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U.S. Military Aid to Al Qaeda: Routine Shipments of Weapons to Syrian “Freedom Fighters”

By Prof Michel Chossudovsky
October 02, 2016

According to Jane’s Defence Weekly, quoting documents released by the U.S. Government’s Federal Business Opportunities (FBO) website, the US –as part of its counterterrorism campaign– has provided Syrian rebels [aka moderate Al Qaeda] with large amounts of weapons and ammunition.

The US and its allies (including Turkey and Saudi Arabia) have relied on shipments of Soviet style light weaponry produced in Eastern Europe, the Balkans and China, etc.

While the US relies on its Middle East allies to undertake shady transactions in a buoyant market for light weapons, a significant part of these weapons shipments is nonetheless directly commissioned by the US government.

Background: U.S. Weapons Supply Routes “Via Third Countries”

Although the bulk of the weapons and ammunition supplied to the Syrian rebels (including the FSA, Al Qaeda affiliated entities and ISIS-Daesh) are channelled by Turkey and Saudi Arabia,

the US is also involved in the routine delivery (from third countries) of light weapons to the rebels including anti-tank and rocket launchers.

America's weapons shipments to Syria's rebels are commissioned by the Pentagon through several intermediaries via a private shipping company from the Black Sea port city of Constanta. None of these weapons under the US military aid program are "Made in the USA".

Washington's decision not to send US made weaponry to the rebels is meant to uphold the camouflage. No doubt, what Washington wants is to ensure that US and Western made weapons are not found in the hands of the terrorists. As we recall, the White House narrative at the outset was: "humanitarian aid" to the rebels, coupled with "some military gear...[but no weapons]" (BBC, October 10, 2015)

US military aid to the rebels is routine and ongoing. According to Jane's Defense Review, the U.S. "is providing [the weapons] to Syrian rebel groups as part of a programme that continues despite the widely respected ceasefire in that country."

According to Jane, the shipments of weapons on behalf of the US is entrusted to private shipping companies :

"The FBO has released two solicitations in recent months [early 2015] looking for shipping companies to transport explosive material from Eastern Europe to the Jordanian port of Aqaba on behalf of the US Navy's Military Sealift Command." (Jane.com April 2016)

The shipments of weapons purchased and funded by the US are carefully coordinated, with deliveries to rebels in the North and South of Syria respectively. The weapons are shipped out of the Romanian Black Sea port of Constanta (December 2015):

1) First, to the Turkish Eastern Mediterranean **facility of Agalar-Limani** near Tasucu in support of rebels in Northern Syria, to be smuggled into Syria with the support of the Turkish authorities. (half the shipment unloaded)

2) The remainder of the shipment to the Jordanian Red Sea **port of Aqaba** (for rebels in Southern Syria) via the Suez canal. From Aqaba, the weapons would be smuggled into Syria through the Southern Syria-Jordanian border.

According to Jane, the cargo included light weaponry including AK-47 rifles, PKM general-purpose machine guns, DShK heavy machine guns, RPG-7 rocket launchers, and 9K111M Faktoria anti-tank guided weapon (ATGW) systems. It is worth noting that a large share of the RPG rocket launchers were slated for delivery to Northern Syria (see table below).

Also of significance, the Black Sea route to Syria has also been used to ship Ukrainian weapons to Al Qaeda and ISIS Daesh.

The world is witnessing yet another arms scandal unfold, after Syrian forces seized a Daesh supply of Ukrainian-made explosives and armor plates used by the terrorists to reinforce their vehicles.

Sputnik, June 5, 2016

994 Tons of Weapons in a Single shipment, Courtesy of Uncle Sam

The following table provides information on the breakdown of the weapons shipment for December 2015 documented by Jane Defense Weekly.

Bear in mind the numbers pertain to a single shipment in December 2015, expressed in kilos (kg).

The amounts are substantial:

The 7.62 x 39 mm refers to ammunition for an AK47. Namely the shipment of 134 tons of ammunition.

The PG 7 VM (2 kg) and PV7 VT (3.3 kg) are anti-tank grenades (which suggests that more than 25,000 PG 7VM units were included in the shipment, and more than 60,000 PG 7VT.)

The total shipment to Aqaba and Angalar is of the order of **994 tons of “humanitarian” R2P light weapons for the “Moderates” in Syria. (in a single shipment out of Romania)**



PG 7VM Anti-tank

Simplified packing list for December 2015 arms shipment

Type	Weight (kg)		
	Aqaba	Agalar	Total
7.62x39 mm	85,190	48,998	134,188
7.62x54 mm	58,752	8,652	67,404
12.7 mm	81,468.40	36,713	118,181
14.5 mm	196,233.76	173,447	369,681
82 mm	53,885.34		53,885
PG-7VM	0.00	68,600	68,600
PG-7VT	36,795	88,224.00	125,019
9M111M	13,540	8,153	21,693
AK-47 & DShK*	12,250		12,250
AK-47 & PKM*		6,540	6,540
PKM	6,340		6,340
DShK & RPG-7*		3,585	3,585
RPG-7	4,120		4,120
Faktoria launchers	2,421.60	298	2,720
Total	550,996	443,210	994,206

* The packing list merged some categories

Source Jane's Defense Weekly

This trade in light weapons is transacted through private companies on contract to the US government's Federal Business Opportunities (FBO), acting on behalf of the US Navy MSC:

- 1) The Pentagon instructs the US Navy MSC with details and specifications of the light weapons to be purchased and shipped to Syria's "freedom fighters" via Turkey and Jordan. The ports of delivery are specified. The final destination of the weapons is not mentioned.
- 2) The Navy's MSC places the order with the FBO.
- 3) The FBO in turn transacts with private companies for the procurement and shipping of the weapons and "explosive materials" out of Constanta, Romania.

According to Jane's report: "The FBO has released two solicitations in recent months looking for shipping companies to transport explosive material from Eastern Europe to the Jordanian port of Aqaba **on behalf of the US Navy's Military Sealift Command.**" (emphasis added)



A still from a video released by the Syrian rebel group Jaish al-Izzah on 16 December 2015 shows one of its fighters preparing to fire an ATGW that could be either a 9K111 Fagot or a 9K111M Faktoria, the two being externally identical. Jaish al-Izzah also uses US-made TOW ATGWs. Source: Jane Defence Weekly

Released on 3 November 2015, the first solicitation sought a contractor to ship 81 containers of cargo that included explosive material from Constanta in Romania to Aqaba.

The solicitation was subsequently updated with a detailed packing list that showed the cargo had a total weight of 994 tonnes, a little under half of which was to be unloaded at Agalar, a military pier near the Turkish town of Tasucu, the other half at Aqaba. (Jane's op cit)

The US Navy's Military Sealift Command's (MSC) mission is to "Operate the ships which sustain our warfighting forces and deliver specialized maritime services in support of national security objectives in peace and war." (MSC mission)

Weapons Shipments by America's Allies in the Middle East

The Jane Defence Weekly report pertains to shipments on behalf of the Pentagon through a third country. It does address the broader and much larger flow of military equipment and weaponry to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State, commissioned by America's allies in the Middle East. These light weapons are also purchased from third countries (i.e. Eastern Europe, Balkans).

According to Deutsche Welle, exports of weapons from third countries (eg. Romania) to Syria are also dispatched by air via Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey and the UAE: "...the munitions, including Kalashnikov AK-47 assault rifles, machine guns, grenades as well as anti-tank guns, **are initially off-loaded in Saudi airbases and ports before smugglers dispatch them to Syrian militants.**" (quoted by Press TV, August 8, 2016, emphasis added)

"International norms governing the control of exports of military technology and equipment are brazenly flouted, the report said, and a considerable amount of munitions exported from Bulgaria

to the aforementioned countries only bear the sign “unknown consignment.”

Such weapons have previously ended up in the hands of such terrorist groups as Daesh, which Saudi Arabia is widely believed to be supporting.

Earlier reports had already exposed that arms were purportedly being trucked into Syria under Turkish military escort, and transferred to militant leaders at prearranged rendezvous.” (Press TV, August 8, 2016)