



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on September 17, 2013

What is the Obama-backed Free Syrian Army?

As weapons and supplies funded by U.S. taxpayers [pour into Syria](#) in a bid to help Western-backed Islamist rebels take down the Assad regime, the Obama administration and its apologists continue to insist that the aid is meant to bolster “moderate” or even “secular” opposition fighters. Among the most frequent entities mentioned as worthy of U.S. government support is the so-called Free Syrian Army — an Islamist-dominated outfit overseen by a Syrian military defector that helps distribute military weaponry and other goods provided by the Obama administration, Western governments, and a coalition of Islamist dictators hoping to unseat their secular counterpart in Damascus.



The outfit’s main selling point appears to be that, as opposed to the more effective fighting forces in Syria, the Free Syrian Army is not technically al-Qaeda. But what is the Free Syrian Army, really? No two analysts have the same answer. To some, the Free Syrian Army is the group that sent a spokesperson to tell the world that it was [preparing an ethnic cleansing program](#) targeting Shia Muslims and Alawites. Among warmongers, especially American “neocons” such as Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) and the Obama administration, the FSA is touted as a heroic organization that should be propped up even more heavily than it is — even [after McCain’s “moderate” FSA rebels turned out to be kidnappers](#). To others, the “army” is really an “army in name only.”

Virtually everyone agrees, however, that it is dominated by Islamists, including the Muslim Brotherhood and various other hardline Salafist groups known for violently seeking sharia law and strict enforcement of their interpretation of Islamic doctrine. In December of 2012, Reuters, among numerous other establishment sources, [reported](#) that the Free Syrian Army had chosen a leader for its new “Islamist-dominated command.” At a meeting in Turkey attended by hundreds of rebel leaders, Western officials, and representatives of Gulf Arab autocracies, a new 30-member “Supreme Military Council” packed with Muslim radicals was selected.

Despite official Western claims about the Free Syrian Army, even Reuters admitted that the make-up of the outfit was dominated by Islamists. “The unified command includes many with ties to the Muslim Brotherhood and to Salafists, who follow a puritanical interpretation of Islam,” the news service [reported](#). Incredibly, the supposed “army” was widely touted in the establishment press and among Western officials as the “moderate” alternative simply because known al-Qaeda fronts were not invited to participate in the meeting. Shortly after the selection of leaders, the Syrian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood demanded that the “international community” immediately “fulfill its obligations” and provide more weapons to the FSA.

To whom exactly would the weapons be provided, though, and for what purpose? The answer to that



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question also depends on who is asked. The Free Syrian Army claims to have units loosely under its command all across Syria, painting its fighters as military defectors and armed protesters merely seeking a “democratic” future without Assad. Whenever atrocities are reported, the FSA usually [tries to disassociate itself](#) with the perpetrators. According to a recent [report by NBC News about extremism](#) within the supposedly “moderate” rebel alliance seeking U.S. weapons, however, it is difficult to determine where the FSA’s sympathies lie, mostly because it is actually just an “army in name only.”

“It is made up of hundreds of small units, some secular, some religious — whether mainstream or radical,” the NBC article noted, contradicting other reports in establishment media outlets like the *New York Times* that point out that there really is no such thing as a “secular” fighting force among the Syrian rebellion. “Others are family gangs, or simply criminals.” Unnamed American officials commenting for the article offered some insight into how the administration could claim that the rebellion is mostly composed of “moderates”: Only rebels fighting directly under al-Qaeda command are counted as “extremists.”

“Most of the groups battling against Assad are composed of Islamist fighters, but only a small minority could accurately be characterized as extremist,” alleged one of the anonymous U.S. officials quoted in the report. Another unnamed source, described as “a senior military official,” however, contradicted those claims. When the definition of radical Islamist is expanded beyond simply membership in al-Qaeda or one of its powerful affiliates fighting in Syria, the numbers are “way higher than that,” the military official said. The Pentagon, meanwhile, estimates that “extreme Islamist groups” now constitute “more than 50 percent” of rebel forces, the source noted, adding that “it’s growing by the day.”

The NBC article also essentially admits that, as one analyst [put it](#), the Free Syrian Army is really a “myth” while its supposed commander, Brig. Gen. Salim Idris, is a “general of nothing.” “Idris acts more as a chairman of the board than a battlefield commander, offering advice and money to other groups that he feels are benefiting the cause,” NBC reported. “But he and his [largely Islamist] senior aides don’t do much vetting of groups or individuals wanting to join the fight, being focused more on winning than on developing a litmus test for membership. Those decisions are typically made by local commanders, say numerous rebel fighters interviewed by NBC News.”

Journalist Daniel Greenfield, whose reporting focuses on radical Islam, [commented](#) on the admissions and pointed out that there is no Free Syrian Army in any real sense. “It’s an umbrella for providing Western aid to a front group run by the Muslim Brotherhood,” he observed. “Idris is basically a politician. He isn’t running the war. Putting him out in front of a lot of Salafist commanders is a scam. They’re the ones running the war. Not him. He’s just another politician funneling money and weapons from the Saudis, the Turks, Qataris and us.” Greenfield also blasted the “funny moderate math” employed by the Obama administration to downplay the overwhelming role of extremists in the Syrian rebellion.

Meanwhile, despite claims of moderation by Western supporters, self-styled Free Syrian Army fighters and groups have been implicated in more than a few atrocities — many of which, such as executing captured prisoners without due process, constitute clear war crimes. Most recently, the FSA worked with the al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra front and the jihadist Ahrar al-Sham group to seize control of the ancient Christian town of Maaloula — one of the few remaining places on Earth where Aramaic, the language of Christ, is still spoken. As [reported](#) by *The New American* and numerous other media outlets, including among the establishment, Christian villagers there said they were ordered to convert to Islam or die. Others were simply slaughtered, in keeping with a [developing pattern](#).



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Before that, a spokesman for the Sunni-dominated Free Syrian Army went on Turkish television in May and [openly threatened that rebel forces would exterminate Shia Muslims](#). According to a [report in Bloomberg](#) about the statements, FSA “Colonel” Abdel-Hamid Zakaria said the minority communities would be “wiped off the map” in response to advances made by Assad’s forces. “It’s going to be an open, sectarian, bloody war to the end,” the spokesman said in May as U.S. lawmakers were working to restrain Obama’s lawless support for the opposition.

In 2012, meanwhile, the Australian Associated Press [reported](#) on FSA war crimes near the border with Iraq documented by Iraqi officials. According to Iraq’s deputy interior minister, Adnan al-Assadi, Iraqi border guards witnessed numerous atrocities when Free Syrian Army forces seized control of border checkpoints. Among the worst: a Syrian lieutenant colonel was detained by FSA fighters, who proceeded to cut off their prisoner’s arms and legs. “Then they executed 22 Syrian soldiers in front of the eyes of Iraqi soldiers,” al-Assadi was quoted as saying.

While the truth remains murky amid dueling propaganda efforts by the Assad regime and rebel forces, critics of the Obama administration’s support for the FSA and other rebel forces continue to sound the alarm bells. Aside from the fact that the administration has no constitutional authority to unilaterally choose sides in a foreign civil war, analysts also say it is simply a bad idea, even if there are genuinely good people fighting among the FSA to remove Syria’s ruthless autocrat.

In Libya, for example, with unconstitutional U.S. weapons deliveries and air support, Islamists and self-styled al-Qaeda leaders [already seized control of a shattered nation](#) and murdered a U.S. ambassador and other Americans. Deliberately handing Syria over to extremists using U.S. taxpayer funds would almost certainly lead to [even greater disasters](#) — especially for the increasingly [embattled Christian](#) and Shia minorities. Thanks to the Obama administration’s brazen support for the rebellion, the responsibility for the bloody fruits of Syria’s civil war will be at least partly shouldered by the American people.

Photo of Free Syrian Army fighters: AP Images

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