

Obama and Al Qaeda

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NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels Tuesday approved Turkey's request for the deployment of Patriot missile batteries and hundreds of US and other foreign troops on the country's border with Syria. The deployment will mark a qualitative escalation of the US-backed war for regime-change in Syria, paving the way, much as in Libya last year, for a direct US-NATO intervention.

Turkey, which has played a leading role in funneling arms, money, foreign fighters and logistical assistance to the so-called "rebels" seeking to overthrow the government of President Bashar al-Assad, justified its request by claiming it was threatened with the use by the Syrian regime of surface-to-surface missiles armed with chemical weapons.

In a clearly coordinated campaign, Turkey's unsubstantiated claim of a chemical weapons threat from Syria was amplified by a flurry of allegations by the US government and major American media outlets. The *New York Times* and CNN cited unspecified "intelligence" about the supposed movement of Syrian chemical weapons components. This was combined with threats from President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who spoke of Syria approaching a "red line" that would result in direct American military intervention.

If the American public is experiencing an unsettling feeling of *deja vu*, it is for good reason. For the second time in a decade, Washington is threatening to launch an unprovoked war in the Middle East on the grounds of phony "intelligence" concerning "weapons of mass destruction."

There is, however, one highly significant difference between how this narrative is being laid out by the Obama administration and the way it was presented under George W. Bush. The lies used to justify the war against Iraq included claims not only about non-existent Iraqi WMD, but also about a supposed threat

that these weapons would be placed in the hands of Al Qaeda terrorists, resulting in new attacks on the scale of 9/11. The Obama administration makes no mention of any such Al Qaeda threat.

What makes this so extraordinary is that, while the allegations of an Al Qaeda presence in Iraq were a complete fabrication, it has become clear that Al Qaeda-connected groups and foreign fighters are playing a decisive role in the Syrian events.

David Ignatius, the *Washington Post* foreign policy columnist, wrote Monday that Jabhat al-Nusra, an Islamist militia with ties to Al Qaeda, now has as many as 10,000 fighters on the ground in Syria and constitutes "the most aggressive and successful arm of the rebel force."

Similarly, David Enders of McClatchy Newspapers, reporting from Syria, wrote that Jabhat al-Nusra "has become essential to the frontline operations of rebels fighting to topple Assad."

"Not only does the group still conduct suicide bombings that have killed hundreds, but they've proved to be critical to the rebels' military advance," Enders continued. "In battle after battle across the country, Nusra and similar groups do the heaviest frontline fighting."

These Al Qaeda-connected forces have in recent weeks overrun Syrian military bases, executing unarmed conscript soldiers taken prisoner. The danger that they could gain access to chemical weapons is very real.

If the Obama administration is silent on this score, it is because the Al Qaeda forces inside Syria are acting as US proxies in the war for regime-change. They have been armed to the teeth by the CIA and Washington's Arab allies, particularly Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and unleashed in a brutal sectarian civil war aimed at destroying the country and creating the conditions for the imposition of a US puppet regime.

More broadly, Washington is seeking to whip up Sunni Islamist forces throughout the region in a sectarian-based conflict directed at weakening the influence of Shia-majority Iran and preparing a war against this oil-rich country of 76 million.

The alliance between Washington and Al Qaeda in Syria was prefigured by a similar relationship established in last year's US-NATO war to overthrow the regime of Col. Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, in which elements from the old Al Qaeda-connected Libyan Islamic Fighting Group functioned as NATO's infantry. The Libyan Islamists became a key component of the foreign fighters now operating in Syria, while large quantities of arms taken from Libyan stockpiles have been funneled to the Al Qaeda-linked militias fighting the Assad regime.

That reliance upon such forces is not without dangers of "blowback" was proven in the assault last September on the US consulate and secret CIA facility in Benghazi. No doubt Washington perceives a similar threat in Syria, but believes that it can deal with the Islamist militias later on, after they have served their purpose of bleeding Syria and overthrowing Assad.

The Syrian events, like the Libyan war before them, have served to expose the US "war on terrorism" as an utter fraud.

US imperialism has come full circle to support Al Qaeda, the Islamist terrorist organization that it initially fostered in the 1980s war to oust the pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan, when Osama bin Laden collaborated intimately with the CIA. While claiming to fight terrorism, Washington is backing a terrorist war in Syria replete with suicide bombers, car bomb attacks on civilian neighborhoods and sectarian death squads.

Of course, earlier claims that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were being waged to eliminate Al Qaeda were themselves lies. In Afghanistan, US military and intelligence officials readily acknowledge that there is virtually no Al Qaeda presence, and in Iraq, US imperialism intervened to overthrow a secular regime that was a bitter enemy of the Islamist terrorists.

The wars in both of these countries, like the more recent military interventions in Libya and Syria, were waged with the aim of establishing US hegemony over the strategically vital regions of Central Asia and the Persian Gulf and control over their vast energy reserves.

Aided and abetted by a servile corporate media, the US ruling establishment has utilized the fiction that America is engaged in a never-ending battle against terrorists to provide Washington and its military-intelligence apparatus with a license to carry out military aggression abroad and a frontal assault on democratic rights at home.

With the intervention in Syria, this ideological pretext, which has played such a central role in US policy over more than a decade, is being blown to pieces.

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