



As Cease-Fire in Syria Begins, Assad Vows to Defeat “Terrorists”

As a U.S.-Russian-brokered ceasefire agreement between the opposing forces in the Syrian civil war is about to take effect on September 12, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (shown) issued a statement broadcast by state media, in which he said: “The Syrian state is determined to recover every area from the terrorists.”



An AP report noted that Assad made his statement during a rare public appearance in the Damascus suburb of Daraya. Rebel leaders surrendered Daraya last month and the government regained control of the city after a four-year siege. During that visit, Assad attended prayers in a mosque celebrating the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha.

According to the terms of the ceasefire agreement, which was announced in Geneva on September 10 by Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the Syrian government and the anti-government rebels are expected to halt all fighting and bombing at 7:00 p.m. local time on September 12 (noon Eastern time).

The AP quoted from a text message it received from Staffan de Mistura, the UN envoy for Syria stationed in Geneva, who said his office would monitor the start of the cease-fire “carefully, before making any hurried comments.”

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The AP reported:

[The agreement] allows the Syrian government to continue to strike at the Islamic State group and al-Qaida-linked militants with the Jabhat Fatah al-Sham group, earlier known as the Nusra Front, until the U.S. and Russia take over the task in one week’s time.

Under the terms of the agreement, the rebels and the Syrian government are expected to stop attacking one another. Assad’s key allies — Russia, Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah — have also endorsed the deal.

The United States, Russia, Iran, and the UN have all designated the Jabhat Fatah al-Sham group as a terrorist organization. A report from the Australian affiliate of ABC News last July quoted a statement from U.S. intelligence chief James Clapper calling the group’s claim to have separated from al Qaeda “a public relations move.”

“Whether or not they are actually separating from al Qaeda, that remains to be seen,” Clapper said at the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado.



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 12, 2016

The AP reported that the ceasefire agreement, under which the rebels and the Syrian government are expected to stop attacking each other, is complicated by the fact that Jabhat Fatah al-Sham “remains intertwined with several other groups fighting on the ground.”

A report from National Public Radio (NPR) cited a joint statement from Kerry and Lavrov saying that Russia has persuaded the Syrian government, which it has supported, to keep its air force from flying combat missions in areas where the opposition is present — areas that will be delineated by the United States and Russia.

Lavrov said that if the ceasefire holds for a week, and both the Assad regime and the opposition allow access to aid — particularly to the northern city of Aleppo — then the U.S. and Russian air forces will work together through a joint operations room to target ISIS and other extremists.

NPR also reported that the U.S. special envoy sent a letter to Syrian rebels before the ceasefire was finalized stating that the Russians and Americans won’t attack more “moderate” rebel forces, even when they are working closely with an al-Qaeda affiliate.

The facts that (as the AP noted) Jabhat Fatah al-Sham “remains intertwined with several other groups fighting on the ground” and that (as NPR noted) Russians and Americans won’t attack more “moderate” rebel forces, even when they are working closely with an al-Qaeda affiliate, highlight what has been an extremely troublesome aspect of the ongoing U.S. support for the rebel forces fighting against the Assad government.

One of the earliest voices against providing U.S. aid to the rebels attempting to overthrow the Assad government was Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.) As was noted in a report in *The Hill* on September 15, 2014, Paul strongly opposed President Obama’s request of Congress to give him authority to arm and train supposedly “moderate” Syrian rebel groups.

“It’s a mistake to arm them,” declared Paul on CBS’s *This Morning* on September 15, 2015. “Most of the arms we’ve given to the so-called moderate rebels have wound up in the hands of ISIS, because ISIS simply takes it from them, or it’s given to them, or we mistakenly actually give it to some of the radicals.”

A major objection Paul had to aiding the rebels was that they were focused on overthrowing Assad’s regime, rather than fighting the terrorist group ISIS. During his interview, Paul pointed to reports of a truce between some “moderate” Syrian rebels and ISIS over the prior weekend.

“I would say one insightful piece of news from the last week is, some of the moderate rebels, so-called moderate rebels have now signed a cease-fire with ISIS,” he said. “So, really their enemy is really Assad. They don’t really care what ISIS does.”

There was much more to the problem than Paul mentioned that month, however. [An article in *The New American*](#) in August 2015 quoted a part of Vice President Biden’s 2014 speech at Harvard during which he admitted that there was no “moderate middle” among the anti-Assad rebels in Syria. In that speech, Biden also mentioned that the insurgency was so focused on removing Assad that it was uninterested in stopping ISIS. However, Biden limited his criticism to the aid that our “allies” in the region were supplying to rebels that included terrorist groups and did not mention the aid our own CIA was giving to them. Biden said, in part:

What my constant cry was that our biggest problem was our allies.... What were they doing? They were so determined to take down Assad and have a proxy Sunni-Shia war, what did they do? They



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poured hundreds of millions of dollars and tens, thousands, of tons of weapons into anyone who would fight. Except that the people who were being supplied were al-Nusra and al-Qaeda and extremist elements of jihadis coming from other parts of the world.

An earlier [report in *The New American* in May 2015](#) cited information from a then-newly released Pentagon report revealing that “the U.S. government knew that supporting jihadists in the fight against Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad would produce a fundamentalist Islamic State in Eastern Syria — and that Obama’s supposed ‘anti-ISIS’ coalition knowingly backed ISIS and other Islamic terrorists for precisely that purpose.”

The New American noted that the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report exposed the lies propagated by the Obama administration, senior U.S. lawmakers, and foreign leaders to dupe Americans into allowing the U.S. government to support non-existent “moderate” rebels in Syria.

The New American has documented as far back as the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 that our interventionist foreign policy in the Middle East has only served to destabilize the region and set the stage for the birth of ISIS, and its spread across large areas of both Iraq and Syria. ISIS has gone from relative obscurity to becoming the world’s best-known terrorist organization in just two years.

The invasion of Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power in 2003 created a power vacuum as the authoritarian but stable government headed by Saddam was filled by an assortment of radicalized factions and an ineffective, weak central government in Baghdad unable to maintain order. With the withdrawal of U.S. troops in 2011, things only worsened, and ISIS initiated its quest to capture much of Iraq and begin its reign of terror.

One would think that our government, having learned from experience that our invasion of Iraq and removal of Saddam Hussein from power was a disaster, would not be so eager to repeat the same game plan in Syria, only with Assad this time playing the part of the regional bogeyman.

That assumption presumes that our foreign policy fiascos are the result of error, however. A more likely explanation is that such destabilization and support for radical jihadists has been our government’s deliberate objective all along.

This explanation is supported by many articles published by *The New American*, the links to some being found below.

Photo: Bashar al-Assad

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