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## Al-Qaeda-Style Rebels ‘Key’ to Civil War

By Jason Ditz

December 2, 2012

The al-Nusra Front, an Islamist rebel faction in Syria which styles itself after al-Qaeda, and which some Western officials say may be directly linked to al-Qaeda, has long been the red-headed stepchild of Syria’s rebel movement, spurned from even other Islamist umbrella groups for fear that their involvement would taint the rest.

The group first made a name for itself killing journalists and burning TV stations, and while the rest of the rebellion has tried to spin itself as moderately as possible, if only for the sake of Western funding, al-Nusra has eschewed this strategy in favor of indiscriminate killing, and has done such a bang-up job of it that now analysts say they may be the “key” to the rebel victory, and are vital to recent rebel offensives.

Which means the battle is now re-branding al-Nusra from the car-bombing lunatic fringe of the rebel movement, the one that is why so many nations are reluctant to arm them, into a fashionable sort of extremist, the kind the West can really sink their teeth into.

That’s going to be a tough sell, but comments from the group insisting that they see no need for elections because they assume the vast majority of Syrians would be fine with a harsh brand of Sharia law could easily be shifted into the sort of “single-candidate” vote that the US and others have found so palatable in post-revolution Yemen.