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Washington's Alliance With Syrian Jihadists

By Justin Raimondo

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Remember when President Obama decided it was time to bomb Syria and was only stopped by a wave of widespread grassroots protest? After announcing his intent to bomb, Obama decided to seek congressional approval and go through the motions of asking permission – although reserving the right to do what he wanted in any event – perhaps because he realized the move would not be popular. And he was right about that: as congressional switchboards were overloaded with calls from outraged, war-weary citizens, one-by-one those members of Congress who were either on the fence or inclined to go along with the War Party changed their minds and defected to the Peace Camp. A broad coalition of anti-interventionist groups, including Antiwar.com, was involved in the campaign against this new folly, and its success was a wonderful sight to behold – but that wasn't the end of the story.

In a little-noticed move, the President has now authorized air strikes over Syria in support of Syrian rebels, as Bloomberg News reports:

“President Barack Obama has authorized the use of air power to defend U.S.-trained Syrian rebels if they come under attack from terrorist groups or the Assad regime, deepening the U.S. role against Islamic State forces in Syria.

“The broader US rules of engagement, approved July 31, came after rebels fighting Islamic State were attacked by the al-Nusrah Front, an al-Qaeda offshoot, in northern Syria, a US

defense official said. The US provided close air support to protect the rebels and quash the attack, he said.

“While air strikes remain limited to Islamic State targets for offensive operations, they can now be used to defend US allies on the ground in Syria, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss private deliberations.”

Bit by bit the US sneaks into Syria, first under the pretext of fighting ISIS and then the parameters are widened to include air support to the 64 rebels we’ve “vetted” and trained. Oh wait – they’re not quite so numerous anymore, since Al Nusra took 10 or so of them captive in the Friday attack – and then repeated the same stunt last [Monday] night: so they must be down to around 40.

The saga of the US-supported rebels is a pathetic story indeed: at first, Washington was supporting the so-called Free Syrian Army, a group of alleged “moderate” Islamist fighters determined to overthrow the secular dictatorship of Ba’athist President Bashar al-Assad. However, their “moderate” act became less credible when entire battalions began to defect to the Al Nusra Front – Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate – and the self-proclaimed “Islamic State,” otherwise known as ISIS.

So it was back to the drawing board for the War Party, and a new scheme was hatched: the plan was to “vet” and train at least a few thousand “moderate” jihadists to take down Assad and fight ISIS, but, as Defense Secretary Ashton Carter lamely explained to an apoplectic John McCain at a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing:

“‘This number is much smaller than we hoped for at this point,’ Carter told the Senate Armed Services Committee on July 7, attributing the delay to U.S. screening standards for the Syrian fighters.”

Yes, those screening standards can be a real pain – especially when there is no way to ensure that the “moderate” rebels who get our Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval one day aren’t going to turn into cannibalistic monsters with a penchant for beheading people in very short order.

As if to underscore the utter cluelessness of US policymakers, the Al Nusra attack on our guys – dubbed “Division 30,” for some reason – came as a complete surprise to those geniuses in Washington. The *New York Times* reports:

“While American military trainers had gone to great lengths to protect the initial group of trainees from attacks by Islamic State or Syrian Army forces, they did not anticipate an assault from the Nusra Front. In fact, officials said on Friday, they expected the Nusra Front to welcome Division 30 as an ally in its fight against the Islamic State.”

“This wasn’t supposed to happen like this,” said one “former official.”

What a joke these people are.

Yet the humor here is dark. Because what does it say about our Syria “strategy” that we expected the Nusra Front – the same folks who brought down the World Trade Center and attacked the Pentagon on 9/11 – to “welcome” American agents with open arms?

Division 30 had a response to the Al Nusra attack: it issued a statement calling on the anti-Assad forces to “‘stand firm and proactively’ against what they called an unprovoked attack, and asked ‘the brothers in the Nusra Front’ to ‘stop the bloodshed and preserve the unity.’”

This is where our tax dollars and military aid is going: to an alliance with Al Qaeda in Syria – one that is contemptuously rejected by Al Qaeda. This is where the “war on terrorism” has ended up: we are now cuddling up to the very same people who struck the first blow in that war on September 11, 2001.

Could our policy be any crazier?

What is our real goal in Syria? Why are we involved in a three-way civil war that has killed hundreds of thousands of people and displaced many more? Why are we overthrowing secular dictators and replacing them with Islamist crazies, as in Libya?

And, last but hardly least: who will put a stop to this madness?