

# OUR SYRIAN REBELS ARE ISSUING THREATS VIA WAPO

This is a striking article in the WaPo. It deals extensively with setbacks rebels in Syria have already suffered at the hand of Russia's campaign. But it bears this headline, as if Trump's administration, not Russian intervention (and Obama's mixed commitment), is the key change.

*Fearing abandonment  
by Trump, CIA-  
backed rebels in  
Syria mull  
alternatives*

As I said, the story provides plenty of evidence the real change here stems from Russian involvement, not Trump's election. But Trump's election provides a way for a bunch of people to issue threats about what rebels might do in response to their fading fortunes.

The story quotes some anonymous US officials which likely includes Adam Schiff, who is also quoted by name, as well as an anonymous "U.S.-vetted rebel commander" who apparently speaks for the thousands the article claims to represent, and Qatar's foreign minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Jassim al-Thani, suggesting that if rebels aren't helped more America's alliance with the Gulf States may be in trouble. It also lays out what Trump's incoming team, including Mike Flynn and James Mattis, might feel about how a Syrian win would help Iran.

I'm most interested in this part of the article, in which a single US official lays out a certain narrative about the US backed rebels – basically pretending that the covert program has worked.

The possibility of cutting loose opposition groups it has vetted, trained and armed would be a jolt to a CIA already unsettled by the low opinion of U.S. intelligence capabilities that Trump had expressed during his presidential campaign.

From a slow and disorganized start, the opposition “accomplished many of the goals the U.S. hoped for,” including their development into a credible fighting force that showed signs of pressuring Assad into negotiations, had Russia not begun bombing and Iran stepped up its presence on the ground, said one of several U.S. officials who discussed the situation on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak publicly.

The United States estimates that there are 50,000 or more fighters it calls “moderate opposition,” concentrated in the northwest province of Idlib, in Aleppo and in smaller pockets throughout western and southern Syria, and that they are not likely to give up.

“They’ve been fighting for years, and they’ve managed to survive,” the U.S. official said. “Their opposition to Assad is not going to fade away.”

Not only does this passage far overstate the success of US efforts, but it – like Qatar’s foreign minister – threatens that these armed men won’t go away if the US backs Assad.

No matter what you think of US efforts in Syria, this kind of narrative from the people who’ve backed an unsuccessful covert program is fairly disturbing, as if even the US officials in the story are siding with the more explicit threats from Qatar against the US.

Yes, if Trump really remains committed to his promised partnership with Russia (assuming he

and the nutjobs he has hired can manage that relationship, which I doubt), the rebels will side with Qatar (and the Saudis and who knows what Erdogan will do?) against Assad – which has basically been what they've been doing all this time anyway. Yes, if that happens, the US will lose its leverage over Qatar, with potentially dangerous consequences.

But this sounds awfully close to Americans turning against American policy, no matter how untutored Trump is.