

POLICY IN SHAMBLES

Kerry Trip Highlights U.S. Support for Jihadi Terror

by Jeffrey Steinberg

March 4—Secretary of State John Kerry’s inaugural trip to the Middle East has only served to highlight both the insanity and the collapse of Obama Administration policy towards the Syria crisis in particular, and to the region as a whole. Sources close to former Senator Kerry have told *EIR* that the newly installed Secretary of State is already experiencing a rude awakening, that he has inherited a mess stemming from White House policy failures dating back to the beginning of the Obama Administration and earlier.

Among the most visible examples was Kerry’s joint press conference in Rome Feb. 28, with Syrian National Coalition head Moaz al-Khatib, who responded to the Secretary’s vaunted upshift in aid with a rant attacking those, implicitly including Kerry, who differentiate between the Syrian terrorists (such as the al-Nusra jihadis formed from al-Qaeda in Iraq) and his own opposition coalition.

According to senior U.S. intelligence sources, the CIA station chiefs in Turkey and Jordan have recently provided blunt assessments that Washington has lost control over the Syrian rebels that Washington and allies have been backing for the past two years, in an effort to overthrow the Assad government, on the model of the disastrous regime-change in Libya.

The Libya regime-change caper effectively turned the country over to the most radical al-Qaeda-linked terrorists and neo-Salafists. Now the U.S. is pushing forward with a policy that will do the same in Syria. Ac-

ording to a recent U.S. intelligence finding, the Syrian opposition is now overwhelmingly under the control of radical Islamists who hate the United States, and advertise that they are in Syria to “fight the Americans.” The earlier beliefs that Washington could vet and control a secular, multi-sectarian opposition, which would retain much of the existing governing structure, minus the Assad clan, have proven to be delusions.

The new priority for Washington, according to the intelligence finding, is that unless the jihadis are defeated, Syria will degenerate into a failed state, or the Saudi-backed Islamists will succeed in creating some kind of Islamic Emirate of Syria, which will make Iran under the Ayatollahs appear to be modern and stable in comparison.

Funding for an ‘Islamic Emirate’

Despite this assessment, the Obama Administration continues to pursue the delusion that it is possible to simultaneously maintain the commitment to overthrow the Assad regime and defeat the jihadists. This policy blunder was front and center last week, when Kerry, on the eve of his Middle East visit, announced that the United States would provide \$60 million in additional non-lethal aid to the rebels.

Leaving aside for a moment the sleight of hand here—which is that the U.S. is approving, if not encouraging, the massive flow of arms and funds from its Saudi-Gulf “allies”—let’s look at what such funds



U.S. State Department

Secretary of State John Kerry's joint press conference in Rome Feb. 28, with Syrian National Coalition head Moaz al-Khatib (shown here), makes clear that the Obama Administration is sinking U.S. foreign policy in the same swamp that has spawned the terrorist upsurge throughout North Africa and the Middle East.

would actually be supporting.

According to a wide variety of sources—from National Public Radio (NPR) to various intelligence professionals—the monies will be going to areas under the control of the rebels, i.e., the best-armed and best-funded of all the fighting groups, typified by the al-Nusra Front. Already, these groups are receiving vast amounts of money from the Saudis, Qataris, and others to set up Islamist schools, medical clinics, food kitchens, and other social services in large portions of northern Syria under rebel control. The Saudis have typically used these institutions as means of recruiting terrorists.

A recent NPR story on a northern Syrian region controlled by the “opposition” reported that, in addition to trying to provide the basics of life to residents, the jihadis who dominate the area are waging war against local religious monuments, including violating the graves of Islamic philosophers revered by the local population. The tension has gotten to the point that local militia now feel compelled to guard the gravesites of their local heroes, against the fanatics who want to rip them up.

The remarks of al-Khatib, nominal president of the Syrian National Coalition, at the press conference with

Kerry, also left little to the imagination about his view of terrorist dominance in the war against Syria, and echoed his remarks, at the Morocco meeting of the Friends of Syria group, in response to the Obama Administration’s blacklisting of the al-Nusra Front on Dec. 12, 2012: “The decision to blacklist one of the groups fighting the regime as a terrorist organization must be re-examined.” On the following Friday, mass demonstrations erupted in Syria around the slogan “We are all al-Nusra.”

According to the State Department transcript, on Feb. 28, Khatib blustered:

“We speak of terrorism. I said to the ministers of foreign affairs that there are three questions we, as Syrians, are tired of and I, as a president, am tired of. Speaking of terrorism, no terrorists in the world have such a savage nature as that of the Syrian regime. That’s one.

“Two, chemical weapons—the destruction by the regime in Syria, while using all sorts of weapons, is much more harmful than any chemical weapon.

“Number three is minorities. The regime has always presented itself as a regime that protects minorities. What I say to you is go to Lebanon and see what the Syrian regime did to the minorities in Lebanon when it occupied Lebanon. This is all I want to say regarding this.

“Concerning the fighters, the mass media pay more attention to the length of the beard of a fighter than to the massacres. Days ago, the blood of children was actually kneaded into the dough with which the bread was made after the massacre. And this is more important than the length of the beard of the fighters. There are people who carry ideas that are strange to our society. We are against all sorts of opinions that want to impose themselves or to destroy the social fabric of Syria.”

This, from a organization whose members boast of suicide bombings, beheadings, and other well-documented atrocities against anyone who opposes them.

Khatib followed with a list of demands from the opposition, which includes the creation of humanitarian corridors to Homs, al-Dara’a, and other parts of north-

ern Syria; that Assad leave as the precondition for any negotiations to end the conflict; and, of course, ending the ban on the provision of weapons to the opposition, among other things.

Who Gets the Weapons?

The rationale of U.S. policy is to provide funds to the secularists to compete with the jihadists for the “hearts and minds” of the Syrian people who are living under rebel control. But the reality is that the Anglo-Saudi bloc is funding a permanent population war in Southwest Asia, and Washington is incapable of defeating that effort by merely supplying small quantities of money to compete.

Unless Washington faces up to the much bigger problem of a London-Riyadh policy of promoting a new Hundred Years War to wipe out the vast majority of people living in the Eurasian crossroads of the Near East and Persian Gulf, and extended all the way into South and Central Asia, the U.S. is doomed to be the biggest loser in this new Great Game.

Already, Washington’s efforts to direct the flow of new weapons into rebel areas in the south of Syria bordering on Jordan, to tilt the balance of military power within the rebel camp, has failed miserably. The *New York Times* revealed last week that, at Washington’s behest, Croatia has been funneling vast quantities of combat weapons to the rebels. Even through the weapons have been routed through Jordan, ostensibly to go to units of the Free Syrian Army under the command of secular Syrian Army officers who have defected from Assad, and have been “vetted” by CIA personnel on the ground, the vast majority of these weapons have found their way into the hands of al-Nusra and related jihadist fronts operating in the North.

The bottom line is that the rebels have rejected Washington’s efforts to draw fault lines between the hard-core jihadists, backed by Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, and the more secular Ba’athist elements.

No Local Situation

Before Kerry met with Khatib and announced stepped-up American aid to the rebels, he had stopped for consultations in London, the first stop on his first international tour. With Kerry at his side, British Foreign Secretary William Hague told a press conference on Feb. 25 that “we must significantly increase support for the Syrian opposition. We are preparing to do just that.” Thus, while in London, Kerry promised, too, that

the Obama Administration is “determined that the Syrian opposition is not going to be dangling in the wind wondering where the support is or if it’s coming. And we are determined to change the calculation on the ground for President Assad.”

The implications of this policy were immediately pointed out, as they have been before, by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, after his meeting with Kerry in Berlin. Back in Moscow, Lavrov warned that the Syrian opposition was being unduly influenced by “extremists who are betting on a military solution to the Syrian problem and are blocking any initiative leading to a dialogue.... No one will solve the Syrians’ problems for them, but in order for this solution to be discussed, it’s necessary to sit down at the negotiating table.”

And, after Kerry’s announcement, the Russian Foreign Ministry charged that the U.S. plan to aid the Syrian opposition promotes extremists who have no interest in peace talks and are determined to seize power through force. “The decisions taken in Rome, and also the statements that were voiced there, both in spirit and literally, encourage the extremists to take power by force regardless of would-be inevitable suffering of ordinary Syrians,” said Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich in a statement posted on the ministry’s website on March 1. “In our view, the urgent task of today is to immediately halt the bloodshed and violence and turn to a political dialogue.”

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Secretary Lavrov have previously been even more explicit about the fact that the U.S. is now funding those very terrorist groups which launched 9/11, and killed four Americans in Benghazi, Libya.

Even more important, they have pointed out that the violation of the UN Charter through unilateral military action against Syria, or any other nation, will escalate the conflict in the region—and potentially threaten Russia’s own security. *That* would be a real “red line” for international conflict, leading toward thermonuclear war.

The Egypt Angle

Another visible sign of the failure of American policy was the refusal of all of the secular Egyptian opposition leaders to meet with Kerry during his visit to Egypt, a key American ally. The visit was highlighted by cartoons in Egyptian opposition newspapers depicting Kerry as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, the

London-based Islamic secret society of which President Mohamed Morsi is a member. The new U.S. Secretary of State was treated as *persona non grata* by the real revolutionaries of Tahrir Square.

Behind this snub, is the fact that the Obama Administration has put its political weight behind what is broadly experienced in Egypt as a Muslim Brotherhood dictatorship, complete with a reign of terror against the opposition that includes extrajudicial murders, imprisonment, torture, and the like. The victims of that new oppression—ranging from former IAEA head Mohamad ElBaradei, to the secular National Salvation Front leader Ahmed el-Borai, to al-Wafd party leader El-Sayyid el-Badawi—refused to meet “so as to not allow a foreign party to dictate its will on Egyptians,” as el-Borai put it.

Indeed, back on Nov. 22, 2012, ElBaradei responded to President Morsi’s declaration of emergency powers by declaring that Morsi had “appointed himself Egypt’s new pharaoh. A major blow to the revolution that could have dire consequences.”

This alienation of the Egyptian public from the United States is bound to get much worse, if Kerry’s declaration of economic policy in Egypt on last week’s

trip is followed through. Kerry insisted that Egypt agree to new IMF conditionalities, including raising taxes and cutting energy subsidies—the very same kind of austerity that led to popular rage against the Mubarak regime and its backers.

Learning the Lessons

Washington’s failure to learn the lesson of Libya, where the overthrow of Qaddafi launched a holy war that has torn apart much of northern Africa, and fueled the massive flow of weapons into Syria, is going to haunt the Obama Administration, and the West more broadly, until a major corrective is implemented. That means, for starters, that Washington must break from the Anglo-Saudi policy of promoting permanent war/permanent revolution throughout Eurasia and Africa, and bring an immediate halt to the regime-change fantasies.

So long as Obama’s crimes in Libya and in the cover-up of the Anglo-Saudi hand behind the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks remain unchallenged, there is no chance of such a policy correction.

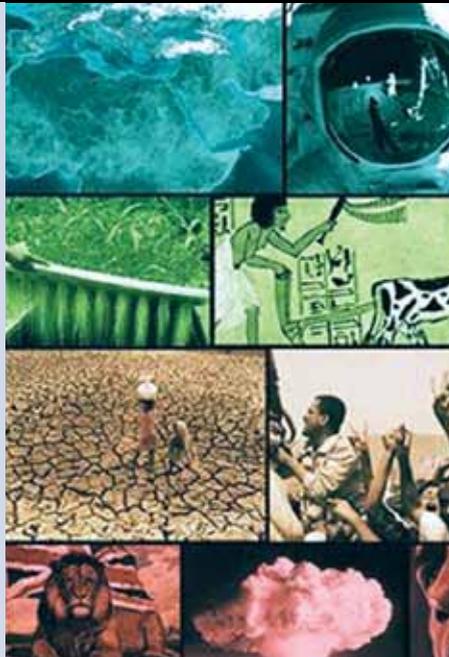
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