

US: “NEVER MIND THAT GUY EATING A HEART, WE HAVE HANDWRITTEN RECEIPTS FOR THE GUNS”

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Lethal aid. Nonlethal aid. Moderate groups. Radical Islamist groups. Light weapons. Anti-aircraft weapons. We have been barraged with a dizzying array of descriptions of what is going on in Syria and to what extent the US is helping which groups.

I have been harping recently on the issue of why the Obama administration is going to great lengths to change the date and time of entry for the first CIA-trained and armed death squads the US sent into Syria. Despite public evidence the first group entered as at least 300 militants on August 17, both Barack Obama and the CIA have “leaked” that the first group of 50 entered or was armed in the last week of August or the first week of September, after the disputed chemical weapons attack on August 21. But keep in mind that these groups are the small death squads built on the US model of the CIA and JSOC troops “training” already organized militia groups that often are organized around ethnic or religious issues. These groups were at the heart of Petraeus’ vaunted COIN strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan. In those countries, they were brutal groups that were known for night raids and the ruthless killing, torture and disappearing of innocent civilians. It’s hard to imagine that the CIA and JSOC have changed their “winning” syllabus for this training, so look for more of these types of atrocities.

Those small death squads being trained by the

CIA and JSOC are separate from the larger Free Syrian Army headed by General Salim Idris, who was a General in Assad's military until his defection in the summer of 2012. A big deal has been made about the fact that the US has not been providing direct lethal aid to the FSA. In fact, back on March 1, Idris took to the pages of Foreign Policy to make his plea for lethal aid directly:

The United States has repeatedly expressed its reluctance to provide Syria's armed opposition with weapons, due to the fear that they will fall into the hands of extremists groups. At this week's meeting in Rome, the U.S. government promised only to provide non-lethal support. It's time for Washington and the international community to reconsider, because the only way to prevent the rise of warlords and extremist groups is to support the organized Syrian opposition in professionalizing the armed revolution.

But look, Idris promised us that his team has things under control and nothing could go wrong with us giving him lethal aid:

In fact, the Syrian Coalition, an internationally recognized umbrella group of opposition parties, has made great strides to account for all advanced weaponry under the rebels' control. It now registers and traces all such arms to ensure that only trained officers under the command ever receive and use them.

The problem, though, is that Idris' claim in March that the US wasn't helping his group with lethal aid was bullshit. As CTuttle reminded us in a comment in my post yesterday, the New York Times discussed how the CIA has been "assisting" the flow of lethal aid to the FSA and other groups for over a year. The Times article was

published a little over three weeks after Idris' plea, but documents CIA involvement in weapons shipments for a long time before that point:

With help from the C.I.A., Arab governments and Turkey have sharply increased their military aid to Syria's opposition fighters in recent months, expanding a secret airlift of arms and equipment for the uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, according to air traffic data, interviews with officials in several countries and the accounts of rebel commanders.

The airlift, which began on a small scale in early 2012 and continued intermittently through last fall, expanded into a steady and much heavier flow late last year, the data shows. It has grown to include more than 160 military cargo flights by Jordanian, Saudi and Qatari military-style cargo planes landing at Esenboga Airport near Ankara, and, to a lesser degree, at other Turkish and Jordanian airports.

/snip/

From offices at secret locations, American intelligence officers have helped the Arab governments shop for weapons, including a large procurement from Croatia, and have vetted rebel commanders and groups to determine who should receive the weapons as they arrive, according to American officials speaking on the condition of anonymity. The C.I.A. declined to comment on the shipments or its role in them.

Hmm. Isn't that interesting. Both Idris and the CIA claim to be in charge of vetting.

With that as background, we have this report in Mother Jones from yesterday, where we get new assurances on just how carefully those getting aid from the US are being vetted. But don't talk

about the lethal aid, it's still "secret" although now Obama is said to have authorized it in June. I guess all that earlier CIA "assistance" on the aid wasn't authorized:

In recent weeks, the Obama administration and hawks favoring a strike on Syria have called for the continued support of supposedly moderate rebels fighting Bashar al-Assad's regime. The United States has been sending millions of dollars in nonlethal aid to the rebels since February, and in June President Obama authorized secretly supplying weapons to opposition fighters. But with hundreds of Syrian rebel groups battling the regime—ranging from the relatively moderate Free Syrian Army (FSA) to the Al Qaeda-affiliated al-Nusra Front—can the administration ensure that US aid is not winding up in the wrong hands? A system designed to monitor the disbursement of nonlethal supplies to the rebels is supposed to make sure assistance goes only to vetted fighters—but, according to government oversight experts, it relies on too much good faith.

And here's how that superior vetting is going to work:

The Syrian Support Group, a US-based nonprofit that is the only organization the Obama administration has authorized to hand out nonlethal US-funded supplies to the rebels, insists it keeps track of who's receiving this assistance based on handwritten receipts provided by rebel commanders in the field. According to Dan Layman, a spokesman for the group, this level of oversight is sufficient to guarantee US assistance is going to the right rebels and is being used appropriately. "What we're getting from [FSA commanders] in receipts directly reflects what's been

given out and to whom, I'm very confident," he says. "The government regularly asks us for updates and new receipts, often faster than we can produce them." Layman doesn't know if or how the US government verifies these receipts.

Hmm. Self-reporting from the folks who are getting the aid. Where have I heard that before and what could possibly go wrong? Maybe John Sopko will wind up being the first Special Inspector General for Syrian Reconstruction.

But look back up there to his comments, and it looks like Idris told us about the receipt plan back in March when he discussed the ability to "account for all advanced weaponry".

And how has that worked out? Going back to the Mother Jones article (remember that Layman is the spokesman for the Syrian Support Group, the US-designated vetter) [emphasis added]:

US assistance ending up with radical elements of the opposition is not the only problem; this aid could also reach rebels committing atrocities. Last week, the *New York Times* posted a video of what it reported to be FSA-armed rebels executing shirtless prisoners. The Syrian Support Group issued a statement disputing the *Times* report, claiming the rebels in the video were from a non-SMC affiliated outfit that did not receive any supplies or funding from the Supreme Military Council.

This spring, one militia leader affiliated with the FSA—his brigade has since been kicked out—was filmed eating a dead soldier's heart. "This stuff happens rarely, but it's unfortunate," Layman says. "With the guy who was eating a heart, he was part of a moderate faction...We work with Idriss and let him know that he

needs to prevent these things.”

Okay, then. As I mentioned on Twitter, if the guy eating a heart is a moderate, I sure don't want to meet one of the radicals. You really just can't make this shit up.

[youtuber
youtube='http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVfoT1r8
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