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<http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-forbidden-truth-the-u-s-is-channelling-chemical-weapons-to-al-qaeda-in-syria-obama-is-a-liar-and-a-terrorist/5339004?print=1>

The Forbidden Truth: The U.S. is Channeling Chemical Weapons to Al Qaeda in Syria, Obama is a Liar and a Terrorist

By Prof Michel Chossudovsky

June 14, 2013

Is president Obama setting the stage for a “humanitarian intervention” by casually accusing the Syrian president of killing his own people?

“Following a deliberative review, our intelligence community assesses that the Assad regime has used chemical weapons, including the nerve agent sarin, on a small scale against the opposition multiple times in the last year,”

White House Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes said in a statement. “Our intelligence community has high confidence in that assessment given multiple, independent streams of information.”

“Obama has give notice to President Bashar Al Assad of ‘enormous consequences’ for having crossed the ‘red line’” by allegedly using chemical weapons.

Money and Weapons for Al Qaeda

A WMD saga modeled on Iraq based on fabricated evidence is unfolding. The Western media in chorus relentlessly accuse the Syrian government of premeditated mass-murder, calling upon the “international community” to come to the rescue of the Syrian people.

“Syria crosses ‘red line’ on chemical weapons. How will Obama respond?”

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The Syrian “opposition” is calling upon the US and its allies to implement “a no fly zone”.

In turn, the White House has acknowledged that the red line “has been crossed”, while emphasizing that the US and its allies will “increase the scope and scale of assistance” to the rebels.

The chemical weapons pretext is being used to justify further military aid to the rebels, which in large part have been decimated by Syrian government forces.

These defeated opposition rebel forces –largely composed of the Al Qaeda affiliated Al Nusrah– are supported by Turkey, Israel, Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

US-NATO-Israel have lost the ground war. Their Al Nusrah Front fighters, which constitute the foot-soldiers of the Western military alliance, cannot, under any circumstances, be rapidly rebuilt through a renewed flow of US-NATO military aid.

The Obama administration is in an impasse: its foot soldiers have been defeated. A “no fly zone” would, at this stage, be a risky proposition given Syria’s air defense system, which includes the Russian S-300 SAM system.



Al Nusra Front “Freedom fighters”

US-NATO Are Training “Opposition” Rebels in the Use of Chemical Weapons

The chemical weapons accusations are fabricated. In a bitter irony, the evidence amply confirms that the chemical weapons are being used **not by Syrian government forces but by the US supported Al Qaeda rebels.**

In a twisted logic whereby realities are turned upside down, the Syrian government is being accused of the atrocities committed by the US sponsored Al Qaeda affiliated rebels.

The Western media is feeding disinformation into the news chain, casually refuting its own news reports. Confirmed by various sources including CNN, the Western military alliance has not only made chemical weapons available to the Al Nusra Front, it has also sent in military contractors and special forces to train the rebels:

*The training [in chemical weapons], which is taking place in Jordan and Turkey, **involves how to monitor and secure stockpiles and handle weapons sites and materials**, according to the sources. **Some of the contractors are on the ground in Syria working with the rebels to monitor some of the sites**, according to one of the officials.*

The nationality of the trainers was not disclosed, though the officials cautioned against assuming all are American. (CNN, December 09, 2012, emphasis added)

While the news report does not confirm the identity of the defense contractors, the official statements suggest a close contractual relationship to the Pentagon:

The US decision to hire unaccountable defense contractors to train Syrian rebels to handle stockpiles of chemical weapons seems dangerously irresponsible in the extreme, especially considering how inept Washington has so far been at making sure only trustworthy, secular rebels – to the extent they exist – receive their aid and the weapons that allies in the Gulf Arab states have been providing.

It also feeds accusations that the Syrian Foreign Ministry recently made that the US is working to frame the Syrian regime as having used or prepared for chemical warfare.

“What raises concerns about this news circulated by the media is our **serious fear that some of the countries backing terrorism and terrorists might provide the armed terrorist groups with chemical weapons and claim that it was the Syrian government that used the weapons,**” the letters said.”(John Glaser, Us Defense Contractors Training Syrian Rebels, Antiwar.com, December 10, 2012, emphasis added)

Lets be under no illusion. This is not a rebel training exercise in non-proliferation of chemical weapons.

While president Obama accuses Bashar Al Assad, the US-NATO military alliance is channeling chemical weapons to Al Nusra, a terrorist organization on the State Department blacklist.

In all likelihood, the training of Al Nusra rebels in the use of chemical weapons was undertaken by private military contractors.

The United Nations Independent Mission confirms that Rebel Forces Are in Possession of Sarin Nerve Gas



While Washington points its finger at president Bashar al Assad, a United Nations independent commission of inquiry confirmed in May 2013 that the rebels rather

than the government have chemical weapons in their possession and are using sarin nerve against the civilian population:

U.N. human rights investigators have gathered testimony from casualties of Syria's civil war and medical staff indicating that **rebel forces have used the nerve agent sarin, one of the lead investigators said on Sunday.**

The United Nations independent commission of inquiry on Syria has not yet seen evidence of government forces having used chemical weapons, which are banned under international law, said commission member Carla Del Ponte. [see image right]

"Our investigators have been in neighboring countries interviewing victims, doctors and field hospitals and, according to their report of last week which I have seen, **there are strong, concrete suspicions but not yet incontrovertible proof of the use of sarin gas, from the way the victims were treated,**" Del Ponte said in an interview with Swiss-Italian television.

"This was use on the part of the opposition, the rebels, not by the government authorities," she added, speaking in Italian. ("U.N. has testimony that Syrian rebels used sarin gas: investigator," Chicago Tribune, May, 5 2013, emphasis added)

Turkish Police Report: US Supported Al Nusra Terrorists Possess Chemical Weapons

According to Turkey's state media agency Zaman, the Turkish General Directorate of Security (Emniyet Genel Müdürlüğü):

[Police have] ceased 2 kg of sarin gas in the city of Adana in the early hours of yesterday morning. The chemical weapons were in the possession of Al Nusra terrorists believed to have been heading for Syria.

Sarin gas is a colourless, odorless substance which is extremely difficult to detect. The gas is banned under the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention.

The EGM [Turkish Police] identified 12 members of the AL Nusra terrorist cell and also ceased fire arms and digital equipment. This is the second major official confirmation of the use of chemical weapons by Al-Qaeda terrorists in Syria after UN inspector Carla Del Ponte's recent statement confirming the use of chemical weapons by the Western-backed terrorists in Syria.

The Turkish police are currently conducting further investigations into the operations of Al-Qaeda linked groups in Turkey. (For further details see Gearóid Ó Colmáin, Turkish Police find Chemical Weapons in the Possession of Al Nusra Terrorists heading for Syria, Global Research.ca, May 30, 2013)

Who has Crossed the "Red Line"? Barack Obama and John Kerry are Supporting a Terrorist Organization on the State Department List



What is unfolding is a diabolical scenario –which is an integral part of US military planning– namely a situation where opposition terrorists of the al Nusrah Front advised by Western defense contractors are actually in possession of chemical weapons.

The West claims that it is coming to the rescue of the Syrian people, whose lives are allegedly threatened by Bashar Al Assad.

Obama has not only “Crossed the Red Line”, he is supporting Al Qaeda. He is a Liar and a Terrorist.

The forbidden truth, which the Western media has failed to reveal, is that the US-NATO- Israel military alliance is not only supporting the Al Nusrah Front, it is also **making chemical weapons available to its proxy “opposition” rebel forces.**

The broader issue is: Who is a threat to the Syrian people? Syria’s President Bashar al Assad or America’s President Barack Obama, who has ordered the recruitment and training of terrorist forces which are on the US State Department blacklist.

In a bitter irony, according to the US State Department Bureau of Counter-terrorism, President Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry, not to mention Senator John McCain could be held responsible for **“knowingly providing, or attempting or conspiring to provide, material support or resources to, or engaging in transactions with, al-Nusrah Front”:**

The Department of State has amended the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and Executive Order (E.O.) 13224 designations of al-Qa’ida in Iraq (AQI) to include the following new aliases: **al-Nusrah Front, Jabhat al-Nusrah, Jabhet al-Nusra, The Victory Front, and Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant.** The consequences of adding al-Nusrah Front as a new alias for AQI include a **prohibition against knowingly providing, or attempting or conspiring to provide, material support or resources to, or engaging in transactions with, al-Nusrah Front,** and the freezing of all property and interests in property of the organization that are in the United States, or come within the United States or the control of U.S. persons. (emphasis added)

The State Department advisory acknowledges that from November 2011 to December 2012:

“Al-Nusrah Front has claimed nearly 600 attacks – ranging from more than 40 suicide attacks to small arms and improvised explosive device operations – in major city centers including

Damascus, Aleppo, Hamah, Dara, Homs, Idlib, and Dayr al-Zawr. During these attacks numerous innocent Syrians have been killed.

The advisory also confirms that “the United States takes this action [of blacklisting the Al Nusrah Front] in the context of our overall support for the Syrian people. ... ”

What it fails to mention is that the Obama administration continues to channel money and weapons to Al Nusrah in blatant defiance of US counter-terrorism legislation.

Washington’s “Go-Between”: General Salem Idriss



Washington’s “Go Between” is the Head of the FSA Supreme Military Council Brigadier General Salem Idriss [right], who is permanent liaison with the Al Nusrah military commanders.

Secretary of State John Kerry meets representatives of the Syrian opposition. US officials meet with General Idriss. The latter, acting on behalf of the Pentagon, channels money and weapons to the terrorists. This model of supporting Al Nusra is similar to that implemented in Afghanistan whereby the Pakistani military government of General Zia Ul Haq would funnel weapons to jihadist “Freedom Fighters” in the heyday of the Soviet-Afghan war.

US support to terrorists is always sent through a trusted intermediary. According to a Obama administration official: “While the United States may have leverage with General Idris, it has no ability to control some jihadists — like the Nusra Front, which is also fighting Syrian government forces.” (New York Times, May 23, 2013)

John McCain Enters Syria, Mingles with US Sponsored Terrorists

Meanwhile, Senator John McCain “entered Syria [early June] from the country’s border with Turkey and stayed there for several hours ... McCain met with assembled leaders of Free Syrian Army units in both Turkey and Syria.” See image below John McCain together with General Salem Idriss)



The Contradictory Role of the United Nations Security Council

In late May 2013, the UN Security Council added Al Nusra to the UNSC “Al-Qaida Sanctions List.” Yet at the same time, the Security Council decision casually dismissed the fact, amply documented, that three permanent members of the Council, namely Britain, France and the US continue to provide military aid to the Jabhat Al Nusra Front, in defiance of international law and the UN Charter.

ANNEX 1

THE TERRORIST DESIGNATION OF AL NUSRAH BY THE US STATE DEPARTMENT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Office of the Spokesperson December 11, 2012

STATEMENT BY VICTORIA NULAND, SPOKESPERSON

<http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/12/20121211139845.html#ixzz2WDKARO9n>

Terrorist Designations of the al-Nusra Front as an Alias for al-Qa’ida in Iraq

The Department of State has amended the Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) and Executive Order (E.O.) 13224 designations of al-Qa'ida in Iraq (AQI) to include the following new aliases: al-Nusrah Front, Jabhat al-Nusrah, Jabhet al-Nusra, The Victory Front, and Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant. The Department of State previously designated AQI as an FTO under the Immigration and Nationality Act and as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist under E.O. 13224 on October 15, 2004. The consequences of adding al-Nusrah Front as a new alias for AQI include a prohibition against knowingly providing, or attempting or conspiring to provide, material support or resources to, or engaging in transactions with, al-Nusrah Front, and the freezing of all property and interests in property of the organization that are in the United States, or come within the United States or the control of U.S. persons.

Since November 2011, al-Nusrah Front has claimed nearly 600 attacks – ranging from more than 40 suicide attacks to small arms and improvised explosive device operations – in major city centers including Damascus, Aleppo, Hamah, Dara, Homs, Idlib, and Dayr al-Zawr. During these attacks numerous innocent Syrians have been killed. Through these attacks, al-Nusrah has sought to portray itself as part of the legitimate Syrian opposition while it is, in fact, an attempt by AQI to hijack the struggles of the Syrian people for its own malign purposes. AQI emir Abu Du'a is in control of both AQI and al-Nusrah. Abu Du'a was designated by the State Department under E.O. 13224 on October 3, 2011, and by the United Nations under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 on October 5, 2011. Abu Du'a also issues strategic guidance to al-Nusrah's emir, Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani, and tasked him to begin operations in Syria.

The United States takes this action in the context of our overall support for the Syrian people. We have provided approximately \$50 million in non-lethal assistance to the unarmed civilian opposition and nearly \$200 million in humanitarian assistance to those affected by the violence in Syria. The violent, sectarian vision of al-Nusrah is at odds with the aspirations of the Syrian people, including the overwhelming majority of the Syrian opposition, who seek a free, democratic, and inclusive Syria and have made clear their desire for a government that respects and advances national unity, dignity, human rights, and equal protection under the law – regardless of faith, ethnicity, or gender. Extremism and terrorist ideology have no place in a post-Asad Syria, and all responsible Syrians should speak out against al-Qa'ida and other extremist elements. By opting for the use of force against its own people, the Asad regime has created the circumstances that attract the violent extremists of al-Qa'ida, who seek to exploit civil strife for their own purposes. The sooner the political transition to a post-Asad Syria begins, the better it will be for the Syrian people and the region.

ANNEX 2

UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

<http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2013/sc11019.doc.htm>

Security Council Al-Qaida Sanctions Committee Amends Entry of One Entity on Its Sanctions List

On 30 May 2013, the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999) and 1989 (2011) concerning Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities approved the amendments specified with underline in the entry below on its Al-Qaida Sanctions List of individuals and entities subject to the assets freeze, travel ban and arms embargo set out in paragraph 1 of Security Council resolution 2083 (2012) adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

B. Entities and other groups and undertakings associated with Al-Qaida

QE.J.115.04. **Name:** AL-QAIDA IN IRAQ
Name **(original** **script):** العراق في القاعدة
A.k.a.: a) AQI b) al-Tawhid c) the Monotheism and Jihad Group d) Qaida of the Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers e) Al-Qaida of Jihad in the Land of the Two Rivers f) The Organization of Jihad's Base in the Country of the Two Rivers g) The Organization Base of Jihad/Country of the Two Rivers h) The Organization Base of Jihad/Mesopotamia i) Tanzim Qa'idat Al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn j) Tanzeem Qa'idat al Jihad/Bilad al Raafidaini k) Jama'at Al-Tawhid Wa'al-Jihad l) JTI m) Islamic State of Iraq n) ISI o) al-Zarqawi network p) Jabhat al Nusrah q) Jabhet al-Nusra r) Al-Nusra Front s) The Victory Front t) Al-Nusra Front for the People of the Levant (الشام لأهل النصر جبهة) u) Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant **F.k.a.:** na **Address:** na
Listed on: 18 Oct. 2004 (amended on 2 Dec. 2004, 5 Mar. 2009, 13 Dec. 2011, 30 May 2013)
Other information: Review pursuant to Security Council resolution 1822 (2008) was concluded on 25 May 2010.

The Committee's Al-Qaida Sanctions List is updated regularly on the basis of relevant information provided by Member States and international and regional organizations. This is the thirteenth update of the List in 2013. An updated List is accessible on the Committee's website at the following URL: http://www.un.org/sc/committees/1267/aq_sanctions_list.shtml.

ANNEX 3 TRANSCRIPT OF STATE DEPARTMENT PRESS BRIEFING CONCERNING AL NUSRAH

Senior Administration Officials on Terrorist Designations of the al-Nusra Front as an Alias for al-Qaida in Iraq

Special Briefing Senior Administration Officials

Via Teleconference

Washington, DC

December 11, 2012 -

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/12/201797.htm>

MODERATOR: Good morning everyone, and thank you for joining this call this morning. Today, we're going to have a background call with three senior Administration officials. We have – Senior Administration Official One will be [Senior Administration Official One]. Senior

Administration Official Number Two is [Senior Administration Official Two]. And then [Senior Administration Official Three] is our Senior Administration Official Three.

So they're going to talk about some of the designations and then take a few questions. So we'll start with our Senior Administration Official Number One, over to you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Okay. The State Department has formally amended al-Qaida in Iraq as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and Executive Order 13224 designations to include the alias al-Nusrah Front. Al-Qaida in Iraq, or AQI, was first designated by the State Department in October of 2004. By way of background, in 2011, the AQI emir, Abu Du'a, tasked Abu Muhammad al-Jawlani to establish al-Nusrah Front in Syria. Abu Du'a provides strategic guidance to al-Jawlani, al-Nusrah's leader.

Since November 2011, al-Nusrah Front has claimed hundreds of attacks, nearly 600, in major city centers across Syria in which numerous innocent Syrians have been injured and killed. AQI has dispatched money, people, and materiel from Iraq to Syria over the past year to attack Syrian forces both on its own initiative and at the request of AQI's facilitation network members in Syria.

Al-Nusrah Front has sought to portray itself as part of a legitimate Syrian opposition, but today's actions are intended to expose them and make clear that the United States believes that al-Nusrah's extremist ideology has no role in a post-Assad Syria. Among the consequences of today's actions is a prohibition against knowingly providing or attempting or conspiring to provide material support or resources to or engaging in transactions with al-Nusrah Front.

It's important to note that the designation of al-Nusrah Front does not mean we have changed our view regarding Assad as the leader of a state that has been a designated state sponsor of terrorism since 1979. Today, we've also sanctioned pro-Assad regime elements, and my colleague from the Treasury Department will speak more specifically to these sanctions and to the designation of two key members of al-Nusrah Front. Over.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Good morning. This is [Senior Administration Official Two] from the Treasury Department. Thank you. Today, we have taken a number of actions alongside and in coordination with our colleagues at the State Department in order to continue and intensify our pressure against the Assad regime, its affiliated militias, and to take action against terrorist leaders who are active in Syria.

Since the beginning of the uprising in Syria, we have been working to powerfully and swiftly intensify sanctions against the Assad regime, to isolate the Syrian Government, hasten Assad's fall, and to encourage those within the Syrian Government to abandon the regime's campaign of violence. We have also used targeted sanctions to expose and combat the interventions of Iran as well as terrorist groups like Hezbollah which have been actively supporting Assad's regime.

The actions we took today fall into basically two buckets: actions against two militias that have been perpetrating violence in coordination with and in affiliation with the Assad government, and then actions in concert with the al-Nusrah action that the State Department has announced to target two main leaders of the Nusrah Front. I'll take those in turn.

Since the beginning of the unrest in Syria, the Shabiha have operated as a direct action arm of the Government of Syria and its security services, with Shabiha units providing support to units from designated security services, such as the Syrian Air Force intelligence and Syrian military

intelligence, that have been among the most active in the violence. Ayman Jaber is currently a Shabiha leader responsible for directing Shabiha operations in Latakia, Syria on behalf of the Syrian regime and is working with the Ministry of Defense and other senior regime officials, including Maher al-Assad, to procure weapons for the Shabiha units under his command.

His brother, who we are also designating today, Mohammad Jaber, arranged for the transportation of pro-Syrian regime thugs from the Shabiha to Turkey in order to attack anti-Syrian regime persons there.

The other pro-regime militia that we are sanctioning today is Jaysh al-Sha'bi, which operates throughout Syria and has been particularly active in Damascus and Aleppo where the militia has supplemented Syrian Government forces operations against the opposition. Jaysh al-Sha'bi was created and continues to be funded and maintained with support from Iran and Hezbollah, and it is modeled after the Iranian Basij militia, which has proven so deadly and effective at using violence and intimidation to suppress political dissent in Iraq.

In addition to our actions against the regime proxies, Treasury is targeting Nusrah Front leaders Maysar Ali Musa Abdallah al-Juburi and Anas Hasan Khattab. Al-Juburi is the religious and military commander for the Nusrah Front in eastern Syria. He moved from Mosul, Iraq to Syria in late 2011 with the objectives of transferring al-Qaida's ideology and techniques to Syria and forming likeminded terrorist groups.

Khattab was involved with the formation of the Nusrah Front for AQI and has communicated with AQI leadership to coordinate the movement of funds and weapons for the Nusrah Front. Khattab also works closely with al-Qaida-linked facilitators to provide logistical support to the Nusrah Front. All of these actions are a part of our ongoing efforts to target actors within Syria working to frustrate the desires of the Syrian people to end the violence and to realize a representative government. We will continue to target the thugs that have worked with the Assad militias, just as we will the terrorists who try to cloak themselves in the flag of the legitimate opposition.

And with that, I'll turn it over to [Senior Administration Official Three].

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: Thank you very much. The steps that we are announcing today in Washington really are the result of growing American concern about the escalation of violence in Syria.

First of all, let's be clear: The Syrian regime started this violence by brutalizing what was a peaceful protest movement. We all know that. We all understand that. And the Syrian regime has used aircraft, it has used artillery, and it appears that it has even used missile to attack the Syrian population and to attack what was a peaceful protest movement. And we have considered the Syrian regime to be a State Sponsor of Terrorism since 1979. We've taken additional steps against the regime in terms of sanctions and in terms of isolating the Syrian regime and putting pressure on it internationally and economically.

Today's actions against the Shabiha, against the Jaysh al-Sha'bi – the People's Army as they call it – against people like Ayman Jaber and Mohammad Jaber are both a recognition of the violence that the regime is inflicting on the Syrian people, and then it also repeats and emphasizes our message that the Syrian regime needs to stop that, and Assad needs to step aside and a political transition needs to begin.

But when we think about that political transition, extremist groups that are denouncing the government and attacking the government, they themselves, as extremists, have no role in that transition and in a future Syria. The protest movement that started out peacefully that I mentioned – it started out peacefully in February and March of 2011 – has always called for a tolerant Syrian society which is free, which respects the human rights of all Syrians equally. That was in the national vision statement that the Syrian opposition published in Cairo on July 3rd, 2012 – that is to say about five months ago, five and half months ago – and in other statements which Syrian opposition figures have announced. But Nusrah, as [Senior Administration Official One] was just talking about, and as [Senior Administration Official Two] was saying, the Nusrah Front is directly linked to al-Qaida in Iraq, and we know what its ideology is.

And we know that the Nusrah Front has denounced the Syrian Opposition Coalition's founding, that it rejects the vision statement that was issued in Cairo, that I mentioned, of a tolerant society, and insists that instead of elections there must be an Islamic state imposed upon Syria. And the Nusrah Front, extremists like it, have no place in the future of the Syrian society, in a tolerant society. And so we have made clear that Nusrah also is an extremist organization and it has to be isolated and that more moderate forces, more forces that believe in tolerance as a model for Syrian society, they need to carry the work of the political transition forward.

I think I'll stop there.

MODERATOR: Thank you. At this time, Operator, we'll be ready to take questions for our three senior Administration officials.

OPERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, if you wish to ask a question, please press * followed by 1 on your touchtone phone. Once again, for any questions, please press *1 at this time. One moment, please.

And we'll go to the line of Ilhan Tanir with Turkish Daily. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Thanks so much. Quick couple questions. One of them is: How is the reaction so far from the Syrian – other Syrian opposition groups? As far as we can see, there is a lot of complaining about this decision on Twitter and social networks that – argument is while the U.S. Government has been talking, Nusrah Front is coming here to fight, and basically they are fighting with the Assad regime, and die.

Can you give us what kind of reaction and see if the Nusrah Front is fighting with the Assad regime? I just don't understand what kind of message is that you mentioned. The message is to Assad regime to leave, but you are labeling his organization as a terrorist organization while they are fighting with the Assad regime. Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: I guess I'll take my first stab at that. I don't know if my colleagues want to join in later. I will let the Syrian opposition representatives speak for themselves. I don't need to speak on their behalf. It's not proper. What I would say is that the United States and other Friends of the Syrian People have long acknowledged the Syrian people's right to self-defense and to defend themselves against the brutality of the Syrian regime. There is no question about that, and we have been saying that for many, many months.

However, acknowledging the right of self-defense is not itself a justification for extremism. And I want to underline here that many people in Syria are afraid of extremism. Many people in Syria are not fighting for an extremist cause. Rather, they are fighting to have their dignity respected,

they are fighting to have their human rights respected, and they do not want – and the United States and the Friends of Syria do not want one terrorist regime to be replaced by a new extremist model. Rather, it is important that Syrians who believe in tolerance, Syrians who believe in the respect for the human rights of all Syrian citizens be the ones who move the political transition forward.

And so there is no contradiction. Instead, what is important is to understand that extremists fighting the Assad regime are still extremists, and they have no place in the political transition that will come. Bashar al-Assad will depart. If he departs today, it's better than if he departs tomorrow. There is too much bloodshed. But extremists should not dictate that political transition.

OPERATOR: You do have a question from the line of Michael Gordon with The New York Times. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, this is primarily for [Senior Administration Official Three], but the others can chime in. Could you please explain what practical, tangible effect this edict on the Nusrah Front might have? It stated that it would prohibit American or American entities from providing support. Are there any such Americans who are providing support? And if not, how will this affect those who have been providing support who are probably sympathetic with this group?

And lastly, tomorrow there'll be a meeting in Morocco of various opposition groups and Friends of Syria. Do any members of this political opposition gathering in Morocco have influence or control over armed opposition elements in Syria today?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: Michael, I'm going to let my colleagues answer the question about the practical and tangible effects because they're more involved in the immediate implementation of the measures. But on the – with respect to your last question about members of the Syrian opposition who will come to Morocco for the Friends of the Syrian People meeting, what I would say on that is that there are not members of armed groups represented at this meeting that I am aware of.

However, there are people here who definitely coordinate with armed groups, with the Free Syrian Army, and who have regular contact with elements of the Free Syrian Army. That is not to say they are giving instructions to it; they do not. It is not to say that they are telling it what to do or what to say in the international field; they are not. In a sense, the Free Syrian Army is a separate organization from, for example, the Syrian National Council or the Syrian Opposition Coalition. They are separate organizations. But there certainly are communications between the two, and there are members of the Syrian political opposition here in Morocco who contact and talk to people from the Free Syrian Army.

I'm – I'll turn it over to my colleagues to talk about the practical and tangible effects and your other question.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Okay, so I think I need to go next. This is [Senior Administration Official One]. Michael, as we said at the top, the technical impact of the – adding al-Nusrah Front as a new alias for AQI, includes this prohibition on knowingly provided material support and the freezing of all property and interest in property in the United States or that come within the United States under the control of U.S. persons. So there are some

practical sanctioning effects of the designation, and it can be a powerful tool over the long run, for law enforcement purposes.

But I think one of the primary effects of this designation is to really expose the presence of al-Nusrah Front, an organization that has been established by the leadership of AQI in Syria, and its activities there.

SENOAR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: If I could just add – this is [Senior Administration Official Two] – exposing the operations and the identities of al-Nusrah’s leaders is a key objective here. So I just wanted to underscore that. Having these individuals on a blacklist has a practical impact beyond just the direct implications of U.S. law. It means for individuals who have demonstrated that they desire to travel back and forth across borders, actions like these in the past have frustrated that ability, have exposed them to being interdicted and detained.

It also means that as al-Nusrah tries to wrap itself in the legitimacy of the opposition that does reflect the Syrian’s people desires, we have called them out, and for those who are seeking to support the legitimate opposition of the Syrian people, we have drawn a bright line. So I think there are very real sort of second-order effects to today’s actions as well.

OPERATOR: You do have a question from the line of Margaret Brennan with CBS News. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. This is a question for [Senior Administration Official Three]. Al-Nusrah Front is viewed as an effective, very lethal fighting force inside of Syria. When it comes to what’s actually happening on the ground right now, what does today’s action do in terms of in any way lessening what they control or what they influence inside of Syria?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: Al-Nusrah Front is one of many groups that are fighting the Syrian regime now. It is not the only one. And in fact, it is a minority. Its influence has grown over recent months, but it still represents a minority element within the broader armed opposition to the Assad regime. So I don’t want to leave any kind of impressions that we are in any way acting against the broader Free Syrian Army, which is a much bigger organization.

And I’d be very clear we talk – I myself talk to the Free Syrian Army, and we have talked to them about things like the code of conduct and how to treat prisoners, et cetera. We have gotten assurances, and we have seen in many instances good behavior and even sanctioning against those elements of the Free Syrian Army that have acted improperly or against that code of conduct. Nusrah, by contrast, has actually been involved in summary executions of prisoners, for example. Whether the American steps today will immediately curtail Nusrah’s capabilities, I don’t think they will, but I think other nations that are involved in helping the armed opposition will now take more seriously our concerns about the Nusrah Front and its expanding influence, and it is important for countries to understand what al-Nusrah is and what it represents.

And it is important for the Syrians in the political opposition and in the armed opposition to understand what Nusrah is and what it represents. The time of a political transition is approaching. It’s approaching quickly as events on the ground move. And it is important to understand that Nusrah is an extremist group that cannot possibly be a part of the political transition to a tolerant and free Syria.

OPERATOR: Next we will go to the line of Mina al-Oraibi. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Hi. This is a question also for [Senior Administration Official Three]. If I can ask, do you expect a position to be taken against Jebhat al-Nusrah Front in Marrakesh tomorrow from other countries? And I also wanted to know, you said you have been in touch with the FSA, so have you informed them in advance of this designation? And have they voiced concerns to you about Jebhat al-Nusrah Front and what they're doing on the ground and whether that actually makes certain civilians in Syria wary of the opposition?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: The meeting in Marrakesh hasn't started yet. The ministers have not arrived. And so I don't want to prejudge what the outcome will be. But what I would say is that the previous Friends of the Syrian People meetings in Tunis, in Istanbul, and in Paris, in each of those occasions, the partner states of the Friends of the Syrian People have emphasized their support for a tolerant Syrian society. They have emphasized their hope that the next Syrian government, after the Bashar al-Assad regime ends, will be one that respects human rights and that treats all Syrian citizens equally, without discrimination, and without prejudice because of their ethnic or religious views. And I do not think that this Friends of Syria conference will deviate from that strong support, that vision of the next Syrian government, after the political transition begins.

With respect to the Free Syrian Army, they know our concern about the Nusrah Front. I have talked to them myself about it and we have talked to others in the Syrian opposition over the past month. And they know what our position is and I'll leave it at that.

OPERATOR: And you do have a question from the line of Joyce Karam with Al Hayat. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes, hi. My question is also to [Senior Administration Official Three]. Would this make it more likely that the U.S. would arm non-extremist elements in the Syria opposition? And if the regime targets al-Nusrah Front now, would the U.S. be okay with that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: I'm sorry. I didn't understand the second question. Can you say it again?

QUESTION: Yeah. If the Assad regime goes ahead and targets al-Nusrah Front, would you be okay with that?

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: I see. Okay. With respect to your first question, we have always said with respect to our policy on providing arms that, number one, we do not provide arms to the Syrian opposition now. We have also said that the President has never ruled out in the future providing arms, but we do not do it now. But number three, for us, providing arms has to be done in a way that helps promote a political solution. And until we understand how these arms promote a political solution, we do not see how provision of arms is a good idea.

With respect to the Assad regime targeting al-Nusrah, I would simply say that we have condemned the Assad regime as a state sponsor of terrorism. We have condemned the Assad regime's incredibly brutal and excessive, egregious acts of violence against the Syrian population. The news from yesterday is just shocking. I'm not going to comment on when it targets al-Nusrah, except to say that we condemn extremism on both sides. We condemn extremism that is the Syrian regime, and we condemn extremism in the Syrian armed opposition.

Neither one of them presents a good – neither one of them presents a realistic way forward for a Syrian political transition that wants to give the Syrian people a system that will be free and respect the human rights of all Syrians.

MODERATOR: Operator, we've only got time for one more question.

OPERATOR: Okay. And that question will come from Hannah Allam with McClatchy Newspaper. Please go ahead.

QUESTION: Yes. Thanks for the call. I was wondering, how do you disentangle the sort of Free Syrian Army rebel units from Jebhat al-Nusrah fighters when there appears to be such close coordination on the battlefield that's opened the door to a scenario where somebody like the Syrian Support Group could come under scrutiny for providing materiel support to Jebhat al-Nusrah via these other more accepted rebel groups? And also has the U.S. talked to the Qataris and the Saudis about cutting off Nusrah – not just state funding but the individuals that are believed to be funding them from those countries? Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: I'm going to answer the second question first about our diplomatic work. And then with respect to the first question, I'll make a comment or two on that, and then – and/or [Senior Administration Official Two] may wish to add something in terms of distinguishing.

With respect to our diplomatic contacts, we absolutely have made our views known about Nusrah to our international partners that are working with us to find a solution, a peaceful and political solution to the Syrian crisis. We absolutely have informed them, and they too know about our views.

I think it is also important here to note one positive sign of how the Free Syrian Army itself has understood the threat that Nusrah represents to the political transition in Syria, which is that during the meetings in Antalya in Turkey last week where they were working to set up a unified command for the Free Syrian Army, notably excluded from that meeting was the Nusrah Front, and we think that was a wise decision. With respect to distinguishing, as I mentioned in Antalya, the groups themselves know who Nusrah is, and I think they are better understanding the threat that it represents.

And so we will certainly continue our discussions with them, which in many cases will be an effort to convince more and more elements of the Free Syrian Army to stay away from al-Nusrah. But as I mentioned, the meeting in Antalya was a step forward. I don't know if [Senior Administration Official One] or [Senior Administration Official Two] want to comment on that business about distinguishing between elements of the Free Syrian Army and other elements of – or I mean, Nusrah.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: I think the only thing I would add to that is that we've taken an important step today to help these groups make the – underscore the importance of the distinction, and the most important thing that we can do in our own assistance is to continue to, as we always do, to strive to ensure that our assistance doesn't fall into the wrong hands.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL TWO: Nothing to add from here.

MODERATOR: Thank you all for joining the call today, and thank you to our officials, and have a good day.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL THREE: Thank you.

SENIOR ADMINISTRATION OFFICIAL ONE: Thank you.