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## Syria is NOT a Civil War, It Is a Foreign Intervention

By James Corbett

October 04, 2013

*Syria is entering a new stage of secular-on-extremist violence, with the collective war against President Assad almost sidelined by the growing mayhem. Outside plans for chaos have begun uncontrollably to shift the war, according to a number of experts.*

Analyst and editor of the Corbett Report, James Corbett, feels it important to emphasize the gap between the motives displayed by various factions inside Syria and the initial aim of external powers to remove Assad.

This view is furthered by professor of international relations Mark Almond, who believes that a diffuse groupings all dangerously seeking personal gain may put disarmament process off the rails.

On one hand, the Syrian conflict is seen as painstakingly planned and funded chaos from outside in Corbett's view. On the other are several civil wars within the main struggle, which are prone to constant shifts in allegiances due to the aforementioned chaos, according to Almond.

**RT:** *What exactly are the radical Islamists fighting for in Syria?*

**James Corbett:** Well, I don't think we have to go very far out on a limb to discover what they are fighting for. We can take it from the words of the international terror bogeyman spokesperson and US collaborator Ayman al-Zawahiri, who used the opportunity of his 9/11

12th anniversary audio message to specifically call for Islamic fighters in Syria to not cooperate with non-Islamic fighters.

The end goal of that is of course Jihad for the purpose of establishing an Islamic state, and that's exactly what motivates these fighters specifically to commit mass executions, taking over entire towns, killing men, women and children with impunity, filming themselves eating hearts and livers of some of the people that they've killed. And other atrocities in this conflict have been waged for the specific purpose of establishing an Islamic state.

**RT:** *And how does the increase in fighting among opposition forces affect the positions of the Syrian government?*

**JC:** I suppose from the Syrian government's point of view, having a divided opposition is a good thing, but I don't know if it makes much of a difference because there are about 10,000 of these Islamic fighters and they are by far the largest percentage in terms of the fighting force on the ground in Syria. They are the ones that are most actively engaged in the fight, because these tend to be the battle-hardened Jihadists who have spent time in other places such as Chechnya and elsewhere, learning how to commit Jihad. So they are the ones taking the brunt of the actual fight.

Even if it does mean that the more moderate rebels – quote unquote – have been sidelined in this conflict, it still means that the Syrian army is still basically fighting against an army of 10,000 Jihadists, and these are the people who seem to have the least scruples when it comes to the way that they engage in this conflict and the extent they're willing to go to.



*Rebel fighters prepare explosive devices to be used during fighting against Syrian government forces on September 7, 2013 in Syria's eastern town of Deir Ezzor*

**RT:** *What unites these opposition rebels is their hatred of President Assad. Why is it so hard for them to come together and fight as a single front?*

**JC:** Well, I think it's based on the fundamentally mistaken assumption that's often purveyed in the media that what's happening in Syria is some sort of civil war, some sort of internal conflict, and a lot of narrative has been framed around that. But I think it's fundamentally false to assert that. I think we have to understand what's happening in Syria as the planned result of a nearly decade-long intervention: foreign-funded, foreign-armed, foreign-supplied, foreign-trained intervention in Syria that has been arming and training Syrian opposition groups – on the record, documentably – back to the Bush administration, as far back as 2006. They were starting to train the opposition forces in Syria.

So we have to understand that this is not some sort of spontaneous uprising; and that as a result there are many different outside forces, including the United States, including the Saudis, the Qataris and others, who are funding and financing their own fighters to go into this conflict. And many of them are motivated for different reasons and are there for different opportunities and some are motivated as mercenaries, others by Jihad and the chance of establishing an Islamic state. But just because they have the same goal of overthrowing the Assad government doesn't mean they are there for the same reasons.

**RT:** *We heard some of those rebel groups have refused to honor the international agreement on the chemical disarmament of Syria. Will they be able to hamper the whole process?*

**JC:** Very easily so, and I think we can see exactly what's kicked off this entire process in the first place. The August 21 attacks in Ghouta, which still there has not been one shred of evidence to suggest that it has been coming from the Syrian government. The weapons inspectors did not conclude that, it was beyond the mandate of their investigation. And in fact all of the evidence continues to point to the fact that it was an attack launched by the rebel groups as a sort of false-flag provocation in order to cross the 'red line,' in order to get military intervention from the US and its allies. And in the exact same vein all it would take is one such similar incident for it to be immediately again be blamed on the Assad government and used again as an excuse for calling off that UN Security Council resolution.

So it's very easy to get this disarmament process off the rails. It would be much more difficult to see this through to completion, even if everyone at the table has the best intentions. All it takes is one rogue group with access to chemical weapons to commit an attack and derail the entire process.



*A member of the Islamic Kurdish Front aims at a position of fellow Kurdish fighters from the Committees for the Protection of the Kurdish People (YPG) during clashes with the militia, reportedly set up to protect the Kurdish areas in Syria from opposing forces, on the outskirts of the northern Syrian city of Raqqa, on August 23, 2013*

### **Islamic rebels ‘hijacking’ civil war**

**RT:** *The radical rebel factions – do you think they are capable of hijacking the civil war and dictating their own rules to the secular opposition?*

Mark Almond: Yes, in some ways they are more dangerous to the secular opponents of Assad than to the Assad regime. One basic problem is that the radical Islamic rebels are not any better motivated. They have an ideology to fight the war, but also they are better funded and better equipped. And so they are both in a position to show themselves as leaders in the fight against Assad, even though they’re not really a threat to his regime. But more importantly, they can silence and intimidate those groups in Syria in the areas where they dominate, who don’t particularly like their brand of Islam.

And indeed there are critics of the whole idea that having a Jihad against Assad is a way to overthrow him, because it seems in fact to have pushed a large number of people who may have been dissatisfied with the regime to say “At least the Assad regime is secular, at least it has certain rules. We would be completely at the mercy with rather arbitrary interpretations of Islam, who impose them brutally.”

**RT:** *International mediators are pushing for peace talks between Damascus and the secular opposition. Can they be brought to the table as well?*

**MA:** Well, it’s not impossible. But the problem of course is that it’s very difficult for the people who want to have a peace conference in the West to admit that we have any kind of contacts with these people, because after all they’re supposed to represent the terrorist threat on a global scale, which since 9/11 has been a threat to America and its European allies.

So the idea that we can somehow negotiate with these people is problematic, even though in practice, of course, there are under-the-table contacts, after all. Turkey – a NATO country provides them with a hinterland through which they're able to operate. Large numbers of foreign fighters – I've seen this myself from Tunisia, for instance – come via Turkey, going to Syria. So there is in fact, if you like, a NATO 'necessary' link with these radical groups. They couldn't really operate in northern Syria without the connivance and, at least, toleration without Turkey and, by extension, NATO partners.



Rebel fighters from the Al-Ezz bin Abdul Salam Brigade pose for picture as they attend a training session at an undisclosed location near the al-Turkman mountains, in Syria's northern Latakia province, on April 24, 2013

**RT:** *Of course the US and its allies have pumped more than a billion dollars' worth of support to the Syrian rebels. But is there any way to be sure the money doesn't end up in the hands of Al-Qaeda?*

**MA:** This is a huge problem; the idea that you could vet with people who get the weapons. There are a large number of groups. Some of them are just local people; some are radicals from within Syria, some from outside. And there's a constant mixing up of people: one group asserts itself, may have a bit of money, and may get some success, draws supporters. It then falls out with other groups. After all, we're seeing in several places in northern Syrian the fighting between the more radical groups – not just between them and the secular opposition, but also between those who claim to be the really true Jihadists against the people they say aren't Islamic enough, even though they might seem to most outsiders to be fairly severe fundamentalists.

So there isn't just a civil war within a civil war, but several local civil wars within this conflict in Syria. And I think anybody who thinks that the West can pick and choose who are the good guys and the bad guys is very naïve.

**RT:** *You briefly mentioned this already, but what are the prospects of extremist elements spilling over Syria's borders and destabilizing neighboring countries there?*

**MA:** Well, we see already in Iraq, for instance, a lot of the violence in Iraq is carried out by the same group that carries out car bombings and attacks in Syria as well. There's the risk to Turkey,

because, of course, inside Turkey it's a very, very, hot topic as to whether the government is wise to pursue the policy towards Syria that it has done; it could spill over into Lebanon, into Jordan; but it could also cause more danger, from the perspective of people in the countries who are supplying the funding to the rebel groups.

Maybe some of the foreign Jihadists who've come down to Syria to fight, who've taken their experience in making car bombs and carrying out assassinations and so on, back into western Europe, back into, perhaps, even the rich Gulf states who fund it. So the danger is, to me, is that Syria could become this seabed for terrorism and instability, and even just violent crime, across much of the world that, at the moment, sees itself as looking on as spectators, but could well find that it has sparked a tsunami of terrorism and disorder that could spread.