The New York Times and terrorism

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30 April 2013

In its article yesterday on the failed assassination attempt against Syrian Prime Minister Wael Nader al-Halqi in Damascus, the *New York Times* includes a remarkable, and revealing, passage. After noting that several had been injured (in fact, at least six were reportedly killed) in a blast that left "a car reduced to a charred skeleton and, nearby, a bus with its windows shattered," the *Times* goes on to write:

"State television in Syria called the attack a 'terrorist explosion' that was 'an attempt to target the convoy of the prime minister.' Terrorist is the word used by the authorities to depict their armed adversaries."

The Syrian government, the *Times* suggests, is manipulating the word "terrorism" in an effort to tar its US-backed opponents.

What unbridled cynicism! It is precisely the American government and its subservient media that have perfected the use of the term "terrorism" and invented the "war on terror" to justify Washington's wars abroad. Any armed opposition to these wars—including attacks on US and allied occupying forces—is denounced as "terrorist" by the American government and news media.

A few examples from the *Times* itself are in order. An editorial published in August 2007, "Wrong Way Out of Iraq," warned that "the United States cannot walk away from the new international terrorist front it created in Iraq," and argued that the US military would need to maintain a presence in the country indefinitely in order "to strike effectively against terrorist sanctuaries."

In an October 2011 editorial, "The Charges Against Iran," the *Times* utilized unsubstantiated allegations of a plot against the ambassador of Saudi Arabia to declare that the Iranian government "has a long history of assassinations and terrorist attacks."

In their articles on drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan, when they report such events, the *Times* and other US media outlets repeat government assertions about the number of "terrorists" killed. In "The Moral Case for Drones," a particularly filthy piece of propaganda published as a "news analysis" article last July, the *Times* ' Scott Shane sought to defend the Obama administration's use of drones to kill people all over the world. The *Times* assured its readers that since "drone operators can view a target for hours or days in advance of a strike, they can identify terrorists more accurately than ground troops and or conventional pilots."

The attitude of the *Times,* and the US media and political establishment as a whole, to the word "terrorism" is entirely determined by its impact on the far-flung operations of US military and intelligence agencies. When the target of attacks is a government that has run afoul of US imperialism, the perpetrators are not terrorists. When the target is the US government or an allied regime, any and all armed opposition is labeled terrorist.

It should be noted that the *Times* is not alone in its reticence to use the word "terrorism" in relation to Monday's attacks in Damascus. The *Washington Post* writes that while no one claimed responsibility, the Syrian news agency blamed "terrorists." In language almost identical to that of the *Times*, the *Post* offers, "The government has repeatedly cast its rivals—ranging from civilian opposition activists to hardened extremist fighters—as ,terrorists' in a bid to win support for its battle…"

Both the *Times* and the *Post* are well aware that the Syrian opposition is dominated by the Al Qaeda-allied Al Nusra Front, which has carried out repeated bloody attacks on civilian targets, with devastating consequences. This year alone, a series of bombings in February killed 80 and injured at least 250 in Damascus, including a massive car bomb that killed 59, mainly civilians; an explosion at the Eman Mosque in

Damascus killed 42 and wounded 82 in March; and a bombing at the Syrian Central Bank killed 15 and wounded 53 in April.

The *Times* itself acknowledged in an article posted on Saturday, "Islamist Rebels Create Dilemma on Syria Policy," that the Al Nusra Front plays a dominant role in the US-backed opposition, including controlling Aleppo, Syria's largest city. "Nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force to speak of," the *Times* admits.

For the American government and its media spokesmen, those responsible for the attacks in Damascus yesterday and many similar incidents may be terrorists, but they are "our terrorists."

Whatever the concerns voiced by sections of the political establishment over the possibility of the Al Nusra Front coming to power, and despite the fact that the US formally designated it a "terrorist organization" in December, the American military and CIA continue to rely heavily on these forces to prosecute their campaign against the government of Bashar al-Assad.

Throughout the US-incited civil war, terrorists in Syria have been the beneficiaries of hundreds of millions of dollars and a steady stream of weaponry from US allies Saudi Arabia and Qatar, with the assistance of the CIA.

The "war on terror" has been utilized by the American ruling class, with the support of the media, as a catch-all justification for war abroad and the dismantling of democratic rights at home. Yet in the midst of this campaign, the US has maintained a working alliance with Al Qaeda, the supposed target of this phony war.