



## Syrian Al-Qaeda Commander: US Forces Are Arming Us in Syria, “The Americans Are on Our Side.” US State Dept: « We Would Never Provide Nusra with Assistance »

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*The State Department admitted that the Nusra Front could be receiving U.S. arms via allied nations, and it's not the first time the U.S. or its allies have been accused of aiding extremist groups in Syria.*

The State Department moved quickly to deny a Syrian rebel commander's recent allegations that the United States is offering arms and military equipment to extremist groups in the Syrian civil war.

On Monday, German newspaper Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger published an interview with [Abu Al Ezz, a commander in the Nusra Front](#), in which he claimed that the United States offers indirect support to his group by sending equipment and aid via allied countries.

“Yes, the US supports the opposition [in Syria], but not directly. They support the countries that support us. But we are not yet satisfied with this support,” Al Ezz said, according to [a translation published by RT](#).

The Nusra Front, or Jabhat-al-Nusra, recently attempted to [rebrand itself as Jabhat Fateh al-Sham](#) and distance itself from its traditional allies, the terrorist group al-Qaida. However, the group's leadership and extremist ideology remain unchanged, and both RT and Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger continue to refer to the group by its former name.

According to Al Ezz, U.S. materiel has been key in turning the tide against Syrian army forces:

Due to these rockets [American-made TOW anti-tank missiles], we reached a balance with the regime. Our tanks came from Libya via Turkey, joined by the [BM-21] multiple rocket launchers.

“The [Assad] government forces have an advantage because of aircraft and missile launchers, but “we have the American-made TOW missiles, and the situation in some areas is under control,” Al Ezz added.

When asked if the TOW missiles were initially intended for Jabhat Al-Nusra or if the group obtained them from the moderate Free Syrian Army, the jihadist clarified: “No, the missiles were given to us directly.”

But Al Ezz went on to add that training on how to use these weapons came directly from the US and its allies. When Jabhat Al-Nusra was besieged, Al Ezz said they “had officers from Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Israel and America here... Experts in the use of satellites, rockets, reconnaissance and thermal security cameras.”

The German journalist asked if US instructors were really present among the jihadists’ ranks. Al Ezz replied: “The Americans are on our side.”

Al Ezz added that Jabhat Al-Nusra received funding from US allies like Saudi Arabia and Israel for achieving specific military goals during the Syrian conflict.

“We got 500 million Syrian pounds (around \$2.3 million) from Saudi Arabia. To capture the Infantry School in Al Muslimiya years ago we received 1.5 million Kuwaiti dinars (around \$500,000) and Saudi Arabia’s \$5 million,” Al Ezz said.

The funds came from the “governments” of those states, not from private individuals, he added.

“Israel is now giving us support because Israel is at war with Syria and with Hezbollah,” Al Ezz said.

As for the ceasefire, the Nusra Front and its allies are refusing to honor it, he said. “We will carry out the next overwhelming attack against the regime in a few days. We have regrouped our forces in all provinces, including Homs, Aleppo, Idlib and Hama.”

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In a press briefing on Monday, [State Department spokesman Mark Toner](#) denied Al Ezz’s allegations, saying:

We’ve absolutely not provided – I can’t say that as – vehemently enough, that we would never provide Nusra with any kind of assistance whatsoever. We view them as a foreign terrorist organization, we view them as an affiliate of al-Qaida, and we’re going to seek their continued destruction.

But later in the same briefing, Toner said that “there are those – and not the United States – but there are those who back various groups and opposition groups within Syria who also may seek to arm them,” effectively admitting that arms could have traveled from the United States to the rebels via another member of the Western-backed coalition in the region.

Watch Syrian rebels fire an American anti-tank missile at a Russian T-90 tank:

Russia’s ambassador to the United Nations, [Vitaly Churkin](#), also raised the issue of the United States’ arming of rebel groups during a special session of the U.N. Security Council

on Sunday. Before a genuine peace process can occur, Churkin said Russia has “to see proof that there is a genuine desire to separate US-allied rebel groups from the Al-Nusra Front, then destroy the Al-Nusra Front and bring the opposition into a political process.”

Al Ezz’s interview is hardly the first time the United States or its allies have been accused of supporting the Nusra Front and other extremist groups operating in Syria. Israel, the recipient of \$3.1 billion in annual military aid from the United States and a key U.S. ally in the Middle East, has reportedly [aided the group with airstrikes and medical care](#). Earlier this month, an Israeli journalist recorded the commander of another rebel group [pleading with the Israeli government for increased military assistance](#).

And in a [December 2015 episode](#) of the BBC Radio series “The Report,” investigative journalist Peter Osborne showed that military aid from the [United Kingdom and United States to so-called “moderate rebel” groups](#) like the Free Syrian Army flows freely to more extreme groups like the Nusra Front.

Alastair Crooke, a British diplomat and former intelligence analyst for MI6, the U.K.’s primary foreign intelligence agency, told Osborne:

The West does not actually hand the weapons to al-Qaida — let alone to ISIS — but the system they’ve constructed leads precisely to that end. The weapons conduit that the West gave to the FSA is understood to be a sort of Wal-Mart that the radical groups can take weapons and use to fight Assad. The weapons migrate along the line to the more radical elements.

Watch “[American allies accused of arming jihadist group Al-Nusra Front](#)”

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