Americans. Oh, and please ignore the fact that our Middle East allies send them money and weapons.

The U.S. relationship with Kuwait consists of "mutual discussions in the event of a crisis; joint military exercises; U.S. evaluation of, advice to, and training of Kuwaiti forces; U.S. arms sales; prepositioning of U.S. military equipment; and U.S. access to a range of Kuwaiti facilities," according to a recent Congressional Research Service report (CRS). In 2004, "the Bush Administration designated Kuwait as a 'major non-NATO ally (MNNA),'" a designation that "opens Kuwait to buy the same U.S. equipment that is sold to U.S. allies in NATO."

"During 2003-2011," according to CRS, "there were an average of 25,000 U.S. troops based in Kuwaiti facilities, not including those rotating into Iraq at a given time." In 2012, then Defense Secretary Leon Panetta noted, "that there were about 13,500 U.S. troops in Kuwait."

One would think it would be implicit in the U.S.-Kuwaiti relationship that Kuwait, as the recipient of all kinds of U.S. aid, privileges, and benefits, would refrain from supporting terrorist groups characterized as America's greatest enemies by the highest Washington officials. And one would be wrong.

The *Washington Post*:

The amount of money that has flowed from Kuwaiti individuals and through organized charities to Syrian rebel groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra totals in the hundreds of millions of dollars, according to experts whose estimates are endorsed by the Treasury Department.

...Last month, the [Obama] administration decided to go public with its concerns. In a remarkably undiplomatic statement that officials said had been cleared at senior levels, Treasury Undersecretary David S. Cohen called Kuwait "the epicenter of fundraising for terrorist groups in Syria."

Kuwait is not unique. Saudi Arabia, the cornerstone of U.S. national security policy in the Middle East, has a long and duplicitous history of harboring Islamic extremists of the al-Qaeda, jihadist type. Most recently, the Saudis have led the charge in aiding terrorist groups fighting in Syria. It is a similar story for Qatar.

In Yemen, al-Qaeda groups have long been tolerated and even cultivated. There are "many Yemenis who have come to suspect that their government is not fighting, but helping cultivate, jihadi activity in their country," *Foreign Policy* has reported. Abdulghani al-Iryani, a Yemeni political analyst, has said as much about the former Saleh regime and he told *Foreign Policy* that the collaboration between the new U.S.-supported Yemeni regime and al-Qaeda militants continues. "At all levels of Yemen's political elite you have collusion and cooperation with militants and terrorists," he said.

The Pakistani government has intricate ties to jihadist groups and even provided Osama bin Laden with safe haven for years after 9/11. Over the past six years though, U.S. taxpayers have sent them more than \$10 billion dollars.

U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East has always been about maintaining dominance over the region, keeping the governments relatively weak and dependent (and undemocratic), and ensuring access to and control over the vast oil and gas resources of the region. The terrorist backlash against this imperialistic and often violent foreign policy is mostly a distraction for U.S. strategists, despite the fact that it became the primary ideological justification for increased U.S. interventionism in the region.

At this point, U.S. policy is perpetuating a dangerous contradiction. Strategists would like to think that this imperialism can be implemented without the blowback of violent extremists and without certain U.S. “allies” directly supporting these terrorists. But it, apparently, cannot be done. Don’t hold your breath for a change in policy to relieve this cognitive dissonance.